

Confucius and the *Analects* Revisited

*New Perspectives on Composition, Dating,
and Authorship*

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Kongzi as Author in the Han

Martin Kern

Thinking about the possible compilation date of the *Lunyu* 論語, one cannot but be struck by its unusual format and title. Every other pre-Qin text that purports to express the thought or reveal the persona of a particular thinker has had that person's name (or some identifying phrase) in its title at least since the Han; the *Lunyu* never does. Whoever titled the text was not concerned with a reader who needed guidance as to whom or what the book might be about;¹ instead, he presupposed that anyone encountering a text titled *Lunyu* would know its affiliation with Kongzi. The text that lacks Kongzi's name in the title was taken for granted to stage, first and foremost, Kongzi the person. If the early interpretation of *Lunyu* as "Selected (or "Ordered")² Sayings" is to be trusted, the title was understood as some sort of digest, offering the distilled essence of a much larger textual repertoire together with an idealized account of Kongzi as a person. In other words, a title such as *Lunyu* makes sense only (a) esoterically or (b) as a designation given at a late stage when both Kongzi the sage person and the idea that he could be represented by sayings and anecdotes had already become widely recognized. It does not make sense to use the impersonal title *Lunyu* in order to introduce a corpus of pithy sayings, short dialogues, and barely contextualized anecdotes related to an otherwise unfamiliar master. Instead, the title "Selected/Ordered Sayings" signals to its potential readers that the text is the thoughtfully arranged compilation of materials related to a familiar persona or discourse. Unlike the "Masters" (*zhuzi* 諸子) texts of early China, the title is not eponymous with (or at least contains the name of) its purported author or protagonist but, precisely by withholding such information, stages the text's authority and, by extension, that of its protagonist. In this, the text called *Lunyu* is also a meta-text that refers back to the nature of its own textuality as well as to the community of its implied (i.e., well-informed) audience. It signals that it has little need to join the argumenta-

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- 1 Note, however, Huang Ren'er's argument that the *Lunyu* was known by various titles, as noted in John Makeham's chapter (chap. 1) in the present volume. Cheng (1993: 315) mentions that the text was originally known as *Kongzi*, "in the same way as writings of other masters of the Warring States period." Finally, note also Michael Hunter's tentative suggestion (in chap. 3 of the present volume) that the title *Lunyu* was related to the "selection" of official candidates.
- 2 For a discussion of *lun* as "ordered," see Graham 1978: 194.

tive fray. And that is indeed the case: the *Lunyu* does not argue or explain why Kongzi is right on this or that; it does not even let Kongzi argue for himself. Instead, it *shows* him as *being* Kongzi.

I find it very difficult to imagine that such a text existed very early or grew somehow organically over time. Michael Hunter's massive evidence of citation data has further convinced me to reject the "accretion model" claimed by Brooks and Brooks³ nearly thirty years after it had been forcefully advanced by Kimura Eiichi 木村英一.⁴ At the same time, considering the meta-textual nature of the *Lunyu*, I am curious as to its representation of Kongzi himself as a master of texts. More specifically, I am interested in his image as the "author" of the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (*Springs and Autumns* [*Annals*])—or at least as the person responsible for the editing of the text⁵—that since antiquity has been so firmly inscribed in the common imagination of Kongzi. Can this representation help us contextualize the *Lunyu* in a particular time and intellectual environment? Traditional (including recent) scholarship suggests that Kongzi's association with the "making" of the *Chunqiu* was of paramount significance for how Kongzi was imagined during the Western Han. If this is true, the thesis for a compilation date of the *Lunyu* around or after ca. 140 BCE faces an enormous conundrum: if Han political and philosophical thinkers imagined Kongzi first and foremost as the author of the *Chunqiu*, how could they possibly avoid any mention of the latter in the *Lunyu*? If anything, a Han dynasty compiler of the *Lunyu* would have been highly interested in the idea of Kongzi as the author of the *Chunqiu*; or at the very least, he would not have chosen to avoid its mention entirely. This question alone suffices to throw doubt on the idea of a Han dynasty compilation date for the *Lunyu*.⁶ Therefore, the present essay explores the subject of "Kongzi made the *Springs and Autumns*" from a Han perspective.

3 Brooks and Brooks 1998.

4 Kimura 1971. For a critique of Brooks and Brooks 1998, see Schaberg 2001b. As noted by Schaberg (133), "To be shown what Brooks and Brooks have promised to show, one must accept the following [six] premises, all of them faulty."

5 To call Kongzi the "author" of the *Chunqiu* is misguided. Since antiquity, different readers have imagined Kongzi's engagement with the text in different ways, but nobody seems to have claimed that he composed it out of nothing. The question is, rather, to what extent Kongzi's rephrasing with "subtle words" (*wei yan* 微言) may have changed the original annalistic records he had inherited from the scribes of the state of Lu 魯. In the present essay, I use "author" not in the modern sense of original creator, but, instead, in the Latin meaning of the Latin verb *augere* (to "augment," to "increase" something that is already in existence) that is the origin of the modern word "author." More on this question below.

6 In other words, the issue would not just require us to admit that the *Lunyu* contains pre-Han textual material; it would question how the text, even if including such material, could have been *compiled* in the Western Han.

My question is not whether or not there was a *Lunyu* text in pre-Han times. Instead I ask, *is it plausible, or even possible*, that the text was compiled during the Han? Can we *falsify* the hypothesis of a compilation date post-140 BCE?

In what follows, I do not aim, or claim, to “prove” the matter one way or the other; the available data do not allow for that.⁷ Somewhat to my own surprise, I show that the notion of “Kongzi made the *Springs and Autumns*” does not suffice to reject the Han compilation hypothesis. What I have found, and will present below, is that the evidence is at best tenuous, and that scholarly consensus on the Han nexus between Kongzi and the *Chunqiu* does not hold, at least not for the time before Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 85 BCE). As it turns out, the idea of Kongzi as the person responsible for the *Chunqiu* can and must be situated more specifically in a particular, and very limited, set of sources.⁸



Before I begin to examine Warring States sources with regard to Kongzi’s involvement with texts, a caveat lector: the term “Warring States sources” itself is extremely problematic. When looking at a text that is traditionally dated to pre-imperial times, it is impossible to separate its original core from the shape and organization it was given by its Han editors. To some extent, all received pre-imperial texts are Han texts.⁹ This is not to say they were newly created (let alone “forged”) in the Han. But it is to insist that the Han “editing”—which is closely associated with the Han imperial bibliographer Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) and his son Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE)—must in each case be understood as a reconstitution of the text in a new form. In fact, according to the little we know about Liu Xiang’s work in response to an imperial edict of 26 BCE, he was tasked to collate and rearrange the writings within the imperial library and to create new physical versions of the ancient texts, written in Han clerical script on bamboo slips of standardized length, to be stored in the imperial palace. This monumental effort entailed countless decisions on archaic, regional, or otherwise obscure graphs, on the assembly of texts of great variety under the headings of particular titles, and on placing texts into a new bibliographic format that constituted nothing less than a late Western Han intellectual history of the entire textual heritage, as far as it was available. Many of

7 To some extent, this echoes the results of Wolfgang Behr’s linguistic analysis of the *Lunyu*. As Behr (2011) has demonstrated, the available linguistic data do not allow any conclusion on the dating of the *Lunyu*.

8 For a fine study that reaches a similar conclusion but altogether has a focus that differs from that of the present essay, see Cai 2010.

9 See the seminal study by Van der Loon 1952.

these decisions intervened in the texts in ways we would normally reserve for an author, including the arrangement of textual material into chapters and possibly “books” that in most cases had never existed in this form before.

Thus, our modern and culture-specific conceptualizations of, and distinctions among, “author,” “compiler,” “editor,” and even “commentator” are quite anachronistic when applied to Chinese antiquity. With this in mind, I am using the term “Warring States sources” in the most charitable way, as if the texts traditionally attributed to that period (such as the *Mengzi* 孟子, quoted below) could be accepted just as such. This is a useful but purely heuristic maneuver, for I do still believe that these sources express some ideas operative in a pre-imperial intellectual milieu, which set them apart from truly imperial texts—that is, texts first created under the political, social, intellectual, and administrative conditions of the Qin-Han empire. That said, if the preponderance of evidence speaks forcefully against accepting a particular passage from such a “Warring States text” as indeed predating the empire, one is obviously still obliged to take note of this fact. Even if we accept the *Mengzi* in general as dating from the late fourth or early third century BCE, we cannot presume that everything in it does so as well.

Furthermore, when reading the pertinent passages in the *Mengzi* and in the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳, it is necessary to be aware of how much the established understanding of these texts is guided by subsequent elaborations. (The same logic extends to the reading of the *Lunyu*: we must be open to the possibility of later interference with an earlier text.) It is therefore useful to recall briefly the traditional view and its tenuous relationship with the actual textual evidence. In his influential book *Writing and Authority in Early China*, Mark Edward Lewis states the following:

The *Gongyang zhuan*, which treats Confucius as the author of the *Chun qiu*, traced its teacher-disciple transmission back to the *Xunzi*. Finally, several late Warring States texts in other traditions, including the *Han Feizi* and the *Zhuangzi*, refer to Confucius’ composition of the *Chun qiu*. Since Han Fei was also a student of Xun Kuang’s it is likely that the latter espoused the theory of Confucius’ authorship of the *Chun qiu*. At any rate, the idea was widely held by the late Warring States period.¹⁰

These assertions regarding the idea of Kongzi’s authorship of the *Chunqiu* are dubious. First, there is but a single explicit reference in the *Gongyang zhuan* where Kongzi is quoted as taking responsibility for the phrasing—though

¹⁰ Lewis 1999: 234.

explicitly *not* for the content—of the *Chunqiu*. In addition, the epilogue to the *Gongyang zhuan*, of unknown origin, refers to a “noble man” (*junzi* 君子) as the person who “made” (*wei* 為, though not the stronger *zuo* 作) the *Chunqiu*.¹¹ Second, neither the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 nor the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 makes any such claim.¹² Third, as Lewis himself notes elsewhere, there is no mention of Kongzi’s authorship of the *Chunqiu* in the *Xunzi* 荀子, despite the insinuation that the purported author of the *Xunzi* somehow “espoused the theory of Confucius’ authorship.”¹³ Fourth, nothing suggests that “the idea was widely held by the late Warring States period.” To the contrary, very few people appear to have been aware of it.

It seems to me that Lewis’s sweeping claims, and the underlying misreading of the textual evidence involved, can come from only one source: the powerful tradition that included both the hagiography of Kongzi and the anachronistic projection of later textual practices and properties into pre-imperial times.¹⁴ When thinking about Kongzi as author, it remains important not to lose sight of this tradition and the extent to which it still holds sway in most quarters of contemporary scholarship. The picture I draw throughout the following pages departs decisively from such views.



Across all Warring States sources, Kongzi as author appears only with respect to a single text, the *Chunqiu*, and very rarely so. The first source, possibly, is *Mengzi* 3B/9:¹⁵

When the world declined and the Way fell into obscurity, heresies and violence arose. There were instances of regicides and patricides. Kongzi

11 See below for both passages. I thank Christoph Harbsmeier, Jens Østergaard Petersen, Paul R. Goldin, and Joachim Gentz for discussing these passages in detail with me.

