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# Confucius in History and Tradition

A Historical-critical analysis of literacy in the time  
of Confucius

Per Andreas Källström

舜鷹豪

Supervisors: Elisabet Göransson & Arthur Holmer

Centre for Language and Literature, Lund University

MA in Language and Linguistics, Chinese

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# Abstract

This thesis sets out to answer the question: “Why didn’t Confucius write a book?” It investigates literacy and textual tradition in the time of Confucius based on research on archaeology, historical text sources and textual analyses of samples of preserved text. Throughout the thesis, observations and analyses on the textual tradition is based on the historical critical method, as practiced in the field of biblical scholarship. Through an overview of the sources of literacy in ancient China, beginning in the Shang dynasty 商 ca. 1200 BC., down through the Warring States period 戰國 *zhànguó* ca. 300 BC., archaeology, history and textual analysis is used interrelate the question of literacy in China during the estimated time of Confucius in the late Spring and Autumn period 春秋 *chūnqiū* ca. 500 BC. For the textual analysis, books III-IX of the *Analects* were chosen, representing what is probably the earliest layer of the *Analects*. Some observations and analysis on the textual tradition of the *Analects* are also included, based on readings using the historical-critical method.

The research shows that it is unlikely that writing had, in the time of Confucius, moved beyond the exclusive realms of divination and elite society. Since Confucius was not a part of either of these worlds, the conclusion is drawn that Confucius, living in a mostly illiterate society, and moreover, living outside the sphere of the political elite, was most likely not literate.

此篇论文旨在回答这个问题：“孔子为什么不写一本书？”基于考古学研究、历史文本来源和对保存文本样本的文本分析，研究孔子时代的识字率和文本传统。在整个论文中，对文本传统的观察和分析是基于历史批判方法，正如在圣经学术领域所实践的那样。通过对中国古代识字来源的概述，从商代开始到战国时期战国考古学、历史学和文本分析被用来将孔子在春秋晚期的估计时间与中国的识字问题联系起来。为进行文本分析，选择了《论语》第三至第九卷，这可能是《论语》最早的一层。还包括一些对《论语》文本传统的观察和分析，这些观察和分析基于使用历史批判方法的阅读。

研究表明，在孔子时代，文字不太可能超越占卜和精英社会的专属领域。由于孔子不属于这两个世界中的任何一个，因此得出的结论是，孔子生活在一个文盲为主的社会，而且生活在政治精英的圈子之外，很可能不识字。

本論文は、「なぜ孔子は本を書かなかったのか？」という問いに答えることを目的とする。孔子の時代の識字能力と文献を、考古学的知見、歴史的文献および現存するテキストサンプルの分析に基づいて調査する。

論文全体を通じた伝統的なテキストに対する考察と分析は、聖書学の分野で用いられた歴史批判的方法に基づく。

古代中国の識字状況を、商代（紀元前 1200 年ごろ）から戦国時代（紀元前 300 年ごろ）において概観する。そしてそれらを考古学、歴史分析、文献分析を用いて、孔子の推定時代である春秋時代後期（紀元前 500 年頃）の中国の識字能力と関連づける。

テキスト分析には、論語の最も初期に書かれたと考えられる八佾第三から子罕第九を用いた。論語の伝統的なテキストへの考察と分析には歴史批判的な手法を用いた。

その結果として、孔子の時代には文字は占術師や文人階級による排他的な領域を超えていた可能性は低いことが示される。そして、孔子はこうした身分のどちらにも属していなかった。つまり、大多数が識字能力のない社会に属しておりさらに文人階級ではなかった孔子は読み書きができなかった、という結論が導き出される。

본 논문은 '왜 공자는 책을 저술하지 않았는가' 하는 질문에 답하는 것을 목적으로 시작되었다. 《논어》(論語)의 초기 저술 원고로 사료되는 제 3 편에서 9 편까지에 드러난 당시의 문해 현상을 밝히기 위하여 현대 성경학 연구 분야의 주류를 이루는 역사비평학(historical-critical method)적 방법을 기반으로 분석이 이루어졌다. 공자의 활동시기로 추정되는 기원전 500 년 춘추(春秋)시대 후기의 문해력에 관한 본 연구의 문헌분석을 삼각비교(triangulation)하기 위하여, 기원전 1200 년경의 상(商)왕조에서 기원전 300 년경의 전국(戰國)시대에 이르는 고대 중국의 고고학 및 역사적 증거 사료를 개관하였다.

본 연구의 분석 결과, 공자의 활동 당시에는 저술 활동이 점성술가 및 지배계층의 배타적 영역 외부로 확산되었을 가능성이 낮은 것으로 보인다. 공자는 이 두 세계의 일원이 아니었기 때문에 문해력 혹은 저술 능력이 없었을 것이라는 결론이 도출되었다.

Keywords: Confucius, *Analects*, lunyu, literacy, Spring and Autumn period

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Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul,

Sir William Jones, Jean-François Champollion, Nabonidus, Mark Van Stone, William Saturno, Frederick Catherwood & John Lloyd Stevens, Hans H Ørberg, Ben Johnson, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustin, St. Jerome, Eusebius, Origen, Tertullian, Philo of Alexandria, Josephus, Irenaeus, Polycarp, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Papias, Cicero, Livy, Marcus Aurelius, Virgil, Suetonius, Tacitus, Numa Pompilius, Ancus Marcius, Donald Kagan, Milman Parry & Albert Lord, Eric Auerbach, Homer, Solon, Tellus of Athens, Protagoras, Herodotus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Andrew & Bethany Case, William Tyndale, Andrew George, Enheduanna, Edgar Snow, James Legge, Arthur Waley, Lionel Giles,

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## List of time periods

### Pre-Qin

Shang dynasty 商代 - ca. 1600-1050 BC

Western Zhou dynasty 西周 - 1050 BC - 771 BC

Spring and Autumn period 春秋 - 771 BC - 475 BC

Warring States period 戰國 - 475 BC - 221 BC

### Imperial China

Qin dynasty 秦代 - 221 BC - 208 BC

Western Han dynasty 西漢 - 202 BC - 9 AD

Eastern Han dynasty 東漢 - 25 AD - 220 AD

## Conventions

All Chinese texts are given as in the original source and referred to by the numbering by James Legge. Classical citations are given in traditional characters, and modern sources from (mainland) China in simplified characters. All Chinese words are transcribed in *pīnyīn*.

# 1. Introduction

This thesis investigates literacy in the time of Confucius based on a close reading of the *Analects* and an investigation of archaeological discoveries relating to literacy in ancient China. The Chinese literary tradition is both very ancient and famous around the world for its wealth of received texts. At the same time, the development of literacy is not necessarily as straightforward and simple as tradition suggests. But before expanding on literacy, this introduction will first give the traditional account of Confucius and his role in the development of literacy in ancient China.

Perhaps the most extensive early account of the life and deeds of Confucius 孔子 *kǒngzǐ* (551 BC - 480 BC) may be found in Han dynasty Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 100 BC) *Records of the Grand Historian* 太史公書 *tàishǐgōng shū*. Born in the state of Lu 魯 in 551 BC into an aristocratic family, Confucius would rise to become one of the great moral teachers in world history. However, his early life was marred with difficulty. When Confucius was very young, his father died, and some time after, his mother died as well, leaving the young man to grow up in poverty and destitution. As he grew up, he occasionally served minor roles in government in his native state of Lu but never rose to political prominence. He set out to wander the lands of the Central States 中國 *zhōngguó*, offering advice to any statesman that would hear it, but his council always fell on deaf ears. After many travels, Confucius returned home to Lu, realizing that his advice was not sought after. He devoted the remainder of his life towards teaching the disciples he had gathered, some of whom had joined him on his journeys, on morality, and compiling the *Five Classics* 五經 *wǔjīng*. The *Classics* is a set of five books: the *Book of Poetry* 詩經 *shījīng* (also known as the *Odes*); the *Book of Changes* 易經 *yìjīng* (a book for divination); the *Book of Documents* 尚書 *shàngshū* (also known as the *Book of History*); the *Spring and Autumn annals* 春秋 *chūnqiū* (which often include the *Zuo Zhuan* commentary 左傳 *zuǒzhuán*); and the *Book of Rites* 禮記 *lǐjì*.<sup>1</sup> These five texts would lay the groundwork for all philosophical teaching in China for millennia to come, serving as the curriculum as late as the last Imperial Examination 科舉 *kējǔ* in 1905.

Upon his death in or around 480 BC, his disciples created schools of their own and compiled their own book of the sayings of their Master in a text called the *Analects* 論語 *lùnyǔ*, which covers 20 chapters (often called books in English) with various sayings by the Master, identified as Confucius, and his disciples. This man, and this book, would then usher in the era known as the 100 Schools of Thought 諸子百家 *zhūzǐ bǎijiā*, during which various philosophical schools vied for supremacy in the various courts of the lands

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the *Three Books on Rites* 三禮 *sānlǐ*: the *Book of Rites* 禮記 *lǐjì*, the *Rites of Zhou* 周禮 *zhōulǐ*, and the *Book of Etiquette and Rites* 儀禮 *yílǐ*, are all viewed as comprising the “rites-section” of the Five Classics

during the Warring States period 戰國 *zhànguó* (ca. 475 BC - 221 BC), roughly contemporary in time and scope with Classical Greece. About three generations later, in the 4th century BC, other schools such as the Mohists, founded by Mozi 墨子 (ca. 470-390 BC), the Daoists, founded by Laozi 老子 (a contemporary of Confucius) and led by Zhuangzi 莊子 (ca. 370 BC - 285 BC), and the Legalists, led by Lord Shang Yang 商鞅 (ca. 390 BC - 340 BC) would engage in frequent philosophical debates with the new leader of Confucianism, Mencius 孟子 *mengzi* (ca. 370 BC - 290 BC).

This is the traditional account of Confucius and early China as it has been passed down through the ages. It is, however, important to distinguish between the traditional Confucius, and his time, and the historical Confucius as historians are able to reconstruct his life based on rigorous methodology.<sup>2</sup> To summarize, the texts that are traditionally ascribed to Confucius are the *Five Classics*, and the *Analects* is said to have been written by his closest disciples upon his death. Some of his deeds are also recounted in the *Mengzi* written by Mencius some 180 years after the death of Confucius, and the fullest account of the life and deeds of both Confucius and his disciples are found in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* roughly 380 years after the death of Confucius. The choice in this thesis is to only look at the *Analects*, and I will get back to this choice later in chapter 2.2.

One particular area of interest is why Confucius never wrote an eponymous work bearing his own name. Lord Shang Yang (mid 4th century BC) wrote the *Book of Lord Shang Yang* 商君書 *shāngjūn shū*, Mencius (late 4th century BC) wrote an eponymous work called the *Mengzi* 孟子, and Zhuangzi (late 4th century BC) wrote the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. While most historians today agree that all of these books underwent heavy redaction and alterations for centuries before reaching their received form, there is still a tradition of Mencius writing the *Mengzi* 孟子, and so on. Why is there not even a tradition of an eponymous work by Confucius (early 5th century BC) called the *Kongzi* 孔子?

This thesis investigates one particular area of the life and times of Confucius, namely literacy, using the historical-critical method (also known as higher criticism) as practiced in biblical scholarship. The method will be explained in detail and demonstrated with examples from the *Analects* in chapter 2, laying out the groundwork for further study of ancient China using this methodology. Although there have been anecdotal remarks on the *general* lack of literacy in the *Analects*,<sup>3</sup> as far as I know, no comprehensive study on this topic has been carried out using the historical-critical method. An extensive background follows in chapter 3, mainly discussing the source text used, its history and transmission as an accretion text, and the choice

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<sup>2</sup> Laozi 老子 is, for instance, viewed by many historians as a purely mythological figure. See e.g. Boltz (1993).

<sup>3</sup> Kern (2018, p. 290) writes of the *Analects*:

“[C]ompared with its emphasis on exemplary conduct, it is remarkably uninterested in texts — their existence, their production, their circulation and reception—altogether”.

of books III-IX as including the earliest layer of the *Analects*. Just like in chapter 2, I provide examples and discussions based on the historical-critical method in this chapter.

The issue of the formation and early transmission of the *Analects* is a much-debated subject within academia, and no textual analysis can be successfully carried out without a proper understanding of the nature of the text itself, requiring an in-depth discussion on the topic. My hope is that, should my findings be considered interesting, the same analysis, using the same methodology, can be easily applied to the remaining books of the *Analects* and to other texts in the extant corpus of ancient Chinese literature.

Chapter 4 is divided into two parts, since I observe the phenomenon of literacy in the early 5th century BC from two independent angles: in the first part (chapter 4.1), traces of literacy found in archaeology and history are presented. The survey traces the development of literacy in ancient China from the earliest archaeological remains dating to roughly 1250 BC down to the time of Mencius in or around the year 300 BC. In the second part (chapter 4.2), a systematic textual analysis of the earliest layers of the *Analects* is added. The textual analysis of the earliest layer of the *Analects* is filtered through every instance of possible reference to writing and every possible reference to the Five Classics that Confucius is also said to have compiled, using the tools of the historical-critical method to judge whether these sayings are early or late. These sayings were first selected based on the three criteria: (a) every instance of usage of the character for “writing” 文 *wen* (found in appendix 1); (b) every remaining possible reference to writing, and; (c) every possible reference to the Five Classics (found in appendix 2, with translations). Finally, they were grouped into various categories that relate to literacy and oral culture and are presented in chapters 4.2.1-4.2.6.

In chapter 5, I discuss the various findings of the research. The textual analysis indicates that the *Book of Poetry* was not in a fixed form and most likely transmitted orally, confirming findings from other authors such as Kern (2005),<sup>4</sup> and that Confucius would not have been active in the two areas of social life most likely to interact with writing (divination and the royal family). Only one instance, III, 9, could possibly refer to writing, and it is a passage that is riddled with problems and possible evidence of text corruption. Furthermore, in this chapter the results are linked to extant scholarship on literacy within sinology, as well as to an interdisciplinary discussion regarding the work of Albert Lord (1960) on illiterate, oral cultures and the Greek bard Homer.

Finally, in chapter 6, a concluding discussion summarizes the presentation and discussion of the archaeological, historical, and critical text analyzes. All this evidence points towards the conclusion that Confucius, living in a mostly illiterate society and being outside the sphere of the political elite, having no

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<sup>4</sup> Kern’s (2005, p. 181) argument is that the *Book of Poetry* had reached a “high degree of canonization” with a more or less fixed form in the late fourth century BC, which implies that it had not reached this form prior to the late fourth century BC.

need for writing, was most likely himself illiterate, and thus, not engaged in the actual process of writing and/or reading.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 The historical critical method

This thesis will use the historical critical method, sometimes called higher criticism, as practiced within the field of biblical scholarship to analyze the source text. The method has been firmly entrenched as the method of biblical scholarship ever since Albert Schweitzer's (1906) *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, known in English as *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, although the history of the development of the method is at least 600 years old.<sup>5</sup>

The method is centered around four main criteria to judge if a passage is early (i.e., closer to purported event) or late (i.e., closer to our own time). The method works quite well in establishing relative dates, but it remains difficult to accurately assess absolute dates. As relative dates are established, a chronology of the evolution of ideas can be traced, from which conclusions may be drawn.

The four criteria are: **dissimilarity**, **independent attestation**, **language and vocabulary**, and **contextual credibility**. All four criteria will be explained below in detail, based primarily on Bart Ehrman's (2004) *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* chapter 13 "The Historical Jesus".

Ultimately, the historical critical method is mainly concerned with understanding the worldview of *the authors* of a text. The historical personage that lies behind the fictional creation of an author is radically inaccessible to the reader. The closer we get to understanding this world view, we may then triangulate our findings, i.e., observe the phenomenon from two different viewpoints, through other methods, such as archaeology and/or other texts, and begin the process of reconstructing the life of the historical person behind the text. However, the entire reconstruction of the historical Confucius, or of the entire *Analects*, is beyond the scope of a master's thesis, and thus this thesis will only look at literacy in the time of Confucius as reconstructed based on archaeological remains and the source text.

A very important principle when using the historical-critical method is to avoid later interpretations to influence the analysis of the text. This means that the writings of later authoritative authors, such as Mencius 孟子 (4th century BC) or Sima Qian 司馬遷 (1st century BC) will not be used to supplement the close

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<sup>5</sup> Some of the most noteworthy contributions to the development of the theory may be listed as follows: Julius Wellhausen's (1883) *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, David Friedrich Strauss's (1835) *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*, Gottlob Christian Storr's (1786) *Über den Zweck der evangelischen Geschichte und der Briefe Johannis*, Jean Astruc's (1753) *Conjectures sur la Genèse*, Richard Simon's (1685) *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, Baruch Spinoza's (1670) *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Lorenzo Valla's (1440) *De falso credita et ementita Constantini Donatione declamatio*, and Abraham Ibn Ezra's (c. 1160) commentary on Deuteronomy 1:2.

reading of the *Analects* since these authors had agendas of their own that would have impacted their reading of the text.

Below, I will introduce the four criteria, how they work, and offer examples from the *Analects*.

### 2.1.1 Dissimilarity

The criterion of dissimilarity is often the criterion that appears most illogical at first but makes the most sense once you understand how it works. Simply put: Does it go against the tendency of the author?

We assume on an a priori basis that the persons who first composed any given text reporting sayings from an authority *generally* wish to present a good picture of their master, whether that would be Jesus, Moses, Confucius, or anyone else. Thus, the tendency of the person who was recording the tradition is to clean up any details that may be construed as negative and remove ambiguity from passages. If a saying gives a negative impression to the reader, or if it has an ambiguous reading that could lend itself to a negative reading, *it is unlikely that the first person who recorded it would invent it*. For every saying, ask: why would a scribe invent this? Sometimes, it is quite clear why a scribe would invent it, and that makes the saying less likely to be historical. Sometimes, it is not clear at all why a scribe would invent a passage, and that makes it more likely that it goes back to an earlier period. An example below taken from book VI of the *Analects* may serve as an illustration:

VI, 28. The Master visited Nanzi. Zilu was displeased. The Master swore [an oath], saying:  
If I have done wrong, may Heaven curse me, may Heaven curse me.<sup>6</sup>

子見南子子路不說夫子矢之曰予所否者天厭之天厭之<sup>7</sup>

Nanzi 南子 (d. ca. 480 BC) was the concubine of Duke Ling of Wei 衛靈公 (ca. 540 BC - 493 BC) and is traditionally regarded as having a morally dubious character. There is no reason whatsoever to invent this passage to (a) introduce the problem of the Master visiting a wicked concubine in a neighboring state to begin with, and (b) phrasing it so that one possible reading among many is that they had sexual intercourse. If this saying had to be invented for whatever reason, why not add some guarding terms like: “The Master visited Nanzi and discussed taxation of the upper classes. Zilu was displeased because he believed in trickle-down economics...”.

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<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by me.

<sup>7</sup> Note that throughout this thesis, I will not offer any punctuation to the original text because there would not have been punctuation in the original text. In most cases, it is obvious where punctuation should be, but sometimes it is not clear at all, and thus I prefer to leave the text as unaltered as possible.

As it stands now, it makes much more sense that the Master did go and visit Nanzi \*for whatever reason, and they did whatever they did\*, Zilu was displeased \*for whatever reason\*, rather than to say that this was invented by a compiler living hundreds of years later and that everyone at the time of the supposed compiler uncritically accepted this.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.1.2 Independent attestation

The criterion of independent attestation, also known as “multiple authorship”, is used a lot in New Testament studies where multiple sources such as Mark, Q, John, and Paul exist. Because this thesis will only concern itself with one text, the *Analects*, this criterion will not be used a lot, although there is at least one instance where it becomes important which will be discussed below.

The criterion itself is easy to understand: if two independent sources say the same thing, it is more likely that they reflect a historical memory. Naturally, if two sayings are verbatim the same, it should be assumed that one copied the other, but sometimes, two different sayings can use different vocabulary to say the same thing, making it appear as though they originally stem from two different sources, increasing the likelihood that the saying goes back to one original source. William Propp (2013, 00:14:12-00:14:22) paraphrases Heinrich Heine quite well: “The duplications and the contradictions in the Bible are the best evidence it was put together in good faith. Bad faith is always scrupulous concerning the details.”

IX, 6: The Tai Zai<sup>9</sup> asked Zigong, Is your Master a *junzi*?<sup>10</sup> If so, how come he has many abilities? Zigong said, Heaven decided for him to be a sage, and for him to have many abilities. The Master heard this and said, The Tai Zai knows me! When I was young I was poor, and thus learned many simple things. Does a *junzi* have many abilities? No, he does not.

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<sup>8</sup> The weight of this passage has been long noted. Eno (2018) writes in footnote 11 on page 43: “Cui [i.e. Cui Shu 崔述 (1740 - 1816)] is the earliest scholar I am aware of to identify an individual Lunyu passage as a late interpolation within an early book. He regarded the report of Lunyu 7/23, which states that Confucius met with the immoral consort of the ruler in the state of Wei, as inconsistent with Confucius’s character (Zhang1954:454).” Eno has pointed out that his numbering it 7/23 is incorrect and he is indeed talking about VI, 28. Naturally, Cui had the wrong approach because his question was not: “why would a scribe invent this?” but rather the more uncritical “how could the Master do this?”, but his reservations show that VI, 28 is a unique passage in the *Analects*. Once you know what question to ask, the nature of the question as being very early becomes obvious.

<sup>9</sup> A high-ranking officer whose name is not recorded. Thus, Tai Zai should be thought of as “governor”, “minister” or something of the sort.

<sup>10</sup> Since the Master replies with the term “*junzi*”, I think it is more likely that the Tai Zai originally asked Zigong if Confucius was a *junzi*, not if he was a sage. Based on the criterion of dissimilarity, it is easy to see how the switch from “gentleman” 君子 *jūn zǐ* to “sage” 聖者 *shèng zhě* could have been made without much notice.



大宰問於子貢曰夫子聖者與何其多能也子貢曰固天縱之將聖又多能也子聞之曰大宰  
知我乎吾少也賤故多能鄙事君子多乎哉不多也

IX, 7: Lao<sup>11</sup> said, The Master said, I have not been tried,<sup>12</sup> thus [I acquired] arts.

牢曰子云吾不試故藝

In IX, 6, we are told that the Master had many abilities *because he was poor when he was young*. In IX, 7, however, we are told that the Master had many abilities *because he was never employed*. Furthermore, they use very different vocabularies: in IX, 6, the term for ‘many abilities’ is 多能 *duō néng*, literally ‘many abilities’. In IX, 7, however, the term used is 藝 *yì*, often translated as “arts”, although this is most likely a mistranslation based on what the term came to mean during the Warring States and Han dynasty time, where it embodied the “Six Arts” 六藝 *liù yì*, the pinnacle of education for any educated man.<sup>13</sup> Here 藝 *yì* bears a negative connotation; it is merely the result of the Master’s being unemployed, it is not an active choice by the Master, implying that it is not a necessity for him. IX, 7 reads as if “had the Master been employed, he would not have acquired arts”. This links it directly to the same type of ‘many abilities’ that we find in IX, 6. Thus, we may assume that ‘many abilities’ 多能 *duō néng* and ‘arts’ 藝 *yì* refer to the same problem in his life.

IX, 6 & 7 both say that the Master had a specific character flaw relating to ‘many abilities’, but (a) they use different vocabulary, and (b) give different reasons for this. Thus, they most likely stem from two different sources. IX, 7 even gives us its supposed source, a certain Lao 牢.

### 2.1.3 Language and vocabulary

The criterion of language and vocabulary is not explicitly mentioned by Bart Ehrman but it occurs frequently enough<sup>14</sup> that it merits a mention here. While it is not applicable in the same way for the *Analects* as it is for the New Testament, because of the issue of lack of multiple authors, the criterion will instead

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<sup>11</sup> “A man we do not know much about. Perhaps the disciple “Ch’in Chang mentioned in 左傳, Duke Chao, 20th year, and the Tzu-lao of 莊子 XXV, 6.” (Waley, p.139)

<sup>12</sup> For public office. In other words, “I, not having been employed, acquired [many] arts”.

<sup>13</sup> It becomes highly significant that the term used is “arts” 藝 *yì* for showing that the *Analects* cannot be an artifact from the Han dynasty.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., Meier (1991, footnote 41 on p. 80-81), in analyzing one of the possible references to Jesus in the works of Josephus discusses the usage of “a wise man” to describe Jesus, a term that is not used in the gospels, which he therefore argues makes that part of the verse early, although he argues that some other interpolations have been made.

mostly be used to compare phrases and words as they occur chronologically in the corpus of Chinese texts from pre-Qin and Imperial China.

The two databases used to search for words and phrases will be ctext.org, run by Dr. Donald Sturgeon of Durham University, for received texts, and inscription.asdc.sinica.edu.tw, run by Academia Sinica 中央研究院 *zhōng yāng yán jiū yuàn* based in Taiwan, for excavated texts. If a word or set phrase occurs only once in the *Analects* and then does not occur in any other received text until the Han dynasty over 300 years later, at which point it suddenly occurs a lot again, that will be viewed as evidence that the saying is a later interpolation. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to date individual passages, so it ultimately does not matter if this saying was written in the 3rd century BC or in the Han dynasty in the 2nd century BC; the only thing that matters is that it is not early.

