



## The “Masters” in the *Shiji*

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### Abstract

The intellectual history of the ancient philosophical “Masters” depends to a large extent on accounts in early historiography, most importantly Sima Qian’s *Shiji* which provides a range of longer and shorter biographies of Warring States thinkers. Yet the ways in which personal life experiences, ideas, and the creation of texts are interwoven in these accounts are diverse and uneven and do not add up to a reliable guide to early Chinese thought and its protagonists. In its selective approach to different thinkers, the *Shiji* under-represents significant parts of the textual heritage while developing several distinctive models of authorship, from anonymous compilations of textual repertoires to the experience of personal hardship and political frustration as the precondition for turning into a writer.

### Résumé

L’histoire intellectuelle des “maîtres” de la philosophie chinoise ancienne dépend pour une large part de ce qui est dit d’eux dans l’historiographie ancienne, tout particulièrement le *Shiji* de Sima Qian, qui offre une série de biographies plus ou moins étendues de penseurs de l’époque des Royaumes Combattants. Cependant leur vie, leurs idées et les conditions de création de leurs textes se combinent dans ces biographies de façon très inégale, si bien que l’ensemble ne saurait être considéré comme l’équivalent d’un guide de la pensée chinoise ancienne et de ses auteurs sur lequel on pourrait s’appuyer en toute confiance. Dans sa façon d’approcher sélectivement les différents penseurs, le *Shiji* tend à sous-représenter des secteurs significatifs de l’héritage textuel; en même temps il développe plusieurs modèles distinctifs de rapport entre texte et auteur, depuis la compilation anonyme de répertoires textuels jusqu’à l’expérience du malheur et à la frustration politique posées comme conditions pour devenir écrivain.

### Keywords

Sima Qian, *Shiji*, Masters texts, philosophy, early China, historiography, intellectual history

The intellectual history of the ancient “Masters” (*zi* 子) depends to a large extent on accounts in early historiography, that is, *Shiji* 史記 and *Hanshu* 漢書. While Sima Tan’s 司馬談 (d. 110 BCE) “Essentials of the Six Intellectual Lineages” (“*Liu jia zhi yao*” 六家之要) refrains from identifying individual texts or thinkers,<sup>1</sup> both are neatly arranged in the *Hanshu* “Monograph on Arts and Writings” (“*Yiwen zhi*” 藝文志).<sup>2</sup> That said, in its biographical sections, the *Shiji* does include accounts of a certain number of authors who in the “*Yiwen zhi*” are listed as “Masters.” The present paper examines how these authors are represented.

An excellent starting point is Griet Vankeerberghen’s recent account of “Texts and Authors in the *Shiji*.”<sup>3</sup> Pointing to excavated texts, Vankeerberghen reminds us that “the texts presented in the *Shiji* may be as different, in title and content, from our received texts as from archaeologically retrieved manuscripts.”<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Esther Klein has used received texts—prominently among them the *Shiji*—to show that the Western Han (and Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 [ca. 145–ca. 85 BCE]) *Zhuangzi* 莊子 most likely looked very different from our received text, and that in particular, it did not privilege (or even contain) the “inner chapters” (*nei-pian* 內篇) that in the later tradition are celebrated as the intellectual core of the *Zhuangzi* and as such are generally attributed to Zhuang Zhou’s 莊周 (late fourth/early third century BCE?) own brush.<sup>5</sup> Both approaches inform us that when reading about the “Masters” in the *Shiji*, we cannot assume that their received eponymous texts are largely identical with the ones that underlie their representation there.

In thinking about the early “Masters,” we also must once and for all abandon the traditional approach that treats the “Masters” as the personal authors of these eponymous texts. To some extent, this requires going against the accounts in the *Shiji* where such authorship is claimed in routine fashion. Yet despite the remaining occasional appeal to such received wisdom<sup>6</sup> and its widely unquestioned acceptance in Chinese

<sup>1</sup> *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 130.3288–92.

<sup>2</sup> *Hanshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), ch. 30.

<sup>3</sup> In *China’s Early Empires: A Re-appraisal*, ed. Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 461–79.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 462.