12 The three passages Lewis (1999: 454n187) cites to support this claim are a *Han Feizi* passage, discussed below, that he misreads (and which, to the contrary, seems to indicate that, here, Kongzi is exactly *not* seen as the author); a *Han Feizi* passage (Wang Xianshen 1998: 34.314) that has Zixia 子夏 commenting on the *Chunqiu* but has nothing to say about Kongzi’s authorship either; and a fragment of dubious origin that only in the seventh-century anthology *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 is attributed to the *Zhuangzi* 莊子.

13 One may also note that the traditional commonplace that Han Fei 韓非 was “a student” of Xun Kuang 荀況 (i.e., Xunzi) has been forcefully challenged by Sato 2013.

14 For two critiques of Lewis’s (over)emphasis on the status of writing in early China, see Nylan 2000; Kern 2000.

15 Note, however, that Van Ess (2015), in a detailed and thoughtful discussion, suggests that *Mengzi* 3B/9 is a later interpolation that *follows* the account of Kongzi in the *Shiji*.

was apprehensive and made the *Springs and Autumns*. The *Springs and Autumns* is the business of the Son of Heaven. Thus, Kongzi said, “Those who recognize me will do so for the *Springs and Autumns*; those who condemn me will do so for the *Springs and Autumns*.”

世衰道微，邪說暴行有作。臣弑其君者有之，子弑其父者有之。孔子懼，作《春秋》。《春秋》、天子之事也；是故孔子曰：知我者其惟《春秋》乎！罪我者其惟《春秋》乎！¹⁶

A few lines later, the *Mengzi* concludes:

After Kongzi had completed the *Springs and Autumns*, rebellious ministers and murderous sons lived in fear.

孔子成《春秋》而亂臣賊子懼。¹⁷

Note what the *Mengzi* does not say: it does not relate Kongzi’s authorship to any specific event, nor does it integrate the composition of the *Chunqiu* with the Master’s biography. By contrast, in Kongzi’s biography in the *Shiji* 史記 (“Kongzi shijia” 孔子世家), the *Mengzi* passages are paralleled in reverse order and strikingly expanded, including with a parallel from *Lunyu* 15/20:

The Master said, “Alas, alas! The noble man resents leaving the world without having his name recognized. My Way is not put into practice, so what can I use to show myself to later generations?” Thus, relying on archival records, he made the *Springs and Autumns*. ... [His] principles of criticizing and diminishing [the rulers of the past] were upheld and applied by true kings of later times. When the principles of the *Springs and Autumns* are put into practice, rebellious ministers and murderous sons from all across the realm will live in fear of them. ... When the disciples received the *Springs and Autumns*, Kongzi said, “Those who in later generations will recognize me will do so for the *Springs and Autumns*, and those who will condemn me will also do so for the *Springs and Autumns*.”

子曰：弗乎弗乎，君子病沒世而名不稱焉。吾道不行矣，吾何以自見於後世哉？乃因史記作《春秋》... 貶損之義，後有王者舉而開之。

¹⁶ Jiao 1987: 452.

¹⁷ Jiao 1987: 459.

《春秋》之義行，則天下亂臣賊子懼焉...弟子受《春秋》，孔子曰：後世知丘者以《春秋》，而罪丘者亦以《春秋》。¹⁸

Here, the *Shiji* itself speaks universally of the “true kings of later times” (後有王者), who include not only Kongzi’s immediate posterity but the rulers of all times, presumably including Sima Qian’s own Emperor Wu 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE), insofar as these were “true kings” (*wangzhe* 王者). In addition, Kongzi is made not once but twice to voice his concern for readers of “later generations” (*houshi* 後世), to whom he “shows himself” (*zi xian* 自見) and who will “recognize” (*zhi* 知) him because of the *Chunqiu*. His final exclamation is positioned right before the concluding narrative of his death, marking it as his testament to posterity and sealing a narrative that, altogether, emphasizes his failure in life.¹⁹ In this, he inscribes himself into the very history he is chronicling: the text of the *Chunqiu* is radically reinterpreted and transformed into an act of dramatic self-expression. It marks the end of his life, and it marks the end of the historical period his text has chronicled. The way the *Shiji* presents Kongzi’s quest for posterity as compensation for this failure has guided the traditional reading of the *Mengzi* passage ever since.

The possible second instance of a text’s mentioning Kongzi as involved with the *Chunqiu* may be found at the end of the *Gongyang zhuan*. Here, the *Chunqiu* text proper closes on a laconic note for the year 481 BCE:

In the fourteenth year [of Duke Ai], in the spring, at the hunt in the western regions they caught a unicorn.

十有四年春，西狩獲麟。²⁰

The *Gongyang zhuan* explains:

The unicorn is a beast of benevolence. When there is one who acts as a true king, it arrives; when there is none who acts as king, it does not

¹⁸ *Shiji* 47.1943–1944. Cf. *Lunyu* 15/20 (“Wei Ling gong” 衛靈公), *Shiji* 61.2127 (“Boyi liezhuan” 伯夷列傳), and *Mengzi* 3B/9.

¹⁹ Note that, here, the statement “When the principles of the *Springs and Autumns* are put into practice, rebellious ministers and murderous sons from all across the realm will live in fear” (《春秋》之義行，則天下亂臣賊子懼焉) is explicitly directed at the time of “future kings” (*hou wang* 後王).

²⁰ *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 709. In the *Gongyang zhuan* and *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳 versions, the *Chunqiu* ends with the year 481 BCE, while the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 version continues the text until 463 BCE.

arrive. ... Kongzi said, “For whom did it come! For whom did it come!” As he turned his sleeve and wiped his face, tears soaked his gown. When Yan Yuan died, the Master said, “Ah! Heaven has bereft me!” When Zilu died, the Master said, “Ah! Heaven has cut me off!” When at the hunt in the western regions they caught the unicorn, Kongzi said, “My Way has reached its end.”

麟者，仁獸也。有王者則至，無王者則不至 ...孔子曰：孰為來哉！孰為來哉！反袂拭面，涕沾袍。顏淵死，子曰：噫！天喪予！子路死，子曰：噫！天祝予！西狩獲麟。孔子曰：吾道窮矣。²¹

The structure is similar to that of the *Mengzi* passage quoted above: a brief factual statement followed, in this case, by the series of Kongzi’s emphatic exclamations—and, in addition, his emotional collapse. On both the textual and the meta-textual level, “My Way has reached its end” is the perfect, if somewhat melodramatic, ending of the text and ending of Kongzi’s life.

In one crucial respect, however, the passage is ambiguous.²² The reading of *wu dao qiong yi* 吾道窮矣 (“My way has reached its end”) in the sense of “I am spent; I am desperate” is the one familiar from later tradition. However, in Han times, perhaps first with Sima Qian’s purported “teacher” Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 179–ca. 104 BCE), the *Gongyang zhuan* entry also became the fountainhead of the theory of Kongzi as the “uncrowned king” (*su wang* 素王). When the *lin* appears, Kongzi is first distressed over its arrival (“For whom did it come! For whom did it come!”) because it should not have arrived in the absence of a true king. Yet some Han readers, Dong Zhongshu among them, had an answer to Kongzi’s seeming incredulity: Heaven, in recognizing Kongzi as the “uncrowned king,” had sent the unicorn *for him*, as an omen of his kingship that overruled the worldly kings, and as the mandate (*ming* 命) to create the *Chunqiu* in order to overwrite, and indeed rectify, history. This reading appears at the beginning of the fragmentary chapter 16 (“Fu rui” 符瑞 [Auspicious Signs and Omens]) of the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (*Luxuriant Dew of the Springs and Autumns*):

²¹ *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 711–716.

²² I am indebted to Paul R. Goldin for having brought this ambiguity to my attention and for initiating and sustaining a thorough discussion of it that further involved Christoph Harbsmeier and Jens Østergaard Petersen. (All three of these friends also offered detailed bibliographic and editorial help throughout the essay, not to mention their learned corrections.)

Regarding what human effort cannot bring about but is instead brought about just by itself: when at the hunt in the western regions they caught the unicorn, this was an auspicious sign marking the reception of the mandate [of Heaven]. This being the case, thereafter [Kongzi] engaged himself with the *Springs and Autumns* to rectify what was not right, and to illuminate the principle of change in dynastic stipulations.

有非力之所能致而自致者，西狩獲麟，受命之符是也。然後託乎《春秋》正不正之間，而明改制之義。²³

While the chapter is clearly fragmentary, and while in general it is impossible to authenticate with certainty any particular part of the *Chunqiu fanlu* as coming directly from Dong Zhongshu or his inner circle,²⁴ the fragments of chapter 16 are a good candidate to belong to the early layers of the text, perhaps dating to the latter part of the second century BCE. They certainly fit a Western Han intellectual context (as does chapter 17, mentioned below) and belong to a line of thought that inspired, for example, Liu Xiang's explicit statement in *Shuiyuan* 說苑 (*Garden of Persuasions*) that the arrival of the unicorn showed "how Heaven recognized the Master" (此天之知夫子也; see below).

This reading of the *Gongyang zhuan* passage raises the question of the meaning of Kongzi's final words, *wu dao qiong yi*: are they a sigh of despair or, rather, one of relief? While the former is favored by the tradition, the latter, advocated by Paul R. Goldin,²⁵ may be closer to the understanding of at least some Han exegetes. In that reading, Kongzi does not simply despair at the absence of a true king; he also realizes that Heaven recognizes him as a sage. Furthermore—and this is missing in the *Gongyang zhuan* passage—Heaven gives him the mandate to compose the *Chunqiu*. In my view, the two readings can be combined: Kongzi receives the mandate only in the absence of a true worldly king; thus, he at once despairs at the world and is relieved, albeit with a heavy heart, that Heaven has recognized him as a sage. This, in fact, can be found in Sima Qian's *Shiji*.

The *Shiji* biography of Kongzi refers twice to Kongzi's response to the appearance of the unicorn. The biography shortens the *Gongyang zhuan* account

23 Su 1992: 157–158; Zhong 2005: 352–354.

24 For the seminal study on the authenticity of the *Chunqiu fanlu*, see Arbuckle 1991. For a proposed stratification of the text, see Queen and Major 2016: 20–29.

25 Personal communication. Early texts use *qiong* 窮 in both senses, "to exhaust" or "to reach the ultimate."

while combining it with passages that have verbatim parallels in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, the *Mengzi*, and three separate entries in the *Lunyu*:²⁶

In the fourteenth year of Duke Ai of Lu, in spring, there was a hunt in Daye. One of Mr. Shusun's chariot drivers captured a beast at Chushang and considered it inauspicious. Zhongni looked at it and said, "It is a unicorn." It was seized. He said, "The [Yellow] River does not bring forth the Diagram; the Luo River does not bring forth the Writing. I am at the end!" When Yan Yuan died, Kongzi said, "Heaven has bereft me!" When after the hunt in the western region he saw the unicorn, he said, "My Way has reached its end!" Sighing deeply, he said, "Nobody recognizes me!" Zigong said, "Why is it that nobody recognizes you?" The Master said, "I do not complain against Heaven, nor do I blame other people. I study from below and reach up above. The one who recognizes me may be just Heaven!"