IX, 11: [Yan Yuan] said with a deep sigh, The more I strain my gaze up towards it, the higher it soars. The deeper I bore down into it, the harder it becomes. I see it in front; but suddenly it is behind. Step by step the Master skilfully lures one on. He has broadened me with culture, restrained me with ritual. Even if I wanted to stop, I could not. Just when I feel that I have exhausted every resource, something seems to rise up, standing out sharp and clear. Yet though I long to pursue it, I can find no way of getting to it at all. (Waley, 1938 translation).

顏淵喟然歎曰仰之彌高鑽之彌堅瞻之在前忽焉在後夫子循循然善誘人博我以文約我以禮欲罷不能既竭吾才如有所立卓爾雖欲從之末由也已

The vocabulary used in this saying is quite unique both in style and content. The passage is filled with sets of four-character expressions<sup>15</sup> which never occur in any other place. Proverbs are occasionally cited, often by the Master<sup>16</sup>, but nowhere does anyone string together 6-8 sets of four-character sayings. Furthermore, the following compounds cannot be found in any other text prior Sima Qian's 司馬遷 *Records of the Grand Historian* 太史公書 completed circa 100 BC:

1. “The more I strain my gaze up towards it, the higher it soars” 仰之彌高 *yǎng zhī mí gāo* (nor the last two characters 彌高 *mí gāo* by themselves)
2. “The deeper I bore down into it, the harder it becomes” 鑽之彌堅 *zuān zhī mí jiān*
3. “[He has] broadened me with culture” 博我以文 *bó wǒ yǐ wén*

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<sup>15</sup> Four-character expressions are very common in both ancient and modern Chinese, but it is rare to have such a high frequency of four-character words.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g., IX, 28

4. “Restrained me with ritual” 約我以禮 *yuē wǒ yǐ lǐ*
5. “Stand up [in front of/before me]” 卓爾 *zhuó ěr*

While the saying is very beautiful and certainly holds some value as a poetic formulation, it is most likely late. It is spoken by Yan Yuan, the foremost of the Master’s disciples and it is easy to imagine a situation where someone would read e.g. V, 9 where the Master says that he himself is not equal to his disciple Yan Yuan “I and you not like [him]” 吾與女弗如也<sup>17</sup> and ask the question: “Why are we following Confucius and not Yan Yuan?”, at which point the need for Yan Yuan to defer to the skill of the Master becomes necessary and the seed for this saying is planted. A later scribe or poet uses a whole range of terms used in his own time to compose IX, 11.

### 2.1.4 Contextual credibility

The criterion of contextual credibility is a strictly negative criterion which serves to argue against a tradition being early based on the historical circumstances as gathered from archaeology, other texts, and other passages in the source text already deemed early. Thus, it is heavily reliant on previous linguistic work and excavations, making it a mainly supplementary criterion.

If a supposed letter by Confucius would be found, praising Liu Bang 劉邦 on his defeating Xiang Yu 項羽 and establishing the Han dynasty 202 BC, it would not conform to the historical fact that Confucius lived hundreds of years prior to this event.

In Book XIII, 3 there is evidence of this type of later interpolation, where the topic of rectifying names, which was not prevalent in the time of Confucius, is put on the lips of Confucius. I will quote Waley (1938, p. 21-22) at length:

Only in one passage of the *Analects* do we find any reference to ideas the development of which we should be inclined to place later than the ordinarily accepted date of the book, [p. 22] namely the middle of the fourth century. I refer to the disquisition on ‘correcting names’ in XIII, 3. In *Mencius* (early third century BC) there is not a trace of the ‘language crisis’, and we have no reason to suppose that the whole sequence of ideas embodied in this passage could possibly be earlier in date than the end of the fourth century.

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<sup>17</sup> I follow Waley’s interpretation on this passage. For a longer discussion, see Waley (1938, p. 74). As was briefly mentioned in the discussion on the criterion of dissimilarity in chapter 2.1.1, merely the fact that V, 9 could be interpreted as the Master deferring to Yan Yuan would be enough to at least warrant a later scribe to affirm the supremacy of the Master’s teachings.

The first part of the saying reads as follows:

XIII, 3a. Zilu said, The ruler of Wei is waiting for you, Master, to administer the government. What is the first action you will take? The Master said, The first thing must be to rectify names! Zilu said, Is that so? You are off the mark, Master! Why must they be rectified? The Master said, You are an uncultured man, Zilu!

子路曰衛君待子而為政子將奚先子曰必也正名乎子路曰有是哉子之迂也奚其正子曰野哉由也

The topic of rectifying names did not take center stage until the work of Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 310 BC - 235 BC), and we may assume that XIII, 3 is a later interpolation either by Xunzi himself, or more likely a disciple belonging to his school. Waley (1938, p. 22) notes of this hypothetical student: “for whom the absence of any reference in the sayings of Confucius to what they themselves taught as a fundamental doctrine must certainly have been inconvenient.”

## 2.2 The choice of the *Analects* for the text-critical study in this thesis

As was mentioned in the introduction, there are several works which claim to retell the deeds of Confucius or are directly related to him. Some of the most noteworthy ones are the *Analects* 論語 *lùnyǔ*, said to have been written by the disciples after the death of Confucius; the *Five Classics* 五經 *wǔ jīng* which are said to have been compiled by Confucius himself, although only the *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳 actually refers to Confucius on a few scattered occasions; the *Mengzi* 孟子 which was written by Mencius, who by tradition was taught by the grandson of Confucius, and the *Records of the Grand Historian* 太史公書 *tàishǐgōng shū*<sup>18</sup> by Sima Qian 司馬遷.

As was discussed briefly under chapter 2.1, an important tenet in the historical-critical method is to read a text without relying on later interpretations by other authoritative texts. This means that one should avoid reading the *Analects* through the lens of the *Mengzi* etc. Thus, choosing to focus on a single work for textual analysis is better than looking at multiple ones. The reason I chose to look at the *Analects* is because it has many interesting features that the other texts do not. One of the most noteworthy features of the later texts is the almost divine nature that is ascribed to Confucius in later works. In the *Mengzi* chapter Gongsun Chou 公孫丑, the disciple Gongsun Chou asks Mencius if the legendary Bo Yi 伯夷 and Yi Yin 伊尹 are

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<sup>18</sup> Nowadays often referred to as the *shǐ jì* 史記.

of the same rank as Confucius is, to which Mencius replies: “No. Since there were living men until now, there never was another Confucius.” (Legge translation) 曰否自有生民以來未有孔子也<sup>19</sup> With such a high view of Confucius, it is difficult to know what other historical, or at least semi-historical, memories that have been omitted from the *Mengzi*. In the *Analects*, on the other hand, the Master is continually bemoaning that he is not a sage. For instance, in IX, 9 we read: “The Master said, “The Feng bird (phoenix) does not come; the river sends forth no map - it is all over with me!” (Legge translation) 子曰鳳鳥不至河不出圖吾已矣夫. The arrival of the Feng bird and the river giving forth a map or charter of some sort were both signs that a sage had arrived on the earth; the absence of these two indicated that the Master was not a sage.

The *Analects* appear to offer a more “human” view of Confucius, as a man who faces defeat and rejection time and again, features that by the criterion of dissimilarity are deemed less likely to be invented out of whole cloth. Furthermore, the paraphrased quote I offered by William Propp (2013, 00:14:12-00:14:22) under chapter 2.1.2: “The duplications and the contradictions in the Bible are the best evidence it was put together in good faith. Bad faith is always scrupulous concerning the details”, is quite applicable to the *Analects*. As was discussed under chapter 2.1.2, there are contradictions in the *Analects*, and as will be discussed under chapter 3.2.3, there is a general lack of editorial oversight in the *Analects*, both of which features that lends itself towards some semblance of credibility on the ancient nature of at least parts of the *Analects*. For these reasons, I chose to only look at the *Analects* in this thesis. Regardless of the specific outcomes of this study, if the general application of the methodology itself proves useful, I hope that the same study can and will be carried out on these other books as well in a greater quest for the historical Confucius.

## 2.3 Applying the methodology

To properly use the historical-critical method, it is imperative to know what type of text is being analyzed. If, for instance, a text is written at one time, in one place, by one person, a scholar would not expect there to be any later interpolations or contradictions, and there would generally be one set vocabulary and phraseology used by the author. If, on the other hand, a text is begun by one person, or a group of people, at one time, but then grows through successive generations of authors in different times and different places, the various features mentioned above would begin to emerge. Thus, for the purposes of accurately analyzing

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<sup>19</sup> Gongsun Chou asks “Comparing Bo Yi and Yi Yin with Confucius, are they to be placed in the same rank?” (Legge translation) 伯夷伊尹於孔子若是班乎 to which Mencius answers “No. Since there were living men until now, there never was another Confucius.” (Legge translation) 曰否自有生民以來未有孔子也

the various features of the source text, chapter 3 will extensively discuss the nature of the *Analects* and its formation, a topic which by no means is considered settled in academia.

In order to triangulate the topic of literacy in the time of Confucius in chapter 4 by way of letting the analysis of the archaeological evidence and the historical sources preserved from different periods be put next to the analysis of the possible instances of literacy in the oldest part of the text itself, in order to be able to draw the conclusions, the thesis first offers a survey of the development of literacy in ancient China from the earliest time there is evidence for literacy, ca. 1200 BC, down to around the year 300 BC, some 200 years after the death of the Master. This survey is based mainly on the work *Writing and Literacy in Early China* by eds. Li & Branner (2011) and will lay the groundwork for understanding what the time of Confucius would have looked like from the perspective of literacy as best as scholars can reconstruct it.

An analysis of the text follows. First, I filtered all verses from books III-IX based on three criteria: (a) every occurrence of the character 文 *wén*; (b) every other possible reference to writing, and (c) every possible reference to the *Five Classics* 五經 *wǔ jīng*. The character 文 *wén* can be translated either as “culture” or “writing”, and it is not difficult to see how the two concepts are at least tangentially connected. Thus, seeing how the *Analects* treat this character is key in understanding how the authors view literacy.

Based on this initial division, I selected a total of 29 total passages that required analysis. I then translated all of these passages based on translation work by previous authors, both Chinese and Western. These translations are all available in appendixes 1 and 2, where appendix 1 discusses all passages that (a) uses *wen* 文 and appendix 2 discusses (b) every other possible reference to writing and (c) every possible reference to the *Five Classics*. Finally, I grouped the relevant passages into various categories relating to literacy and oral culture to form a coherent analysis in chapter 4.2.

## 2.4 Translation

Translating ancient texts is always difficult. Not only is the vocabulary deceptively different,<sup>20</sup> but the context is often difficult to understand. In the case of the *Analects*, context is often completely non-existent and in the best of cases the reader is only offered one or two sentences of context for a saying. It is impossible to know if the context offered was there in the beginning, or if it is the work of a later compiler that is himself trying to understand a supposedly preserved saying from the Master.

Some of the sayings are very easy to understand, and in those cases I have chosen to simply relay the translation of James Legge (1893), but in most cases I have offered the translations of Arthur Waley (1938) and D.C. Lau (1992) as well and translated the saying by myself. I have tried my best to faithfully reproduce

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<sup>20</sup> Because some words that have one meaning today might have had a completely different meaning millennia ago.

in English the source text as I believe that it was originally written. When interpreting a text, there is always the issue of reading what you want into the text. In order to avoid this as much as possible, I have tried to rely on the interpretations of other scholars, mainly Arthur Waley (1938), whose famous translation often goes into text-critical arguments and reconstruction of supposedly earlier versions of a saying, and D.C. Lau (1992), who represents an “evolution” of Waley’s work and who also often deals with text-critical arguments. I follow the interpretation of either both or at least one of them on the main points in every single translation I make except for IX, 15, which I read as having a later interpolation (see appendix 2). I also refer rather extensively to the works of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), the “Thomas Aquinas of the East”, whose interpretation is viewed as authoritative, although it is often based on ideological grounds, rather than text-critical (see Waley, 1938, p. 72-77); James Legge (1893), the first “authoritative” translator of most books in the extant corpus of ancient Chinese literature into English, but who often relied on the faulty assumptions of Zhu Xi (see Waley, 1938, p. 72-77), and Yang Bojun 杨伯峻 (1909-1992), whose translation of the *Analecets* into modern Chinese in 1958<sup>21</sup> represents a modern interpretation of the traditional view. Although Yang is not afraid to point out problems with the text,<sup>22</sup> he rarely diverts from the traditional interpretation.

In at least one case,<sup>23</sup> my translation has omitted parts of the received version of the text, and in other cases I have changed the interpretation of individual characters,<sup>24</sup> but I have always kept the received form of the Chinese intact.

I have considered adding glossing to the translation, but I find that it might not help the non-Classical Chinese speaker too much, nor is it the common practice amongst other scholars.<sup>25</sup> The biggest problem with interpreting ancient Chinese texts is how you choose to interpret a character. Thus, is 文 *wen* supposed to be translated as “Chinese character”, “writing”, “language”, “literary composition”, “classical Chinese”, “refined”, “good”, “King Wen”, “bookish”, “moral character”, “civilian”, “tattoo”, or “decorative design”? The authoritative dictionary of the Chinese language, the *Hanyu Da Cidian* 汉语大词典 lists 38 total possible meanings for the character 文 *wén*, and it would not be feasible to gloss all meanings for every character in a passage. Since the main problem in understanding a text is not a word-by-word gloss, but

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<sup>21</sup> I will, however, refer to the 2006 edition.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g., the discussion on VII, 33 in chapter 4.2.1, where Yang says that there is no evidence that *mò* 莫 actually does mean ‘probably’, but that there is no better interpretation that allowing for that possibility, even though, as is shown in chapter 4.2.1, there is a better interpretation and reading *mò* 莫 as ‘probably’ is incorrect. Nevertheless, his admitting to the problems with the traditional view is highly indicative of his integrity and faithfulness to reproduce the text as he saw fit, standing with one foot in the camp of text-criticism and one foot in the camp of traditional interpretation.

<sup>23</sup> IX, 15

<sup>24</sup> E.g., VII, 17

<sup>25</sup> See e.g., Hunter & Kern (2018)

rather how you choose to interpret each individual character, glossing will not help the non-Classical Chinese speaker and might actually serve to confuse the reader.



## 3. Background

In order to accurately analyze the various features of the *Analects* in chapter 4.2, this chapter will first discuss the transmission of the text and then present and discuss the three major competing theories on the formation of the *Analects*: the traditional view of perfect transmission of authorship by the direct disciples of Confucius in chapter 3.2.1, the theory of the *Analects* compiled during the Western Han dynasty ca. 150 BC in chapter 3.2.2, and finally the accretion text theory in chapter 3.2.3. As of now, there is no large consensus among scholars on which theory is most likely.

The goal of this chapter is only to familiarize the reader with the main arguments for the accretion text theory to justify the text-critical approach made in chapter 4.2. If the *Analects* is not an accretion text, many of the arguments in chapters 4.2 and chapter 5 (although not necessarily all of them) would fall, and therefore it is important to discuss the topic of the formation of the *Analects* in detail. As was stated in chapter 2, how a text was compiled directly determines many of the features one would expect to find. A text written by one person at one time and in one place would, in general, lack many contradictions and use one set of vocabulary and phraseology, whereas a text that has grown both through additions and redactions over generations before reaching its fixed form would have more of these features. Thus, when using the historical-critical method for analyzing the *Analects*, it is important to know exactly what type of text it is.

### 3.1 The transmission of the text

Chronologically, the first time the term *Analects* 論語 *lùnyǔ* is mentioned by name is in the *Book of Rites* 禮記 *lǐjì* from the early 4th century BC<sup>26</sup>, which if anything throws doubt on the authenticity of that passage, but which led Lau (1992, p. 263) to conclude that: “a work under the name of *Lun yü* 論語 must have existed before the Han dynasty.” While I am not inherently opposed to the conclusion, I am certainly not as confident as he is.

According to Makeham (1996, p.1), the *Analects* appear almost out of nowhere in or around the year 140 BC and comes in three flavors: a Lu 魯 version,<sup>27</sup> a Qi 齊 version,<sup>28</sup> and an ‘old’ 古 *gǔ* version.<sup>29</sup> The ‘old’ version, named old because it was written with an older style of characters used during the Warring States period, was supposedly found hidden behind a wall in a house owned by Confucius’s descendants.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Fāng jì* 坊記, 17.

<sup>27</sup> That is, from the state of Lu 魯, where Confucius lived.

<sup>28</sup> A powerful neighboring state of Lu.

<sup>29</sup> That is, 古 *gǔ* means ‘old’ in Chinese.

<sup>30</sup> The careful reader will remember the story of how King Josiah found a “Book of the Law” during his renovation of the Temple in 2 Kings 22

Makeham (1996, p.14) states that scholarly consensus is that the ‘old’ version was an authentic text hidden away during the book burning under the Qin dynasty.

### **Textual history**

According to Cheng (1993, p. 313-319), the received text is an attempt at syncretism by Chang Yu 張禹 (d. 5 BC.), tutor to the emperor-to-be Cheng 成帝 (r. 33-7 BC) who took the Lu version as the main text and made references to the Qi text as he saw fit. This version, known as the Chang Hou Lun 張侯論 became the most famous version of the text during the Han dynasty and was engraved in stone in 175 AD in the “Stone Classics of the Xiping era” 熹平石經 *xīpíng shījīng*. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-ca. 200 AD) wrote a famous commentary which was preserved in the works of He Yan 何晏 (ca. 195-249 AD), and this text appears to be the same as the received text. Thus, Cheng (1993, p. 317) concludes that the *Analects* is the result of a “gradual process of several centuries”. Based on textual history, it may be assumed that the text had reached its received form at the latest in the 2nd century AD based on the stone inscription in 175 AD.

### **Archaeological history**

Van Els (2018) states that the earliest archaeological evidence for the *Analects* comes from two separate tombsites, both dating to ca. 50 BC: the Dingzhou *Analects* 定州論語 excavated from the city of Dingzhou south of Beijing, and the Pyongyang *Analects* 平壤論語 which are currently in the capital of North Korea. Of the two, only the Dingzhou *Analects* have been subjected to any form of academic scrutiny at all, and the Pyongyang *Analects* have not been released to the academic world by the North Korean government. Unfortunately, van Els (2018, p. 154) says that the Dingzhou *Analects* have not fared too well. Shortly after the Dingzhou tomb of Liu Xiu 劉脩 was sealed in 55 BC., graverobbers broke in. However, they accidentally started a fire and fled. This fire damaged many of the manuscripts and threw the bamboo strips in disorder, meaning that it is impossible to know if they were in the same order as the received text. Furthermore, after their discovery in 1973, they were stored in Beijing. In 1976, the Tangshan 唐山 earthquake toppled the boxes where these strips were stored and caused further damage to the text.

As for the text witness itself, while there are some differences, most are inconsequential. Textual variants center mostly on word order, omissions of modal particles, and variations of individual graphs (van Els gives the example “such as 立, now written with an additional 亻 “man” element on the left: 位 “place, location”” on p. 162).

As for the Pyongyang *Analects*, van Els (2018, p. 164-171) says that they are only known through an accidental leak in 2003, where in a cache of some 152 color photos and ca. 3400 black-and-white photos of North Korean archaeological digsites and remains were given to Japanese scholars and painters Egami Namio 江上波夫, Hirayama Ikuo 平山郁夫, and Itō Toshimitsu 伊藤利光. Of these, one black-and-white photo showed some 30 bamboo strips which appear to contain an ancient version of the *Analects*. They then found that a similar picture had been released in 2001 and Japanese and Korean scholars have since worked on these two joint pictures to form some sort of understanding of the two text witnesses. They appear to have roughly the same features of textual variation as the Dingzhou *Analects*. Van Els (2018, p. 173) claims that “The two excavated manuscripts, the earliest representations of the *Analects* we have, reveal that the text had by and large acquired its current form when the bamboo strips were placed in their respective tombs, around 50 BCE.” Thus, we may confidently assume that the text was fixed from the middle of the 2nd century AD, and based on archaeological remains, we may assume that the text had already been largely fixed in content, although not on a character-by-character basis, by circa 50 BC.

### 3.2 The nature of the text and three theories on its compilation

What about the text itself? What kind of text is it? First, some general observations:

1. It has 20 *piān* 篇. Although “chapter” would probably be a better description, it is usually translated as “book”, and it will be translated as “book” in this thesis as well. They will be referred to by Roman numerals I, V, X.
2. Each book has *roughly* 20-25 sayings, most of which are by “the Master” 子 *zǐ*, which is understood to be Confucius, some by “Confucius” 孔子 *kǒngzǐ*, and some by various disciples.
3. Most sayings are plain statements by the Master. A few are dialogues between the Master and the disciples. On a rare occasion, the speaker is one of the disciples or a third party.
4. On occasion, although not very often, a very brief context is given for a saying.

As for the 20 books, as early as the 12th century, it was noted by Hu Yin 胡寅 (1098-1156) that there was a stylistic distinction between the first ten books I-X and books XI-XX which he deemed as later (Brooks & Brooks, 1998, p. 201). In the 18th century, it was noted by Cui Shu 崔述 (1740–1816) that the style and personages of the last five books, XVI-XX, was so different from the rest that they must be a very late addition. He noted, for instance, that Book XIX only had sayings by the disciples and none by the Master (Lau, 1992, p. 265). A variety of different layers have been suggested, and a discussion will follow below.

First, authorship. One of the biggest problems is that the *Analects* has never had any *one* tradition of authorship. Rather, the authorship of the work has always been identified with “one or more of Confucius’s disciples”. Ban Gu 班固 (32-92 AD), author of the *Book of Han* 漢書 *hàn shū* (finished by his sister Ban Zhao 班昭 in 111 AD), wrote under the ‘Treatise on Literature’ 藝文志 *yìwén zhì* chapter:

The *Lun yǔ* contains the replies made by Master K’ung to his disciples and contemporaries, and the discussions between the disciples or the words that they heard from the Master. At that time each disciple held his own record, so that when the Master died, his followers put their notes together to make a compilation, thus called the *Lun yǔ*. (Cheng translation, 1993, p. 313)

論語者孔子應答弟子時人及弟子相與言而接聞於夫子之語也當時弟子各有所記夫子既卒門人相與輯而論纂故謂之論語

But this does not actually help us very much. Which disciples? When? Famously, book VIII, 3-7 records the death of one of the disciples Zengzi 曾子 ca. 429 BC.<sup>31</sup> How does that fit in if the *Analects* were written right after the death of Confucius in 480 BC? All we can really say is that it is an anonymous work, and we may reasonably speculate, based on the findings in 2.1.1 and 2.1.2, that *parts of it* could have been written down by those who had closest access to the Master, which reasonably would be his disciples, but not much more can be said.

Several theories have arisen as to the formation of the *Analects*. Below, I will present and discuss three of them: perfect transmission as per the traditional view, a Han dynasty artifact, and finally the accretion text theory.

### 3.2.1 Theory 1: The traditional theory of perfect transmission

The traditional theory of perfect transmission of the sayings of Confucius has been around at least since the time of Ban Gu’s 班固 comment in the *Book of Han* cited above. However, it becomes problematic not only because of such passages as IX, 11 discussed in chapter 2.1.3, which uses a vocabulary and style that is much more in line with Imperial times than the time of the death of Confucius, but also due to a type of passages that have evidence of commentary added by later scribes. A perfect example of this is VIII, 20, a passage that has clearly undergone one major change by a later scribe. This case will now be discussed in

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<sup>31</sup> Makeham (1996) states that Zengzi died ca. 429 BC, at least 50 years after the death of Confucius. See my discussion on VIII, 3 under 4.2.3.

detail, showing that it is impossible that every sentence in this passage was authored by the same hand, and that it is much more likely that it was authored by one person and that a later scribe, unfamiliar with the first scribe, added a sentence to it which has since become part of the entire saying.

Almost all scholars agree that VIII, 20 has the Master remembering the glorious days of the ancient king Wu of Zhou 周武王, the semi-mythological king who overthrew the Shang dynasty 商 in or around 1045 BC, some 500 years before Confucius lived, but to reach this conclusion they all have to make difficult interpretations that open up for internal contradictions in the text and add supposedly missing sentences. I will first offer James Legge's translation, which appears to be quite standard with little deviation on the major points of interpretation by other scholars and point out four of the major problems with this interpretation. I will present my own solutions to these problems along with my own translation, and finally offer some final remarks on the history of the making of this passage.

Shun had five ministers, and the empire was well governed. King Wu said, "I have ten able ministers." Confucius said, "Is not the saying that talents are difficult to find, true? Only when the dynasties of Tang and Yu met, were they more abundant than in this of Zhou, yet there was a woman among them. The able ministers were no more than nine men. King Wen possessed two of the three parts of the empire, and with those he served the dynasty of Yin. The virtue of the house of Zhou may be said to have reached the highest point indeed." (Legge translation)

舜有臣五人而天下治武王曰予有亂臣十人孔子曰才難不其然乎唐虞之際於斯為盛有  
婦人焉九人而已三分天下有其二以服事殷周之德其可謂至德也已矣

The following major problems with his translation may be noted as follows:

1. Where does the first sentence come from? The second sentence is said by King Wu and the rest is said by Confucius, but no source is given for "Shun had five ministers, and the empire was well governed."
2. King Wu says that he has ten able ministers. A smaller mistake Legge does is tying the phrase "there was a woman, and so there were only nine men" 有婦人焉九人而已 to the preceding sentence rather than the following, so his translation reads "Only when the dynasties of Tang and Yu met, were they more abundant than in this of Zhou, yet there was a woman among them." However, it makes much more sense to read this sentence as tying into what King Wu said

regarding his having ten able ministers,<sup>32</sup> so I choose to follow Waley (1938) on this point and read a full stop after “Only when the dynasties of Tang and Yu met, were they more abundant than in this of Zhou.” If this is the case, why is Confucius trying to get that number of able ministers in the court of king Wu *lower*?