<sup>5</sup> Klein, “Were there ‘Inner Chapters’ in the Warring States? A New Examination of Evidence about the *Zhuangzi*,” *T’oung Pao* 96 (2010): 299–369.

<sup>6</sup> Recently, e.g., Wiebke Denecke, *The Dynamics of Masters Literature: Early Chinese*

scholarship as well as in contemporary Western studies of Chinese philosophy, there is overwhelming evidence that most—if not indeed *all*—of our received “Masters” texts are composite works that stage their respective “Masters” rather than being authored by them.<sup>7</sup> I consider the vast majority of early Chinese texts to be circumscribed anthologies or repertoires of material that were not “written up” (in acts of individual authorship) but rather “edited down” (in processes of selection) into the books we now have, a process that entirely dissolves the notion of individual authorship in favor of the roles of compilers and editors.<sup>8</sup> Thus, I view the *Shiji*’s strong emphasis on individual historical personalities as authors of their texts as an anachronistic representation dating to the late second century BCE, and possibly driven by Sima Qian’s personal experience.<sup>9</sup>

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According to Vankeerberghen’s survey, the *Shiji* does not mention authors evenly throughout its many chapters. Of the sixty-nine chapters of “Arrayed Traditions” (*liezhuan* 列傳),<sup>10</sup> only eleven attribute texts to individual authors. There also are certain clusters of chapters that speak of pre-Qin authors: chapters 62 through 65 speak of eleven fourth- or third-century BCE thinkers<sup>11</sup> who—beginning with the “Yiwen zhi”—are traditionally identified as Legalists, Daoists, or military strategists (including Guan Zhong 管仲 [Guanzi 管子], Lao Er 老耳 [Laozi 老子],

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*Thought from Confucius to Han Feizi* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2010), or Paul Fischer, *Shizi: China’s First Syncretist* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> For a perceptive analysis, see Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1999), ch. 2.

<sup>8</sup> For a compelling analysis of the case of the *Analects*, see Michael Hunter, “Sayings of Confucius, Deselected” (Ph.D. diss. Princeton Univ., 2012), and his forthcoming *Confucius Beyond the Analects* (Leiden: Brill). Obviously, there remains a small number of texts that do not fit this model, the *Zhou Yi* 周易 and perhaps also the *Laozi* 老子 being prominent examples.

<sup>9</sup> On the representation of authorship in the *Shiji*, see Ke Mading 柯馬丁 (Martin Kern), “*Shiji* li de ‘zuozhe’ gainian” 《史記》裏的「作者」概念, in *Shiji xue yu shijie hanxue xubian* 史記學與世界漢學續編, ed. Lee Chi-hsiang 李紀祥 and 柯馬丁 (Taipei: Tangshan chubanshe, forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> Not counting the final chapter 130, the “The Lord Archivist’s Self-Narration” (“Taishigong zixu” 太史公自序).

<sup>11</sup> In the following, I refrain from noting dates for these pre-imperial thinkers, as most of these dates are either unknown or open to doubt.

Zhuang Zhou, Shen Buhai 申不害, Han Fei 韓非, and Sun Wu 孫武 [Sunzi 孫子]), and chapter 68 is devoted exclusively to the paradigmatic Legalist Shang Yang 商鞅. Chapter 74 includes no fewer than sixteen authors of various persuasions (most famous among them Meng Ke 孟軻 [Mengzi 孟子], Zou Yan 鄒衍, Xun Kuang 荀況 [Xunzi 荀子], Gongsun Long 公孫龍, and Mo Di 墨翟 [Mozi 墨子]); part of *Shiji* 76 is devoted to the statesman Excellency Yu 虞卿, while *Shiji* 77 introduces another military strategist, Wei Wuji 魏無忌 (Wei Gongzi 魏公子). Finally, distinctly separate from these chapters, the *Shiji* provides the biographies of Qu Yuan 屈原 (ch. 84) and Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (ch. 85). While authors also appear in some unexpected places such as in the preface to the “Annalistic Table on the Twelve Lords” (“Shi’er zhuhou nianbiao” 十二諸侯年表, ch. 14), it is worth noting that within the “Arrayed Traditions,” the initial cluster of authors appears in the four chapters immediately following the programmatic first (“Boyi liezhuan” 伯夷列傳, ch. 61), and that except for Qu Yuan and Lü Buwei, all biographies of authors are clustered in roughly the first quarter of the sixty-nine “Arrayed Traditions.” (Neither Qu Yuan nor Lü Buwei—nor, for that matter, Kongzi 孔子—should be regarded as “Masters.”) Furthermore, none of the group biographies of authors arranges them according to ideological coherence—at least not along the intellectual lines provided in the *Hanshu* “Yiwen zhi.”<sup>12</sup>