魯哀公十四年春，狩大野。叔孫氏車子鉏商獲獸，以為不祥。仲尼視之，曰：麟也。取之。曰：河不出圖，雒不出書，吾已矣夫！顏淵死，孔子曰：天喪予！及西狩見麟，曰：吾道窮矣！喟然歎曰：莫知我夫！子貢曰：何為莫知子？子曰：不怨天，不尤人，下學而上達，知我者其天乎！²⁷

The passage suggests the richness, fluidity, and flexible applicability of Kongzi lore in Han times. Sima Qian's account is a patchwork from at least four different sources, where Kongzi also appears under three different designations (Zhongni 仲尼, Kongzi 孔子, and *zi* 子). It jumps abruptly from point to point: first, Kongzi is shown as the person who correctly identifies the unknown beast; second, a passage on the absence of auspicious omens (the Yellow River Diagram and the Luo River Writing) is inserted in which Kongzi claims to be "at the end" (吾已矣夫); third, as in the *Gongyang zhuan*, he is quoted as feeling "bereft" after the death of his student; fourth, now returning to the capture of the unicorn, he claims, "My Way has reached its end"; fifth, he declares that only Heaven may recognize him (as in *Lunyu* 14/35; see below), but not without "sighing deeply" (喟然歎) and lamenting that, otherwise, "Nobody recognizes me!" (莫我知也夫).

26 *Lunyu* 9/9 ("Zi han" 子罕): 鳳鳥不至，河不出圖，吾已矣夫！*Lunyu* 11/9 ("Xian jin" 先進): 顏淵死。子曰：噫！天喪予！天喪予！*Lunyu* 14/35 ("Xian wen" 憲問): 子曰：莫我知也夫！子貢曰：何為其莫知子也？子曰：不怨天，不尤人，下學而上達。知我者其天乎！*Mengzi* 2B/13: 君子不怨天，不尤人。；*Zuozhuan* Ai 14.

27 *Shiji* 47.1942.

This patchwork sequence emphasizes different aspects of Kongzi's personality: his perspicacious mind in identifying supernatural portents and judging the state of the polity;²⁸ his deep emotionality, paired with his concern for posterity, in this case of his student; and his sense of not being recognized. Even though the passage does not relate these traits explicitly to Kongzi's authorship of the *Chunqiu*, they reappear in many depictions of other authors in the *Shiji*. Furthermore, the passage may well imply Sima Qian's knowledge of the connection between the unicorn as an omen of Kongzi's recognition by Heaven and of Kongzi's "mandate" to compose the *Chunqiu* as mentioned in the *Chunqiu fanlu* fragment. In fact, these various aspects of Kongzi's personality are also attributed to Sima Qian as he presents himself, or is presented, in the *taishigong yue* 太史公曰 ("the Honorable Lord Archivist says") comments found throughout the *Shiji*, and they further relate to his own authorship of the latter.²⁹ In short, the *Shiji* develops the image of Kongzi as both ideal and prototypical.

By contrast, the passage in the *Shiji*'s "Rulin liezhuan 儒林列傳" (Arrayed Traditions of the Forest of Ru Scholars) is drastically shortened while making the connection with the *Chunqiu* explicit:

When at the hunt in the western region they captured the unicorn, [Kongzi] said, "My Way has reached its end!" Thus, relying on archival records he made the *Springs and Autumns* so as to conform to the kingly law, with his phrasing subtle and his guidance broad. In later generations, many were the scholars who quoted from it.

西狩獲麟，曰：吾道窮矣！故因史記作《春秋》，以當王法，其辭微而指博，後世學者多錄焉。³⁰

Here, a third element is added: relating the making of the *Chunqiu* to the experience of "My Way has reached its end," the passage claims that now, because of the *Chunqiu*, Kongzi's influence continues through subsequent generations—an idea that resonates deeply and repeatedly elsewhere in the *Shiji* (see below), including in the parallel to the *Mengzi* passage cited above.

While the concluding *Gongyang zhuan* entry says nothing about the quest for posterior recognition (or Kongzi's authorship), it is followed by an epilogue

28 In early texts, Kongzi is celebrated as being particularly perspicacious in understanding and judging others (just as he was the one to correctly identify the unicorn); see Hunter 2017: chap. 2. For his ability to read portents, see also Nylan and Wilson 2010: 14, 20, 90.

29 See Kern 2015, 2016.

30 *Shiji* 121.3115.

on the “making” of the *Chunqiu* that reads like an external insertion. Even if the *Gongyang zhuan* were to be accepted as a Warring States text,³¹ it remains difficult to decide how to date this epilogue and whether or not it even relates to Kongzi:

Why did the noble man make the *Springs and Autumns*? Given that, in order to bring order to an age of chaos and to return it to correctness, nothing comes even close to the *Springs and Autumns*, would it be that he made it for this reason? Or was it because, as a noble man, he delighted in speaking of the Way of Yao and Shun? Or, finally, was it not because he was delighted that [future sages like] Yao and Shun would recognize the noble man?³² When establishing the right principle of the *Springs and Autumns* in order to await [his recognition by] later sages, this surely is what a noble man would delight in.

君子曷為為《春秋》？撥亂世，反諸正，莫近諸《春秋》，則未知其為是與？其諸君子樂道堯舜之道與？末不亦樂乎堯舜之知君子也？制《春秋》之義，以俟後聖，以君子之為亦有樂乎此也。³³

Who is the “noble man” (*junzi* 君子)? To a faithful reader of the *Mengzi* (and of a host of later texts), the answer is clear: Kongzi. But if one situates the *Gongyang zhuan* epilogue in pre-imperial times, there are serious arguments against that understanding. To begin with, we do not know whether or not the term *junzi* is referential at all—it may well be understood as “a noble man.” Both the *Zuozhuan* and the *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳 repeatedly invoke Kongzi as commentator; the former identifies him as either “Kongzi” or “Zhongni” 仲尼 (Kongzi’s courtesy name), and the latter invariably as “Kongzi.” At the same time, the *Zuozhuan* attributes yet another set of comments to “the [or “a”?] noble man.” As noted by Eric Henry, the ways in which the “noble man” and “Kongzi” express themselves on events in the *Zuozhuan* differ strikingly and consistently, and the “Kongzi” comments clearly postdate those of the “noble man.”³⁴ Thus, whoever added the “Kongzi/Zhongni” comments seems to have

31 As argued by Gentz 2001: 345–403.

32 The sentence is ambiguous; I agree with Malmqvist (1971: 218–219), Gentz (2001: 90), and Li (2007: 412) who take it to express the hope that future sages in the mold of Yao and Shun will recognize the author of the *Springs and Autumns*.

33 *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 719–721. Gentz (2001: 89–90, 384) has also identified this passage as a postface. In addition to Gentz’s analysis, see also the discussions in Schaberg (2001: 305–306) and, most detailed, in Li (2007: 411–421).

34 Henry 1999; see also Schaberg 2005.

assumed that the “noble man” was *not* Kongzi/Zhongni.³⁵ Likewise, the authoritative “noble man” who in eleven instances delivers pithy statements in the *Guoyu* 國語 is unrelated to Kongzi.

On the other hand, in its dual references to an age in turmoil and to the theme of recognition (*zhi* 知), the *Gongyang zhuan* epilogue echoes the *Mengzi* passage quoted above. As will be shown below, the dual themes of “Kongzi made the *Springs and Autumns*” and “the noble man being recognized” together belong to the core of the Kongzi image nowhere more prominently than in the *Shiji*.³⁶

While the *Lunyu* lacks any mention of the *Chunqiu*, it repeatedly touches on the question of recognition, as noted by Hunter in this volume (chap. 3): aside from 1/1 (“Not taking offense when not being recognized, is this not the mark of the noble man?” [人不知而不慍，不亦君子乎]), in 1/16 the Master says, “Do not worry about people not recognizing you; worry about you not recognizing others” (不患人之不己知，患不知人也); in 4/14 (“Li ren” 里仁), he declares, “Do not worry about not having a position; worry about what it takes to establish yourself. Do not worry about nobody recognizing you; strive for that for which you can be recognized” (不患無位，患所以立。不患莫己知，求為可知也); in 11/26 (“Xian jin” 先進), the Master admonishes his disciples, “You constantly say, ‘People don’t recognize me!’ but if someone recognized you, what would you do with that?” (居則曰：“不吾知也！”如或知爾，則何以哉); in 14/30 (“Xian wen” 憲問), a variant of 1/16 is given (“Do not worry that people do not recognize you; worry that you yourself are incapable” [不患人之不己知，患其不能也]), just as another one appears in 15/19 (“Wei ling gong” 衛靈公) with “The noble man is distressed by his lack of ability; he is not distressed that people do not recognize him” (君子病無能焉，不病人之不己知也).

While Hunter reads some of these passages as indicating that the *Lunyu* Kongzi is indeed much concerned with recognition, I think they must predominantly be taken to say that the noble man should *not* worry about not being recognized—as is clearly stated in the paradigmatic passage of *Lunyu* 1/1. This is the opposite of the Kongzi in the *Mengzi*, who exclaims that he will be recognized, or condemned, *only* for the *Chunqiu*, and even more so of the anonymous “noble man” in the *Gongyang zhuan* epilogue, who awaits posterity to

35 The relationship between the “noble man” and “Kongzi/Zhongni” comments may also be conceptualized differently, namely, that both were woven together by an editor. (By contrast, Henry 1999 takes the “noble man” as the *Zuozhuan* narrator.) In other words, while one stratum may be older, both may have entered the *Zuozhuan* text at the same time. (I thank Paul R. Goldin for this insight.) But even then it would appear that the editor distinguished “Kongzi/Zhongni” from the “noble man.”

36 For a broader study on the problem of recognition, see Henry 1987.

give him his rightful recognition. In my reading, only two passages in the *Lunyu* show a somewhat different take on recognition, but even these do not accord with the *Gongyang zhuan* or the *Mengzi*. One is 14/39, where someone observes that the Master's playing of the chime stones seems to reveal his frustration over not being recognized; the person then remarks, "If nobody recognizes him, he should just stop it!" (莫己知也，斯已而已矣) and should instead adapt to the circumstances, an argument that the Master readily accepts. The other is 14/35, where the Master states, "Nobody recognizes me!" (莫我知也夫) and then concludes—at most with an implied sense of frustration—that "the one who recognizes me may be just Heaven!" (知我者其天乎). Here, Kongzi may be lamenting the ignorance of others in an imperfect world, but what truly matters to him is to be recognized by Heaven—which both *Chunqiu fanlu* (explicitly) and *Shiji* (implicitly) relate to his mandate for making the *Chunqiu*. There are several other passages in the *Lunyu* (e.g., 9/13 and 13/2) that dwell, directly or indirectly, on the theme of recognizing the worthy, but we do not find Kongzi advocating explicitly that one should worry about others' recognition of *oneself*. In sum, while the dual connection of Kongzi with the theme of recognition and the creation of the *Chunqiu* attains a strong presence with Sima Qian (see below) and gains further traction in the last decades of the Western Han, it is weak in the Warring States and never directly advanced in the *Lunyu*. Mark Edward Lewis and Stephen W. Durrant both cite with appreciation Chen Renxi's 陳仁錫 (1581–1636) statement that Kongzi's entire biography in the *Shiji* hinges on the notion of Kongzi's not being employed (篇中以用不用二字為關鍵).³⁷ Remarkably, the very part of the biography that emphasizes this element is also densely populated with lines from the *Lunyu*—as if the latter could be appropriated for a stance that it never takes.