3. The sentence that begins “King Wen possessed two of the three parts of the empire...” lacks a grammatical subject in the Chinese altogether.
4. What is the entire verse actually trying to say? Is it a praise of cutting down personnel costs? Is it Confucius remembering the glory days of yore?

I would offer the following solutions to these problems:

1. The first sentence is spoken by an observer of the text to the reader of the text. In other words, it is a commentary solely for the benefit of the reader, and the two characters in the text, King Wu and Confucius, are not aware of this sentence. Thus, to understand this verse we must remove the first sentence from the verse.
2. The translation of *luàn* 亂 to “able” is what one might call a “correct misunderstanding”, but it gets a little bit complicated. The speech made by king Wu is found verbatim in various other ancient texts such as the *Book of Documents* 書經 *shūjīng*,<sup>33</sup> in the context of his preparation of the conquest of the Shang dynasty 商. In that context, it is clear that *luàn* 亂 means “able” and Waley (1938, p. 256) explains it as a character which uses the left part of *luàn* 亂 but exchanges *ya* 乚 component for 司 *sī*. However, I am unable to find this character in any database, so I will refer to this character simply as *sī* 司. Regardless of what the original character might have looked like,<sup>34</sup> the received version of the *Book of Documents* still has *luàn* 亂, which actually means “rebellious”, “traitorous.” If we read the passage with “rebellious” 亂 *luàn* rather than “able” 司 *sī*, it suddenly makes a lot of sense why Confucius would want to get the number of “rebellious” men lower.

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<sup>32</sup> Otherwise, where does Confucius get the “nine men” from? It also creates a massive contradiction since the first sentence tells us that Shun had five ministers; it would make no sense to then have the same text tell us that Shun had nine ministers plus a woman. If we were to follow the logic of the text with Legge’s interpretation, we know that Shun has five ministers, and then we are told that one is a woman, thus he should have *four* ministers, not *nine*. However, I feel that it must be mentioned that Lau (1992) does follow Legge’s interpretation, although I am not sure why.

<sup>33</sup> See the chapter 泰誓中 *tài shì zhōng* - Great Declaration II

<sup>34</sup> Without getting into a longer discussion of character evolution in the Chinese language, one character can diverge into two different forms, so that *luàn* 亂 can later take on a different form later on but still retain its original, now “incorrect” form in the texts where the original form has already been used. Simply put, when tradition has decided that the “wrong” form of a character should be used in a text, it is quite common to see the “wrong” form stay in the text for generations.

3. Because the passage is traditionally understood as Confucius talking to himself, or at least alone commenting on the events 500 years prior, the lack of a grammatical subject is both obvious and problematic. Various interpreters all recognize this and deal with it in slightly various ways. Legge (1893) and Yang (2006) add: “King *Wen* controls...”, Waley (1938) and Brooks and Brooks (1998) add: “King *Wu* controls...”, and Lau (1992) add: “The Zhou controls...”. However, if we alleviate the text of the burden of historical plausibility and instead read the text for what it says, as a conversation between two people, the grammatical subject in this sentence suddenly becomes clear: it is the person Confucius is talking to, i.e., king Wu, or perhaps by extension his entire court.
4. By keeping the above three points in mind, it is easy to imagine how this passage played out in the mind of the original author: king Wu is preparing for his conquest of the Shang dynasty. He has found ten rebellious ministers and is worried. What is he worried about? I will quote from Waley (1938, p. 47): “[I]n Confucius’s time /.../ a theory had grown up that every great armed conquest was preceded by a period of cultural preparation, a building up of *tê* (moral force) as distinct from the *li* (physical force) of the warrior, which unless backed by *wên* (culture) cannot prevail.” To use a slightly anachronistic term, he is afraid that these ten rebellious ministers have impeded claim to the Mandate of Heaven. Confucius assures him, pointing to three different arguments, that king Wu is still justified in carrying out his conquest. Confucius might then turn to the entire court and exclaim: “You control two third of the land, and yet you continue to serve the Yin. The moral power [i.e., your claim to the Mandate of Heaven] of Zhou has now reached its peak. [What are you waiting for?]”

With all these points in mind, I offer the following translation:

King Wu said: I have ten traitorous ministers. Confucius said: “It’s difficult to find good talent”, isn’t that how the saying goes? Besides, during the reign of Yao and Shun there were more of these [i.e., traitorous people]. Finally, one of the ten is a woman, so it’s only nine [traitorous] people. You control two thirds of all the lands, and yet you serve the Yin. The moral power of Zhou can now be said to have reached its climax!

武王曰予有亂臣十人孔子曰才難不其然乎唐虞之際於斯為盛有婦人焉九人而已三分天下有其二以服事殷周之德其可謂至德也已矣

It now becomes easy to see how problematic this passage would have been to other scribes. Not only are there numerous obvious problems regarding historicity, such as Confucius and king Wu talking, but the

misinterpretation of *luàn* 亂 which creates a contradiction with how the character is used in the original context. The original author either did not know the exact context of the phrase spoken by king Wu, or he did not care. Both are possible.

A later, probably highly educated, scribe tries to reconcile these problems by finding the moral precept to be Confucius's apparent focus on the number of "able" ministers. The scribe probably thought something like: "If king Wu had 10 ministers, and Confucius says that they were even better in the time of Yao and Shun, and Confucius then tries to get the number of ministers down to nine, Yao and Shun probably only had five ministers because they are twice as good as king Wu." He then adds his commentary: "Shun had five ministers, and the empire was well governed", which has ever since focused the mind of the reader away from the core of this passage, that someone has placed the righteous rebellion of Zhou against the Shang on the lips of Confucius, to a simple commentary on bureaucratic personnel decisions.

From this example, it is clear that VIII, 20 is best understood to have undergone commentary by a later scribe that was largely, and probably completely, disconnected from the original author. The first author was more concerned with the ideological implications of Confucius as not only a great moral teacher, but also as the catalyst for the righteous rebellion against the Zhou, than he was concerned with historical accuracy. The later commentator probably viewed this passage as authentic but could not reconcile it due to its historical impossibility and felt forced to add a commentary to solve the apparent contradiction of Confucius talking with king Wu. This sequence of events would not be possible if the *Analects* was a perfect transmission of the sayings of Confucius.

### 3.2.2 Theory 2: The *Analects* compiled under the Western Han

The view that the *Analects* is a Han dynasty artifact has been espoused by scholars such as Michael Hunter (2017) and Kern (2018). Firstly, the absence of any reference to the *Analects* prior to 140 BC. (or thereabouts) is held up as evidence that the text did not exist prior to this time.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, Hunter (2017) set out on a Herculean task in mapping every single reference to Confucius in the entire corpus of ancient Chinese literature from the Warring States all the way down to the Eastern Han, a time span of some 700 years. In this study, he has convincingly shown that in texts prior to 100 BC., the time of the compilation of the *Records of the Grand Historian* 太史公書 wherein the *Analects* is cited quite a lot, only in some 9% of all occurrences is there a parallel to be found in the *Analects*. In texts written after 100 BC. (including *Records of the Grand Historian*), the overlap rises to 44%.<sup>36</sup> Thus, he concludes that the *Analects* did not

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<sup>35</sup> As I stated above, I would agree with Hunter that the *Book of Rites*'s reference to the *Analects* appears to be a later interpolation.

<sup>36</sup> There are two excellent tables in his (2017) book on page 84 and 85 which I highly recommend.



hold its canonical status in pre-Qin China, which is a very reasonable assumption, and then speculates further that the *Analects* is: “best read as a text compiled in response to this earlier, more dynamic “Kongzi,” the goal of which was to establish a fixed, independently quotable version of Kongzi for elites of the Han dynasty” (Hunter, 2017, p. 314).

First of all, I would like to question the conclusion that the 9% overlap would be a low number. The large group of biblical scholars who came together to form the Jesus seminar in the 1990s with the aim of establishing how much of the sayings credited to Jesus in the gospels are actually likely to be sayings by the historical Jesus, argued that only 18% of all sayings in the Gospels date back to the historical Jesus (Funk et al. 1996).<sup>37</sup> In the light of this, considering the *Analects*, if we were to assume in an idealized thought experiment that the *Analects* was composed and finished the day of the death of the Master and perfectly recorded every single word, and was then lost for 350 years before being rediscovered behind a wall in a house, and every other reference in every other book is based on hearsay and memory, a 9% overlap would not at all be unreasonable.

Furthermore, the question to ask is not: “Why doesn’t [insert book before 100 BC.] cite the *Analects*?”, but rather: “If someone sat down in 100 BC. to invent a collection of sayings of Confucius, why only include 9% of the known material?” Why not reference the Spring and Autumn annals 春秋 *chūnqiū*, which Confucius supposedly compiled himself? In the *Mengzi*, we are told that “Confucius made the *chunqiu*” 孔子[...]作春秋.<sup>38</sup> Why leave out some of the most popular sayings of Confucius, such as “Heaven does not have two suns, neither [should] the people have two kings” 天無二日民無二王? We know that it was a popular saying and that it was credited to Confucius, because it occurs credited to him e.g., in the *Mengzi* 孟子 and twice in the *Book of Rites* 禮記 *lǐjì*. It may sound counterintuitive at first, but based on the criterion of dissimilarity there is a strong case for arguing that if there is only a 9% overlap in sayings between texts prior to 150 B.C. and *Analects*, it actually lends credence to the authenticity of the *Analects* as a very old document because no one would compile a document with only 9% overlap with known material.

Secondly, while there are no dates given for Confucius,<sup>39</sup> based on who he interacts with in the texts, his death can be established to be somewhere around 480 B.C., because he does not interact with anyone long before this<sup>40</sup> or immediately after. As far as I know, this rule is not broken once in the *Analects*.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ehrman (2016, 00:18:15-00:18:20) said of this work: “I wasn’t actually surprised about the 18%; my problem was I thought they had the wrong 18%.”

<sup>38</sup> Tang Wen Gong II 滕文公下.

<sup>39</sup> Waley (1938) on pages 78-79 humorously points out the European’s obsession with dates in contrast to the Chinese’s rather haphazard approach. I would venture a guess that the European obsession stems from the obsession of historicizing in the Bible, most notably events such as Noah’s Flood which is dated *to the day* of the event in Gen 7:11

<sup>40</sup> With one crucial exception, VIII, 20, which was discussed in chapter 3.2.1.

<sup>41</sup> Although I could be mistaken on this point, suffice it to say that it is not broken often.

Furthermore, Goldin (2018) has shown that not even later ideological or philosophical concerns are addressed in the *Analects*, with clear later interpolations such as XIII, 3 discussed in 2.1.4, and that an analysis of Warring States texts based on their ideological and philosophical concerns in general follow the traditional chronology quite well.<sup>42</sup> I would guess that even a highly trained author in our modern times would have a difficult time writing down a collection of sayings of someone that died 330 years ago and *not once* misattribute the chronological accuracy of mostly irrelevant side characters. Yet, the supposed Han dynasty compilers of the *Analects* managed to do this. At the same time, as has been pointed out by Hunter (2017) in several instances in his books, most of the overlaps between the *Analects* and other pre-100 B.C. texts are not word-for-word reproductions of the sayings, they are merely *parallels*. This means that Hunter’s Han dynasty compiler must at the same time have been one of the most skillful chronological experts in the history of the world,<sup>43</sup> while at the same time being totally incompetent when it comes to both selecting and verbatim quoting the known sayings of Confucius. This seems highly unlikely.

Finally, if the *Analects* is a Han dynasty artifact, a whole host of passages suddenly become very difficult to explain based on the historical critical method. As has already been discussed in chapter 2, the Master’s visit to Nanzi described in VI, 28, and the contradiction relating to the Master’s “many abilities” discussing in IX, 6 and 7 seems impossible to have been invented by a later scribe, and certainly one who was living 300 years later working to create a collection of sayings of the most sacred sage in his tradition.

### 3.2.3 Theory 3: The accretion text theory

This theory, promoted by scholars such as Eno (2018) and Brooks & Brooks (1998), several Japanese scholars such as Takeuchi Yoshio 武内義雄 (1886–1966), Tsuda Sōkichi 津田左右吉 (1873–1961), and Kimura Eiichi 木村英一 (1906–1981), but also Arthur Waley (1938), states that the *Analects* grew through accretion. An earliest layer would have been written down, possibly by the first-generation disciples themselves, and successive generations would have added and altered (as shown in chapter 3.2.1) more sayings to the text until it reached its final form at some point in or around the early Han dynasty. The accretion text theory could either allow for some sort of “one added book every decade” as promoted by Brooks & Brooks (1998), or, it could have been a core around the time of the death of Confucius, then

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<sup>42</sup> For example, Goldin (2018) argues that the *Analects* never refer to the concept of physical self-cultivation, but he says features prominently in the *Mozi* (earliest layers probably from 4th century BC) and the *Mengzi* (earliest layers probably from the late 4th century BC). In V, 13, Zigong 子貢 specifically says that the Master never discoursed on “human nature” 性, a topic that later becomes important in Chinese philosophical debates.

<sup>43</sup> In a culture which Waley (1938) points out rarely concerns itself with accurate historical dates (see footnote 31 above).

another addition of several books 100 years later, then another addition of several books 100 years later, then a final addition and redaction in the Han dynasty.

Eno (2018, p. 47-54) has discussed the *Analects*'s very interesting "editorial disorder." That is; *some* of the books appear to have been altered by an editor as sayings are grouped, whereas other books do not appear to be edited at all. For instance, he points to Book I and Book VIII as good examples. In Book I, sayings 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16 are sayings by the Master, while sayings 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 13 are sayings by the disciples. This appears to be totally scattered and without any editorial oversight whatsoever, as the sayings do not even strictly alternate one at a time. In Book VIII, verses 1, 18-21 are sayings related to the ancient sages, verses 2, 8-17 are sayings by the Master, and verses 3-7 are sayings by Zengzi 曾子. This book clearly has had at least some editorial oversight. As illustration, Eno (2018, p. 51) uses the following two figures on page 51. Figure 1 shows Book I divided into passages where the Master speaks in white and where the disciples speak in gray. Figure 2 shows Book VIII divided into sayings related to ancient sages in white, sayings by the Master in light gray, and sayings by the disciple Zengzi in dark gray.

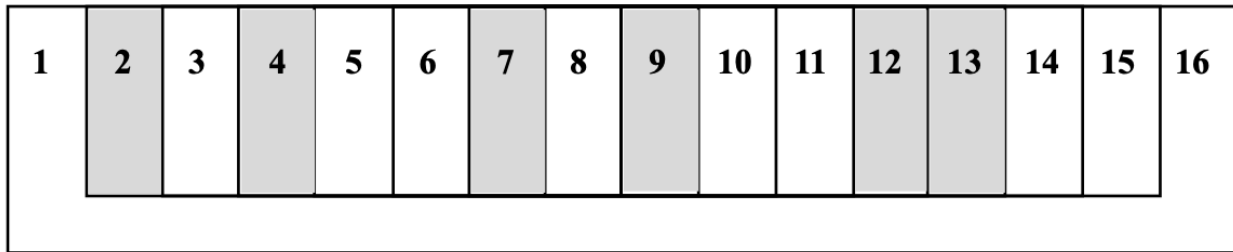


Figure 1: Book I of the *Analects* color coded. White sayings are sayings by the Master, gray by disciples. Taken from Eno (2018), page 51.

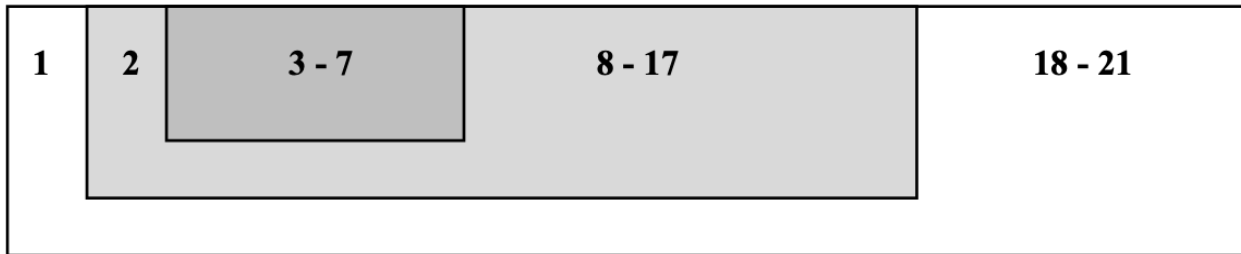


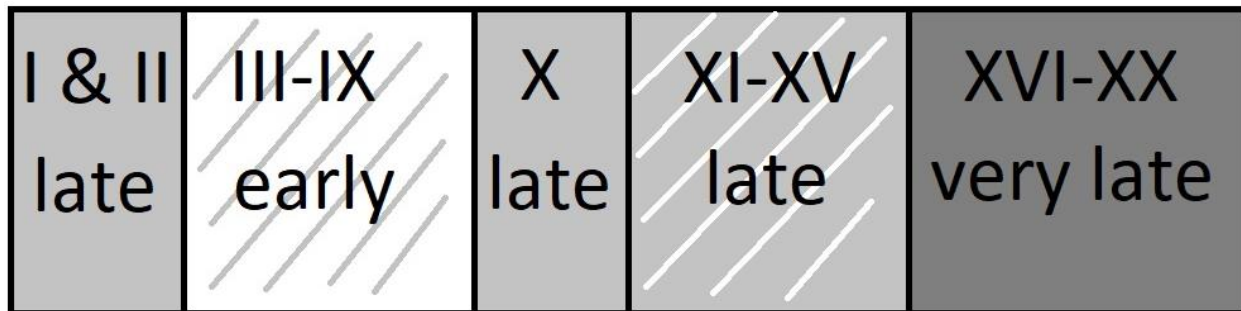
Figure 2: Book VIII of the *Analects* color coded. White sayings are sayings by the Master relating to ancient sages, light gray are more general sayings on morality by the Master, dark gray are sayings by the disciple Zengzi. Taken from Eno (2018), page 51.

The fact that *some* books have had editorial changes and others have not is an incredibly interesting feature and any possible pattern remains hidden. It also heavily indicates that not all books were written by the same hand, which would argue in favor of the accretion text theory.

Furthermore, regarding the actual sayings themselves, a variety of features has already been established in this thesis, as follows:

1. At least one saying appears to be early (VI, 28 discussed in chapter 2.1.1)
2. At least one saying appears to be very late (IX, 11 discussed in chapter 2.1.3)
3. There is at least one contradiction between different sayings (IX, 6 and 7 discussed in chapter 2.1.2)
4. At least one saying appears to have undergone commentary by a later scribe (VIII, 20 discussed in chapter 3.2.1)

These features are exactly the features that define an accretion text, and thus the accretion text model appears most applicable to the *Analects*. The question that follows is naturally: “which books came first?” The question is doubly applicable given the natural parameters of a master’s thesis, where length of the thesis is a natural limiting factor. I have decided to follow what Waley (1938, p. 11) calls “a perfectly consistent whole and apparently belong together”; i.e., books III-IX, as my source text specifically. Eno (2018, p. 43) has pointed out that Waley does not actually give much reason for this categorization, but Eno (2018, p. 53) does also view III-VII as the “*Shanglun* Core Source”. Brooks & Brooks (1998) believe IV-VI to comprise the earliest layer.<sup>44</sup> Below, I will defend the selection of III-IX as the source text used in this thesis. To make it easier to visualize the division of the books, I offer the following picture:



As noted above, most scholars who uphold the accretion text theory generally view some amalgamation of III-IX to be early (naturally allowing for individual later interpolations in these early books).

Books XVI-XX have been established for hundreds of years to be late (see chapter 3.2). Books I-II are texts clearly written for the education of young princes, with a heavy emphasis of teaching young children how to behave towards their parents and superiors, quite distant from the teachings of the Master that we find in other parts of the text. Brooks & Brooks date these texts quite late: Book II to 317 BC and book I to 294 BC. Book X is clearly, as Waley (1938) identifies it, a wholly separate text on ritual that has been edited in X, 1 to read “Confucius” 孔子 instead of “gentleman” 君子 *jūnzi*. Waley (1938) notes that in X, 6, the editors have forgotten to alter “*jūnzi*” to “Confucius”. Thus, the only remaining texts are III-IX and XI-XV. As was noted earlier, the whole later section of the *Analects* that comprise XI-XX has been viewed

<sup>44</sup> They argue that book IV was written ca. 479 BC., which would have been right around the death of Confucius, and then argue that book V was written ca. 470 BC., book VI was written ca. 460 BC., and then VII-IX (440, 436 and 405 BC) as a set of books, then X, XI and III, onwards, roughly one book every 14 years down until the conquest of Lu 魯 in 249 BC. See their Contents on page ix for a detailed list of the compilation of all books.

as later books based on linguistic evidence for almost a millennium at this point, which means that III-IX should be viewed as earlier than XI-XV, although it is possible that some parts of XI-XV are early and the study on the subject of intertextual knowledge is lacking.

As long as books III-IX include what could potentially be the core, excess books examined will in no way impede the research. Even though I would argue for III-IX as comprising a potential “core” of the *Analects*, that does not at all mean that every single saying in it is early (as has already been shown); rather that the earliest sayings in the *Analects* generally happen to be found in III-IX. It is not impossible that there are individual sayings in the other books that are also early. Finally, if one were to argue that there is no way of knowing if the current sayings were originally in the same order and in the same books as the received text, which is a valid argument, I would simply ask that the choice of III-IX be viewed as a random sample. If there is no structure or order whatsoever, then 1-3 is just as representative as 1, 6, 38. In all 20 books, there are a total of 503 verses by Legge’s counting. Books III-IX account for exactly 200 of those (again, by Legge’s counting). Thus, this sample would account for roughly 39.8% of all sayings.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 Traces of literacy in archaeology and history

#### An overview of sources to literacy in ancient China

“The first question that must be dealt with in any study of the patriarchal traditions is that of the historical milieu out of which they arose.” John Van Seters (1975, p. 7). Following in the footsteps of John Van Seters’s *Abraham in History and Tradition*, I will first outline the development of literacy in China from the earliest archaeological evidence of writing in the 13th century BC all the way down to circa 300 BC. Confucius would have lived towards the end of this period, flourishing around 500-480 BC, but I think it will become apparent why it is important to understand the history of literacy from the earliest times when dealing with literacy in the late 6th and early 5th century BC. Most of this will be based on the work of Li and Branner (2011) (eds.) *Writing and Literacy in Early China*. At the end of each chapter, I will add a note with the amount of received texts based on linguistic dating. Note that while most, if not all, of these texts probably had a final round of redactions at some point during the Han dynasty, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address every single chapter and every single interpolation of every book. The list of received texts concerns itself mainly with the core of text.

#### 4.1.1 Shang dynasty 商 (ca. 1200 BC - 1050 BC)

According to Boltz (2011, p. 51-84), writing is first attested from Oracle Bone Inscriptions (hereafter OBI) 甲骨文 *jiǎgǔwén* that date from circa 1200 B.C. - 1050 B.C. in the city of Anyang 安陽, the ancient capital of the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600 B.C. - 1050 B.C.), written mostly on turtle shells or buffalo bones. They reveal a written system that appears fully functional and that has the possibility to express virtually any idea or concept. Yet, there are no archaeological finds prior to this to show a development to this point, and perhaps more intriguing, the OBI refers almost exclusively to divination, with rare exceptions of inscriptions detailing royal rituals, ceremonies, and ancestral sacrifices. This has led some scholars, such as Bagley (2004), to draw the conclusion that writing did exist in an extremely varied fashion throughout various levels of Shang society but that unfortunately everything except for the divination was written on perishable materials and so it has not stood the test of time. However, when any argument is based on the notion that every piece of evidence is lost and unretrievable, it is not a strong argument.

Suffice it to say for now that the archaeological evidence could be interpreted as if there was writing on bamboo and silk (both perishable materials), but there is nothing in the archaeological records to suggest that they were writing anything different from what survived on the turtle shells and animal bones. This

will be addressed throughout the remainder of this overview. The archeological evidence indicates, as elaborated by Smith (2011, p. 173), that perhaps a few dozen individuals at most were literate at this time, all working directly for the royal court.

From this period, we have no received texts whatsoever.

#### 4.1.2 Western Zhou 西周 (1050 BC - 771 BC)

The Western Zhou is remembered as *the* high tide of Chinese civilization. Undoubtedly, much of this is a later retrojection by various people at least as late as the Republic (see Harris, 2013)<sup>45</sup>. Writing remains restricted, but through a long list of archaeological discoveries of bronze vessels inscribed from this time there is an abundance of not only divinatory inscriptions, but also what has been described as “audience ceremonies”. Falkenhausen (2011, p. 240-251) gives several examples from excavated texts of “audience ceremonies” which are recorded on bronze vessels and contain inscribed laudatory praise between the king and a subject, in a highly stylized dialogue, wherein the subject offers praise to the king, the king in turn offers praise to the subject and bestows the bronze vessel and other gifts onto the subject, after which the subject offers praise once again.