Compared to both the “Yiwen zhi” and recently excavated manuscripts, the *Shiji* is far from comprehensive in its listing of authors and texts; the “Masters” mentioned here are but a fraction of those listed in the “Yiwen zhi.” This limited treatment of textual composition even extends to Sima Qian’s own time: the *Shiji*’s account of the Western Han “poetic exposition” (*fu* 賦) is incoherent, highly incomplete, and does not even mention Sima Qian himself as a *fu* author even though in the “Yiwen zhi,” he is credited with eight *fu* compositions.<sup>13</sup> It is not that the well-known and prolific *fu* authors<sup>14</sup>—in their majority being Sima

<sup>12</sup> As also noted by Lee Ting-mien, “A Methodology of Interpreting Early Chinese Texts: Explanatory Power, Intertextuality, and Coherence,” paper presented at the conference “Reading the Masters: Contexts, Textual Structures, and Hermeneutic Strategies,” Masaryk University (Brno, Czech Republic), September 5–6, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> *Hanshu* 30.1749.

<sup>14</sup> Including Mei Sheng 枚乘 (d. 141 BCE), Zhuang Zhu 莊助 (d. 122 BCE; in the *Hanshu* called Yan Zhu 嚴助), Kong Zang 孔臧 (ca. 201–123 BCE), Yuqiu Shouwang 吾丘壽王 (ca. 156–110

Qian’s contemporaries and residing at Emperor Wu’s 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE) court<sup>15</sup>—are not mentioned in the *Shiji*. Most appear in various contexts, and some even are important enough to merit their own biographies, but they are not mentioned as authors of texts.<sup>16</sup> We do not know what to make of these omissions, especially in light of the fact that other historical figures—such as Jia Yi 賈誼 (ca. 200–168 BCE)<sup>17</sup> or Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179–117 BCE)<sup>18</sup>—have their *Shiji* biographies filled almost entirely with extensive writings attributed to them. If records of authorship even for Sima Qian’s contemporaries get short thrift in the *Shiji*, it is not surprising that accounts of earlier periods are just as sketchy. All we can say is that the inclusion of authors in the *Shiji* is selective in the extreme, and that we do not understand the principles behind these choices.<sup>19</sup>

Before continuing to the representation of “Masters” in the *Shiji*, one should add a brief note on the authorship of this representation itself: purely for the sake of convenience, let us assume there is a single person who wrote the various accounts of “Masters” texts in the *Shiji*, and let us call this imagined author Sima Qian. In reality, I very much doubt this assumption. There is too much in the *Shiji* that seems to come from a later time (including, for example, the Sima Xiangru biography),<sup>20</sup> and biographies like those of Qu Yuan or Laozi 老子 are too poorly patched

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BCE), Zhufu Yan 主父偃 (d. 126 BCE), Zhu Maichen 朱買臣 (fl. 127 BCE), Liu An 劉安 (175–122 BCE), Liu Yan 劉攽 (fl. mid-second century BCE), Mei Gao 枚皋 (fl. 130–110 BCE), Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (154–93 BCE), Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 195–115 BCE), or Zhuang Ji 莊忌 (ca. 188–105 BCE; in the *Hanshu* called Yan Ji 嚴忌).

<sup>15</sup> For an excellent account of the literary climate at the Wudi court, including the *fu* writers active there, see David R. Knechtges, “The Emperor and Literature: Emperor Wu of the Han,” in *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China*, ed. Frederick P. Brandauer and Chun-chieh Huang (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1994), 51–76.