Finally, the third passage possibly of pre-Han origin that mentions Kongzi as the author of the *Chunqiu* is also found in the *Gongyang zhuan*, under the twelfth year of Duke Zhao 昭 (530 BCE):

In the twelfth year, in spring, Gao Yan of Qi led an army and brought to power the Northern Yan Earl at Yang. What is meant by "Earl at Yang"? It is Prince Yang. The Master said, "I already knew this [miswriting of a personal name as a location]." A bystander said, "If you knew this, why did you not change it?" [The Master] said, "What about those [other instances] where one does not know [that something is wrong]? The *Springs and Autumns* is so faithful to history that its sequence [of lords is

37 Durrant 1995: 38; Lewis 1999: 228, citing Durrant. For Chen's original remark, see Ling 1576: 47.24a.

the one established] by Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin, and its accounts of assemblies [match] how they were arranged by the hosts. [However,] as for its [choice of] words, I, Qiu, must bear the blame alone.”

十有二年。春。齊高偃帥師。納北燕伯于陽。伯于陽者何。公子陽生也。子曰：我乃知之矣。在側者曰：子苟知之，何以不革。曰：如爾所不知何。《春秋》之信史也。其序則齊桓晉文。其會則主會者為之也。其詞則丘有罪焉耳。³⁸

This is the only passage in the *Gongyang zhuan* where Kongzi, referring to himself in an intimate register by his first name, is mentioned explicitly as taking responsibility for the phrasing of the text. Together with *Mengzi* 3B/9 and, perhaps, the *Gongyang zhuan* epilogue, it constitutes a claim that is isolated among Warring States texts but fits tightly with Sima Qian's account of Kongzi's involvement with the *Chunqiu*. This observation does not constitute proof that the *Mengzi* and *Gongyang zhuan* passages are Han-dynasty interpolations, though it must be noted that no Han dynasty text cites *Mengzi* 3B/9 or, more generally, the *Mengzi*'s claim regarding Kongzi's authorship. Perhaps the *Gongyang zhuan*, as Joachim Gentz and others hold,³⁹ was indeed connected to Kongzi already in late Warring States times, and this connection is even implied within the text itself, including in its use of “the noble man” as a designation for Kongzi.⁴⁰ But to judge from the evidence of our available sources, this idea would have been confined to a very small community of thinkers, if it had any influence at all. It had yet to gain prominence in the broader intellectual discourse of its time, and—most important for my present concerns—it had yet to become a defining feature in the conceptualization and representation of the Master.



The *Hanshu* 漢書 “Yiwen zhi” 藝文志 (Treatise on Arts and Letters) begins its account of the writings in the imperial library as follows:

In the past, after Zhongni had perished, his subtle words were cut off; after his seventy disciples had died, the great meaning became perverted.

38 *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 566–569. See also Gentz 2001: 96–98; Malmqvist 1978: 137; Malmqvist 1971: 203.

39 Gentz 2001.

40 For a critique of this last assumption, see Schaab-Hanke (2002: 283–291) who further refers to Pu 1995: 240–256.

Therefore, the *Springs and Autumns* split into five [interpretive lineages], the *Poetry* into four, and the *Changes* accumulated traditions of multiple lineages.

昔仲尼沒而微言絕，七十子喪而大義乖。故《春秋》分為五，《詩》分為四，《易》有數家之傳。⁴¹

While it remains inconclusive whether or not the “noble man” in the *Gongyang zhuan* epilogue originally referred to Kongzi, there is no question that readers and writers since Han times accepted this identification; no Han reader after Sima Qian would have failed to identify the “subtle words” (*wei yan* 微言) as those of the *Chunqiu*. If, for the sake of tracing the Han view of Kongzi, we read the *Mengzi* and *Gongyang zhuan* as mutually supportive statements on Kongzi’s authorship, we recognize in them a number of points, all of them relevant to the Kongzi figure in the *Shiji*:

First is the choice of verbs. In both *Mengzi* 3B/9 and the *Gongyang zhuan* epilogue, Kongzi “makes” the *Chunqiu* as a textual response to the collapse of the moral and social order. The former uses the term *zuo* 作, while the latter uses *wei* 為 and then also notes that he “fashioned” (*zhi* 制) “the right principle” (*yi* 義) of the *Chunqiu*. Especially the use of *zuo* may be an oblique way of calling Kongzi a sage who “makes” at the level of the earlier sage-kings.⁴² What Kongzi “makes” is not just a text, but a new model of sovereignty that replaces the ways of earlier kingship with his own, as he appropriates “the business of the Son of Heaven.” Before the empire, nobody except Kongzi is ever credited with “making” a text meant to be read by an anonymous audience of readers, including those of posterity.

Second, the *Mengzi* does not simply speak about Kongzi; it quotes him directly, infusing the account with the immediacy and authenticity of the Master’s own voice; the final entry of the *Gongyang zhuan* (before the epilogue) does the same, and so does the entry under Duke Zhao, which even uses the intimate self-designation *Qiu*. This voice is highly personal and resonates throughout the subsequent tradition—Kongzi consistently speaks not just his mind but also his heart. Needless to say, we do not hear Kongzi speak; we hear him as the *Mengzi* and the *Gongyang zhuan*, some centuries after his death, imagine and present him as speaking.

⁴¹ *Hanshu* 30.1701.

⁴² For a discussion of *zuo* in early China, see Puett 2001.

Third, again in the *Mengzi*, Kongzi assumes true ownership of his work, and he is willing to bear the consequences. He is, in other words, a Foucauldian author who accepts punishment for his work.⁴³

Fourth, the writing of history is conceived as a direct intervention into the political and social status quo. According to the *Gongyang zhuan* epilogue, the *Chunqiu* “brings order to an age of chaos and restores it to correctness” (撥亂世，反諸正)，⁴⁴ while the *Mengzi* states, “After Kongzi had completed the *Chunqiu*, rebellious ministers and murderous sons lived in fear” (孔子成《春秋》而亂臣賊子懼). While the former statement rectifies an imperfect past by means of a retrospective judgment that, in turn, is to be taken as guidance for the present and future, the comment in the *Mengzi* indicates an immediate and pervasive reception of Kongzi’s work—which raises very interesting questions about how it was “published,” that is, how it was transmitted to those “rebellious ministers and murderous sons.” In my reading, this is not merely pure fiction but an early step in the development of Kongzi’s hagiography.

And fifth, Kongzi in both texts is portrayed as a self-conscious author who—while responding to his own time—writes for posterity, a motif that becomes central with Sima Qian. Thus, Kongzi’s writing provides us with his judgments on history, but more important, it tells us about his own moral stance. Kongzi inscribes himself into the text, assuming the role of the true author: the *Chunqiu* text attains a new meaning, and with it a new hermeneutical challenge, because it is now associated with Kongzi as its author.

It is by no means clear what it means that Kongzi “made” the *Chunqiu*, considering that the text reflects (in a way that we do not really understand, considering Kongzi’s purported reworking of the text) the chronicles of his home state of Lu from 722 to 486 BCE (to 481 BCE in the *Gongyang zhuan* version). The *Chunqiu* is not a narrative; it is not even the skeleton of a possible narrative, presuming far more than it actually says, including the audience’s familiarity with numerous names, events, and their actual significance. Thus, it cannot possibly have been directed at any wider general audience (including “rebellious ministers and murderous sons”) because such an audience would not have been able to make any sense of it. Perhaps the early texts merely suggested that Kongzi “initiated” or “gave rise to” (other possible readings of the verb *zuo*, and a better match with Latin *augere*, “to augment”) its particular significance—in other words, that he transformed the chronicle into a discourse. The ambivalence over Kongzi’s role is apparent from the fact that in Han texts, he is also said to have “fashioned” (*zhi* 制), “made” (*wei* 為),

43 Foucault 1979.

44 On the function of historiography to rectify history itself, see Schaberg 2001a: esp. chap. 8.

“organized” (*zhi* 治), “arranged in sequence” (*ci* 次), “transmitted” (*shu* 述), “brought to completion” (*cheng* 成), or “perfected” (*xiu* 修) the *Chunqiu*. Each of these terms still assigns to him the principal responsibility for the text in its final form.

In light of these ambiguities, it is perhaps not surprising that there even seems to exist some early evidence against Kongzi’s authorship of the *Chunqiu*. In an anecdote in *Han Feizi* 韓非子 chapter 30, “Nei chushuo, Part One” 內儲說上, Duke Ai of Lu 魯哀公 asks Kongzi why in the *Chunqiu* it is recorded that “[i]n winter, in the twelfth month, hoarfrost fell without killing the beans” (冬十二月實霜不殺菽).⁴⁵ Kongzi responds that sometimes, someone who should be killed is not killed, and that “when Heaven loses the Way, even grasses and trees will go against it—how much more so if the ruler of men loses [the Way (that his people will go against him)]” (天失道，草木猶犯干之，而況於人君乎).⁴⁶ Here, Kongzi is portrayed as a perspicacious conversational commentator on the *Chunqiu*—in other words, he would be explaining his own text. While some scholars take these comments to suggest Kongzi’s authorship of the *Chunqiu*, one may just as well conclude the opposite: as Kongzi used his “subtle words” to reveal the truth of history in coded ways, why would he then also go on record with an explicit commentary, and even autocommentary? Even more improbable is the setting of the anecdote: the entry supposedly raised by Duke Ai is the final (thirty-third) year of Duke Xi 僖公, the fifth duke chronicled in the *Chunqiu*, while Duke Ai is the twelfth and final duke chronicled there. Of course, Duke Ai could not possibly refer to the (already completed?) text of the *Chunqiu*—a text that includes his own reign—and engage the very author of the text in conversation.⁴⁷ If anything, the anachronistic anecdote seems to suggest that whoever was responsible for including it in “Nei chushuo”—one of a mere handful of *Han Feizi* chapters named in the *Shiji*⁴⁸—considered Kongzi *not* to be the author of the *Chunqiu*.

We can assume that the author of the anecdote was aware of these contradictions and expected the same from his audience. In having Kongzi explain the *Chunqiu* to Duke Ai, he granted him authority over the text. To some extent, this situation parallels—as noted above—Kongzi’s role as commentator on the *Zuozhuan*, where the voice of Kongzi/Zhongni is clearly external to the

45 The actual wording in the received *Chunqiu* is slightly different: “there fell hoarfrost without killing the grass” (隕霜不殺草).

46 Wang Xianshen 1998: 30.223–224.

47 Of course, Duke Ai may have had access to the earlier court annals created by the Lu court scribes; but he could not have referred to the *Chunqiu* as a text whose “subtle phrases” were fashioned by Kongzi.

48 *Shiji* 63.2147.

text and even postdates that of the “noble man.” In both cases, Kongzi’s authority is not that of an author, but of a most perceptive reader. Yet at the same time, we must remain alive to the possibility that ancient readers were less troubled than we are today by textual and logical inconsistencies. Perhaps the author of the “*Nei chushuo*” could have it both ways and simply consider Kongzi the ultimate authority on all matters related to the *Chunqiu*, and hence present him as both author and commentator. Or perhaps he was playing with the expectations of an audience that already took Kongzi for granted as the author of the *Chunqiu*. We do not know; but if the latter was indeed the case, it remains curious that such an assumption was not voiced elsewhere as well.