Most of the bronze vessels only contain one of these three speeches, but some do contain all three, leading scholars to assert that the general style was fixed, and it was a matter of finding enough space on the bronze vessel to fit enough of the speeches.

These bronze vessels show a natural evolution from literacy being used for ritual and divination practices, and as society becomes more complex and stratified, literacy only slowly transforms specifically into a way for a subject to personally tie in with the royal family. That the bronze vessels still do not show diaries, do not contain longer debates or philosophical discussions which has so come to characterize ancient Chinese writings, that they do not cite complex bureaucracy<sup>46</sup> or any other feature that could be viewed as “high literacy”, indicates that literacy remained both exclusive and limited.

According to Falkenhausen (2011, p. 250): “In any case, it was through its oral delivery during the court audience that the royal mandate acquired its validity. A copy of the written version was later given to the awardee as a memorandum”. The fact that the memorandum came in bronze vessel-form and not in a more readable form indicates that it was not intended for reading so much as for displaying, further implying a

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<sup>45</sup> Not at all too dissimilar from the Abrahamic religions’ imagined view of the United Monarchy under David and Solomon. Coincidentally, these two golden ages happen about the same time: the Western Zhou high period being right after its founding in 1050 B.C., and David and Solomon’s reign lasting circa 1010 B.C. - 930 B.C.

<sup>46</sup> Elaborate ceremonies are cited, but this is not the same as bureaucratic, administrative literacy à la Mycenaean Greece that Harris (1989) discusses. There are no extensive tax records etc.

society wherein most are not literate. Perhaps the family would have memorized the ~100 characters on their bronze vessel, but that would not make them literate.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, there is some indirect evidence of writing on bamboo or silk. Li (2011, p. 287-292) argues quite convincingly that the Sanshi *pán* 散氏盤 (JC: 10176), a bronze vessel in the shape of a bowl, which contains a political peace treaty between the two warring states Ze and San that was originally written on perishable material such as bamboo or silk and was only later cast onto a bronze vessel. This indicates that even when writing was on perishable material, it looked the same as it did on bronze vessels, further indicating that there are no vast treasure troves of written material that perished due to erosion.

From this period, based on linguistic evidence, we may infer that about half of the *Book of Poetry*<sup>48</sup> 詩經 *shījīng* and most of the *Book of Changes* 易經 *yìjīng* was compiled. Possibly, fragments from this time are scattered in other received texts. However, no direct text witness exists from this period. See Loewe (1993) for an extensive discussion of all texts in ancient China.

#### 4.1.3 The Spring and Autumn period 春秋 (771 BC - 475 BC)

According to Cook (2011, p. 309-311), the fall of Haojing 鎬京, the capital of the Western Zhou dynasty, in 771 BC to barbarians, sent shockwaves around ancient China. Not only was the center for culture gone, but the power that emanated from it, which local rulers depended upon for their immediate power over their local area, was also gone. Whereas most bronze vessels in the Western Zhou are audience meetings praising the cherished ancestors who founded the Zhou dynasty and from which both the king of Zhou and his subject receives his power, there is a marked shift in content, but not in style, during the Spring and Autumn period when this source of power was gone.

The social and political life of the elites remained highly oral during the Spring and Autumn period. Music and dance performances were the key form of entertainment and interaction with other elites. Cook (2011, p. 324-325) states the following:

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<sup>47</sup> For those of us that have learned how to read Chinese, at least to a semi-sufficient level, we all know that there is a big difference between learning 400 characters and learning 4000 characters. Learning how to read Chinese is not comparable to learning how to read Greek or Latin.

<sup>48</sup> I follow Dobson's (1964) dating on the *Book of Poetry*, where he claims that parts of Xiao Ya 小雅 date to the 8th century BC and all of "Airs of the States" 國風 date to the 8th and 7th century. It must also be noted that, given that the *Book of Poetry* is just that: poetry, it is not necessarily true that a song was written down the same time it was sung: it might have been that the *Book of Poetry* wasn't actually written down for centuries after the songs were first sung.



The sense is that the music acted as the medium for transferring the ancestral power and that many ancestral narratives and songs were retold [p. 325] and transmitted through this medium to the next generation.

However, on page 302 he claims that while there is only evidence to show that independent text production existed in the Warring States period, it “no doubt existed earlier”. Twice on page 304, once on 312, and once on 330 does Cook refer to the *literate* Confucius. It is not clear if he is outright saying that Confucius was literate, probably because the evidence is scanty at best, leading him to use phrases such as: “This loss of an oral musical tradition coincides with the rise of independent textual production as *symbolized* by Confucius” (p. 312, my italics). The guarding term “symbolized” implies that Cook knows that his retrojection of independent text production in the late Spring and Autumn and early Warring States period simply is not borne out by the evidence we have today. This will become apparent in the next section where I discuss excavated tombs dating to the Warring States period 戰國 *zhànguó*.

From this time period, based on linguistic evidence, the remaining parts of the *Book of Poetry* 詩經 *shī jīng*, parts of the *Book of Documents* 尚書 *shàngshū*, also known as the *Book of History*,<sup>49</sup> were composed. See Loewe (1993) for an extensive list of all texts in ancient China.

#### 4.1.4 The Warring States period 戰國 (475 BC - 221 BC)

In the Warring States period, there is finally solid evidence of a literate society. Cook (2011, p. 304-305) notes that education in the middle and late Warring States period would have centered around the ability to compose texts and debate philosophical ideas. The Jixia Academy 稷下學宮 *jìxià xuégōng* in the powerful state of Qi 齊 is established at some point in the mid to late 4th century BC<sup>50</sup> in an attempt to build a literate class in society. It must be remembered that 250 years is still a long time, and there was a massive shift in literacy during these 250 years. This becomes evident when we examine excavated tombs.

The Tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng 曾侯乙墓, sealed in 433 B.C., has the traditionally vast amounts of treasure and wealth associated with ancient Chinese tombs (Ebrey, n.d.), with beautiful bells and bronze

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<sup>49</sup> Note that this book was not finished at this time, as the Master himself tells us in III, 9. An extensive discussion follows on III, 9, but it is impossible to account for a completed *Book of History* by the time of whoever authored III, 9 no matter how you choose to interpret the passage.

<sup>50</sup> Traditionally dated to the 18th year of King Xuan 宣王, i.e., 318 B.C. in *Records of the Grand Historian* (田敬仲完世家). The passage I am referring to reads: “十八年宣王喜文學游說之士自如騶衍淳于髡田駢接子慎到環淵之徒七十六人皆賜列第為上大夫不治而議論是以齊稷下學士復盛且數百千人”. However, Makeham (1994, appendix E, footnote 2) has pointed out that the traditional reading might be mistaken since it says that the academy thrived *once again*, and instead dates it to the grandfather of King Xuan, Duke Huan of Tian Qi 田齊桓公 (r. 374–357 BC).

vessels and artifacts showing tremendous craftsmanship. However, still so close in time to the advent of true independent text production in China, the *writing* found in this tomb is far from impressive. It is noteworthy for being the first tomb that contains bamboo slips (Cook, 2011, p. 325), and yet the bamboo slips contained nothing more than attendance lists at the funeral of the Marquis. University of Washington (Ebrey, n.d.) claims a total of 26 bamboo articles were found among 124 musical instruments, such as bells, 528 jade and gold objects, 4777 bronze weapons and other treasures. Suffice it to say, based on both volume and content, the earliest direct evidence of bamboo slips appears more important to later scholars than to the inhabitant of the tomb, and does not suggest that writing on bamboo carried anything radically different than writing on animal bones.

Only some 130 years later the Guodian tomb 郭店 was sealed in roughly 300 BC. Here we find a nice cache of texts. Both some received texts such as Laozi 老子 and previously unknown works are found (Richter, 2011, p. 210). Another 130 years or so later, the Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb which was sealed around 165 B.C., has even more text, such as two copies of the Laozi 老子 and a copy of the *Book of Changes* 易經 *yìjīng*. Richter (2011, p. 210) points out that just the two Laozi-texts found in Mawangdui contain more characters than all texts found in the Guodian tomb put together, and there are some four more texts found at Mawangdui. It seems evident from archaeological tomb findings that true independent text production did not begin until somewhere in the 4th century B.C., which is exactly the time when received texts, based on linguistic dating, begin to appear in large quantities.<sup>51</sup>

The fact that there are individual fragments of text that do go back in a continuous line as early as 1000 B.C. shows that not only were the ancient Chinese capable of transmitting texts, *they were doing it*, it is just that the scope of transmission remained extremely small until around 300 B.C. This would be inconceivable if literacy played a large and varied role in society. Both archeology and our received corpus, based on linguistic dating, triangulate to literacy existing, but in a very small scope in society until an explosion of literary creativity in or around 350-300 B.C, only *after which* literacy takes hold of the Chinese tradition, which it has maintained down to this day.

From this period, there are well over 30 received texts. Due to such an expansive list, only some of the more famous received texts will be listed here. the *Dàodéjīng* 道德經 (which is also known as the *Laozi* 老子, with direct textual witnesses), the *Analects* 論語, the *Mengzi* 孟子, the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, the *Book of Lord*

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<sup>51</sup> With, of course, the three notable outliers: the *Book of Poetry*, which easily could have been transmitted orally and most likely was. Falkenhausen (2011, p. 254) points out: “poems like this [i.e. the *Book of Poetry*] circulated originally in oral form, and the main mode of transmission is likely to have remained oral even after the texts of the “*Daya*” [大雅] odes had been committed to writing”; the *Book of Changes*, a handbook on divination which would probably have been the only text actually worth properly transmitting when the majority of all literary effort is focused on divination; and part of the *Book of History*, which accounts for the rest of the literary production of the society in the form of audience situations as discussed above.

*Shang Yang* 商君書, the *Zuozhuan Commentary* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋左傳, the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, the *Tales of the States* 國語.

## 4.2 Literacy in the Confucius text tradition

### The *Analects*

In this chapter, I will carefully examine the tradition of Confucius that is relayed in books III-IX of the *Analects* as it pertains specifically to literacy. An extant list of translated sayings that contain the character for “writing” or “culture” 文 *wén* which is discussed in chapter 4.2.1 can be found under appendix 1. An extant list of the remaining sayings which are discussed in chapters 4.2.2-4.2.6 are found in appendix 2.

The chapter is divided into six parts where I discuss various passages that are directly related to literacy. These are: an example of misreading the character *wén* 文 as “literacy”, how the Master and the disciples interact with the *Book of Poetry*, late interpolations, errors in transmission, possible references to now-lost texts, and a final chapter where I discuss the only two passages that appear to reference literacy: III, 2, and III, 9, which are both late based on the criteria of the historical-critical method. The reason why I choose to look at every passage referring to the Five Classics 五經 *wǔjīng*, and especially the *Book of Poetry*, is because Confucius is traditionally said to have compiled them, and while many modern scholars reject this view, he is still intimately tied to them as the great interpreter of them. Furthermore, as was shown under chapter 4.1, the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of Changes*, and the *Book of History* are the only received texts which, based on linguistic evidence, could confidently be claimed to have existed in the time of Confucius. Had Confucius been literate, the Five Classics, or at least some of them, would most likely have been known to him, whether he was their compiler or interpreter. If we turn that argument on his head, if he was literate, what other texts would have existed for him to read?

Four verses are either citations of the *Odes* or references to the Five Classics without any context, making it impossible to extract any specific data on it. These are III, 16, 20; VIII, 8; 15. There is no real way to argue either that these are early or late because they do not provide enough context for analysis, and so they will merely be translated in appendix 2.

### 4.2.1 Example of misreading the character *wén* 文 as “literacy”

The character *wén* 文 occurs a total of 23 times in 14 different sayings in books III-IX. Six times in five different sayings it is used in a name and thus irrelevant for this thesis.<sup>52</sup> In the remaining passages, reading

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<sup>52</sup> V, 15, 18, twice in 19, 20; IX, 5. See appendix 1.

the character as “literacy” or “written documents” or anything of the sort is forcing a reading of the text that is not natural. To demonstrate this, I will explain VII, 33 which is often pointed to as the Master referring to literacy but is better understood to refer to “effort”. The traditional translation, where *wén* 文 is read as referring to literacy, as rendered by James Legge (1893):

The Master said, "In letters I am perhaps equal to other men, but the character of the superior man, carrying out in his conduct what he professes, is what I have not yet attained to."

子曰文，莫吾猶人也躬行君子則吾未之有得

To illustrate how this has traditionally been read, I added a comma between the characters *wén* 文 and *mò* 莫. The reason for placing the comma here is due to the traditionally authoritative interpretation of this passage by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200). He notes of the character *mò* 莫: “莫，疑辭” *mò, yí cí* which has traditionally been understood to mean: “[The character] *mò* 莫 means ‘probably’”. Thus, the reading of the text becomes “*wén* [comma!] probably I resemble [other] people”, or in more understandable English: “When it comes to *wén*, I am probably like other people.” In this sentence, *wén* could still technically mean “cultural behavior” or the like, but reading it as “letters”, as Legge does, makes perfect sense as well.

However, Waley pointed out already in 1938 that there is no evidence that *mò* 莫 can mean “probably”, and even the traditional scholar Yang (2006), who maintained the reading of *mò* 莫 as ‘probably’, admitted that there is no hard evidence for such usage in the pre-Qin era.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the comma cannot be placed before *mò* 莫 since *mò* 莫 actually means “no one” and the sentence would not make sense if *mò* 莫 is to be read as “no one.” Instead, Waley reads the sentence as “*wén mò* [comma!] I like [other] people.” He argues that *wén mò* 文莫 is a mistake in transmission, and the correct characters are *mín mù* 忖懃, pointing to Zhu Qifeng’s 朱起鳳 *A Study of Words* 辭通 *cí tōng* page 1407 for more uses of this binome. *Mín mù* 忖懃 means: “to exert oneself”. With this information in mind, Waley translates the passage as follows:

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<sup>53</sup> Yang (2006, p. 86): “When it comes to *mò* 莫 [meaning ‘probably’] in old texts from the pre-Qin era, *although there is a lack of hard evidence*, reading it like this [i.e., as ‘probably’] is the best interpretation yet. Because of this [i.e., there is no better way to interpret the passage], most translators adopt this reading [of *mo* 莫 as ‘probably’].” 关于“莫”字的说法在先秦古籍中虽然缺乏坚强的论证，但解释本文却比所有各家来得较为满意 Here it might be good to remind the reader that although I am using the 2006 edition of Yang’s translation, his translation was actually made in 1958 and he might very well be forgiven for not being acquainted with Waley’s translation at the time.

The Master said, As far as taking trouble goes, I do not think I compare badly with other people. But as regards carrying out the duties of a gentleman in actual life, I have never yet had a chance to show what I could do.

子曰文莫，吾猶人也躬行君子則吾未之有得

Not only has other scholars, such as Lau (1992), adopted this reading of the text, but *mín mù* 文莫 can now be found in the Hanyu Da Cidian 汉语大词典 where it is defined as “黽勉 *mǐn miǎn*, 努力 *nǔ lì*” “to exert oneself, to work hard” with a direct reference to this passage.

However, Waley’s translation has a problem. The last part of Waley’s translation “I have never yet had a chance to *show what I could do*” 吾未之有得 is an odd translation. A literal translation would be: “I not yet regarding this [i.e., behaving like a gentleman] have attained.” Lau (1992) translates it as “(In how to be a practising gentleman) I can, as yet, claim no insight”. Even traditional scholars such as Chen (2016) who still maintain the reading of *mo* as “probably” still translate the last part of the sentence as “(To fully act out the role of a gentleman) I have not yet attained” (身体里行做个君子)我还没有做到.

If we translate the entire passage with Waley’s contribution regarding the correct reading of *mín mù* 忞懞 and the otherwise near consensus on “I have not yet attained to [behaving like a gentleman]” 吾未之有得, it would read something like this:

The Master said, In effort, I am like others, but when it comes to acting out the proper behavior of a gentleman, I have not yet attained it. (My translation)

子曰文莫吾猶人也躬行君子則吾未之有得

Here we come to the crux of the problem: the passage reads as if the Master is saying that he is trying as much as other people, but he is nevertheless unable to attain the level of gentleman that others have attained. One could explain away this by saying that the Master is merely humble and providing an example for his disciples in modesty, and since the aim of this thesis is not to reconstruct every facet of the historical Confucius I will leave the question of proper interpretation of this passage unanswered for now, but it is easy to see why the clear reading of this passage has required so much added explanation where none is needed: one possible reading is that the Master did not view himself as a gentleman, a *jūnzǐ* 君子. In any case, it should be obvious that reading *wén* 文 as “literacy” or “written materials” in this passage does not provide for the best understanding of the passage. Of the remaining 13 sayings found in books III-IX of the

*Analects* where *wén* 文 is used, 12 that cannot be used to positively identify literacy in the time of Confucius, whether it is because of misreadings, the criterion of dissimilarity or the criterion of language and vocabulary, are discussed in appendix 1. The only case where *wén* 文 most likely should be read as “written documents” is III, 9, which will be discussed in chapter 4.2.6.

#### 4.2.2 The Master and the disciples talking about the *Book of Poetry*

Three passages, and perhaps a fourth, relate how the Master interacted with his disciples and the *Book of Poetry*. These are III, 8; VII, 11; IX, 27 and possibly IX, 31. I say possibly IX, 31 because this passage appears to cite a song and treats said song in the same manner as the other three *Odes*, but the song found in IX, 31 is not a received song, i.e., it is not recorded anywhere else, nor is there any reference to it. Nevertheless, since it appears to be a song and the Master’s interpretation is recorded (although without any input from the disciples), it will be treated as if it were an *Ode* to the Master. The remaining three passages all relate a very similar atmosphere and a very similar treatment of the *Odes*. When it comes to the context of these passages, the Master is found discussing a deeper meaning of the *Odes*. However, very interestingly, the *Odes* cited are not word-for-word reproductions of the *Odes* found in the received version of the *Book of Poetry*.

In III, 8, the disciple Zixia 子夏 cites the Shuoren 碩人 *Ode* and asks the Master for clarification about its deeper meaning. Very interestingly, the version of the *Ode* that Zixia cites has an added sentence at the end. The poem as related by Zixia reads:

*The sweet smile dimples,  
The beautiful color in her eyes,  
[It is her] natural beauty [that] makes her beautiful.*

巧笑倩兮美目盼兮素以為絢兮

While the first two lines are part of the received *Ode*, the last sentence is not, and yet this becomes the focal point of the interpretation by the Master when he replies: “The job of painting comes after<sup>54</sup> a plain [canvas?]”. For a longer discussion on the possible meaning of this passage, see appendix 1.

In VII, 11, two disciples, Yan Yuan 顏淵 and Zilu 子路 are together with the Master. Zilu asks the Master who he would bring along if the Master was to go to war, presumably as second-in-command. The Master’s reply is as follows:

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<sup>54</sup> I.e., requires

“The man who attacks a tiger;  
Who will cross the river,  
who will die without any regrets, such a man would I not take with me...”

暴虎馮河死而無悔者吾不與也

The first two lines is found in the Xiao Min 小旻 *Ode* in the *Book of Poetry*. However, the citation does not appear to be very appropriate. The entire *Ode* consists of the singer lamenting the corruption and decadence of the Zhou court, and at the end the singer exclaims: “They dare not attack a tiger, they dare not cross the river!” 不敢暴虎不敢馮河 In other words, to the singer of the Xiao Min *Ode*, the attributes of daring to attack a tiger and daring to cross the river are positive attributes of a bygone age; these are exactly the type of attributes you would want in someone who joins you when you go to war. However, to the Master these are negative attributes, either implying that he found these attributes in a totally different context or that he misunderstood the *Ode*.

In IX, 27, the Master is again with Zilu and the Master says:

[Dressed in] tattered hemp-quilted robe, and standing next to [someone dressed in] furs of  
fox and badger, and to not be ashamed, isn't that like our You?<sup>55</sup>  
*No jealousy, no covetousness,*  
*[For such a man,] of what use is the not-good?*

衣敝緼袍與衣狐貉者立而不恥者其由也與不忮不求何用不臧

The last two lines are from the Xiong Zhi 雄雉 *Ode* in the *Book of Poetry* and appears to be in praise of Zilu. However, after the Master has said this, Zilu begins to repeatedly chant this as if to memorize it 子路終身誦之 “Afterwards [Zilu] kept on continually chanting those lines to himself.” (Waley translation), whereupon the Master says that there is no need to memorize it 是道也何足以臧 “Come now, the wisdom contained in them is not worth treasuring” (Waley translation).<sup>56</sup> This passage is very interesting for two reasons. First of all, it quite explicitly tells us how the *Book of Poetry* could have been orally transmitted: the Master sings and the disciple joins in. Similar data appears in VII, 32 where it is stated that if the Master

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<sup>55</sup> I.e., Zilu

<sup>56</sup> See appendix 2 for a discussion on the interpretation of *hé zú yǐ zāng* 何足以臧. I follow the interpretation of Waley (1938).

encountered someone who could sing well, the Master would insist that the person would sing the song twice, and that the Master would join in the second time 子與人歌而善必使反之而後和之 “When in the Master’s presence anyone sang a song that he liked, he did not join in at once, but asked for it to be repeated and then joined in” (Waley translation). This behavior fits an oral culture perfectly and reflects the findings reported in Albert Lord’s (1960) *The Singer of Tales*, where he recounts the research of Milman Parry conducted with illiterate oral bards in Yugoslavia in the 1930s. For a longer discussion, see chapter 5.2.2. Secondly, the Master’s note that Zilu does not have to memorize the *Ode* implies that not all *Odes* were sacred and had to be memorized. Some of them were apparently simply not worth memorizing.

Finally, in IX, 31, while there is no context, the passage appears to cite a song that is not received. Therefore, we may only speculate on how this song would have been viewed by the author, i.e., whether it was “just a song” or if it was on par with the *Odes*, although it must be said that there appears to be no reason in the text why it would have been viewed differently from the *Odes*. What is interesting to note is that after the song, which appears to be a love song about two lovers who have been separated, has been cited (it is not mentioned who cites it, it is merely stated), the Master critiques it by saying: “He didn’t actually love her. If he did, what distance could be [between them]?”

What we may infer, taken together with the other three passages, is that the Master viewed both *Odes* and songs (which he probably did not distinguish between), as changeable, without a fixed form, where the main emphasis was not to be able to retell an *Ode* word for word, and it appears as though sometimes it was even acceptable to cite an *Ode* completely out of context, as in the case of VII, 11, where the Master either felt that the singer of that *Ode* was completely wrong, or the Master was familiar with a completely different version of the *Ode*. Both are possibilities. In either case, these four verses consistently reflect the sort of oral, illiterate society that is found in Albert Lord’s work from 1960 where transmission of songs is done orally and based on memorization. Since there is no written form that is familiar to most people, there is no concept of a perfectly fixed form and individual masters will add and redact songs to fit their own particular teaching style.

### 4.2.3 Later interpolations

Three passages in the selected books of the *Analects* that either directly or indirectly refer to writing are clear later interpolations. These are VII, 18; VIII, 3 and IX, 15. They all shed light on various topics and will be dealt with separately below.

VII, 18 recounts how the Master would use *yǎ yán* 雅言 (lit. ‘elegant speech’), which is probably meant to refer to some form of upper register in a situation of diglossia, or perhaps it just means “proper pronunciation”. Much has been made about this in writing by e.g., Behr (2010, p. 572) and Branner (2011,



p. 125) as evidence that a situation of diglossia existed in the early 5th century BC. However, the term *yǎ yán* 雅言 does not occur again in any text until the Han dynasty where it appears in the Lunheng 論衡, the Kongcongzi 孔叢子 (both ca. 100 AD), with one possible reference in the Jiaoshi Yilin 焦氏易林 from the Western Han ca. 100 BC. There are no excavated texts referring to this term. Since the term *ya yan* is the focal point of the entire passage, it would be impossible to remove the term and keep the rest of the passage intact. This suggests based on the criterion of language and vocabulary that the entire passage is a later interpolation from Han dynasty times, whether that would be from the Western Han BC or the Eastern Han AD.

VIII, 3 records the death of the disciple Zengzi 曾子, which Makeham (1996, p. 3) dates to ca. 429 BC since VIII, 4, which is related to this passage, refers to a minister of Lu named Meng Jingzi 孟敬子 who was still alive when Duke Dao 悼 died in 429 BC. The careful reader will remember from chapter 3.2.3 that Eno (2018, p. 51) has noted the clear editorial nature of the entire Book VIII, which for the purposes here it only needs to be mentioned that VIII, 3-7 refer to the disciple Zengzi and none of the other passages in the Book mention him at all. Thus, at the very least this passage is, by the very nature of referring to the death of a disciple in or around 430 BC, not able to tell us much about society prior to 480 BC when Confucius was still alive. However, it is still very interesting to note a few characteristics of this passage. First, the fact that Zengzi, on his deathbed, cites the exact same *Ode* as the Master did in VII, 11, only he cites the last three lines, but I must admit that if there is a deeper connection between these two passages it has eluded me.