<sup>16</sup> For the full account, see Kern, “The ‘Biography of Sima Xiangru’ and the Question of the *Fu* in Sima Qian’s *Shiji*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123 (2003): 303–16.

<sup>17</sup> *Shiji* 84.2491–2504.

<sup>18</sup> *Shiji* ch. 117.

<sup>19</sup> Vankeerberghen, “Texts and Authors in the *Shiji*,” 465, believes that “*Shiji*’s selection of authors and texts, their placement within the *Shiji* as a whole, and the specific rhetoric employed while presenting them are likely to be significant.” This may be so in some specific instances but may not be the case in general.

<sup>20</sup> See Kern, “The ‘Biography of Sima Xiangru’ and the Question of the *Fu* in Sima Qian’s *Shiji*.” There (p. 303, n. 2), I also note a series of further studies that have called other *Shiji* chapters into doubt.

together to come from the same Sima Qian who elsewhere appears as a superior stylist.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, there are common features among the depictions of authors in the *Shiji* that may or may not reflect a single voice. Let us call this voice Sima Qian simply because this makes things a lot easier than not having a name for it at all.

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As noted above with the example of the *Zhuangzi*, and as will be further seen below, this author of the various accounts of the “Masters” texts appears to have had a very different knowledge of these texts, when compared to our own, or a strikingly different approach to them. First, more often than not he does not speak of a single book but of individual essays; and second, he tends to mention only a small number of essays, compared to the many more titled chapters in our received books. Moreover, it might be noted, the same text can be treated in different ways in two different chapters of the *Shiji*, possibly undermining the assumption that both come from the same author.<sup>22</sup>

When speaking of texts—which he mostly calls “writings” (*shu* 書), but sometimes also by particular genres as in the case of the different sections of the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋—Sima Qian on occasion mentions very large textual corpora (repeatedly “more than one hundred thousand words”) while at the same time naming only a small number of essays that in their received counterparts are at most the length of a modern book chapter. (An exception is the mention of “The Light and the Heavy” [“Qing zhong” 輕重] which in the received *Guanzi* is not a chapter but an entire section of chapters.) Aside from the massive *Lüshi chunqiu*,<sup>23</sup> the *Springs and Autumns Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) attributed to Kongzi, and a small number of cases where Sima Qian reports that a variety of texts were grouped together under a single title (see below),

<sup>21</sup> For a translation and analysis of the Qu Yuan biography, see David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 51–66.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., the descriptions of both *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 and *Yushi chunqiu* 虞氏春秋, discussed by Paul R. Goldin in his review of Knoblock and Riegel’s translation of *Lüshi chunqiu* in *Early Medieval China* 7 (2001): 114–15, n. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Which the *Shiji* (85.2510) characterizes as a collection of “eight surveys, six discourses, and twelve almanacs” (八覽、六論、十二紀), matching, albeit not in this order, the received edition of the text.

there is no indication that he thought of the various “writings” of Warring States authors as “books”; nor is it clear what formulaic expressions such as “several tens of thousand” or “more than one hundred thousand” words really mean: consider that the writings of Zhuangzi are said to be of “more than one hundred thousand words” (其著書十餘萬言) while the received *Zhuangzi* contains less than two thirds of that. One way to explain the larger number is by reference to the fact that many early texts apparently existed in various parallel versions, which led the imperial bibliographer Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE), when collating texts like *Xunzi* 荀子 or *Guanzi* 管子, to remove some ninety per cent (!) of his material as “duplicates.”<sup>24</sup> These cannot have been true duplicates in the sense of more or less identical copies, because such copies would have been nothing more than multiple material objects. To exist as separate manuscripts in the imperial library, they probably would have needed to be sufficiently different and mutually independent from one another, such as different expressions or textual arrangements of the same ideas within the overall textual repertoire associated with *Xunzi* or *Guanzi*. In this way, the “more than one hundred thousand words” that Sima Qian attributes to Zhuangzi may not have been all unique texts but, instead, may have included a multiplicity of writings that were considered to belong to a common corpus and whose coherence with one another may well have been found in their partial overlap.