While modern scholars like Yang Bojun and others have long questioned any involvement of Kongzi with the *Chunqiu*,⁴⁹ the idea of Kongzi as its “maker” became accepted over the long course of the Han dynasty and has been widely current since. Thus, Michael Nylan has stated that “The Han saw Kongzi, above all, as the author of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. ... [T]he story about his compilation of the *Annals* seems to drive all the other stories about Kongzi.”⁵⁰ This is certainly the view one takes away from reading Sima Qian’s comments on Kongzi and from much of the literature from the late first century BCE through the end of the Eastern Han in the early third century CE. Yet it is not at all what we find before or even a generation after Sima Qian. There are, in fact, very few sources that attribute the *Chunqiu* to Kongzi.⁵¹

The first is Dong Zhongshu, who in two of his three responses to Emperor Wu’s policy questions—in the early years of the emperor’s reign—stated (or repeated the statement in the *Mengzi*) that “Kongzi made the *Chunqiu*” (孔子作《春秋》).⁵² Likewise, in his proposal to ban all teachings “that are not within the curriculum of the Six Arts and Kongzi’s precepts” (不在六藝之科孔子之術者),⁵³ Dong connects the sage to the entire body of learning that gradually became distilled into the Five Classics (*wu jing* 五經). Finally, chapter 17 of the *Chunqiu fanlu*, “Yu xu” 俞序 (Summary Postface[?]), begins with the phrase “As for Zhongni’s making of the *Springs and Autumns*” (仲尼之作《春秋》也). However, not only is the attribution of the entirety of *Chunqiu fanlu* to Dong Zhongshu, and hence the date of any particular section, uncertain (though

49 Yang 1993: “Introduction,” 5–16. Yang cites not only a range of compelling reasons to question Kongzi’s involvement with the text but also a series of traditional thinkers from the seventh century onward who already doubted it. For further discussion, see also Gentz 2001: 38–40.

50 In Nylan and Wilson 2010: 68, 74.

51 For a similar argument, see Hunter 2017: 73n118.

52 *Hanshu* 56.2509, 2515.

53 *Hanshu* 56.2523.

both chapters 16 and 17 are plausible as dating to mid-Western Han times); scholars have also called into question the reliability of Dong's responses to Emperor Wu, raising the possibility that they were reshaped or even retrospectively created by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), the author of the *Hanshu*.⁵⁴

The second source to speak of Kongzi's engagement with the *Chunqiu* is the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 of 139 BCE. In chapter 9 of this text, "Zhushu" 主術 (The Precepts of Rulership), Kongzi is called the "uncrowned king" (*su wang* 素王) for his "single-minded concentration on teaching the Way" (*zhuanxing jiaodao* 專行教道). In relating the 242 years of the Springs and Autumns period, "selecting what was good and weeding out what was shameful, he accomplished the kingly Way and was broad-minded in his deliberations" (采善鉏醜, 以成王道, 論亦博矣); furthermore, "he created the *Springs and Autumns* without speaking of ghosts and spirits and without daring to concentrate on his own concerns" (作為《春秋》, 不道鬼神, 不敢專己).⁵⁵ Here, the Master is commended for a "selfless" text that that does not advance his personal causes.

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This, then, is the entire evidence for Kongzi's authorship from the Warring States and early imperial periods up to Sima Qian. As Michael Loewe has noted, neither Lu Jia 陸賈 (ca. 228–ca. 140 BCE) nor Jia Yi 賈誼 (201–169) mentions Kongzi's involvement with the *Chunqiu* anywhere in their received writings,⁵⁶ nor does any early Han source other than the *Huainanzi*, including Sima Qian's contemporaries—not in expository prose, not in memorials to the throne, not in imperial edicts. The earliest recorded instances following Sima Qian's writings would come only a generation later, during the reign of Emperor Xuan 宣帝 (r. 74–49 BCE): when Huan Kuan 桓寬 retrospectively compiled the (idealized)⁵⁷ *Yantie lun* 鹽鐵論 (*Debate on Salt and Iron*) of 81 BCE, he mentioned that Kongzi "made the *Springs and Autumns*":

Therefore, [Kongzi] traveled east and west, north and south, to persuade [the regional lords] but was not employed. Thereupon, he retired and perfected the kingly Way and made the *Springs and Autumns*, bequeathing it to the posterity of a myriad years.

54 See Loewe 2011: 118–121; Arbuckle 1991: 66–76; even more critical is Sun 2000.

55 Liu 1997: 9.313.

56 Loewe 2011: 149.

57 See Loewe 1974: 81–112.

是以東西南北七十說而不用丙，然後退而修王道，作《春秋》，垂之萬載之後。⁵⁸

Finally, shortly after 68 BCE the then governor of Shanyang 山陽, Zhang Chang 張敞, noted in a memorial that “Zhongni made the *Springs and Autumns*” (仲尼作春秋).⁵⁹

In light of the meager overall evidence to attribute such authorship to Kongzi, it is perhaps surprising that the few references available all appear in an almost offhand, matter-of-fact way. Nobody in early China felt the need to argue over Kongzi’s authorship of the *Chunqiu*—but then again, nobody in early China ever argued over the authorship of any text. “Kongzi made the *Springs and Autumns*” was never explicitly disputed, nor was there an attempt to explain in further detail how he did it, or what it was exactly that he did; the only characterization of that process is the repeated formula, first appearing in the *Shiji*, that he “relied on archival records” (因史記). We also know that the *Shiji* was not in general circulation during the first century BCE, and the surge of references to Kongzi’s authorship during the final three decades of that century is not sufficiently explained by way of reference to Sima Qian’s Kongzi biography.

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The *Chunqiu* was prominent enough already in the fourth century BCE to give rise to a body of texts that directly or indirectly responded to it, including *Zuozhuan* and *Gongyang zhuan*. In the **Yucong* 語叢 1 manuscript from the Guodian 郭店 corpus, probably dating from the late fourth century BCE, it is listed together with the other curricula of the *Yi* 易 (*Changes*), the *Shi* 詩 (*Poetry*), the *Shu* 書 (*Documents*), the *Li* 禮 (*Rituals*), and the *Yue* 樂 (*Music*)—that is, the Six Arts (*liu yi* 六藝)—and characterized as that “which brings together the affairs of the past and the present” (《春秋》所以會古今之事也).⁶⁰ Moreover, the *Shiji* knows of an entire lineup of texts that were said to have drawn on the *Chunqiu*, and where it appears that the term is not (as elsewhere) used as the generic designation of historical annals but refers to a single text of elevated

58 Wang Liqi 1992: 20.253–254 (“Xiangci” 相刺).

59 *Hanshu* 76.3217; Loewe 2011: 149n123.

60 Jingmen shi bowuguan 1998: 195 (slips 40–41). I deliberately say “curricula” and not “books,” as I believe that the Six Arts, which in Han times became distilled into the Five Classics (by losing the *Music*), were not yet defined texts but rather repertoires (or discourses) of textual and ritual practices, forming the core of the Ru 儒 body of learning.

status.⁶¹ It seems utterly unlikely that mere archival records, drawn up in the most basic format of annalistic notations, were as such considered important. What made them important was their moral and political interpretation, or the possibility of such interpretation.⁶² In other words, the *Chunqiu* constituted a curriculum of learning not as a body of factual records but as a repertoire of historical knowledge from which to extract lessons of precedence and edification. In this sense, it mirrored the songs from the *Shi*, which in **Yucong* 1 are characterized as that “which brings together the aspirations of the past and the present” (《詩》所以會古今之志也);⁶³ and it can be compared to the *Yi*, in the same manuscript said to be that “which brings together the Way of Heaven and the Way of Man” (《易》所以會天道人道也).⁶⁴ Before the Han, no available source associates the *Yi* or the corpus of the *Shi* with an author or a compiler, which suggests there was no felt need for one. What both texts needed, however, were interpreters and teachers—masters who would turn these non-narrative, nonargumentative, and hermeneutically wide-open (and therefore problematic) texts into repositories of cultural, political, and moral meaning. Leaving the *Mengzi* and *Gongyang zhuan* passages aside for a moment, this is precisely what can be said about the *Chunqiu* wherever else this text is mentioned. Before the Han, its prestige and authority were located not in the figure of an author but in its hermeneutic possibilities to reveal the past as meaningful for the present. To the extent that any one person mattered in relation to the text, it was not its originator but its interpreter and teacher, just as Kongzi is drawn upon as interpreter and teacher of the *Poetry* in the Shanghai Museum manuscript now titled, by its modern editors, **Kongzi shilun* 孔子詩論 (*Kongzi's Discussion of the Poetry*).

In evaluating the historical reliability and significance of the *Mengzi* and *Gongyang zhuan* passages quoted above, we must consider this intellectual milieu of the Warring States, which on the whole had no need, and therefore likely no place, for a single authorial figure within the textual and ritual repertoire of the Six Arts. For both the *Shi* and the *Yi*, the authorial absence was not a deficiency but a quality of the text and its traditional authority. What mattered was the interpretability of the text, which was neither controlled nor constituted by its attribution to a historical persona, nor constrained by the

61 *Shiji* 14:509–510.

62 Pines (2009: 318–332) has suggested that the *Chunqiu* originated from records for the ancestral sacrifice, and that at least some of its commentaries—especially the *Gongyang zhuan*—maintained a strong religious significance. Sima Qian, however, does not dwell on the religious meaning of the *Chunqiu*.

63 *Jingmen shi bowuguan* 1998: 194 (slips 38–39).

64 *Jingmen shi bowuguan* 1998: 194 (slips 36–37).

author function as “the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning”;⁶⁵ it was inexhaustibly profound because it “has never finished saying what it has to say.”⁶⁶

Discussions such as in **Yucong* 1, but also in the *Zuozhuan* and *Gongyang zhuan*, suggest that the same was generally true for the *Chunqiu*. It was not before the Han that all the Five Classics became texts in search of their authors, and that the figure of the exemplary interpreter—Kongzi—became re-configured as the exemplary author (for the *Chunqiu*), commentator (for the *Yi*), and compiler (for the *Shi* as well as for the *Shu* and the *Li*). Remarkably, while the figure of Kongzi as interpreter and teacher to some extent receded—note that there is no Han text comparable to the *Kongzi shilun*—it did not entirely disappear; the result is the self-contradictory image of the Master as both author of and (auto)commentator on the *Chunqiu*. Meanwhile, the *Lunyu* never once mentions the *Chunqiu*, but it does portray Kongzi as involved with the *Shi* and, to a lesser degree, also with the *Yi*, the *Shu*, and matters of ritual—yet nowhere as their author, compiler, or systematic commentator. It is fair to say that the *Lunyu* is largely uninterested in exploring Kongzi’s authorship or arrangement of any one of the classics, the *Chunqiu* included. In fact, compared with its emphasis on exemplary conduct, it is remarkably uninterested in texts—their existence, their production, their circulation and reception—altogether.