What is interesting to note is that Zengzi is recorded as using the phrase “*The Book of Poetry* says:” 詩云 *shī yún* before citing the *Ode*. This phrase, “[insert book] says” occurs as early as the 4th century BC in e.g., the *Mengzi* 孟子 and becomes extremely common throughout the late Warring States period and Imperial times. This phrase is only used twice in the *Analects*; here, recording the death of Zengzi, most likely much later than the death of Confucius, and once in Book I which is viewed in this thesis as a very late book. This is not only an anecdote, but it is important because the lack of such a phrase in what is considered to include the earliest layer would imply that not only are the people in these early books not necessarily aware of “*the Odes*”, but when they cite the *Odes*, they are not necessarily authoritative. As was shown in chapter 4.2.1 discussing how the Master and disciples interacted with each other and the *Book of Poetry*, there does not appear to be a single fixed form of the *Odes* as they add sentences and cite out of context causing direct contradictions, and the lack of the authoritative phrase “*The Book of Poetry* says:” would lend itself as a further characteristic of an illiterate society without a fixed form of the *Odes*. For a further discussion, see chapter 5.1.1.

In IX, 15, the Master is recorded as saying that after he returned from the State of Wei to his native State of Lu, he corrected music, and the Ya 雅 and Song 頌 sections of the *Book of Poetry* each achieved their proper place. However, the phrase “each achieved their proper place” 各得其所 *gè dé qí suǒ* is a phrase that only beings to be used during the Han dynasty. While it occurs some 40-50 times in total in Han dynasty texts, it only occurs three times in texts written before 350 BC; this passage in the *Analecets*, book 15 of the Mozi 墨子, and in the Xi Ci II 繫辭下 section of the *Book of Changes* 易經. As will be discussed later on in the 5.2 analysis, there is every reason to expect book 15 of the Mozi to be a later compilation during the Han dynasty because it refers to literacy in a way that does not conform to the social coherence of the purported time period in which it was written, i.e., before 350 BC. The Xi Ci II section of the *Book of Changes* has always been viewed as very late, even by traditionalists who identify it as being written by Confucius himself, signaling that even from ancient times it was clear that this section was separate and distinguishable from the core of the *Book of Changes*. Thus, it would not be strange to find an otherwise anachronistic phrase in this section of the *Book of Changes*.

Therefore, based on the criterion of language and vocabulary, it appears as though the passage is late. However, compared to VII, 18, where it was impossible to disconnect the term deemed late from the passage, in it in theory possible to disconnect the last part of the sentence: “and the Ya 雅 and Song 頌 sections of the *Book of Poetry* each achieved their proper place”, from the first part where the Master says that he corrected music after he returned from Wei. Under appendix 2 I develop the idea that the first part of the saying is early, but the part of the saying that refers to the *Book of Poetry* specifically must be deemed as a late interpolation, like the late interpolation on the already existing verse VIII, 20 discussed in chapter 3.2.1.

#### 4.2.4 Error in transmission

An error in transmission is when a scribe either accidentally or deliberately changes a character while he is making a copy of it. One such example exists in the *Analecets* as it relates to writing, and it is VII, 17. Many scholars have treated it as the Master referring to the *Book of Changes* 易經 *yìjīng*, as the received form of the passage has the Master saying: “If some years were added to my life, I would give fifty to the study of the Yi, and then I might come to be without great faults.” 子曰加我數年五十以學易可以無大過矣 (Legge translation). However, Waley (1938) pointed out that the Lu version reads *yì* 亦 and not *yì* 易, the usage of the character for “The *Book of Changes*” 易 *yì* in this verse is probably wrong and was originally the character for “also” 亦 *yì*, and a scribe either accidentally or with intent changed the character. The proper translation of the verse is reconstructed by Waley (1938) as follows: “Give me a few more years, so that I

may have spent a whole fifty in study, and I believe that after all I should be fairly free from error.” Lau (1992) follows this interpretation. Similar usage of “also” 亦可 *yi ke* is found in e.g. I, 13; VI, 2 and 27.

Thus, based on the criterion of dissimilarity and the principle of *lectio difficilior potior* “the more difficult reading is correct”, it is easy to see how a scribe could read “also” 亦 *yì* and change it into “The *Book of Changes*” 易 *yì* to force the Master to mention the *Book of Changes*, which is not mentioned or referred to once in the entire *Analects*, but it is impossible to see how a scribe could read “The *Book of Changes*” 易 *yì* and change it into “also” 亦 *yì*. Therefore, VII, 17 should be viewed as an error in transmission that does not refer to neither the Five Classics nor writing.

#### 4.2.5 Possible now-lost texts mentioned

Some scholars have argued that two texts lost to time are mentioned by name in the selected books of the *Analects*, a book called “The Prayers” 誥 *lěi* in VII, 35 and Waley (1938) specifically believes that there are two books called “Model Sayings” 法語 *fǎ yǔ* and “Choice and Promotion” 巽與 *xùn yǔ* in IX, 24.

In VII, 35, the Master is very ill and Zilu asks to pray for him. Zilu then says *lěi yuē* 誥曰 which is literally translated as “prayer say”. Thus, scholars such as Legge (1893) and Waley (1938) believes 誥 *lěi* to be a book called “The Prayers” or something of the sort. However, this reading is probably incorrect. Context can luckily be found in the closest contemporary dictionary available: the *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 from ca. 100 AD. In it, Xu Shen’s 許慎 entry on the character 譙 *lěi* reads as follows:

*Lěi* 譙, the same as “prayer” 禱 *dǎo*. Accumulating accomplishments and moral virtue to appease the spirits. The *Analects* read: “The prayer [offered for you]: Prayers for you have been made to the spirits above and below.

譙禱也累功德以求福論語云譙曰禱尔于上下神祇从言巽省聲

Thus, we may see that *lěi* 譙 was originally the character in the sentence, and that it simply meant “prayer” 禱 *dǎo*. Lau (1992) also reads it this way, translating it as follows: “The prayer offered is as follows: ...”

In IX, 24, Waley (1938), and as far as I know only Waley, believes that the two terms 法語 *fǎ yǔ* and 巽與 *xùn yǔ* refer to two texts which he names “Model Sayings” for the first and offers the suggestion “Choosing and Promotion”, texts that stir the reader and induces change for the better. However, the supposed “Model Sayings”, which he believes is the same as the “Rules of Speech” 法言 *fǎ yán* referenced in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, does not appear to be a text that fits the description of “stirring” the reader, as the

“Rules of Speech” appears to be a guide to properly serving as a messenger. One of the two times it is mentioned in the *Zhuangzi* it reads as follows: “Transmit the message exactly as it stands; do not transmit it with any overflow of language; so is (the internuncio) likely to keep himself whole” (Legge translation) 故法言曰傳其常情無傳其溢言則幾乎全. This does not appear to fit the description of a stirring book.

Since there is no other mention whatsoever in any text ever of the supposed “Choosing and Promotion” 巽與 *xùn yǔ* text, it is difficult to even begin to disprove its existence, and I think the best course of action is to wait for further excavations to find this supposed text before we assume that it did exist. It appears as though the reading of the verse to not refer to texts, but rather to “words of strict admonition” 法語之言 *fǎ yǔ zhī yán* and “words of gentle advice” 巽與之言 *xùn yǔ zhī yán*, or something of the sort, as the rest of the scholarly world interprets it, offers a much better understanding of the verse.

#### 4.2.6 The remaining passages

Only two passages appear to directly refer to a situation in which the *Book of Poetry* holds authority reminiscent of a literate society or to texts, and those are III, 2 (discussed in appendix 2) and III, 9 (discussed in appendix 1). Both have their own unique characteristics which point to them being late.

In III, 2, we are told that the Three Families, de facto but not de jure rulers of Confucius’s native State of Lu 魯 used the Yong *Ode* 雝 while removing vessels after a ceremonial ritual. This *Ode* was, however, reserved for the royal family, apparently making it tantamount to sacrilege for a non-royal family to use it in this manner. The Master cites the *Ode* and then asks: “What application [can these words have] in the hall of the Three Families?” In this verse, the *Ode* itself does carry authority unlike what was seen in the verses discussed where the Master talked about the *Book of Poetry* with his disciples where they felt free to redact them as they saw fit. This would suggest, based on the criterion of contextual credibility, that III, 2 does not fit the overall picture given by the selected books of the *Analects*. Even so, it is noteworthy that while the *Ode* itself does carry weight, the Master does not use the phrase “The *Book of Poetry* says” which, while by no means a requirement, could have been expected if it was a later interpolation. However, the fact that the verse already cites the Yong *Ode* by name would imply that it is a later interpolation, since it does not appear customary in books III-IX of the *Analects* to cite both the name of an *Ode* and sing it; in almost all instances an *Ode* is merely sung, and in two cases (III, 20 and VIII, 15), we are given the name of an *Ode* but it is not sung. It could be that the *Ode*’s referenced in III, 8 etc. were known by some name to the Master and his disciples, however, by no means does anyone ever go to any effort to mention the name of the *Ode* they are referring to when they are also quoting it. When *Ode*’s are mentioned by name, such as in III, 20 and VIII, 15 where the Guan Ju *Ode* 關雎 is mentioned, it is not cited. III, 2 is the only verse that both gives the name and cites the *Ode*, and that lends great authority to the *Ode* and does not

change it in any way. Based on the criterion of contextual credibility, this passage is so different from the rest of the *Analects* that it should be viewed as a later interpolation. To look at it from the other side; if this is the only passage out of 200 that supports the traditional view of literacy in the *Analects*, that is not a strong case.

The remaining passage, III, 9, is unique not only in the *Analects*, but also among the extant corpus of ancient Chinese literature (both received and excavated texts), because it uses the phrase *wén xiàn* 文獻 that is only used one other time in the entire corpus, in the *Book of Han* 漢書 (ca. 111 AD) under the “Treatise on Literature” chapter 藝文志 *yìwén zhì* where it cites this passage. To make it clear, apart from this one passage in the *Analects* there is no other independent use of *wén xiàn* 文獻 in the extant corpus. Both individual characters, “text”/“culture” 文 *wén* and “learned man” 獻 *xiàn* are used frequently in texts as early as the Oracle Bone Inscriptions 甲骨文 *jiǎgǔwén* from the Shang dynasty 商 before 1050 BC, but they are never put together except for this passage. In later Chinese, the phrase takes on the meaning of “literary works”, but evidently this was not in use at any point during pre-Qin or Han dynasty China. This makes the saying appear to be quite late. Furthermore, it appears as though the text is corrupt in other areas as well. The Master says that he *can* talk about the rituals of the ancient dynasties even though the successor states cannot confirm what he says. He says that “if they had enough *wén xiàn*, they/it would confirm what he says.” This makes one wonder how he is able to talk about these ancient states, seemingly without any access to them whatsoever. Even in an oral culture, you would need learned men to tell you about the past. Waley (1938) suggests the interrogative particle *hū* 乎 has been left out and the Master is in fact saying: “*how* can I talk about the rituals...”. If this is the case, then the Master would appear to be reliant on texts for learning about the ancient past as one would expect from a literate person in a literate society. However, the final sentence is “if there was enough *wén xiàn*, I could *confirm* 徵 *zhēng* what I say”, not “I could learn”, which means that adding *hū* 乎 requires changing “confirm” 徵 *zhēng* to a different character as well, and the more changes you propose to a saying the weaker the argument gets. As far as I know, no one else adds the interrogative particle like Waley does.

I think the only reasonable approach to III, 9 is to say that it is corrupted, evidenced by its unique use of *wén xiàn* 文獻 and the overall message of the passage which apparently has the Master being able to talk about ancient rituals without any evidence.

## 5. Discussion

Below I will discuss the findings of the investigation in chapter 4.

### 5.1 The *Analects*

#### 5.1.1 The *Book of Poetry* as an unfinished work

The only text referred to in books III-IX of the *Analects*, which also happens to be a received text, is the *Book of Poetry*. No other text, whether received or not, is referenced by name, and potential references are most likely based on misreadings of the text. There is no mention of the other four classics which Confucius is supposed to have compiled, not even the Spring and Autumn Annals 春秋 *chūnqiū* which Confucius is said to have written himself, nor does there appear to be any direct knowledge of them.

Furthermore, as was shown in chapter 4.2.2, the *Book of Poetry* is, to put it bluntly, misunderstood and/or poorly used, which could be explained either by a poor interpreter, or that the work was unfinished at the time which we are dealing with. The view in this thesis is that of the latter. Of the six times the *Book of Poetry* is cited, five different *Odes* are referred to. These are the Yong 雝 (III, 2); Shuo Ren 碩人 (III, 8); Guan Ju 關雎 (III, 20; VIII, 15); Xiao Min 小旻 (VII, 11), and Xiong Zhi 雄雉 (IX, 27). There is also a curious apparent reference to an *Ode* that did not survive time in IX, 31. The Guan Ju *Ode* is not recited, nor is there any interpretation given of it (beyond “it is good”), meaning that we cannot infer any knowledge of it from the *Analects*, and the remaining four *Odes* reveal a very ad-hoc approach to the *Odes*. The Yong 雝 *Ode* in III, 2 appears to be the only *Ode* treated as some sort of “canon”; it is an *Ode* which carries with it an unquestionable authority that can only be used in a specific setting by specific people; it is only to be sung at the royal court of Zhou and even the mere usage of it by the Three Families is an abomination to the Master. This does not fit the criterion of contextual credibility as no other passage in the selected books holds this high view of the *Odes*. The Shuo Ren 碩人 (III, 8) has an extra sentence added to it at the end which adds a whole new layer of meaning to the *Ode*; indeed, one might say that it changes the very nature of the entire *Ode*. The Master appears both to be punning the last sentence of the Xiong Zhi 雄雉 (IX, 27) while saying that the *Ode* is not noteworthy enough to be memorized, and the Master appears to wholly misunderstand the force of the Xiao Min 小旻 (VII, 11) *Ode*.

However, albeit in a roundabout way, Confucius is able to lead his disciples into extracting moral lessons about ritual through the Shuo Ren 碩人 (III, 8); he is able to paint vivid pictures of personal characteristics through the Xiao Min 小旻 (VII, 11), and he feels qualified to pass judgment on the quality of the Xiong Zhi 雄雉 (IX, 27). There appears to be no lack of skill in interpretation.

That the apparent *Ode* in IX, 31 did not survive time means that it is difficult to draw any concrete conclusion about it, but even then, we still see the Master criticizing the man in the song when he comments “He didn’t actually love her. If he did, what distance could be [between them]?”, showing the same type of mix of authority and respect any good interpreter possesses.

How then, do we reconcile that a great interpreter can willfully judge, add sentences and misunderstand the basic premise of *Odes*? The *Book of Poetry* was not in the received form yet. This appears to be the best way to understand the nature of its usage in books III-IX in the *Analects*. That the form of the *Book of Poetry* was not fixed, and yet well known, would fit perfectly with the oral culture as mentioned briefly under IX, 27 that Albert Lord (1960) wrote about in the *Singer of Tales*. An actual physical copy of a given text is by no means necessary for a work to be known throughout the lands. For a further discussion, see 5.2.2.

### **The phrase “The Book of Poetry says” 詩云 *shī yún***

As stated, the *Book of Poetry* (indeed most books) is often cited directly through the phrase “the *Book of Poetry* says” 詩云 *shī yún*. This only occurs twice in the *Analects*, once in Book I, 15, deemed a late Book by this thesis, and once in VIII, 3, the one with the disciple Zengzi who it was established must have died after 429 BC., i.e., at least 50 years after the death of the Master. In the extant corpus, the character “said” 曰 *yuē* is sometimes used instead of *yún* 云, fulfilling the same function, e.g., *shī yuē* 詩曰, but this does not occur either in the *Analects* books III-IX, except for VII, 35 which was discussed in chapter 4.2.5, where it was shown that *lěi* 誄 is better understood as a prayer and not a text.

In fact, the prevalence of the phrase “the *Book of Poetry* says” 詩云 *shī yún* is so strong in ancient China that when the mysterious song that is referenced in IX, 31, which is not extant in our received *Book of Poetry*, and is cited the only other time in the extant corpus of ancient Chinese literature in the Chunqiu Fan Lu 春秋繁露 under the “Bamboo and Trees” 竹林 *zhú lín* chapter, the author of that text prefaces the quote with “the *Book of Poetry* says” 詩云 *shī yún*,<sup>57</sup> even though there appears to be no indication that the song was actually a part of the *Book of Poetry*.

While I do not think that it is an independently strong argument for dating, it is curious that the phrase “the *Book of Poetry* says” 詩云 *shī yún* is absent from the layer in the *Analects* where there does not appear to be a fixed form and interpretations lend themselves for us to speculate that Confucius had a completely different version of the *Ode* in the case of VII, 11.

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<sup>57</sup> 詩云棠棣之華偏其反而豈不爾思室是遠而孔子曰未之思夫何遠之有

From the *Analects*, we may reason that the *Book of Poetry* was an unfinished work in the late Spring and Autumn and early Warring States period, and that it did not carry the authority it does later. Beyond divinatory texts and inscribed ritual bronze vessels, the only other full text we know to have existed (both from received texts and excavations) at this time is the *Book of Changes* 易經 *yìjīng*, which is neither cited nor referenced once in the *Analects*. If Confucius was highly literate, what texts are left for him to have read?

### 5.1.2 The exceptions to prove the rule

The only verses left are III, 9 and VII, 25. VII, 25 reads “The four things the Master taught were *wen*, behavior, devotion [to work], and keeping promises.” It should be clear that the *wén* 文 here cannot be unequivocally established to refer to writing because there is not enough context for the saying. It could mean writing just as it could mean culture and cannot fall on either side of the argument.

Only III, 9 (discussed in chapter 4.2.6 and appendix 1), then, which is riddled with problems relating to vocabulary and possible text corruption, appears to suggest a knowledge and understanding of writing. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Master in this particular passage is at least aware that writing exists and that it has practical purposes in the preservation of rituals. However, he does not seem to think that the absence of such documents would impact his own ability to discuss said rituals.

### 5.1.3 Lack of divination and aristocratic ties in the *Analects* books III-IX

As was argued quite extensively in chapter 4.1, writing appears to have begun as a divinatory practice in ancient China. It also appears as though writing remained within the confines of divination for several centuries. In the large corpus of excavated material dating from the 13th century onwards, the vast majority are oracle bones and starting in about the 10th century inscribed bronze vessels. There appears to be a slow progression towards including “audience meetings” between a subject and a king as a common topic of writing. However, it is not until the late 4th century BC., that both excavated texts and received texts (based on linguistic dating) begin to show a full range of literacy on a multitude of topics in large quantities.

We already know that Confucius struggled with employment and there appears to be no memory or recollection of him having ever had the pleasure of any sort of audience meeting with a member of the royal family in books III-IX.<sup>58</sup> What about divination? Books III-IX are almost completely silent on the topic of

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<sup>58</sup> Beyond his meeting with the royal concubine Nanzi in VI, 28, but it appears as though the Master would have preferred to forget this meeting himself.



divination. Outside of off-the-cuff remarks such as V, 18<sup>59</sup> where a person is derided for housing tortoises,<sup>60</sup> there is virtually no reference to the practice of divination at all. In fact, two passages in books III-IX, VII, 21 and IX, 1, both lend themselves towards the explicit idea that Confucius was not interested in divination. Neither of these outright state it but serve as small pieces of supplementary evidence. VII, 21 reads: “The Master did not speak on the extraordinary, physical strength, disorder, and *spiritual beings*.” 子不語怪力亂神. IX, 1 reads: “The Master rarely spoke on profit, *destiny*, and the Good.” 子罕言利與命與仁. To my understanding, divination was not about destiny per say, rather about connecting to the spirit world where ancestors lived, but in either case, these concepts are at least tangentially related. Thus, in two separate passages, we see later people talking about Confucius and denying his interest in concepts related to divination. If Confucius was a diviner, one would not expect to find these passages.

As shown under chapter 4.1, it is difficult to understate the importance of divination and its relationship to writing in the time prior to, of, and after Confucius, and the relation between divination and scapulimancy, necessitating writing, is clear. That Confucius shows no interest in the one, would lend itself to infer that he would see no use for the other.

As for aristocratic ties, Confucius is by tradition said to have been part of the *shì* 士 social class, which was comprised of nobility who were not first in line to inheritance and thus were able to write but did not have a job (since most jobs were hereditary). However, Confucius not referred to as a *shì* a single time in books III-IX, and Pines (2012, p. 78) has pointed out that Confucius is the “first known ideologically active” *shì*, which further questions if he was actually part of this social stratum, or if this is a later retrojection by later members of the *shì* who wanted to lay claim to the authority that came with an association with Confucius. Waley (1938, p. 33-34) suggests that reading *shì* 士 as “scholar” is a mistranslation and that the term, in the *Analects*, refers to “knights”/“soldiers” and that it is only used metaphorically to represent the disciples of Confucius as “Knights of the Way” (Waley, p. 34).

In books III-IX, Confucius does not appear to have direct ties to the aristocracy, beyond the ability to interact with persona non grata such as Nanzi (VI, 28, discussed in chapter 2.1.1), of morally dubious character, and the unnamed Tai Zai official in IX, 6 (discussed in chapter 2.1.2). Confucius is almost exclusively portrayed as interacting with his disciples, not with rulers and aristocrats.<sup>61</sup> Since it was established in chapter 2 that one of the tenets of the historical-critical method is that a text should not be interpreted through the lens of other texts, that later texts described Confucius as a member of the *shì* class should not impact how we read Confucius in the *Analects*.

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<sup>59</sup> Found under appendix 1.

<sup>60</sup> Whose shells would have been used for divination.

<sup>61</sup> In most instances when there is interaction with the nobility, such as III, 6 and III, 21, is it the disciples who are interacting with the nobility and Confucius must go through them to have any sort of connection with the nobility.

## 5.2 Literacy

### 5.2.1 Scholarship

I would like to quote at length from Martin Kern (2005) in his book *Text and Ritual in Early China*:

[I]t seems to me that, for early China, the later Chinese tradition as well as modern scholarship in its wake has sometimes exaggerated the status of writing at the expense of all other forms of human cultural practice, notably among them the performance of texts. If the early Chinese had any desire to mass-produce those early texts that were manifestly recognized as canonical by the late fourth century B.C.E., they certainly had the means to accomplish such an endeavor in the same way as they were able to locally mass-produce all kinds of weapons, tools, ritual objects, and also administrative writings. We are still looking for some more suggestive traces of such textual mass production than we have glanced so far from both the literary tradition and the archaeological record. (p. 182)

Kern is certainly right in his observation. The *Mengzi* 孟子 (compiled as early as the fourth century BC but with later redactions during the Han) retrojects the compilation of the *Spring and Autumn annals* 春秋 *chūnqiū* to Confucius. The compilers in the Han dynasty retrojected writing even further back onto the great kings of the Zhou and Shang dynasties. On the very next page (i.e., page 183), Kern (2005) cites a passage from the Mozi, book 12, saying 12, where Mozi is said to have “carried many books” 載書甚多 *zàishū shènduō* and claims this as a puzzling piece of evidence for writing in the time of Mozi in the early 4th century BC. However, the very next line in the text he cites recounts Mozi saying: “In the olden days, Duke Dan of Zhou read one hundred pages every morning...” 昔者周公旦朝讀書百篇. Needless to say, there appears to be no evidence for that claim. If the author got the second half wrong, how can we trust that he got the first half right? I think it is much more likely that virtually every piece of puzzling evidence for literacy, which does not comprise many pieces to begin with, is a sign of retrojection by later scribes trying to find literacy in a largely illiterate society.

In his seminal work *Ancient Literacy*, William Harris (1989) undertook a study of literacy in ancient Greece and Rome showed that the literacy rate, at the best of times, was around 10% in these two ancient civilizations largely contemporary with ancient China. While this thesis is concerned primarily with ancient China, there are some interesting parallels that can be drawn. The scholarly world Harris faced when he wrote his book seems quite like the world of sinology today. He cites, for instance, Stubbs (1980) *Language and Literacy. The Sociolinguistics of Reading and Writing*, page 27: “in Athens in 500 B.C. it is probable

that a majority of the citizens could read the laws which were posted round the city”, and Harris then comments: “[I]t is indicative of common procedure that he refers to two authorities neither of whom has the slightest acquaintance with the evidence, though he knows literacy well enough to see that this would have made the place a historical exception.” (Harris, 1989, p. 8).<sup>62</sup>

In *Writing and Literacy in Early China*, Yates (2011) writes the following on pages 341: “An intriguing passage in the *Mozi* 墨子 suggests that ordinary commoners and those performing military service as part of their tax obligations in late Warring States and early imperial China may have been more literate than we have previously imagined.” The passage referred to is found in book 15, saying 13, which essentially says that in wartime regulations are to be posted everywhere in the city and everyone should look at them. In chapter 4.2.3 where I discussed IX, 15, I pointed out that the phrase “each achieved their proper place” 各得其所 *gè dé qí suǒ* only occurs in three texts dated earlier than the 4th century BC: the *Analects*, an appendix to the *Book of Changes* 易經 *yìjīng*, and the *Mozi* 墨子 book 15. The criterion of language and vocabulary and social coherence both strongly indicate that sections of book 15 of the *Mozi* 墨子 are late. However, Yates implies that virtually everyone could read when he writes: “They [i.e., authorities] make no provision for those who could not read. Presumably, they never even thought of illiteracy as a valid excuse for failure to abide by the written regulations” (p. 342). First of all, while he is correct in placing this passage as dating to imperial China rather in the time of Mozi, he never explicitly mentions that there is a 200-year gap between the estimated time of Mozi and imperial China, which might lead the inexperienced reader to assume that these regulations would have applied to the time of Mozi in the first half of the 4th century BC. But more importantly, the fact that signs were to be posted says nothing about the ability of the vast majority of the population to read them. The problem that both Stubbs with the Athenians and Yates with the Chinese seem to have, is that they assume that the main purpose of a text is to bear information, because that is the purpose of texts in a literate society. However, in a mostly illiterate society, they do not. They bear power; they symbolize *impermeability*.