At the same time, not all of these materials were considered equally significant. For essays attributed to Zhuangzi, Sima Qian mentions a mere four titles (or five, depending on how one parses the text),<sup>25</sup> with none from the celebrated “inner chapters.” For the *Han Feizi*, another text of “more than one hundred thousand words,” he gives six titles, including “*Nei wai chu*” 內外儲 (“Inner and Outer Collections [of Persuasions]”) that in the received text occupy a total of six chapters; he also, uniquely among the pre-Qin “Masters” texts, includes the entire text of “*Shui nan*” 說難 (“The Difficulties of Persuasion”) to fill most of the

<sup>24</sup> See Piet van der Loon, “On the Transmission of Kuan-tzu,” *T'oung Pao* 41 (1952): 361 (for the *Guanzi*), and John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1988–94), vol. 1, 106–7 (for the *Xunzi*).

<sup>25</sup> *Shiji* 63, 2143–44; see Klein, “Were there ‘Inner Chapters’ in the Warring States?,” 318–19, n. 53; also William H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed. *The Grand Scribe's Records*, vol. 7: *The Memoirs of Pre-Han China* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), 24, n. 25.

space of Han Fei's biography.<sup>26</sup> For Guanzi, he provides five titles, including "The Light and the Heavy" which, like the *Han Feizi's* "Nei wai chu," may have been multiple essays (once again as reflected in the chapter divisions of the received text);<sup>27</sup> for Zou Yan, yet another text of "more than one hundred thousand words," he offers just two titles.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps Sima Qian knew only a fraction of the material even if he was aware of its altogether much larger corpus; alternatively, he may have chosen to focus only on some essays while remaining silent on others, much in the way as for many readers, "Xing'e" 性惡 came to stand for the *Xunzi* altogether—so much so that "readers of later centuries ... seemed not to peruse much" of the entire text beyond this particular chapter.<sup>29</sup>

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To the limited extent that it mentions them altogether, the *Shiji* represents the production of the "Masters" texts in several different ways. Some biographical subjects are depicted primarily as authors; their biographies contain virtually no other information of substance. Chapter 74, the group biography titled "Mengzi Xun qing liezhuan" 孟子荀卿列傳 ("The Arrayed Traditions of Mengzi and Excellency Xun"), is an excellent example.<sup>30</sup> It begins with a *taishigong yue* 太史公曰 ("the Grand Noble Archivist said")<sup>31</sup> statement immediately making authorship the main topic of the chapter:

<sup>26</sup> *Shiji* 63.2146–55. In noting "six titles," I count "Nei wai chu" as two, an "Inner" and an "Outer Collection [of Persuasions]," corresponding to chapters 30–35 in the received *Han Feizi*.

<sup>27</sup> *Shiji* 62.2136.

<sup>28</sup> *Shiji* 74.2344.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Rakita Goldin, *Confucianism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2011), 72.

<sup>30</sup> For a fine translation of the entire chapter, see Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, vol. 7: *The Memoirs of Pre-Han China*, 179–87. I have adopted some of the phrasing there.

<sup>31</sup> I believe that *taishigong yue* can only be construed in the past tense, because *taishigong* is a retrospective honorific reference that was used either by Sima Qian to refer to his father, Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 BCE), or by a later reader/editor to refer to Sima Qian (who initially may have pronounced himself with a more modest *Qian yue* 遷曰 ("Qian says") or some similar expression. Despite centuries of discussion, the authorial identity behind the *taishigong yue* comments cannot be decided.