By far the single most important source for Kongzi’s authorship is the *Shiji*. In its concluding chapter 130, where the historian gives account of both his own life and his text, he creates a genealogy of suffering authors in which Kongzi’s authorship of the *Chunqiu* takes a decidedly different turn compared with the passages in the *Mengzi* and the *Gongyang zhuan* epilogue. Like so many others, Kongzi writes not merely out of political frustration and moral indignation but in direct response to personal suffering:

In the past, the Earl of the West was incarcerated in Youli, and he expanded the *Classic of Changes*; Kongzi was in a desperate situation between Chen and Cai, and he made the *Springs and Autumns*; Qu Yuan was banished, and he composed “Encountering Sorrow”; Zuo Qiuming lost his eyesight, and there was the *Discourses of the States*; Sunzi got his

65 Foucault 1979: 159.

66 Calvino 1986.

feet chopped off, and he discoursed on the *Art of War*; Lü Buwei was banished to Shu, and his contemporaries transmitted *Lü's Survey*; Han Fei was imprisoned in Qin, and [there were] the “Difficulties of Persuasion” and “Resentment about Solitude.” Most of the three hundred *Odes* [in the *Poetry*] were made by worthies who gave expression to their rage. All these men had something eating away at their hearts. They could not carry out the Way, and hence they wrote about the past while thinking of those to come.

昔西伯拘羑里，演《周易》；孔子厄陳蔡，作《春秋》；屈原放逐，著《離騷》；左丘失明，厥有《國語》；孫子臆腳，而論《兵法》；不韋遷蜀，世傳《呂覽》；韓非囚秦，《說難》、《孤憤》；《詩》三百篇，大抵賢聖發憤之所為作也。此人皆意有所鬱結，不得通其道也，故述往事，思來者。⁶⁷

While echoing Kongzi's quest for posterity in more general terms, this passage—repeated in Sima Qian's famous letter to Ren An 任安⁶⁸—in several of its details directly contradicts what the *Shiji* tells us about these authors elsewhere: Han Fei 韓非 (d. 233 BCE) was invited to the Qin court because the King of Qin (and future First Emperor) admired his already-existing essays “Gu fen” 孤憤 (Solitary Resentment) and “Wu du” 五蠹 (Five Vermin). He also had composed “Shui nan” 說難 (Difficulties of Persuasion) before arriving in Qin, where his imprisonment occurred later.⁶⁹ Likewise, Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (d. 235 BCE) was the chancellor of Qin when he oversaw the composition of the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (*Mr. Lü's Springs and Autumns*), which included a section of “surveys” (*lan* 覽); only several years later was he banished.⁷⁰ Leaving aside the question of whether such openly contradictory statements should be attributed to the same author, the narrative in chapter 130 offers a genealogy of a particular ideological bent.

Most important, the text constructs a direct relationship between personal suffering and authorship. In this account, Kongzi (like Han Fei) no longer writes in response to the political circumstances of his time (as he does in the *Shiji* passage from the “Arrayed Traditions of the Forest of Ru Scholars” where he composes the *Chunqiu* following the capture of the unicorn); instead, he becomes an author because of his personal fate. As the catalog of suffering

67 *Shiji* 130.3300.

68 *Hanshu* 62.2735. The letter is also preserved as “Letter in Response to Ren Shaoqing” (Bao Ren Shaoqing shu 報任少卿書) in chapter 41 of the *Wenxuan* 文選.

69 *Shiji* 63.2155.

70 *Shiji* 85.2510–2512.

authors makes clear, they all respond to personal disaster in the same way: it is, in fact, the experience of suffering itself, and only this experience, that turns them into authors—none of them is writing by choice. In Kongzi's case, the "making" of the *Chunqiu* arises from being in dire straits "between Chen and Cai," which is "by far the most well-attested Kongzi tradition from the early period."⁷¹ To be sure, the distinction between Kongzi's personal suffering and his political frustration is not absolute. But there is still a striking difference between writing when "between Chen and Cai" and, as noted elsewhere in the *Shiji*, writing after the appearance of the unicorn. While the latter, close to the end of Kongzi's life, portends both the futility of Kongzi's political ambition and his imminent demise, the former aligns a significantly earlier moment of physical suffering (in this case, starvation) with the assaults on other heroes from the past. The difference between the two narratives is remarkable. The narrative about the unicorn shows Kongzi as a sage and historian of unique apprehension and clairvoyance, a solitary man who recognizes the unicorn for what it is, and who is being recognized by Heaven. The Kongzi "between Chen and Cai" is merely one among many who wrote out of suffering, one point in the line leading to Sima Qian himself. But both versions are meaningful for the author of the *Shiji*, as they express the dual motivations of his own authorship: writing out of personal suffering *while also* writing out of the desire to give testimony to a past that ends only in the time and person of the historian. For both the *Chunqiu* and the *Shiji*, these two motivations have generated two different meanings and readings of the text that cannot easily be reconciled. Both advance fundamental truth claims, but these claims—one by the historian, the other by the man speaking of his pain—are not entirely mutually supportive. At best they can be read as parallel or complementary; at worst, mutually undermining. Together they constitute the torn personas of both Sima Qian and his Kongzi.⁷²



The *Shiji*'s conflicting statements regarding Kongzi's authorship of the *Chunqiu* mark him as a composite persona, an image that could be invoked in different ways and for different rhetorical ends. Even though the *Mengzi* passage does not include the quest for posterity, it shows Kongzi as a high-minded author

⁷¹ Hunter's chapter 3 in the present volume, p. 78.

⁷² It may be argued that Kongzi's personal suffering is somehow related to his desire to rectify the sociopolitical conditions of both past and present, but the texts do not actually say so.

who, with fierce intent, fuses historical truth with personal emotion. Speaking its author's heart and mind, the *Chunqiu* "makes sense" not as a mere chronicle but as the manifestation of both personal self-expression and political and historical critique.

Sima Qian may well have inherited his understanding from recent tradition, that is, the *Gongyang zhuan* reading of the text for which his purported teacher Dong Zhongshu and, before Dong, Scholar Huwu 胡毋(母?)生 (early second century BCE) and Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 (ca. 200–121 BCE) were principal experts. But more than those of his predecessors, Sima's account is repeatedly focused on the Master's authorship. In the *taishigongyue* statement to Kongzi's *Shiji* biography, Sima states, "When reading the writings of Master Kong, I see him before me as the person he was!" (余讀孔氏書，想見其為人).⁷³ The idea that through a person's writing one gains direct access to his personality is repeated again verbatim (想見其為人) in the statement on the other archetypal author of early China, Qu Yuan 屈原 (trad. ca. 343–278 BCE),⁷⁴ who is likewise represented as having composed his writings out of the same fusion of political frustration and personal suffering. Several similar, though more indirect, statements to the same effect can be found in the *Shiji*'s evaluation of various philosophical "Masters."⁷⁵ In all such cases, it is the text that leads to the true nature of the author as a person—but only through its perceptive posthumous reader, who thus constitutes the posterity in which the author is finally recognized. The author becomes dependent on his reader: it is the latter who now imagines the former, who rescues both the text and the person.

The principal difference in the accounts discussed so far concerns the authorial motivation: did Kongzi make the *Chunqiu* in response to a world without a true king (and for the mandate that he has therefore received from Heaven), and hence as a moral critique of the past and a guide for the future, or did he write from the experience of personal suffering and hence as a means of self-expression? The *Shiji* has it both ways, even though the second motivation has the potential to undermine and destabilize the first: how can Kongzi be an impartial critic of the past if he is driven by personal resentment? This tension is given voice already before Sima Qian—namely, in the above-quoted passage from the *Huainanzi*, "Zhu shu" (chap. 9): "He created the *Springs and Autumns* without speaking of ghosts and spirits and without daring to concentrate on his own concerns" (作為《春秋》，不道鬼神，不敢專己).⁷⁶ In other

73 *Shiji* 47.1947.

74 *Shiji* 84.2503.

75 See Kern 2015.

76 Liu 1997: 9.313.

words, this passage of the *Huainanzi* contradicts the notion that Kongzi wrote out of personal suffering. In “Fan lun” 汎論 (Boundless Discourses; chap. 13), the *Huainanzi* repeats the theme that the *Chunqiu* originated in response to the decline of order. Here, the text appears entirely impersonal—not “created” but “having arisen” in “an age of decline,” playing on the intransitive meaning of *zuo* 作 as “to arise”:

When the kingly Way became deficient, the *Poetry* arose; when the House of Zhou failed and the principles of ritual collapsed, the *Springs and Autumns* arose. The *Poetry* and the *Springs and Autumns* are praised by the scholars, but each was produced by an age of decline.

王道缺而《詩》作，周室廢、禮義壞而《春秋》作。《詩》、《春秋》，學之美者也，皆衰世之造也。⁷⁷

A parallel can be found in *Mengzi* 4B/21, which also mentions the two classics most closely associated with Kongzi:

Mengzi said, “When the footprints of the [ancient] kings disappeared, the *Poetry* vanished. After the *Poetry* had vanished, the *Springs and Autumns* arose.”

孟子曰：王者之迹熄而《詩》亡，《詩》亡然後《春秋》作。⁷⁸

Late in the Western Han, Liu Xiang’s *Shuiyuan* goes so far as to quote Kongzi himself on this impersonal, quasi-natural rise of the *Chunqiu*:

Kongzi said, “Had the Way of Xia not vanished, the Virtuous Power of Shang would not have arisen; had the Virtuous Power of Shang not vanished, the Virtuous Power of Zhou would not have arisen; had the Virtuous Power of Zhou not vanished, the *Springs and Autumns* would not have arisen. After the *Springs and Autumns* had arisen, the noble man [men?] understood that the Way of Zhou had vanished.”

⁷⁷ Liu 1997: 13.427.

⁷⁸ Jiao 1987: 572. For a different reading, with 迹 (traces) as 迳 (wooden clappers), see Yang 1988: 193: “When the wooden clappers of the [ancient] kings went silent, the *Poetry* vanished.”

孔子曰：夏道不亡，商德不作；商德不亡，周德不作；周德不亡，《春秋》不作；《春秋》作而後君子知周道亡也。⁷⁹

In yet another passage, the *Shuiyuan* states,

The Master traveled to persuade seventy regional lords, not having a stable residence. He was intent on making the common people across the realm obtain their proper station, yet his Way was not carried out. He retired and perfected the *Springs and Autumns* . . .

夫子行說七十諸侯無定處，意欲使天下之民各得其所，而道不行。退而修《春秋》...⁸⁰

Finally, the *Shuiyuan* takes a turn that connects it directly to the *Chunqiu fanlu* fragment noted above:

[Kongzi] appreciated the finest of what was good and censured the tiniest of what was detestable. Human affairs were penetrated, the kingly Way was fulfilled; as [Kongzi] refined and harmonized the sage stipulations, he communicated them to Heaven above, and the unicorn arrived—this shows how Heaven recognized the Master! Thereupon he sighed deeply and said, “Isn’t Heaven of utmost brightness so that it cannot be overshadowed? How then can there be a solar eclipse? Isn’t Earth of utmost security so that it cannot be in peril? How then can Earth be shaken?” Yet Heaven and Earth are still being overshadowed and shaken; thus, when the worthies and sages speak to the world but cannot have their Way carried out, disasters and natural anomalies arise together. The Master said, “I do not complain against Heaven, nor do I blame other people. I study from below and reach up above. The one who recognizes me might be just Heaven!”