The reason for posting laws is not so everyone can read them, but to make sure that a given law is set in stone and not subject to the whims of a clan elder or patrician who at any time can conveniently remember “back in the good old days when I was a boy, there just so happened to be a court case that conveniently applies perfectly to my side of the case.” As long as one person in a hundred can independently decipher a text and relay it once to the masses, the text has fulfilled its purpose to transmit knowledge and then takes on the purpose of symbolizing power, authority and unchangeability; a written text, whether law or military order, cannot be changed. We should not assume that texts have the same function in a society with 1%

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<sup>62</sup> The two sources he cites are Cipolla (1969, p. 38) and Goody & Watt (1962). Carlo M. Cipolla was an economic historian, Jack Goody was a social anthropologist and Ian Watt, although a literary historian, wrote mainly on novels.

literate people and 99% literate people, and one may point out that even though we now live in a society where everyone can read the laws, that has in no way diminished the power of the law profession.

### 5.2.2 Oral culture

As was mentioned previously, a great source of inspiration for this work has come from Albert Lord's (1960) *The Singer of Tales*, wherein he continues the research Milman Parry conducted in Yugoslavia in the 1930s. First, I would like to quote at length from Lord on the question of why Confucius did not write a book. Lord (1960, p. 152) writes the following on Homer and the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*:

We are in the dark about why the poems were written down. We may be fairly certain, however, that it was not Homer's idea. He would have no need for a written text; he would not know what to do with it. Surely, as master of the oral technique, he needed no mnemonic device. That he might wish to see his songs preserved may seem a valid reason to us, but no oral poet thinks even for a moment that the songs he sings and which others have learned from him will be lost. Nor has he a concept of a single version which is so good that it must be written down to be kept. I'm suggesting such reasons we are putting into the mind of an oral poet something logical for us but foreign to him. I feel sure that the impetus to write down the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* did not come from Homer himself but from some outside source.

The illiterate, oral society and culture that Lord describes has many overlaps with features of the *Analects* discussed in this thesis, particularly how the *Book of Poetry* is treated by the Master and his disciples. Lord argues that the oral society is much more fluid when it comes to transmission of stories and that *wording* is not considered important, since there is no single fixed form of a song or story that the singer can rely on. Thus, to transmit a song or a story is not to memorize the word order, nor even the inessential parts of the story (whatever they may be): the oral poet believes that his role is to retell the essence of the story and add his personal ornamentation. Thus, to the oral poet, there is no "one *Book of Poetry*" just as there is no "one *Iliad*"; there are only "the songs of the Zhou court" or "the story of the Trojan War".

A perfect example of this phenomenon is relayed on page 78, where Lord describes an encounter with Avdo Međedović, whom he described as "the most talented Yugoslav singer in our experience" (Lord, 1960 p. 78) and another singer named Mumin Vlahovljak. Avdo had been with Lord and Parry for several weeks dictating songs when Parry met Mumin. Parry discovered that Mumin knew a song that was not in Avdo's repertoire, and asked Mumin to sing it while Avdo was present. After Mumin had finished singing this song comprising several thousand lines, Parry asked Avdo what he thought about it. Avdo said that it was a good

song but that he could sing it better. Parry then asked him to sing it again, whereupon he did. Lord (1960, p. 78) says the following about Avdo's version:

Avdo began and as he sang, the song lengthened, the ornamentation and richness accumulated, and the human touches of character, touches that distinguished Avdo from other singers, imparted a depth of feeling that had been missing in Mumin's version.

While the Master is never recounted as singing songs of several thousand lines, the way the *Book of Poetry* is referred to in the *Analects*; with ornamentation and richness that would have distinguished Confucius from other people in his day, reflects the society that Lord describes. In the *Analects* III-IX, whenever a claim is made, whenever a "better" version of an *Ode* is sung, there is never any source to back it up; there is no concept of any single authoritative body of knowledge in the world that is reflected in the *Analects* except for the Master himself. This falls in line with the oral society described in Lord (1960).

Furthermore, Lord (1960, p. 28) notes that the role of the oral bard in an illiterate society is not a creative role, but rather as a conservator of tradition, as a defender of the historical truth of what is being sung. He says on page 28: "It is not the artist but the historian who speaks at this moment, although the singer's concept of the historian is that of guardian of legend." Compare this to perhaps Confucius's most famous statement of all, often held up as the best evidence that Confucius did not want to write his own book found in *Analects* Book VII, 1a: "I transmit, I do not create" 述而不作 *shù ér bù zuò*. Confucius viewed himself not as a creative force, but as a transmitter of the historical truths of oral tradition that he had been taught throughout his life; he viewed himself as a guardian of legend.

As for the tradition of Confucian "authorship" of the *Five Classics*, that Confucius would have preferred to preserve his teachings by compiling the *Five Classics* always seemed like a strange argument to me. Bertrand Russell never said: "It is too bothersome to write a book, so I will make slight alterations to the *Book of Psalms* so that my teachings may be preserved." Mencius certainly did not seem to think that this was a good stance for preservation of his own knowledge and much preferred, at least by tradition, to write his own book. The same can be said for a whole range of characters from the mid-to-late Warring States period. The only exception to this tradition of "the wise man who authored his own work" is Confucius, and it may be reasonably speculated that this contradiction in terms; that the greatest of wise men never authored his own work, became the impetus for the subsequent tradition of his "authoring", i.e. editing, the *Five Classics*, who were themselves anonymous works without authors. This solution of Confucian authorship of the *Five Classics* provided both Confucius with books that made him fulfill the necessary requirement of "the writer" to become a truly wise man, and it provided the *Five Classics* with unshakeable authority.

As a final note on the first quote from Lord (1960), he notes that the impetus for the writing down of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* did not come from Homer himself but rather from some outside source. Recall the traditional account of the formation of the *Analects*: the disciples kept their own notes on the teachings of the Master and used that to compile the *Analects* after the death of the Master. Even by the traditional account, Confucius was not interested in textually preserving his knowledge. This is explained perfectly if he lived in an illiterate, oral society.

## 6. Conclusion

This thesis has used the historical-critical method on books III-IX of the *Analects* to investigate literacy in the time of Confucius. The method proved successful in analyzing various passages selected as pertaining to literacy. The criterion of language and vocabulary proved particularly important in analyzing individual passages, along with the criterion of dissimilarity. The criterion of multiple attestation was useful in finding a clear contradiction between IX, 6 and 7 and thus aiding in establishing the nature of the text in chapter 3, showing its potential for further use in ascribing various books/passages in the *Analects*, and other texts, to various authors in future studies, but it did not prove very useful for this specific investigation since only one text, the *Analects*, was investigated. Were more texts, such as the *Mengzi* 孟子 and *Zuo Zhuan* commentary 春秋左傳 *chūnqiū zuǒzhuán* to be investigated, one may expect that it would become a very important criterion. The criterion of contextual credibility only proved useful in a few instances in this thesis such as identifying XIII, 3 and III, 2 as, for their separate reasons, later interpolations, but the criterion might prove useful, along with the criterion of multiple attestation, in future studies on the topic of authorship of the *Analects*, and a larger investigation into the historical Confucius.

Furthermore, this thesis investigated the formation of the *Analects* and has shown that the text is best understood as an accretion text, with some passages dating early and other passages dating as late as the Han dynasty. The history of literacy based primarily on archaeological discoveries has shown that the evolution of writing was a slow, gradual process from simple divination in the 13th century BC to received texts only emerging in large quantities beginning in the 4th century BC, and tomb excavations confirm that writing did not merit a large ceremonial role in burials until the Mawangdui tomb 馬王堆 dating to ca. 300 BC. Furthermore, the quantity of received texts, based primarily on linguistic evidence, from different time periods also show a sharp increase beginning only the mid-to-late Warring States period, beginning ca. 350-300 BC.

The textual analysis of books III-IX, argued to include the earliest layer of the *Analects*, has shown to reflect a society that appears wholly disinterested, or perhaps even unaware, of writing. Talking is the mode of communication, and songs are taught through oral recitation. Of the *Five Classics*, only the *Book of Poetry* is mentioned and how it is treated and “misquoted”, i.e., adapted to the individual singer with additions and commentary, echoes the oral culture Albert Lord (1960) describes in *The Singer of Tales* where even the concept of a single fixed form does not exist.

All these factors converge to reflect a largely illiterate society in the 6th and 5th centuries BC that is distinctly different from the type of society that is reflected in later society in the late Warring States period onwards. Writing, originally developed as a tool for divination, had in the 6th century BC only evolved to bronze vessels recording audience meetings between king and subject and possibly political treaties

between states. While heavily in use in these very limited areas, its larger function does not appear to have been fully realized until the mid-to-late 4th century BC onwards. Later layers of the *Analects*, as well as other texts from later times, indicate a highly developed, literate society. That is why the *Mengzi* gives authority to the *Book of Poetry*, but the *Analects* books III-IX does not.

In essence, the chronological shift for the catalyst of independent text production in ancient China argued for in this thesis does not amount to more than some two centuries, from the early Warring States period in the early 5th century BC to the middle of the Warring States period in the middle-to-late 4th century BC. Later intellectuals, probably as early Mencius in the late 4th century BC, retrojected their own time's high literacy onto earlier times.

I will end by citing Branner (2011, p. 86):

People who wrote and read Chinese in early times must have thought critically about what they were doing from the beginning, but whatever they thought does not seem to have made its way into the received tradition until rather late.

Actually, complete silence on the subject would be strange if literacy really was common in Early China; we would expect to hear about it from some source or other and perhaps we will soon, through excavated texts.

It is possible that future archeological excavations will indicate that literacy was in full swing in the early 5th century BC., or the 6th, or the 7th, but that is not the case today. As of today, all evidence points to literacy remaining the exclusive business of diviners and members of society privileged enough to warrant an audience with the King until the late 4th century, and it is only at that point that the philosophical debates, long historical narratives, and other texts that has come to characterize the extant corpus of ancient Chinese literature is put to writing. Confucius was neither a diviner nor in direct connection with the royal family, and so the historical Confucius should be viewed as an oral, illiterate teacher in an oral, illiterate society.

Further investigation on the formation of the *Analects*, reconstruction of ancient China, and historical-Confucius research will hopefully further corroborate this conclusion.



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# Appendix 1 - verses containing *wén* 文 as mentioned in chapter 4.2.1

This appendix contains a translation of every passage in books III-IX of the *Analecets* that contains *wén* 文 as mentioned in chapter 4.2.1.

I offer the received form of the text, the translation of one or more authoritative translators and often provide my own translation, sometimes with extensive discussions on the reasons for my translation choices. In a few cases, my interpretation does not differ from Legge on the crucial interpretation of the passage, and in those cases, I will only offer Legge's translation with a short comment. In other instances, where my interpretation differs greatly, I will offer the translations of Waley (1938) and/or Lau (1992), followed by an extensive discussion and finally offer my own translation.

Each discussion will be structured in the following way:

Book X, verse Y

Original Chinese received form. The character *wén* 文 in **bold**.

Translation into English by Legge (1893). The translated word for *wén* 文 in **bold**.

If necessary: Translation into English by Waley (1938). The translated word for *wén* 文 in **bold**.

If necessary: Translation into English by Lau (1992). The translated word for *wén* 文 in **bold**.

Discussion on the translation.

If necessary: my own translation. The translated word for *wén* 文 in **bold**.

## Book III

### III, 9

Received form of the text:

子曰夏禮吾能言之杞不足徵也殷禮吾能言之宋不足徵也**文**獻不足故也足則吾能徵之矣

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "I could describe the ceremonies of the Xia dynasty, but Qi cannot sufficiently attest my words. I could describe the ceremonies of the Yin dynasty, but Song cannot sufficiently attest my words. (They cannot do so) because of the insufficiency of their **records** and wise men. If those were sufficient, I could adduce them in support of my words."

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said, How can we talk about the ritual of the Hsia? The State of Ch'i supplies no adequate evidence. How can we talk about the ritual of Yin? The State of Sung supplies no adequate evidence. For there is a lack both of **documents** and of learned men. But for this lack we should be able to obtain evidence from these two States.

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said, "I am able to discourse on the rites of the Hsia, but the state of Ch'i does not furnish sufficient supporting evidence; I am able to discourse on the rites of Yin, but the state of Sung does not furnish sufficient supporting evidence. This is because there are not enough **records** and men of erudition. Otherwise I would be able to support what I say with evidence."

Discussion:

This passage has shown some difficulties both in dating and interpretation. While it is clear that *wén* 文 is almost certainly meant to be read as "texts" here, when it comes to dating, the usage of the phrase "texts and learned men" 文獻 *wén xiàn* is unique not only in the *Analects*, but in the extant corpus of Chinese literature, only being used one other time during the pre-Qin and Han dynasty eras in the *Book of Han* from ca. 111 AD where it cites this passage. To make it clear: there is not a single independent usage of the phrase "texts and learned men" 文獻 *wén xiàn* in the entire corpus of early Chinese literature. However, both "culture"/"texts" 文 *wen* and "learned men" 獻 *xiàn* occurs very often throughout the Warring States period and Imperial times. Based on the criterion of language and vocabulary, it could indicate that this passage was written as late as the Eastern Han dynasty since that is the only other time the phrase "texts and learned men" 文獻 *wén xiàn* is used, citing this verse specifically. However, the passage has more problems which will be discussed below.

As for the interpretation, Waley (1938) suggests that the interrogative particle is missing and that the Master is actually asking: "How can we talk about the ritual of the Hsia?", which makes more sense with the first half of the passage where these states do not offer evidence, but that makes the usage of the word "confirm", "prove", "verify" 徵 *zhēng* throughout the text very difficult to interpret since the emphasis of the passage seems to be the impossibility of *confirmation* of the Master's doctrine, not the ability or inability to talk about these rituals. Thus, I choose to read the received version, without the interrogative particle, as correct. This interpretation, which is held by e.g., Lau (1992) and Yang (2006), could then be taken at face value: the Master *was able* to talk about the rituals of the ancients, not only without having access to any potential documents, but furthermore, it sounds like there is a more or less complete absence of these documents in these states to begin with. That means that, to the author of this passage, the traditions of the Xia and Shang were handed down *orally*, and while some states might have carried out Spring and Autumn

annals-*esque* history collection, the states who were the supposed direct descendants of the two great dynasties of prehistory did not.

A further logical conclusion that should be drawn from this passage as it is currently written is that whoever wrote this passage was not aware of large swaths of the *Book of Documents* 尚書 *shàng shū*, a collection of books which by any stretch of the imagination would have been viewed as sufficient evidence for inferring the rituals of the two ancient dynasties. Throughout Chinese history, the *Book of Documents* have been viewed as providing exactly the sort of “confirmation” on knowledge about the Xia and Shang dynasties. Eno (2018, p. 57-60) has also argued that the *Book of Documents* were not completed until the Qin dynasty 秦, based on the lack of citations to 16 of the 20 books in the *Books of Zhou* 周書 *zhōu shū* section.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps some early form of this passage could support such a finding, but it would have to be a very early saying if that is the case which does not cohere well with the problematic usage of “texts and learned men” 文獻 *wén xiàn*. All that can be said with a high degree of confidence is that this passage is corrupt in one way or another. Waley’s point that there appears to be a missing interrogative particle, although problematic with the text as it currently stands, is still well taken as indicating that the situation that is presented in the passage as it currently stands: with the Master being able to talk about things without any supporting evidence, is odd. As it stands right now, this passage cannot be used either to affirm or reject writing.

My translation of the text as it is currently written would not differ much from Legge (1893) or Lau (1992), although I think that the text is so corrupted it is impossible to know what it originally said.

### III, 14

Received form of the text:

子曰周監於二代郁郁乎文哉吾從周

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "Zhou had the advantage of viewing the two past dynasties. How complete and elegant are its **regulations!** I follow Zhou."

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said, Chou could survey the two preceding dynasties. How great a wealth of **culture!** And we follow upon Chou.

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<sup>63</sup> See Eno (2018) page 59, footnote 59. Eno relates the formation of the *Book of Documents* to the Qin court’s effort to “comprehend the past and present” 通古今 *tong gujin*. For more, see Eno (2018) page 58-59.

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said, “The Chou is resplendent in **culture**, having before it the example of the two previous dynasties. I am for the Chou.”

Discussion:

The meaning is quite clear in this passage: the Zhou dynasty could, and did, inspect the previous two dynasties of Xia and Shang, modified the regulations, laws, culture, rituals etc. to perfection, leading the Master to state that he should follow Zhou, she being the ‘peak’ of culture.

In this sentence, *wén* 文 cannot refer to writing.

My translation would not differ from the three scholars.

## Book V

### V, 13

Received form of the text:

子貢曰夫子之文章可得而聞也夫子之言性與天道不可得而聞也

Legge (1893) translation:

Zi Gong said, "The Master's **personal displays of his principles and ordinary descriptions** of them may be heard. His discourses about man's nature, and the way of Heaven, cannot be heard."

Waley (1938) translation:

Tzu-kung said, Our Master's views concerning **culture** and the outward insignia of goodness, we are permitted to hear; but about Man's nature and the ways of Heaven he will not tell us anything at all.

Lau (1992) translation:

Tzu-kung said, “One can get to hear about the Master's **accomplishments**, but one cannot get to hear his views on human nature and the Way of Heaven.”

Discussion:

According to Waley (1938), the character 章 *zhāng* means “emblem”, and here takes on a metaphorical meaning akin to “something you can see”, meaning that “culture emblem” 文章 *wén zhāng* should be



understand along the lines of “the physical ways to see the culture of a person”.<sup>64</sup> The Master apparently believed that you could see good breeding in a person. This contrasts nicely with the remaining passage where the “culture emblem” is compared to human nature and the Way of Heaven.<sup>65</sup> The passage only becomes “troublesome” because the word 文章 *wén zhāng* in later Chinese takes on the meaning of “written document”. However, reading it as “written document” here makes the passage less smooth: while it is not *impossible* to phrase it like this, it seems odd that Zigong would have used the verb “listen” 聞 *wén* to refer to a written document.

More importantly, “written document” is not inherently in opposition to “human nature and the Way of Heaven”, which means that forcing “written document” into the text must then mean that Zigong said something along the following lines: “We were allowed to listen to recitations of the Master’s written works, but we were not allowed to listen to the Master’s words on human nature and the Way of Heaven”. This would only work if (a) the Master would read aloud from his select works, and no such evidence exists in the *Analects*, and; (b) the Master’s views on human nature and the Way of Heaven were not part of his written works, *and that this would have been known to the audience*, because otherwise there is no conflict in the passage which would make including the first part of the sentence superfluous. The first part of the sentence “We were allowed to hear the Master discourse upon *wen zhang*” is there to contrast what they were not allowed to listen to. Thus, reading *wén zhāng* 文章 as “written documents” appears anachronistic and the sentence is overall much better understood if it means “culture emblems”, metaphorically meaning “physical manifestations of culture”.

In this sentence, *wén* 文 cannot refer to writing.

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<sup>64</sup> This is also the interpretation found in Xie Bing’s 邢昺 “*Analects annotations*” 論語注疏, of Zhu Xi 朱熹, and Lau (1992).

<sup>65</sup> One wonders if this is a reference to predestination. Cf. IX, 1. Waley (1938, footnote to IX, 1) notes that the topic of fate and predestination was discussed during the time of Mozi 墨子, which would place this passage chronologically at some time after the death of the Master, when the topic of predestination has blossomed. Zigong would have had to answer the question: “What did Confucius say about predestination?” His answer, then, would have been something like: “The Master did not concern himself with fate. He was more interested in the behavior of man.”

## V, 15

Received form of the text:

子貢問曰孔**文**子何以謂之**文**也子曰敏而好學不恥下問是以謂之**文**也

Legge (1893) translation:

Zi Gong asked, saying, "On what ground did Kong **Wen** get that title of **Wen**?" The Master said, "He was of an active nature and yet fond of learning, and he was not ashamed to ask and learn of his inferiors! On these grounds he has been styled **Wen**."

Waley (1938) translation: not needed.

Lau (1992) translation: not needed.

Discussion:

Kong Wen Zi 孔**文**子 was an official in the State of Wei 衛, and a contemporary of the Master. Not much needs to be said about this passage; he is stylized as Wen 文 because he was eager to learn and was so modest that he was not afraid to ask subordinates for knowledge, meaning that 文 wen refers to culture and/or good breeding. "Eager to learn and modest" cannot be summed up as "Kong Writing Zi", but "Kong the Cultured Zi" fits quite well.

In this sentence, *wén* 文 cannot refer to writing.

## V, 18

Received form of the text:

子曰臧**文**仲居蔡山節藻梲何如其知也

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "Zang **Wen** kept a large tortoise in a house, on the capitals of the pillars of which he had hills made, and with representations of duckweed on the small pillars above the beams supporting the rafters. Of what sort was his wisdom?"

Waley (1938) translation: not needed.

Lau (1992) translation: not needed.

Discussion:

In this passage, *wén* 文 is merely part of the name of the gentleman in question, who is raising tortoises, whose shells are used for divination, which was limited to the royal family (see Waley's (1938) footnote on this passage).

In this sentence, *wén* 文 cannot refer to writing.

V, 19

Received form of the text:

子張問曰令尹子文三仕為令尹無喜色三已之無愠色舊令尹之政必以告新令尹何如子曰忠矣曰仁矣乎曰未知焉得仁崔子弑齊君陳文子有馬十乘棄而違之至於他邦則曰猶吾大夫崔子也違之之一邦則又曰猶吾大夫崔子也違之何如子曰清矣曰仁矣乎曰未知焉得仁

Legge (1893) translation:

Zi Zhang asked, saying, "The minister Zi **Wen** thrice took office, and manifested no joy in his countenance. Thrice he retired from office, and manifested no displeasure. He made it a point to inform the new minister of the way in which he had conducted the government - what do you say of him?" The Master replied. "He was loyal." "Was he perfectly virtuous?" "I do not know. How can he be pronounced perfectly virtuous?" Zi Zhang proceeded, "When the officer Cui killed the prince of Qi, Chen **Wen**, though he was the owner of forty horses, abandoned them and left the country. Coming to another state, he said, 'They are here like our great officer, Cui,' and left it. He came to a second state, and again said 'They are here like our great officer, Cui,' and left it also - what do you say of him?" The Master replied, "He was pure." "Was he perfectly virtuous?" "I do not know. How can he be pronounced perfectly virtuous?"

Waley (1938) translation: not needed.

Lau (1992) translation: not needed.

Discussion:

All that needs to be said of this passage is that *wén* 文 is used twice as names for two different people; 子文 Zi Wen (middle of the 7th century B.C., see Waley (1938)) and 陳文子 Chen Wenzi (middle of the 6th century B.C., see Waley (1938)).

In this sentence, *wén* 文 cannot refer to writing.

## V, 20

Received form of the text:

季文子三思而後行子聞之曰再斯可矣

Legge (1893) translation:

Ji **Wen** thought thrice, and then acted. When the Master was informed of it, he said, "Twice may do."

Waley (1938) translation: not needed.

Lau (1992) translation: not needed.

Discussion:

Here again, *wén* 文 is part of a name and nothing more. 季文子 was an official in the State of Lu 魯 in the middle of the sixth century B.C. (see Waley, 1938).

In this sentence, *wén* 文 cannot refer to writing.

## Book VI

### VI, 18

Received form of the text:

子曰質勝文則野文勝質則史文質彬彬然後君子

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "Where the solid qualities are in excess of **accomplishments**, we have rusticity; where the **accomplishments** are in excess of the solid qualities, we have the manners of a clerk. When the **accomplishments** and solid qualities are equally blended, we then have the man of virtue."

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said, When natural substance prevails of **ornamentation**, you get the boorishness of the rustic. When **ornamentation** prevails over natural substance, you get the pedantry of the scribe. Only when **ornament** and substance are duly blended do you get the true gentleman.

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said, "When there is a preponderance of native substance over **acquired refinement**, the result will be churlishness. When there is a preponderance of **acquired refinement** over native substance, the result will be pedantry. Only a well-balanced admixture of the two will result in gentlemanliness."

Discussion:

This verse is incredibly difficult to translate, but, fortunately, the understanding of *wén* 文 is the one thing that is clear. Keeping the social background of early Warring States China in mind when we read this text, I think it is most likely that 質 *zhì* “substance” are in one way or another related with social rank. Building on the principle of intertextual knowledge in chapter 3.3, we can actually gather a lot more context for this passage.

XII, 8. Ji Zicheng said: A *junzi* is inborn qualities and nothing more. Of what use is culture? Zigong said: A shame!.. the honorable gentleman’s words! [As the saying goes] [What a] *junzi* [says], a team of horses cannot catch up to.<sup>66</sup> Culture is like inborn qualities, inborn qualities are like culture. The tiger’s or leopard’s hairless hide, is like the dog’s or goat’s hairless hide.