Whenever I read the writings of Master Meng and reach the passage where King Hui of Liang asks “By which means can you profit my state?,” I cannot but put down the text and sigh.<sup>32</sup>

太史公曰：余讀孟子書，至梁惠王問“何以利吾國”，未嘗不廢書而歎。

As it happens, this refers to the very first line of the received *Mengzi* text—which suggests that for Sima Qian, there was no single book that began this way, or otherwise, he would not be speaking of “reaching” the passage in question. Then, the *taishigong yue* statement continues:

Alas! Profit is truly the beginning of disorder! As for “The Master rarely spoke of profit” [*Lunyu* 論語 9/1], he was constantly on guard against its source. Thus he said “To act out of concern over profit brings much resentment” [*Lunyu* 4/12]. From the Son of Heaven to the common people, how are the ills of the desire for profit different!<sup>33</sup>

嗟乎！利誠亂之始也！夫“子罕言利”者，常放其原也。故曰：“放於利而行，多怨。”自天子至於庶人，好利之弊何以異哉！

In this, Sima Qian makes the *taishigong yue* passage about “the desire for profit” (*hao li* 好利) as if this was the core of the entire group biography. Moreover, he integrates into his text two quotations elsewhere related to Kongzi (found in *Lunyu* 4/12 and 9/1), placing Mengzi’s text directly into the intellectual and textual tradition of the latter; and by invoking Kongzi without explicit attribution, he appears to presume his readers to be familiar with this tradition.

The entire purpose of the brief Mengzi biography that follows this introduction is to provide the circumstances that led to the production of Mengzi’s text. It says virtually nothing about Mengzi’s life. Instead it positions him vis-à-vis the political and intellectual context of the fourth century BCE and marks his writing as the final response to his failure to gain recognition or employment:

Meng Ke was a man from Zou. He received instruction from a disciple of Zisi. After he had mastered the Way, he traveled to serve King Xuan of Qi, but King Xuan could not use him. He proceeded to Liang, but when King Hui of Liang did not consider his words effective, he was regarded as aloof and detached from reality. At

<sup>32)</sup> *Shiji* 74.2343.

<sup>33)</sup> *Ibid.*

the time, Qin used Lord Shang to enrich the state and strengthen the troops; Chu and Wei used Wu Qi for military victories and to weaken their enemies; Kings Wei and Xuan of Qi used men like Master Sun and Tian Ji, whereupon the many lords turned eastward and paid respect to Qi. All under Heaven was committed to forming alliances and joining forces, holding attacks and incursions in high esteem. Yet Meng Ke set forth the virtue of Tang, Yu, and the three dynasties, and thus, wherever he went he did not fit in. He retired and together with men like Wan Zhang discoursed upon the *Odes* and the *Documents*, transmitted the intent of Zhongni, and made the *Mengzi* in seven chapters. Later, there were the men associated with the Masters Zou.<sup>34</sup>

孟軻，騷人也。受業子思之門人。道既通，游事齊宣王，宣王不能用。適梁，梁惠王不果所言，則見以為迂遠而闕於事情。當是之時，秦用商君，富國彊兵；楚、魏用吳起，戰勝弱敵；齊威王、宣王用孫子、田忌之徒，而諸侯東面朝齊。天下方務於合從連衡，以攻伐為賢，而孟軻乃述唐、虞、三代之德，是以所如者不合。退而與萬章之徒序詩書，述仲尼之意，作孟子七篇。其後有騷子之屬。

The story of Mengzi is thus a story of failed ambition, where only the failure of any political accomplishment, together with the experience of a world in turmoil, finally turns the protagonist into an author. What Mengzi the man could not achieve in life is now given over to *Mengzi* the text. This text is modeled on the ideas of high antiquity as much as Mengzi's biography is modeled on Kongzi's example. According to his *Shiji* biography, Kongzi only turned to writing after his sagely advice had been rejected: "Lu in the end could not make use of Kongzi, and Kongzi also did not seek office" (魯終不能用孔子，孔子亦不求仕).<sup>35</sup>

Xunzi's biography is equally brief: when he—a man from Zhao—arrived in Qi, the doctrines of Zou Yan, Zou Shi 鄒奭, and Chunyu Kun 淳于髡 were celebrated there. As the Qi court had to fill its positions, Xunzi was thrice elevated to the position of libationer before being slandered (*chan* 讒). He left for Chu where he became Prefect of Lanling, but when his lord died, he was cast aside (*fei* 廢) again. Aghast at the political chaos and the glib scholars around him, he put forward his critiques of the various intellectual lineages, "arranged them in a composition of several tens of thousands of words and died. He was then buried at Lanling" (序列著數萬言而死。因葬蘭陵).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup>) Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>) *Shiji* 47.1935.