采毫毛之善，貶纖介之惡，人事浹，王道備，精和聖制，上通於天而麟至，此天之知夫子也。於是喟然而歎曰：天以至明為不可蔽乎？日何為而食也？地以至安為不可危乎？地何為而動？天地尚有動蔽，是故賢聖說於世而不得行其道，故災異並作也。夫子曰：不怨天，不尤人，下學而上達，知我者其天乎！⁸¹

79 Xiang 1987: 1.31 (“Jun dao” 君道).

80 Xiang 1987: 14.350 (“Zhi gong” 至公).

81 Xiang 1987: 14.351 (“Zhi gong”).

Here, we witness an amalgam of various passages from the *Shiji*, the *Mengzi*, and the *Lunyu*, combining the various ideas already encountered above. Yet more explicitly than in any other Western Han source, the unicorn, sent by Heaven, appears in response to the presence of the sage because, indeed, only Heaven recognizes Kongzi.

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In sum, by late Western Han times the image of Kongzi as an expert in the interpretation of the *Chunqiu* had fully developed into one of his authorship of the text itself. For pre-imperial times, however, their general (let alone wide-spread) conflation is questionable: if anything—as in the *Han Feizi* passage where Kongzi is consulted by Duke Ai—the two ideas appear as mutually exclusive. Among our available sources, by far the most influential account of Kongzi as author of the *Chunqiu* is that of the *Shiji*, even though it is riddled with contradictions about Kongzi's motivation. Across its various chapters, the *Shiji* connects Kongzi repeatedly to the *Chunqiu*, for example, in its table on the feudal lords.⁸² Later Western and Eastern Han texts such as *Shuiyuan*, *Yantielun*, and *Kongzi jiaiyu* 孔子家語 (*Family Sayings of Kongzi*),⁸³ but also public figures such as Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE)⁸⁴ and Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 9–23),⁸⁵ drawing on a pool of earlier statements, could routinely refer to Kongzi as having created the *Chunqiu*. In addition, Xin 新, Eastern Han, and Wei 魏 dynasty thinkers would refer to Kongzi as having encoded the *Chunqiu* with predictions about the rise of Wang Mang's Xin dynasty,⁸⁶ the restoration of the (Eastern) Han,⁸⁷ or the establishment of the Wei dynasty,⁸⁸ respectively.

In view of these various sources and the authority that the *Mengzi*, the *Gongyang zhuan*, and, most of all, the *Shiji* have exerted over the tradition, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the great majority of Warring States and early Han texts never speak of Kongzi as the author of the *Chunqiu*. These include the “Masters” texts as well as Han texts such as *Han Shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (*Outer Tradition of the Han Poetry*), *Liji* 禮記 (*Records of Ritual*), *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記 (*Elder Dai's Records of Ritual*), Jia Yi's *Xinshu* 新書 (*New Writings*), of Lu Jia's *Xinyu* 新語 (*New Discourses*), and Liu Xiang's *Xinxu* 新序 ([*Writings*] *Newly*

82 *Shiji* 14.509–510.

83 *Kongzi jiaiyu* 39/2 (“Benxing jie” 本性解); 42/1 (“Quli Zigong wen” 曲禮子貢問).

84 *Hanshu* 87B.3578.

85 *Hanshu* 99B.4109.

86 *Hanshu* 99B.4109.

87 *Hou Hanshu* 13.538.

88 *Sanguo zhi* 3.108.

Arranged). From this larger perspective, it is not surprising that the *Chunqiu* (let alone its authorship) is never once mentioned in the *Lunyu*. Some of the characteristics attributed to Kongzi there are also applied to him as author in the *Shiji* and later texts, in particular his sense of rightness and ritual order. Yet other aspects of the Kongzi persona seem to show a particular Han perspective: his subtle phrasing, his unique perspicaciousness in identifying the unicorn and other portents, his sensibilities as a reader, his sage nature as the “uncrowned king,” his intense emotion, his desire for recognition and quest for posterity. It would not have escaped an author like Sima Qian that all these traits were precisely the ones that he claimed for himself.⁸⁹ We are well advised to consider how much the Kongzi persona in the *Shiji* depends on his biographer and therefore should not be projected back into earlier sources, including the *Lunyu*. According to the Kongzi biography in the *Shiji*, Kongzi becomes involved with the classics only toward the end of his failed career.⁹⁰ When after fourteen years of unsuccessful travel, he finally returns home to Lu 魯, he begins to talk about good government in terms that no reader can fail to relate to Sima Qian’s personal fate (and that of his father): “Good government,” Kongzi is made to pronounce, “lies in the selection of ministers” (政在選臣); and then he goes on to explain that in order to lead the people, one does not rely on rewards but on the good moral example of the ruler. Perhaps unsurprisingly, “thereafter Lu in the end could not make use of Kongzi, and Kongzi also did not seek office” (然魯終不能用孔子，孔子亦不求仕).⁹¹ Just like Mengzi, who retires after not having been employed,⁹² Kongzi advises his ruler in vain and moves to the fringes; and also like Mengzi, he then turns to writing as the logical consequence of having been rejected as an adviser.

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89 Here, I paraphrase David Schaberg’s (2001a: 257) fine observation with respect to the *Zuo-zhuan* compilers, namely, that “the historiographers . . . could not have failed to recognize what they had in common with the men whose deeds they were commemorating.” For extensive discussion of how much of Kongzi Sima Qian saw in himself, see Durrant 1995.

90 See also Kongzi’s involvement with all the classics in Sima Qian’s “Self-Narrative” (*Shiji* 130.3296–3297), where particular emphasis is placed on the *Chunqiu*.

91 *Shiji* 47.1935.

92 *Shiji* 74.2343. Zhao Qi 趙歧 (d. 201), the author of the earliest extant commentary of the *Mengzi* (and possible organizer of the *Mengzi* as a book), emphasizes this parallel between Mengzi and Kongzi. Hunter (2014: 73–74) suggests that Zhao Qi may have gone so far as to structure and title the *Mengzi* chapters in order to stress the connection with the *Lunyu*.

The *Huainanzi*—perhaps together with the writings attributed to Dong Zhongshu—provides evidence that the attribution of the *Chunqiu* to Kongzi predates the *Shiji*. However, the *Huainanzi* may slightly postdate a possible compilation window for the *Lunyu* toward the beginning of Emperor Wu's reign, the approximate date proposed by Hunter, as do Dong Zhongshu's compositions (which could even be significantly later). This would leave us with the *Mengzi* and *Gongyang zhuan* passages as our only available—and highly tenuous—references to the connection between Kongzi and the *Chunqiu*. In other words, the compilers of the *Lunyu* may not have been aware of this connection at all, which would be a fine explanation for their failure to mention the *Chunqiu*, let alone Kongzi's authorship of it. Yet on the other hand, we must remain alive to the fact that so much of the textual world of Warring States, Qin, and Han China is lost to us. There is every possibility that tomorrow, some excavated manuscript will plainly state, "Kongzi made the *Springs and Autumns*." *And then what?* Let us therefore assume, if only for the sake of the argument, that the *Lunyu* compilers of the mid-second century BCE were indeed aware of this very phrase. Why did they decide—and *why were they free*—not to include it in their representation of the Master?

One explanation for this decision might be found in the way the *Chunqiu* was read in the Han—the very way that made it so potent in political discourse. While the text rarely served as an authoritative "proof text" as the *Shi* and the *Shu* were rhetorically invoked to cap philosophical and political arguments, it offered (a) a repository of *applicable* precedents together with (b) a model of political judgment and criticism available to the newly emerging class of scholar-officials. In this combination, the text extended the "oppositional stance"⁹³ of the pre-Qin philosophers to the new class of career classicists—the salaried Ru scholars at the imperial court. If the *Shu* was frequently invoked in imperial edicts,⁹⁴ it was because it represented the royal voice. By contrast, the *Chunqiu*, as read through the *Gongyang*, *Guliang*, and *Zuo* traditions, provided the model of the upright minister and noble adviser whose wisdom was as often ignored as it was heeded. In other words, if the voice of the *Documents* could be appropriated as the imperial voice, the voice of the *Chunqiu* and its three traditions was available to those speaking truth to power. After all, this was the role by which Kongzi himself, as the "uncrowned king," was defined: the sage king who, in Heaven's view, replaces the worldly kings. As scholars since Chen Renxi in the late Ming have repeatedly noted, the *Shiji* suggests that Kongzi's entire involvement with all of the Six Arts (and Five Classics) derived from his

93 See Lewis 1999: chap. 2, esp. 70–73.

94 As noted by Michael Hunter (personal communication).

experience of “not being employed” (*bu yong* 不用)—neither abroad nor after his final return to his home state of Lu. Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 100), who in his *Lunheng* 論衡 (*Balanced Discussions*) refers to Kongzi’s authorship of the *Chunqiu* some twenty times (but barely to his engagement with the other classics), goes so far as to assert that “had Kongzi become king, the *Springs and Autumns* would not have arisen” (使孔子得王,《春秋》不作).⁹⁵ In this, he echoes not only Sima Qian’s genealogy of suffering authors but also a *taishigong yue* comment in the *Shiji* on the writing of another *Chunqiu* text, this one by Excellency Yu 虞卿 (Yu Qing; third century BCE): like Kongzi, Excellency Yu is said to have written the *Yushi chunqiu* 虞氏春秋 (*Mr. Yu’s Springs and Autumns*) in order to “show himself to later generations” (自見於後世):

However, had Excellency Yu not gone through hardship and grief, one might say that he also would not have been able to compose writings and show himself to later generations.

然虞卿非窮愁，亦不能著書以自見於後世云。⁹⁶

But perhaps something even simpler and more obvious is behind Wang Chong’s comment: a text like the *Chunqiu* cannot be the work of a king. In its reading as a work of “praise and blame” (*baobian* 褒貶), it can only be a text speaking upward to power, not one speaking downward from there. The figure of Kongzi as a failed political adviser only enhanced its critical stance and trustworthiness.

What further made the text both powerful and problematic was its association with an age of moral decline, as is emphasized in so many passages—starting with the *Mengzi*—quoted above; like none of the other classics, it was the very product of a corrupt time. When a Han official invoked the *Chunqiu* to speak, directly or indirectly, in the voice of Kongzi, he immediately assumed a position that was doubly fraught: as a morally superior yet at best marginally powerful person speaking toward his ruler, and as a man whose appropriation of the *Chunqiu* could carry the implication of criticizing his own times. Considering the constant factionalism that marked political debate throughout the Han, such thoughts would never have been far away, neither for the officials nor for their emperors. In fact, the issue is addressed head-on in Sima Qian’s “Self-Narrative” that concludes the *Shiji*. In an exchange with Grandee Hu Sui 壺遂, Sima defends his own composition of a work of history by saying

95 Huang 1990: 19/82.1152 (“Shu jie” 書解).

96 *Shiji* 76.2376. For further discussion, see Kern 2015.

that it is precisely *not* like the *Chunqiu*, that is, a work of political criticism. To his praise of Kongzi's work that "to bring order to an age of chaos and to return it to correctness, nothing comes even close to the *Springs and Autumns*" (撥亂世反之正，莫近於《春秋》), Hu Sui retorts,

Since in Kongzi's time, above there was no enlightened lord, below [Kongzi] could not gain employment. Therefore, he made the *Springs and Autumns*. ... Today, as you, sir, above have met an enlightened Son of Heaven, below you have secured a position; the ten thousand matters are complete, each having been placed in correct order. In what you discourse upon, what is it that you wish to explain?