棘子成曰君子質而已矣何以文為子貢曰惜乎夫子之說君子也駟不及舌文猶質也質猶文也虎豹之鞞猶犬羊之鞞

In XII, 8, Zigong musters a defense of the role of *wén* 文 for a *jūnzǐ*. How does he do this? He says that the hide of a tiger, if you were to strip it of its hair, is like the hide of a dog if one were to strip that of hair. What ultimately separates the tiger’s hide from the dog’s hide? Hair! An outside, external, visible factor. In the discussion on V, 13, we saw that culture can “manifest” itself in an external, visible way. Thus, the *wén* 文 in VI, 18 should be read as “culture” or perhaps “cultural ornamentations”. Legge (1893) reads *wén* 文 as “accomplishments”; Waley (1938) as “ornamentation”; Lau (1992) as “acquired refinement”.

Another character which needs further inspection is *shǐ* 史. From as early as the oracle bone inscriptions in the Shang dynasty (ca. 1200 BC), it carried the meaning of “scribe”. Thus, some translate the second sentence as: “Where the accomplishments are in excess of the solid qualities, we have the manners of a clerk.” (Legge, 1893); “When ornamentation prevails over natural substance, you get the pedantry of the scribe” (Waley, 1938); “When there is a preponderance of acquired refinement over native substance, the result will be pedantry.” (Lau, 1992). Even here, it is clear that it is the *manners* of said clerk/scribe (i.e., pedantry), and not the office itself which is in question. However, it is problematic. The structure of the sentence clearly outlines that *shǐ* 史 is meant to be contrasted with *yě* 野 “brutishness.” Thus, it would be very odd to refer to a characteristic in the first sentence, and an occupation in the next. In the Hanyu Da

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<sup>66</sup> A saying in Chinese, still in use today, which means that once a word has been said, you cannot take it back.

Cidian 漢語大辭典, one of the glosses for *shǐ* 史 is “to exaggerate, to be boastful” *fú kuā* 浮誇. Not only that, but they cite this exact verse, VI, 18, as an example text of it. This reading of *shǐ* 史 makes the entire verse make sense. The two conflicting pairs are inborn qualities vs. acquired traits, and ‘brutishness’ and ‘boasting’. When you have inborn qualities, you have an uncultivated upper-class brute who relies on social rank and money rather than on manners. When you have acquired traits without social rank, you have boasting. When you have a blend of these two; rank and manners, you have a *jūnzǐ*.

In this sentence, *wén* 文 cannot refer to writing.

My translation:

The Master said, When inborn qualities prevail over **cultural ornamentation**, there is brutishness. When **cultural ornamentation** prevails over inborn qualities, there is boasting. **Culture** and inborn qualities in harmony; thus is a *junzi*.

## VI, 27

Received form of the text:

子曰君子博學於文約之以禮亦可以弗畔矣夫

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "The superior man, extensively studying all **learning**, and keeping himself under the restraint of the rules of propriety, may thus likewise not overstep what is right."

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said, A gentleman who is widely versed in **letters** and at the same time knows how to submit his learning to the restraints of ritual is not likely, I think, to go far wrong.

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said, “The gentleman widely versed in **culture** but brought back to essentials by the rites can, I suppose, be relied upon not to turn against what he stood for.”

Discussion:

This saying has many possible interpretations. I follow Mao Qiling’s 毛奇齡 (1623-1716)<sup>67</sup> interpretation that the particle *zhī* 之 points to *wén* 文 rather than *jūnzǐ* 君子. This creates a better flow in the text where the meaning of ‘reins in culture by ritual’ means something like: “makes complex culture simple through

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<sup>67</sup> Also adopted by e.g. Waley (1938), and Lau (1992)

ritual”,<sup>68</sup> as opposed to reining in himself. In essence, the goal of the *jūnzǐ* is to know every single aspect of cultural behavior, but always aim to keep it simple; this, the Master believes, is best achieved by adhering to ritual. While probably a later saying itself, it is well reflected in book XIII, 25: “The *junzi* is easy to serve and difficult to please” 君子易事而難說也. Lau (1992) reads *wén* 文 as ‘culture’.

As to understanding *wén* 文, if we are to take it to refer to writing, which Waley (1938), Yang (2006) and others do, then *yuē zhī yǐ lǐ* 約之以禮 does not make much sense read as “rein in the writing by ritual”. These scholars avoid the problem by simply not translating it and instead write “at the same time knows how to submit his learning to the restraints of ritual” (Waley, 1938). It is difficult to imagine how one submits their *writing* to ritual. Furthermore, while culture is inherently bound together with ritual, writing is not, making it much easier to see the Master trying to expound on this relationship between culture and ritual and the interplay between these two. This connection is lost if *wén* 文 is to be read as writing.

In this sentence, *wén* 文 cannot refer to writing.

My translation:

The Master said, A *junzi* that is well versed in **culture**, but reins in culture by ritual, can be trusted to not turn back [on a promise?]

## Book VII

### VII, 25

Received form of the text:

子以四教文行忠信

Legge (1893) translation:

There were four things which the Master taught: **letters**, ethics, devotion of soul, and truthfulness.

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master took four subjects for his teaching: **culture**, conduct of affairs, loyalty to superiors and the keeping of promises.

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master instructs under four heads: **culture**, moral conduct, doing one’s best and being trustworthy in what one says.

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<sup>68</sup> This is the argument of Mao Qiling.

Discussion:

There is not much that can be said about *wén* 文 this passage because it wholly lacks context. There is no way to know if it refers to culture or written material or anything else. What I will point out is that this appears to be a saying *about* the Master, indicating that it is *more likely*, although not conclusive, that it was said about the Master after his death. If this is the case, which seems the likely reading, it is not impossible that later criticism of illiteracy on the part of the Master could have played a role and that the disciples were trying to polish the idea of the Master as a literary interpreter. That is to say, once high literacy became the norm for great thinkers in the late 4th century BC, the natural question would have been: “Where is Confucius’s book?” Perhaps there was a distant memory of a largely illiterate age, or perhaps someone would have inferred that Confucius could not write in other ways, but there could have arisen a situation in which Confucius was accused of not being literate, upon which this passage was formed to ensure that he did in fact teach “literacy” *wén* 文. However, this is mere conjecture and the meaning of *wén* 文 cannot be established in this passage.

In this sentence, *wén* 文 cannot refer to writing.

My translation:

The four things the Master taught were *wen*, behavior, devotion [to work], and keeping promises.

## VII, 33

Received form of the text:

子曰文莫吾猶人也躬行君子則吾未之有得

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "In **letters** I am perhaps equal to other men, but the character of the superior man, carrying out in his conduct what he professes, is what I have not yet attained to."

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said, As far as **taking trouble** goes, I do not think I compare badly with other people. But as regards carrying out the duties of a gentleman in actual life, I have never yet had a chance to show what I could do.

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said, “In **unstinted effort** I can compare with others, but in how to be a practising gentleman I can, as yet, claim no insight.”



Discussion:

This passage is highly problematic, but mostly due to tradition. In his commentary, Zhu Xi 朱熹 wrote this very troublesome line: “莫，疑辭” *mò yí cí* which could mean a lot of things, but probably something along the lines of “[The character] 莫 means ‘probably’”. This has led a long line of scholars to separate *wén mò* 文莫 into two words: “*wén*, probably” which then would cause the sentence to read something like: “When it comes to *wen*, I probably am like others”. This is e.g. the reading of Legge (1893) and many modern Chinese sinologists such as Yang (2006). However, as Waley (1938) points out, there is no evidence that *mò* 莫 can mean “probably”. Waley instead glosses *wén mò* 文莫 as *mín mù* 忞懞.<sup>69</sup> The word *mín mò* 文莫 is now found in the Hanyu Da Cidian 漢語大辭典 where it specifically relates to this passage and even has 文 pronounced as *min*. Thus, the interpretation that *wén mò* 文莫 cannot mean anything, thus we add an entirely different meaning to 莫 rather than adding the proper radicals to the characters, cannot be sustained.

*Mín mù* 忞懞 means “putting in effort”, or something of the like. Thus, the Master said, “when it comes to putting in effort, I am like others...”. This, of course, leads to the very obvious question: “putting your effort into what?” It seems, based on the remaining part of the saying, as if he is putting in effort into becoming a *jūnzǐ*, but that he is unable to put into practice the actions/manners of a *jūnzǐ*. Thus, it is clear based on the criterion of dissimilarity why this other line of interpretation has arisen: Confucius is himself saying that he is not able to become a *junzi*. The interpretation which reads *wén, mò* 文, 莫 rests not on textual evidence, but on an effort to prevent the clear reading of the text.

In this saying, *wén* 文 cannot refer to writing. For a longer discussion, see chapter 4.2.1.

My translation:

The Master said, In effort, I am like others, but when it comes to acting out the proper behavior of a *junzi*, I have not yet attained it.

## Book VIII

### VIII, 19

Received form of the text:

子曰大哉堯之為君也巍巍乎唯天為大唯堯則之蕩蕩乎民無能名焉巍巍乎其有成功也煥乎其有文章

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<sup>69</sup> The careful reader will notice that 忞懞 are the same two characters as 文莫, only with the heart-radical 心 below or 忞 to the side.

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "Great indeed was Yao as a sovereign! How majestic was he! It is only Heaven that is grand, and only Yao corresponded to it. How vast was his virtue! The people could find no name for it. How majestic was he in the works which he accomplished! How glorious in the elegant **regulations** which he instituted!"

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said, Greatest, as lord and ruler, was Yao. Sublime, indeed, was he. 'There is no greatness like the greatness of Heaven', yet Yao could copy it. So boundless was it that the people could find no name for it; yet sublime were his achievements, dazzling the **insignia of his culture!**

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said, "Great indeed was Yao as a ruler! How lofty! It is Heaven that is great and it was Yao who modelled himself upon it. He was so boundless that the common people were not able to put a name to his virtues. Lofty was he in his successes and brilliant was he in his **civilized accomplishments!**"

Discussion:

The character *wén* 文 occurs here in the same form as it did in V, 13 in the form of 'culture emblem' 文章 *wén zhāng*, most likely meaning the manifestations of his cultural behavior and not writing.

In this saying, *wén* 文 cannot refer to writing.

## Book IX

### IX, 5

Received form of the text:

子畏於匡曰文王既沒文不在茲乎天之將喪斯文也後死者不得與於斯文也天之未喪斯文也匡人其如予何

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master was put in fear in Kuang. He said, "After the death of King **Wen**, was not the cause of truth lodged here in me? If Heaven had wished to let this cause of truth perish, then I, a future mortal, should not have got such a relation to that cause. While Heaven does not let the cause of truth perish, what can the people of Kuang do to me?"

Waley (1938) translation: not needed.

Lau (1992) translation: not needed.

Discussion:

In this saying, *wén* 文 is used both in the name of King Wen, the Culture King, one of the two founders of the Zhou dynasty, and to refer specifically to the culture he established. It cannot mean writing in this passage.

In this sentence, *wén* 文 cannot refer to writing.

## IX, 11

Received form of the text:

顏淵喟然歎曰仰之彌高鑽之彌堅瞻之在前忽焉在後夫子循循然善誘人博我以文約我以禮欲罷不能既竭吾才如有所立卓爾雖欲從之末由也已

Legge (1893) translation:

Yan Yuan, in admiration of the Master's doctrines, sighed and said, "I looked up to them, and they seemed to become more high; I tried to penetrate them, and they seemed to become more firm; I looked at them before me, and suddenly they seemed to be behind. The Master, by orderly method, skillfully leads men on. He enlarged my mind with **learning**, and taught me the restraints of propriety. When I wish to give over the study of his doctrines, I cannot do so, and having exerted all my ability, there seems something to stand right up before me; but though I wish to follow and lay hold of it, I really find no way to do so."

Waley (1938) translation: not needed.

Lau (1992) translation: not needed.

Discussion:

This passage has been discussed as a Han dynasty interpolation in the chapter on methodology. It is possible that *wén* 文 could be read as writing here.

## Appendix 2 - verses either possibly referencing now-lost texts or references to the Five Classics 五經 *wǔ jīng*, as mentioned in 4.2.2-4.2.6

This appendix contains a translation of every passage in books III-IX of the *Analects* that does not use the character *wén* 文 but that is said to refer to writing in one way or another, such as referring to a now-lost text or referring to the Five Classics as discussed in chapters 4.2.2-4.2.6. I again offer the received form of the text, the translation of one or more authoritative translators and often provide my own translation, sometimes with extensive discussions on the reasons for my translation choices. In those cases where my interpretation does not differ from Legge on the crucial interpretation of the passage, I will again only offer Legge's translation with a short comment. In those other instances where my interpretation differs greatly, I will again offer the translations of Waley (1938) and/or Lau (1992), followed by an extensive discussion and finally offer my own translation. Since these sayings do not necessarily rely on one single character, as was the case with appendix 1 where the specific use of the character *wén* 文 was investigated, only on a few occasions will key words and phrases be set in **bold**, but for most of the sayings no **bold** will be offered as there is no single word that is necessarily more important than all other.

Each discussion will be structured in the following way:

Book X, verse Y

Original Chinese received form.

Translation into English by Legge (1893).

If necessary: Translation into English by Waley (1938).

If necessary: Translation into English by Lau (1992).

If necessary: my own translation.

### Book III

#### III, 2

Received form of the text:

三家者以雍徹子曰相維辟公天子穆穆奚取於三家之堂

Legge (1893) translation:

The three families used the Yong ode, while the vessels were being removed, at the conclusion of the sacrifice. The Master said, "Assisting are the princes; the son of heaven looks profound and grave' - what application can these words have in the hall of the three families?"

Waley (1938) translation: not needed.

Lau (1992) translation: not needed.

Discussion:

This is a clear reference to an *Ode* found in the *Book of Poetry* 詩經 *shī jīng*. The Yong 雝 *Ode* is found under the 頌 *Sòng* section, 臣工之什 - Decade Of Chen Gong, which Dobson (1964, p. 323) dates as the earliest layer of the *Book of Poetry*. As is discussed in chapter 4.2.6, this is the only instance in III-IX where an *Ode* from the *Book of Poetry* is referred to as an authoritative source, and it one of only two times that an *Ode* is referred to by name (the other being the two mentions of the Guan Ju *Ode* 關雎 in III, 20 and VIII, 15) and the only time it is referenced by name and actually cited. As was discussed in chapter 5.1.1, these features make it stand out amongst other references to the *Odes* in the *Analects*, while conforming to later uses of the *Book of Poetry* as a source of authority, making it likely that this saying is a later interpolation.

### III, 8

Received form of the text:

子夏問曰巧笑倩兮美目盼兮素以為絢兮何謂也子曰繪事後素曰禮後乎子曰起予者商也始可與言詩已矣

Legge (1893) translation:

Zi Xia asked, saying, "What is the meaning of the passage -

'The pretty dimples of her artful smile!

The well-defined black and white of her eye!

The plain ground for the colors?"

The Master said, "The business of laying on the colors follows (the preparation of) the plain ground." "Ceremonies then are a subsequent thing?" The Master said, "It is Shang who can bring out my meaning. Now I can begin to talk about the odes with him."

Waley (1938) translation:

Tzu-hsia asked, saying, What is the meaning of

*Oh the sweet smile dimpling,*

*The lovely eyes so black and white!*

*Plain silk that you would take for coloured stuff.*

The Master said, The painting comes after the plain groundwork. Tzu-hsia said, Then ritual comes afterwards? The Master said, Shang it is who bears me up. At last I have someone with whom I can discuss the Songs!

Lau (1992) translation:

Tzu-hsia asked,

“Her entrancing smile dimpling,

Her beautiful eyes glancing,

Patterns of color upon plain silk.

What is the meaning of these lines?”

The Master said, “The plain silk is there first. The colours come afterwards.”

“Does the practice of the rites likewise come afterwards?”

The Master said, “It is you, Shang, who have thrown light on the text for me. Only with a man like you can one discuss the *Odes*.”

Discussion:

As was discussed in 4.2.2 and again in 5.1.1, this saying refers to the Shuo Ren 碩人 *Ode* from the *Book of Poetry*, except it has an added line at the end. In the received form in the *Book of Poetry*, the last line is “The beautiful color in her eyes”<sup>70</sup> 美目盼兮 *měi mù pàn xī*, whereas here Zixia ends the *Ode* with the line: “[It is her] natural [beauty] that makes [her] beautiful.”<sup>71</sup> 素以為絢兮 *sù yǐ wéi xuàn xī*. The implications of this feature are discussed at length in chapter 5.2.2. However, there are some other interesting features of this saying as well, such as the final sentence “The one who bears me up is Shang!” 起予者商也 *qǐ yú zhě shāng yě*. Most translators essentially read “enlighten” 啟 *qǐ* for “lift up” 起 *qǐ*, meaning that Zixia has enlightened the meaning of the *Ode* for the Master, but that does not make much sense since Zixia is only

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<sup>70</sup> My interpretation of the Mao Commentary’s 毛傳 *máo zhuàn* (3rd century BC) definition of *pàn* 盼 as the “separation of white and black” 黑白分 *hēi bái fēn* is just that; that which separates the white sclera from the black pupil in the eye, namely the colored iris. The traditional interpretation that refers to the “clearly defined black and white” in her eyes makes little sense to me since most humans have clearly defined white and black in their eyes.

<sup>71</sup> I translate this particular sentence with a rather free hand to capture what it is most likely meant. The original Chinese simply reads: “plain makes bright” and most translators try to tie specifically into the reply from the Master, but that is an odd choice since they are sacrificing the integrity of the *Ode* for the benefit of a commentary by the Master. I think it is much more sound to retain the integrity and internal consistency of the *Ode* and have the Master answer by an allegory.

able to reach this conclusion after the Master has explained it to him. Perhaps Legge is in fact closest when he translates it as “bring out my meaning”, but even so, the entire sentence is difficult to understand.

The fact that the passage is so difficult to understand does lend credence to it. That is not to say that this is a 100% accurate and correct representation of an historical discussion between the Master and Zixia, but based on the criterion of dissimilarity, it seems highly unlikely for a (much later) scribe to invent a passage (a) that has so many question marks, and (b) that misquotes the *Book of Poetry*. Had the passage ended with the Master saying: “Yes, you got it”, this verse could have been viewed as a way for a later scribe to offer his own interpretation of the *Shuo Ren Ode*, which is unlikely since the actual interpretation is of the one sentence that is not found in the *Shuo Ren Ode*. However, as it stands right now, the passage ends with the “exaltation” of Zixia to “fellow *Ode*-interpreter”, and it seems unlikely that any scribe at a much later date would have been interested in Zixia’s ability or inability to discuss the *Odes*.

What can be noted is that this discussion between the Master and one of his disciples as a distant memory of some form of historical event could shed light on how the *Odes* would have been transferred in a mostly oral culture: the disciple has learned the *Ode*, most likely from the Master, and has pondered over it. Upon having a realization of a deeper meaning between the lines of the *Ode* (mostly in the last sentence, which is presumably added by the Master since it is not in our received text), he asks the Master questions. There is no text; there is no need for a text. The *Ode* is, after all, sung. The exact words of the song are still not fixed; either the Master has heard a version unlike others, or he has added on a final sentence to elevate the passage into a “better” form which now comments on morality rather the appreciation of female beauty.

My translation:

Zixia asked:

*The sweet smile dimples,*

*The beautiful color in her eyes,*

*It is her natural beauty that makes her beautiful.*

What does this mean?

The Master said, The job of painting comes after a plain [canvas?].<sup>72</sup> Zixia said: Then, ritual comes after? The Master said, The one who bears me up is Shang!<sup>73</sup> Now I can finally begin to discuss the *Odes*.

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<sup>72</sup> I.e., adding colors (painting) requires a white (plain) canvas.

<sup>73</sup> I.e., Zixia

### III, 16

Received form of the text:

子曰射不主皮為力不同科古之道也

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "In archery it is not going through the leather which is the principal thing - because people's strength is not equal. This was the old way."

Waley (1938) translation: not needed.

Lau (1992) translation: not needed.

Discussion:

The only reason I bring this up is because the phrase “shoot don't pierce leather” 射不主皮 *shè bù zhǔ pí* is found in the classic *Etiquette and Ceremonies* 儀禮 *Yilǐ*. However, it does not seem as though the Master is himself quoting that specific passage since the point he is making is not to comment on the winner and loser of the archery competition (which is the context in which the saying finds itself in the *Etiquette and Ceremonies*), but rather to make a statement on how one may infer moral teachings from the rules of archery: in an archery competition, the goal is not to display physical strength by piercing the leather; that would be unfair since some people are born with greater natural strength. Rather, the goal is to hit the bullseye as best as you can, which, one may infer, the Master believed was a result purely based on dedication to the art of archery and not a gift one is born with. Thus, he says, the way of the ancients was to order society so that people are rewarded for their dedication, and not from luck based on God-given talents. But this passage does not seem to be directly related to the saying in the *Etiquette and Ceremonies*.

### III, 20

Received form of the text:

子曰關雎樂而不淫哀而不傷

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "The Guan Ju is expressive of enjoyment without being licentious, and of grief without being hurtfully excessive."



Waley (1938) translation: not needed.

Lau (1992) translation: not needed.

Discussion:

The Guan Ju *Ode* 關雎 is today numbered as the first *Ode* in the *Book of Poetry*. The Master appears to have had a particular liking for it, as he refers to it in VIII, 15 as well. In that passage, it is clear that the Master *heard* the *Ode*, as it is directly linked to a certain music master Zhi. Both adjectives used: “expressive of enjoyment without being licentious” 樂而不淫 *lè ér bù yín* and “grief without being hurtfully excessive” 哀而不傷 *āi ér bù shāng* are almost never used in other texts. *Lè ér bù yín* 樂而不淫 is only used twice; once in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 Xiang Gong 襄公 Year 29, which is referenced in the *Records of the Grand Historian* under the “Wu Taibo chapter” 吳太伯世家; and *āi ér bù shāng* 哀而不傷 is only used once, in the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* 列女傳 under the chapter talking about Consort Ban 班婕妤. Such rare usage of these terms could imply that it is a late saying, but not much more can be said. It is difficult to definitely date this either early or late, unless it would be possible to show beyond all reasonable doubt when the name of the Guan Ju *Ode* received its name, and even then, it would only be possible to say that this passage could only have been written after that point; it would still not tell us when it was written.

## Book VII

### VII, 11

Received form of the text:

子謂顏淵曰用之則行舍之則藏唯我與爾有是夫子路曰子行三軍則誰與子曰暴虎馮河死而無悔者吾不與也必也臨事而懼好謀而成者也

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said to Yan Yuan, "When called to office, to undertake its duties; when not so called, to lie retired - it is only I and you who have attained to this."

Zi Lu said, "If you had the conduct of the armies of a great state, whom would you have to act with you?" The Master said, "He who will unarmed attack a tiger, or cross a river without a boat, dying without any regret, I would not have act with me. My associate must be the man who proceeds to action full of solicitude, who is fond of adjusting his plans, and then carries them into execution."

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said to Yen Hui, The Maxim

*When wanted, then go;*

*When set aside, then hide.*

is one that you and I could certainly fulfil. Tzu-lu said, Supposing you had command of the Three Hosts, whom would you take to help you? The Master said, The man who was ready to ‘beard a tiger or rush a river’ without caring whether he lived or died -- that sort of man I should not take. I should certainly take someone who approached difficulties with due caution and who preferred to succeed by strategy.

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said to Yen Yüan, “Only you and I have the ability to go forward when employed and to stay out of sight when set aside.”

Tzu-lu said, “If you were leading the Three Armies whom would you take with you?”

The Master said, “I would not take with me anyone who would try to fight a tiger with his bare hands or to walk across the River and die in the process without regrets. If I took anyone it would have to be a man who, when faced with a task, was fearful of failure and who, while fond of making plans, was capable of successful execution.”

Discussion:

I will start by pointing out that the first part of the passage, the Master’s praising of himself and Yan Yuan, does not fit with the latter half of the passage discussing warfare, indicating that it is either a wholly different saying and that these two should not be grouped together, or that it is a later interpolation by someone that wanted to suggest to the reader that this other man that the Master refers to is, in fact, Yan Yuan himself. In either case, these two are always read together as one saying and it does not impact my thesis how the two seemingly separate sayings may fit together.

The first part of the Master’s reply to Zilu’s question: “the man who dares to attack a tiger; who dares to wade through the [Yellow?] river”, is a reference to an *Ode* under the 小雅 *Xiǎo Yǎ* section. However, it is a very odd passage to quote. The entire *Ode* is called the *xiǎo mín* 小旻, and reads like something the Polish jester Stańczyk would sing: the country is in disarray, there are many people who would like the prestige of working in the royal audience but no one who will take any responsibility for anything, the tortoises no longer speak,<sup>74</sup> people only listen to shallow words, corruption seeps in. At the very end of this very tragic outlook of the court, the singer complains: “No one dares to attack a tiger; no one dares to wade through the [Yellow?] river.” 不敢暴虎不敢馮河 In other words, in this *Ode*, it is *good* to dare to attack a

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<sup>74</sup> A very poetic way of saying that divination no longer works, because scapulimancy was most commonly carried out on tortoise shells. Thus, corruption and decadence has gone so far that even the spirits will not speak to the diviners anymore.

tiger, and it is good to dare to wade through the Yellow river. These two things are, to the singer, the signs of a bygone age of peace, harmony, and righteousness. This makes the Master's comment very odd.

There are different possible ways to interpret this: (a) the way the song was taught to the Master was different, which seems quite likely given that he also does not have the same song as we do in III, 8; (b) the Master somehow disagreed with the singer; (c) the Master only knew of the final line and did not know the context in which it was sung. As was discussed in chapter 5.2.2, an amalgamation of these features would fit perfectly into an oral society, where one or more of these factors could play a role in the Master's usage of the *Ode*.