<sup>36</sup>) *Shiji* 74.2348.

Remarkably, despite the “several tens of thousands of words” and the fact that Xunzi is mentioned in the title of *Shiji* 74, there is not a shred of information on any of his intellectual positions. His critique of the various intellectual lineages may be an oblique reference to what in the received *Xunzi* is chapter 6, “Against the Twelve Masters” (“Fei shi’er zi” 非十二子), which, according to John Knoblock, “has done more damage to his reputation” than any other part of the *Xunzi*.<sup>37</sup> The chapter attacks Mozi, Shen Dao 慎到, and Tian Pian 田駢—all of whom are mentioned in *Shiji* 74—but then also Zisi and Mengzi; and on the other hand, it criticizes the discourse of the “Five [Modes of Virtuous] Conduct” (*wuxing* 五行).<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, Zou Yan’s biography occupies the lion’s share of *Shiji* 74, succeeding directly Mengzi’s and being followed by those of Chunyu Kun, Shen Dao, Xunzi, Mozi, and a series of others mentioned along the way, including Huan Yuan 環淵, Jiezi 接子, Tian Pian, Zou Shi, Gongsun Long, Juzi 劇子, Li Kui 李悝, Shizi 尸子, Chang Lu 長蘆, and Xuzi 吁子. In terms of their intellectual positions, all these different thinkers cannot be grouped under a header that singles out Mengzi and Xunzi, nor are these two placed in any form of relation to one another. Why, then, is chapter 74 titled the way it is?

According to their biographies there, Mengzi and Xunzi share only two characteristics that set them apart from all others mentioned in the same chapter: first, they remained unsuccessful in life, with Mengzi never attaining a position and Xunzi being slandered in his first appointment and dismissed from his second. For all others, Sima Qian either does not comment on their careers, or—in the cases of Zou Yan and of Chunyu Kun—he mentions their spectacular successes with the lords of their time. Second, both Mengzi and Xunzi were disturbed by the political circumstances of their time, which goes to explain their lack of success.

<sup>37</sup> Knoblock, *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 212.

<sup>38</sup> As Pang Pu 龐樸 has pointed out, *wuxing* here does not refer to the “Five Phases” theory associated with Zou Yan but to the tradition now known from the “Wuxing pian” 五行篇 manuscript from Mawangdui 馬王堆; see Pang Pu, *Zhubo Wuxing pian jiaozhu ji yanjiu* 竹帛《五行》篇校注及研究 (Taipei: Wanjuanlou, 2000), 136; further Kuan-yun Huang, “Xunzi’s Criticism of Zisi—New Perspectives,” *Early China* 37 (2014): 291–325. I thank Paul Goldin for these references.

In fact, at the end of Zou Yan's biography, the *Shiji* falls into a personal voice of judgment:

Such was the respect and ritual honor [Zou Yan] was treated to when traveling among the many lords—how could this be the same as Zhongni looking famished between Chen and Cai, or Meng Ke being in straits in Qi and Liang!<sup>39</sup>  
其游諸侯見尊禮如此，豈與仲尼菜色陳蔡，孟軻困於齊梁同乎哉！

From here, Sima Qian launches a series of examples of upright personalities (once again including Kongzi and Mengzi) who did not compromise their virtue by pleasing the rulers of their time, while those who followed Zou Yan,

such as Chunyu Kun, Shen Dao, Huan Yuan, Jiezi, Tian Pian, or Zou Shi all composed writings to speak about the matters of political order and turmoil in order to ingratiate themselves with the rulers of their time—how can one discuss them all!<sup>40</sup>

如淳于髡、慎到、環淵、接子、田駢、騶奭之徒，各著書言治亂之事，以干世主，豈可勝道哉！

It thus turns out that chapter 74 is far from being a plain account of various thinkers and traditions. With the single exception of Zou Yan, it engages only minimally, if at all, with either the actual biographies or the intellectual positions of the various “Masters.” Many thinkers are simply mentioned by name because “many in our times possess their writings” (世多有其書) so that no further elaboration is needed.<sup>41</sup> About Mo Di, whose brief account is awkwardly appended at the very end of the chapter, Sima Qian only has some hearsay to offer:

Purportedly, Mo Di was a grandee of Song. He was good at [discussing matters of] defensive warfare and brought about the restriction of expenses. Some say he lived in Kongzi's time, others say he lived thereafter.<sup>42</sup>

蓋墨翟，宋之大夫，善守禦，為節用，或曰並孔子時，或曰在其後。

<sup>39)</sup> *Shiji* 74.2344.