孔子之時，上無明君，下不得任用，故作《春秋》...今夫子上遇明天子，下得守職，萬事既具，咸各序其宜，夫子所論，欲以何明？

This prompts Sima Qian to offer his remarkable disclaimer, dripping with irony, self-effacement, and accusation:

Yet if servicemen and worthies are capable but not employed, it is the shame of one who holds the state [i.e., his emperor]; and if the ruler above is enlightened and sagacious but the fame of his virtue is not spread, it is the fault of the officials. Moreover, I have enjoyed holding my office, but to discard and not record the flourishing virtue of the enlightened sage and to erase and not transmit the accomplishments of the meritorious ministers, hereditary houses, dignitaries, and grandees and to let the words of the former men [of virtue] fall away would be the greatest of all crimes. What I call [my task of] transmitting affairs from the past is [merely] to put what has come down from the earlier generations into good order and balance, and it is not what one calls "making"; thus, your comparing [my work] to the *Springs and Autumns* is mistaken.

且士賢能而不用，有國者之恥；主上明聖而德不布聞，有司之過也。且余嘗掌其官，廢明聖盛德不載，滅功臣世家賢大夫之業不述，墮先人所言，罪莫大焉。余所謂述故事，整齊其世傳，非所謂作也，而君比之於《春秋》，謬矣。⁹⁷

Here is what Sima Qian manages to say in a most eloquent act of affirmation by way of denial: First, Kongzi made the *Chunqiu* in response to an age of

⁹⁷ *Shiji* 130.3297–3300.

moral decline. Thus, his work not merely offers historical criticism but is the foremost way “to bring order to an age of chaos and return it to correctness.” Second, because Sima’s own time is blessed with an enlightened sage, there cannot be anything to criticize. Third, it *would* be a ruler’s shame not to employ (*bu yong* 不用, the very phrase Sima uses elsewhere for Kongzi’s fate) the worthies—which, as it happens, is precisely what Emperor Wu did to Sima Tan 司馬談 (who in 110 BCE died out of grief over the humiliation) and then to Sima Qian himself (who was forced to choose between suicide and castration). Fourth, it would then be the historian’s greatest crime not to record the worthies of his time (who, just like those from the past, suffer from neglect and abuse and whose virtue would otherwise be forgotten)—a direct echo of the description of Kongzi’s efforts in *Shiji* chapter 61, “The Biography of Boyi” (Boyi liezhuan 伯夷列傳), and another slight aimed at Emperor Wu. Fifth, in claiming that his work therefore cannot be compared to the *Chunqiu*, he appropriates Kongzi’s most famous disclaimer, “I transmit but do not make” (述而不作), pronounced in *Lunyu* 7/1.⁹⁸ In short, Sima Qian artfully concurs with Hu Sui that indeed he is a second Confucius; and his work, a new *Chunqiu*. This is the climate of Western Han intellectual life, and we cannot think about the role of the *Lunyu* in the Han—and its relation to the *Chunqiu*—without thinking about Han political debates.

There is very limited evidence that the *Chunqiu* was part of the upbringing of members of the imperial family. For the year 123/122 BCE, the *Hanshu* notes that Emperor Wu had his crown prince, Liu Ju 劉據 (Wei taizi 衛太子), tutored in the Gongyang teaching of the text; in addition, Liu Ju also received the Guliang teaching.⁹⁹ I do not know what to make of this singular case other than to point out how exceptional it is. Fifty years later, shortly after 74 BCE, Emperor Xuan heard that Liu Ju had been “fond of” (*hao* 好; as opposed to “be instructed in”) the Guliang teaching; after some consultation with his scholars at court, the emperor deemed it appropriate to promote the *Guliang zhuan*.¹⁰⁰ The very fact that the initial event was remembered two generations later suggests that it was highly exceptional. By contrast, the *Hanshu* repeatedly mentions the *Lunyu* as one of the central texts for the education of the crown prince and other members of the ruling family,¹⁰¹ making it an imperial text par excellence. All these mentions also include references to one of the other classics—that is,

98 As Michael Hunter has pointed out to me (personal communication), Sima Qian himself does not explicitly attribute the phrase *shu er bu zuo* to Kongzi.

99 *Hanshu* 63.2741.

100 *Hanshu* 88.3618.

101 *Hanshu* 53.2428, 68.2947, 71.3039, 75.3159, 78.3282, and 81.3347. See also Hunter’s essay in the present volume (chap. 3).

either the *Shi*, the *Shu*, the *Yi*, or instructions in ritual—yet not once to the *Chunqiu*. Was it seen as incompatible with the *Lunyu*? The Kongzi of the *Chunqiu* is by definition a man of judgment and argument, most keenly interested—as is made explicit repeatedly when Han authors talk about the text—in future applications of the experiences from the past, including his subtle but nevertheless harsh criticism of rulers. The Kongzi of the *Lunyu*, by contrast, is overall a less explicitly political figure and, indeed, is notably deferential toward political authority.¹⁰² He does not speak for the ruler, nor does he speak up to or against the ruler. He speaks only for himself, advocating a set of social norms and moral ideals that could easily be accommodated to the education of the imperial crown prince.

Given our limited evidence, it would be quite hazardous to state any of this in absolute terms. But the closer and longer one looks at the Han, the less surprising the absence of the *Chunqiu* in the *Lunyu* seems to become. The traditional view that sees Kongzi's authorship of the *Chunqiu* as central to how early thinkers envisioned the Master has little support before Sima Qian and remains strikingly limited even for another century after him.

Epilogue

It should be clear from the foregoing pages that I am not primarily interested in the question of whether or not “Kongzi made the *Springs and Autumns*.” Whether Kongzi was regarded as its author (in whatever sense) or as its supreme interpreter does not change our understanding of the text. For the dating of the *Lunyu*, the issue cannot be used to falsify a Western Han compilation date. The more interesting question would be why Kongzi's authorship was suddenly so important to Sima Qian while barely ever mentioned before—and how it then disappeared again from the textual record until several generations after Sima Qian. In light of the fact that the *Shiji* was not widely known or available during the first century BCE, there seems to have been some undercurrent of intellectual history where this claim was considered credible or even important; moreover, such an undercurrent, invisible to us today, may have existed already in the late Warring States. Our surviving sources are too fragmentary; we simply do not know.

Whatever the case, it still remains unclear what “Kongzi zuo *Chunqiu*” 孔子作春秋 may have meant initially—for example, in the *Mengzi* (if that passage should date from the Warring States). Before Sima Qian, one could accept

¹⁰² Hunter 2017: 287–288.

Kongzi as the supreme authority on the *Chunqiu* without implying that he was the author of the text. For once, we could take his statement “I transmit but do not make” seriously. In this case, what Kongzi does is not passive transmission but active interpretation: he brings the text from the past to life. As such, *shu* is not less than *zuo*. While only the sages “create” or “make,” they depend on posterity to “transmit,” that is, to reactivate and reconstitute the meaning of antiquity for an ever-evolving present time. This—not creation as such—is the principal significance of Kongzi’s involvement with the *Chunqiu* in all early passages, including those (such as the one in *Han Feizi*) that cannot be constructed as direct statements on authorship. Kongzi is the person who makes the *Chunqiu* speak—not about himself but about the past that has given rise to the present.¹⁰³ “Kongzi *zuo Chunqiu*,” at least initially, may thus best be understood as “Kongzi gave the *Springs and Autumns* its meaning,” and made that meaning matter. He did not “make” the text but “augmented” (*augere*) it. What is more, the title *Chunqiu* may then refer to more than just the text we have: namely, to the entire *discourse* and field of knowledge of the past as represented by the text and its interpretation.¹⁰⁴ Or put in other terms: “Kongzi *zuo Chunqiu*” refers to giving rise to the interpretation of the recent past through textual means—which is what elevates the *Chunqiu* to the level of a classic.¹⁰⁵

Without this interpretive appropriation, the court chronicle of Lu would have remained just that: an annalistic list of events, stored in the archive. While Sima Qian wants us to believe that Kongzi created the *Chunqiu* out of his personal urge and necessity, it may well be the other way around: the text needed Kongzi in order to become a classic that, to repeat Italo Calvino’s beautiful observation, “has never finished saying what it has to say.” But to assume the durability and authority of a classic, it did not really need Kongzi the author; it needed Kongzi the “augmenter” and interpreter (just as, from a Han perspective, the *Shi*, *Shu*, and *Yi* needed Kongzi’s editorial and commentarial involvement). Authorship without interpretable intent means literally nothing, while on the other side, interpretation does not require authorship.

From this perspective—which matches how Kongzi is portrayed across early sources, including in the *Lunyu*—Kongzi becomes a function of the process

103 As Hunter (2017: 54–56 and chap. 2) notes, Kongzi is unique in his status as a universal commentator.

104 I assume the same situation to explain the inflated numbers of characters that the *Shiji* notes for many early “Masters” (*zi* 子) texts; see Kern 2015.

105 For a dense and sophisticated analysis of the mutually constitutive relationship between Kongzi as sage author and the *Chunqiu* as canonical writing, see Guo 2016. Guo’s discussion of the discursive practices of Chinese classicism since the Han touches on many of the issues raised in the present essay.

of the text's canonization. Before that, he already is the established authority on the *Shi*, and it is easy to see how this authority is then transposed to the other classics, including the *Chunqiu*. But with the latter text, Kongzi also takes on a new role: more than being the transmitter and teacher of the glorious era of high antiquity, he is now also the interpreter of the recent past and even of his own present time, in which he intervenes by way of his text. Among the classics, the *Chunqiu* is the true bridge to antiquity, as it connects an earlier past all the way down to Kongzi's own time and even to his death. It is therefore also the one text that can be claimed to have arisen only at a time of decline—which, finally, with the appearance of the unicorn, seems to collapse the moment of interpretation into that of creation, and the interpreter into a man of political and even personal despair.

As noted above, the original prestige and authority of the text may have rested not with the figure of an author but with the text's hermeneutic possibilities to reveal the past as meaningful for the present. The author figure—as “the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning”—was then both: a function that opened the text to a *particular*, unified interpretive perspective and one that restricted it to just that. It enabled the text to mean *something* while impeding it to mean something else. But if the original connection of Kongzi with the *Chunqiu* turned a corpus of annalistic records into a classic of hermeneutic needs so that it could continue “saying what it has to say,” Sima Qian's account, together with late Western Han ideological and bibliographical purposes and practices, helped to stabilize further the significance of the *Chunqiu* as Kongzi's “work” and by this also to limit its possible range of interpretation.

Textual repertoires and traditional records do not have authors; when they acquire authors, they become “works.” With Sima Qian and then in the late Western Han, the attribution of the classics to Kongzi cannot be divorced from this textualization, definition, and stabilization of the traditional canon into a fixed set of books. But even by 140 BCE, this development had yet to occur, whether with the alleged establishment of the “erudites for the Five Classics” (五經博士) in 136 BCE or significantly later.¹⁰⁶ In other words, the Kongzi of the *Lunyu* may have arrived just a bit too early to participate in this endeavor.

106 For the most systematic review—and rejection—of the claim in *Hanshu* 6.159 that Emperor Wu “established the erudites for the Five Classics” (*zhi wujing boshi* 置五經博士), see Fukui 2005: 109–258. Fukui argues for a much later date.

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