My translation:

The Master said to Yan Yuan, When in office: to act, and when discarded: to disappear;  
only you and I have mastered this.

Zilu said, Master, if you were to lead command of the Three Armies, whom would you  
take with you?<sup>75</sup> The Master said,

*The man who dares to attack a tiger;*

*Who dares to wade through the river,*

who will die without any regrets, such a man would I not take with me. It must be someone  
who would be afraid at the outset,<sup>76</sup> but who knows how to scheme and finish the business.

## VII, 17

Received form of the text:

子曰加我數年五十以學易可以無大過矣

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "If some years were added to my life, I would give fifty to the study of the Yi, and then I might come to be without great faults."

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said, Give me a few more years, so that I may have spent a whole fifty in study, and I believe that after all I should be fairly free from error.

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said, "Grant me a few more years so that I may continue to learn at the age of fifty and I shall, perhaps, be free from major errors."

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<sup>75</sup> As second in command?

<sup>76</sup> I.e., someone who is familiar with the dangers of war. The respect for war is a common topic in the world famous "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu 孫子兵法.

Discussion:

This passage has been discussed in chapter 4.2.4. The traditional reading: “The Master said, “If some years were added to my life, I would give fifty to the study of the Yi, and then I might come to be without great faults.” as rendered by Legge is problematic as it refers to the character 易 yì “The Book of Changes”. However, as was discussed in chapter 4.2.4, should be read as 亦 yì “also”. This is the reading by scholars such as Waley (1938) and Lau (1992). Many traditional scholars still read it as 易 yì “The Book of Changes”, but based on the criterion of dissimilarity it is difficult to see how a scribe would read “The Book of Changes” and decide to instead write “also”, but it is easy to see how a scribe would read “also” and decide to write “The Book of Changes” instead. Further, Waley (1938) notes in a footnote on this passage regarding the *Book of Changes*: “There is no reason to suppose that the *Changes* had in Confucius’s time been philosophized, or that he regarded it as anything but a book of divination.” Examples of 亦可 yì kě can be found in the *Analects*,<sup>77</sup> both in passages from the early and later layers.

## VII, 18

Received form of the text:

子所雅言詩書執禮皆雅言也

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master's frequent themes of discourse were: the Odes, the History, and the maintenance of the Rules of Propriety. On all these he frequently discoursed.

Waley (1938) translation:

The occasions upon which the Master used correct pronunciation were when reciting the *Songs* or the *Books* and when practising ritual acts. At all such times he used the correct pronunciation.

Lau (1992) translation:

What the Master used the correct pronunciation for was the *Odes*, the *Book of History* and the performance of the rites. In all these cases he used the correct pronunciation.

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<sup>77</sup> E.g., VI, 2, 27

Discussion:

All other usages of 雅言 *yǎ yán* all date to the Han dynasty. According to the Academia Sinica database there is not a single use of *yǎ yán* 雅言 from any excavated texts or bronze vessels. The first time the term occurs outside of the *Analects* is in the *Jiaoshi Yilin* 焦氏易林 dating to the Western Han dynasty. This saying is most likely a later insertion by someone at a later time who was bent on promoting an upper register in a situation of diglossia and needed an ancient authority for support. Thus, *yǎ yán* 雅言 could be interpreted as diglossia like the Hochdeustch parallel the Swiss spoke that Waley (1938) refers to: the Swiss spoke Hochdeustch in church services in 1938, the ancient Chinese (probably during the Han dynasty) spoke *yǎ yán* 雅言 while singing poetry, reciting the *Book of Documents*, and conducting rituals. Thus, I translate it as “refined language”, understanding that it is merely a name and may just as well be translated as “the *Ya* language”.

My translation:

The Master used the *refined language* while singing the *Odes*, reciting the *Book of Documents*, and while conducting rituals. On all these occasions, he used the *refined language*.

## VII, 35

Received form of the text:

子疾病子路請禱子曰有諸子路對曰有之誄曰禱爾于上下神祇子曰丘之禱久矣

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master being very sick, Zi Lu asked leave to pray for him. He said, "May such a thing be done?" Zi Lu replied, "It may. In **the Eulogies** it is said, 'Prayer has been made for thee to the spirits of the upper and lower worlds.'" The Master said, "My praying has been for a long time."

Waley (1938) translation:

When the Master was very ill, Tzu-lu asked leave to perform the Rite of Expiation. The Master said, Is there such a thing? Tzu-lu answered saying, There is. In **one of the Dirges** it says, 'We performed rites of expiation for you, calling upon the sky-spirits above and the earth-spirits below.' The Master said, My expiation began long ago.

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master's illness became grave. Tzu-lu asked permission to offer a prayer. The Master said, "Is there such a thing?"

Tzu-lu said, "Yes, there is. **The prayer offered** is as follows: pray ye thus to the gods above and below."

The Master said, "In that case, I have long been offering my prayers."

Discussion:

A common interpretation of this verse is that Zilu is quoting from a text called 誄 *lěi*, *The Prayers*.<sup>78</sup> If this interpretation is correct and there once was such a text, it is no longer known to us. Waley (1938, p. 131) notes on this passage: “In a fragment of one of the lost books of *Chuang Tzu* [i.e. the *Zhuangzi* 莊子] there is a parallel story in which Tzu-lu [i.e. Zilu] wants to take the omens about Confucius’s chance of recovery, and Confucius says ‘My omen-taking was done long ago!’ See *T’ai P’ing Yü Lan* 849, fol. 1 verso.” However, reading 誄 *lěi* as referring to a text called *Prayers* is probably not correct. First of all, note that Confucius appears unaware of the prayer, which one would expect if it is a prayer by Zilu, but it would not necessarily be expected if it is a recitation from a book. While it is referred to as a text in Xie Bing’s 邢昺 (932 AD - 1010 AD) “*Analects* annotations” 論語注疏 from the early Song dynasty,<sup>79</sup> the interpretation of the slightly later Zhu Xi appears to interpret it merely as a prayer that is spoken, although it is a little bit ambiguous as he uses the verb 述 *shù* which can mean either to “write down” or “to elaborate”, “to narrate”. Since Zilu does not appear to actually write down the prayer in the text, reading 述 *shu* as “write down” does not fit the context and thus reading it as referring to speaking/saying seems the more plausible reading of Zhu Xi.<sup>80</sup>

Furthermore, context can be found in the closest contemporary dictionary available: the *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 from ca. 100 AD. In it, Xu Shen’s 許慎 entry on the character 誄 *lěi* reads as follows: “*Lěi* 誄, the same as “prayer” 禱 *dǎo*. Accumulating accomplishments and moral virtue to appease the spirits. The *Analects* read: “The prayer [offered for you]: Prayers for you have been made to the spirits above and below.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, we may see that *lěi* 誄 was originally the character in the sentence, and that it simply meant “prayer” 禱 *dǎo*, not that it was referring to a text, because Xu Shen tells us that it doesn’t while referring specifically to our text. Lau (1992) also reads it this way, translating it as follows: “The prayer offered is as follows: ...”

*Lěi* 誄 was not a text, it is a prayer.

My translation:

The Master was very ill. Zilu asked to pray for him. The Master said, May such a thing be done? Zilu replied, Yes. **The prayer offered** for you: Prayers for you have been made to the spirits above and below. The Master said, I have prayed for a long time.

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<sup>78</sup> Also translated as Eulogies (Legge, 1893).

<sup>79</sup> “子路失孔子之指故曰有之又引禱篇之文以對也”

<sup>80</sup> “誄者，哀死而述其行之辭也。”

<sup>81</sup> 誄禱也累功德以求福論語云誄曰禱尔于上下神祇从言纍省聲

## Book VIII

### VIII, 3

Received form of the text:

曾子有疾召門弟子曰啟予足啟予手詩云戰戰兢兢如臨深淵如履薄冰而今而後吾知免夫小子

Legge (1893) translation:

The philosopher Zeng being ill, he called to him the disciples of his school, and said, "Uncover my feet, uncover my hands. It is said in the Book of Poetry,

'We should be apprehensive and cautious,

as if on the brink of a deep gulf,

as if treading on thin ice,

I and so have I been. Now and hereafter, I know my escape from all injury to my person. O ye, my little children."

Waley (1938) translation:

When Master Tsêng was ill he summoned his disciples and said, Free my feet, free my hands. The *Song* says:

*In fear and trembling,*

*With caution and care,*

*As though on the brink of a chasm,*

*As though treading thin ice.*

But I feel now that whatever may betide I have got through safely, my little ones.

Lau (1992) translation:

When he was seriously ill Tseng Tzu summoned his disciples and said, "Take a look at my hands. Take a look at my feet. The *Odes* say,

In fear and trembling,

As if approaching a deep abyss,

As if walking on thin ice.

Only now am I sure of being spared, my young friends."

Discussion:

This passage is clearly late by the very nature of it referring to the death of Master Zengzi, once a disciple of the Master himself, which Makeham (1996, p. 3) notes must have happened after 429 B.C., at least 50 years after the death of the Master, since VIII, 4 notes that Meng Jingzi 孟敬子, a minister in Lu, visits Zengzi while he is ill (most likely the same illness), and Meng Jingzi was alive when Duke Dao 悼公 died

in 429 B.C.<sup>82</sup> Thus, this passage is not directly related to the Master in any way. However, for a longer discussion on the usage of “The *Book of Poetry* says”, see chapter 5.1.1.

## VIII, 8

Received form of the text:

子曰興於詩立於禮成於樂

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "It is by the Odes that the mind is aroused. It is by the Rules of Propriety that the character is established. It is from Music that the finish is received."

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said, Let a man be first incited by the *Songs*, then given a firm footing by the study of ritual, and finally perfected by music.

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said, “Be stimulated by the *Odes*, take your stand through the help of the rites and be perfected by music.”

Discussion:

There is not much that can be inferred from this saying since it is so brief. One can point out that there is nothing in the saying that necessarily indicates that any reading is taking place at any point; to develop a human appears to be a social process that requires knowledge of poetry, ritual, and music. Perhaps the distinction between “poem” 詩 *shī* and “music” 樂 *yuè* indicates that some poems were sung a capella? This is one possible distinction, as it would be difficult to imagine a society where you are only allowed to sing poems while accompanied by an orchestra, but it is not definitive. As for the dating of this passage, it is difficult to date it either early or late since it is so short and wholly lacking context.

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<sup>82</sup> Makeham’s (1996) footnote reads: Dating based on *Shiji*, 15.702



## VIII, 15

Received form of the text:

子曰師摯之始關雎之亂洋洋乎盈耳哉

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "When the music master Zhi first entered on his office, the finish of the Guan Ju was magnificent - how it filled the ears!"

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said, When Chih the Chief Musician led the climax of the *Ospreys*, what a grand flood of sound filled one's ears!

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said, "When Chih, the Master musician, begins to play and when the *Kuan chü* comes to its end, how the sound fills the ear!"

Discussion:

The careful reader will remember that the Guan Ju *Ode* 關雎 is mentioned in III, 20, which the Master claims is the perfect song. As was the case in that saying, there is not enough context to date that passage either early or late.

## Book IX

### IX, 15

Received form of the text:

子曰吾自衛反魯然後樂正雅頌各得其所

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "I returned from Wei to Lu, and then the music was reformed, and the pieces in the Royal songs and Praise songs all found their proper places."

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said, It was only after my return from Wei to Lu that music was revised, Court pieces and Ancestral Recitations being at last properly discriminated.

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said, “It was after my return from Wei to Lu that music was put right, with the *ya* and *sung* being assigned their proper places.”

Discussion:

On the face of it, this passage is very late due to the usage of the set phrase “each achieved their proper place” 各得其所 *gè dé qí suǒ*. While this phrase becomes popular later on during the Han dynasty, it is only used three times in texts that supposedly date prior to the year 400 B.C.: this saying in the *Analec*s, book 15 of the *Mozi*, and in the Xi Ci II 繫辭下 section of the *Book of Changes*. As was discussed in chapter 5.2.1, there is every reason to expect book 15 of the *Mozi* to be a later compilation during the Han dynasty because it refers to literacy in a way that does not conform to the social coherence of the time period. The Xi Ci II section of the *Book of Changes* has always been viewed as very late, even by traditionalists who identify it as being written by Confucius himself, signaling that even from ancient times it was clear that this section was separate and late from the core of the *Book of Changes*. Thus, it would not be strange to find an otherwise anachronistic phrase in this particular section of the *Book of Changes*. Thus, while the phrase “each achieved their proper place” 各得其所 *gè dé qí suǒ* becomes common in the late 3rd century BC, where it is found in texts such as the *Xunzi* 荀子, *Shuoyuan* 說苑, *Huainanzi* 淮南子, *Shiji* 史記, *Jiaoshi Yilin* 焦氏易林, in total some 50 times in the late Warring States and Han dynasty times,<sup>83</sup> the fact that the only three occurrences of the phrase in supposedly earlier documents show signs of later interpolations in other areas, must indicate that these three occurrences are all later interpolations as well.

On the face of it, this saying is late. However, it is possible that the first half of the saying is early and does reflect a historical memory of the Master’s sojourns in the state of Wei 衛; of the five *Odes* that he cites, III, 2 and VII, 11 are from the *Sòng* 頌 and the *Xiǎo Yǎ* 小雅 sections respectively, and the rest come from “Airs of the States” 國風 *guó fēng*, a chapter which is itself divided based on where each *Ode* comes from. Of these three remaining times the *Book of Poetry* is cited, III, 8, 20; IX, 27, the songs cited are the *Shuo Ren* 碩人 (III, 8); the *Guan Guan Ju Jiu* 關關雎鳩 (III, 20); and the *Xiong Zhi* 雄雉 (IX, 27). If you were to look up these songs in a modern edition of the *Book of Poetry*, the *Shuo Ren* is listed under Wei 衛風; the *Guan Guan Ju Jiu* is listed under ‘Zhou and South’ 周南, and the *Xiong Zhi* is cited under Bei 邶風. However, in Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 commentary, dating to the late 12th century, he writes of the *Xiong Zhi* which is now listed under Bei as follows: “This is the *Xiong Zhi* song from Wei” 此衛風雄雉之詩. In other words, in Zhu Xi’s *Book of Poetry*, the *Xiong Zhi* was listed under songs from Wei. If that is the case,

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<sup>83</sup> Not even the *Mengzi*, which most likely has a core dating to the mid Warring States period, uses it.

that would mean that of the three *Odes* that we can locate geographically, two would come from Wei and one comes from the rather obscure “Zhou and South”. While there is no way to affirm that these *Odes* are in the right order, or that Zhu Xi’s copy of the *Book of Poetry* was correct, it is at the very least an odd coincidence that two of the three songs happen to come from the same place where the Master himself associates with the process of “correcting music”.

My translation:

The Master said, I returned from Wei to Lu, and afterwards corrected music.

## IX, 24

Received form of the text:

子曰法語之言能無從乎改之為貴巽與之言能無說乎繹之為貴說而不繹從而不改吾末如之何也已矣

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "Can men refuse to assent to **the words of strict admonition**? But it is reforming the conduct because of them which is valuable. Can men refuse to be pleased with **words of gentle advice**? But it is unfolding their aim which is valuable. If a man be pleased with these words, but does not unfold their aim, and assents to those, but does not reform his conduct, I can really do nothing with him."

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said, The words of the *Fa Yü* (**Model Sayings**) cannot fail to stir us; but what matters is that they should change our ways. The words of the *Hsüan Chü* cannot fail to commend themselves to us; but what matters is that we should carry them out. For those who approve but do not carry out, who are stirred, but do not change, I can do nothing at all.

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said, “One cannot but give assent to **exemplary words**, but what is important is that one should rectify oneself. One cannot but be pleased with **tactful words**, but what is important is that one should reform oneself. I can do nothing with the man who gives assent but does not rectify himself or the man who is pleased but does not reform himself.”

Discussion:

Almost all commentators translate 法語之言 *fǎ yǔ zhī yán* as “words of strict admonition” (Legge, 1893) or something of the sort.<sup>84</sup> Waley (1938), however, sticks out as he always does, and notes a possible parallel in the Zhuangzi 莊子 where a text called the *fǎ yán* 法言 is cited twice in chapter 4 人間世 *rén jiān*

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<sup>84</sup> “Exemplary words” (Lau, 1992), “Words that are strict and conform to principle” (Yang, 2006, my translation)

*shì* of the Inner Chapters. However, from what little we may gather in the two citations in the *Zhuangzi*, one would be hard pressed to imagine that it was a work that stirred people; the first citation reads: "Transmit the message exactly as it stands; do not transmit it with any overflow of language; so is (the internuncio) likely to keep himself whole" (Legge translation) 故法言曰傳其常情無傳其溢言則幾乎全, and the second reads:

Let not an internuncius depart from his instructions. Let him not urge on a settlement. If he go beyond the regular rules, he will complicate matters. Departing from his instructions and urging on a settlement imperils negotiations. A good settlement is proved by its lasting long, and a bad settlement cannot be altered - ought he not to be careful? (Legge translation)

故法言曰無遷令無勸成過度益也遷令勸成殆事美成在久惡成不及改可不慎與

Legge translates *fǎ yán* 法言 in the *Zhuangzi* simply as "Rules of Speech", which seems wholly appropriate and to the point. Thus, it is not even necessarily a text itself, but rather rules laid down for transmitting messages or the like, which could be written down, or could be a so-called "unwritten rule". Unfortunately, Waley never translated the *Zhuangzi*, so it is impossible to know if he would have translated these passages in any radically different way, but as it stands, neither of these passages appear to have anything that would be excessively difficult to translate; they read quite smoothly, making it unlikely that Waley would have translated them much differently. If that is the case, it seems unlikely that the *Fayan* we find in the *Zhuangzi* would be the basis that the Master would give the highest praise. In this instance, I think the more traditional reading of the text, which is followed by, as far as I know, everyone, is the correct one.

My translation:

The Master said, **Words of admonition**, how can they fail to stir us? It is best to change ourselves to follow them. **Words of obedience**, how can they fail to please us? It is best to alter ourselves to follow them. Someone who is pleased but does not alter their behavior, who is stirred but does not change their behavior, I cannot do anything with him.

## IX, 27

Received form of the text:

子曰衣敝緼袍與衣狐貉者立而不恥者其由也與不忮不求何用不臧子路終身誦之子曰是道也何足以臧

Legge (1893) translation:

The Master said, "Dressed himself in a tattered robe quilted with hemp, yet standing by the side of men dressed in furs, and not ashamed - ah! it is You who is equal to this!

He dislikes none,

he covets nothing -

what can he do but what is good!"

Zi Lu kept continually repeating these words of the ode, when the Master said, "Those things are by no means sufficient to constitute perfect excellence."

Waley (1938) translation:

The Master said, 'Wearing a shabby hemp-quilted gown, yet capable of standing unabashed with those who wore fox and badger.' That would apply quite well to Yu, would it not?

Who harmed none, was foe to none,

Did nothing that was not right.

Afterwards Tzu-lu (Yu) kept on continually chanting those lines to himself. The Master said, Come now, the wisdom contained in them is not worth treasuring to that extent!

Lau (1992) translation:

The Master said, "If anyone can, while dressed in a worn-out gown padded with old silk floss, stand beside a man wearing fox or badger fur without feeling ashamed, it is, I suppose, Yu.

Neither envious nor covetous,

How can he be anything but good?"

Thereafter, Tzu-lu constantly recited these verses. The Master commented, "The way summed up in these verses will hardly enable one to be good."

Discussion:

This passage, like the other that tries to relay the direct teachings of the Master onto the *Odes* (i.e., III, 8 and VII, 11), is very difficult to understand. Let me begin by pointing out that You 由 is the same person as Zilu 子路; You is his personal name and Zilu is his courtesy name. With that out of the way, I will first address the translation of the last sentence, as that should be the main point of interest to other scholars. The normal reading of the last sentence is to read it as it is received, i.e., with 臧 read as *zāng* "good",

“excellent”. This makes sense to some extent, since this character is used in the *Ode* cited above, which is part of the Xiong Zhi *Ode* 雄雉 as discussed above at great length under IX, 15. However, the meaning of the passage then becomes impossible to understand. Legge translates the last sentence as: “Those things are by no means sufficient to constitute perfect excellence.” Lau (1992) translates the last sentence as: “The way summed up in these verses will hardly enable one to be good.” Yang (2006) translates it in a similar way. But here is the problem: the Master is then criticizing his own quote. It is the Master who decided to cite the last two sentences of the 雄雉 Xiong Zhi ode in order to comment on the moral character of Zilu; the Master is the one who brings in this quote into the conversation. Why would he then turn around and immediately *criticize* the very same *Ode*? It makes no sense.

Waley (1938), as always, comes to the rescue and points out that 臧 *zāng* is probably meant to be read as 藏 *cáng* “store up”. The reading then becomes something like: “it is the way (i.e., it is common sense), there is no need to store it up (i.e., there is no need to memorize it; the *Ode*).” Thus, the Master’s problem is not necessarily with the *Ode* (since that would not make sense); it is with Zilu’s behavior of immediately *memorizing* the *Ode*. Furthermore, it does not seem to be a big problem for the Master, so much as “don’t waste your time memorizing common sense knowledge”. Waley (1938) argues that the Master is punning on the double meaning of *zāng cáng*, and not only does this make the sentence fit in with the overall passage, but it is further strengthened by the fact that the way the Master phrases his sentence “how enough(verb) to(grammaratical particle) store up” 何足以藏 *hé zú yǐ cáng* is almost exactly the same as “how use(verb) not(grammaratical particle) good” 何用不臧 *hé yòng bù zāng*. It is clear that the Master is trying to draw some parallel here, and it would make sense that the “parallel” is by punning on the double meaning of the character 臧 *zāng*. Thus, both how the last sentence fits into the overall passage, and the structure of the Master’s last sentence, implies that the correct reading is 藏 *cáng* “store up”.

Finally, as discussed in chapter 4.2.2 and 5.2.2, this verse gives us a potential glimpse into the master-disciple dialogues of the Master and his disciples and almost certainly into the master-disciple dialogues of the Master when he was a disciple himself: when a master sang a song from the *Odes*, his disciple would immediately begin to hum it to himself to memorize it. It is quite simple, but this is exactly the behavior Lord (1960) describes after his and Milman Parry’s journeys to Yugoslavia in the 1930s while conducting field experiments on oral bard-cultures; the master sings, and the disciple memorizes. IX, 27 reflects exactly the type of situation and milieu that one would expect from a master-disciple relationship in an oral culture.

My translation:

The Master said, Dressed in tattered hemp-quilted robe, and standing next to someone dressed in furs of fox and badger, and to not be ashamed, isn't that like our You?<sup>85</sup>

*No jealousy, no covetousness,*

*[For such a man,] of what use is the not-good?*

Zilu began to repeatedly chant this. The Master said, It is the way; it is not worth treasuring to that extent.

## IX, 31

Received form of the text:

唐棣之華偏其反而豈不爾思室是遠而子曰未之思也夫何遠之有

Legge (1893) translation:

"How the flowers of the aspen-plum flutter and turn!

Do I not think of you?

But your house is distant."

The Master said, "It is the want of thought about it. How is it distant?"

Waley (1938) translation:

*The flowery branch of the wild cherry*

*How swiftly it flies back!*

*It is not that I do not love you;*

*But your house is far away.*

The Master said, He did not really love her. Had he done so, he would not have worried about the distance.

Lau (1992) translation:

The flowers of the cherry tree,

How they wave about!

It's not that I do not think of you,

But your home is so far away.

The Master commented, "He did not really think of her. If he did, there is no such thing as being far away."

Discussion:

This passage is actually quite interesting for many reasons. First of all, while it certainly appears as though the Master is citing a song, it is not a received song, i.e., it is not a song in the *Book of Poetry* nor anywhere

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<sup>85</sup> I.e. Zilu

else, with the exception of one mention in the Chunqiu Fanlu 春秋繁露 which references this passage (see chapter 5.1.1).

A curious feature about this song is that it almost appears to be an amalgamation of different *Odes*:

1. The first sentence “The flowery branch of the wild cherry” 唐棣之華 *táng dì zhī huá* occurs in the He Bi Dui Yi 何彼禕矣 *Ode* from Shao and the South 召南 *zhào nán*;
2. Waley (1938) noted that the second sentence “How swiftly it flies back!” 偏其反而 *piān qí fǎn ér* is similar to “swiftly its ends fly back” 翩其反矣 *piān qí fǎn yǐ* (Waley translation, 1937) from the Jiao Gong *Ode* 角弓.
3. The last two sentences: “It is not that I do not love you // But your house is far away.” 豈不爾思 室是遠而 *qǐ bù ěr sī shì shì yuǎn ér* are almost reproduced character by character in the Zhu Gan 竹竿 *Ode* from Wei 衛 which Legge translated as: “Do I not think of you? // But I am far away, and cannot get to you.” 豈不爾思遠莫致之 *qǐ bù ěr sī yuǎn mò zhì zhī*.

However, there is no obvious red thread that goes through these three different songs (e.g., the Jiao Gong *Ode* is about brotherly love, not romantic love). Are we meant to infer that this was actually an amalgamation made by the Master himself drawing from a varied repertoire of *Odes* to compile his own song, or is it just yet another well-known song using common terminology that deals with the topic of love that is now lost? It is difficult to say for sure.

For a longer discussion on this passage, see chapters 4.2.2. and 5.1.1.