<sup>40)</sup> *Shiji* 74.2346.

<sup>41)</sup> *Shiji* 74.2349.

<sup>42)</sup> *Shiji* 74.2350.

It seems clear that Sima Qian knew virtually nothing about either the person or his writings. That he still felt the need to include him here suggests that *Shiji* 74 is meant as a catch-all summary of the more or less well-known thinkers of the past, but without particular interests in their actual biographies or intellectual positions; even in the cases of Mengzi and Xunzi, the chapter’s nominal protagonists, we learn virtually nothing about their lives or ideas. Instead, Sima Qian roughly divides the representatives of the various philosophical traditions into three groups: a large group of those who ingratiate themselves in order to receive respect, honor, and material wealth; an equally large group of others about whom he has nothing to say, or does not feel the need to say anything; and a small minority—Kongzi, Mengzi, Xunzi—who lament the moral and political collapse of the political world, who write against it, and who are willing to suffer in doing so. It is only this last group for whom the chapter seems written; the others are merely a foil or do not matter at all. Recall the initial *taishigong* section with its central focus on the “desire for profit”: this is not merely a theme in the *Mengzi* but serves as the yardstick to measure the moral integrity of *all* Warring States thinkers, writers, and persuaders, and that leads Sima Qian to privilege Mengzi and Xunzi over everyone else mentioned in the chapter. As will be discussed below, this theme is not unique to chapter 74 but central to Sima’s notion of authorship, which in turn has shaped the self-representation of uncounted Chinese intellectuals ever since.

There are other “Masters” in the *Shiji* who are mainly characterized in terms of their thought and textual production. A primary example is Zhuangzi,<sup>43</sup> who is included in another group biography of thinkers and authors, *Shiji* 63, “The Arrayed Traditions of Master Lao and Han Fei” (“Laozi Han Fei liezhuan” 老子韓非列傳). Aside from the initial identification of his place of origin, his name, and the time when he lived, his brief biography is devoted entirely to his thinking and writing; he “slandered the followers of Kongzi and illuminated the techniques of Laozi” (以詆訛孔子之徒，以明老子之術), and his writings were “all empty sayings without reality” (皆空語無事實). Finally, the topos of not finding employment is first mentioned (王公大人不能器之) but then reversed in a brief anecdote where Zhuangzi gets to express laughingly

<sup>43</sup> *Shiji* 63.2143–44.

his intent to “never in my life serve in office” (終身不仕). In sharply condensed form, the anecdote can also be found in the received *Zhuangzi*,<sup>44</sup> a fact that blurs the line between biography and the constructed character of “all empty sayings without reality.”

The remaining biographies in chapter 63 are highly uneven. By far the longest one is that of Han Fei; aside from Kongzi's, his is the most substantial biographical and intellectual account of any pre-Qin “Master” discussed in the *Shiji*. Like Mengzi and Xunzi, he is portrayed as a man frustrated with the rotten politics of his time; in response, he wrote “more than one hundred thousand words,” for which Sima Qian—unlike in the cases of Mengzi and Xunzi—cites six essays by title. These—unlike the ones cited for Zhuangzi—are not from the margins of the received *Han Feizi* 韓非子 but fairly representative pieces canonized even today, including “The Five Vermin” (“Wu du” 五蠹), “Solitary Resentment” (“Gu fen” 孤憤), “The Forest of Persuasions” (“Shui lin” 說林), and “The Difficulties of Persuasion” (“Shui nan” 說難). Despite the fact that the biographies of Laozi and Han Fei are placed together, Sima Qian does not mention the *Han Feizi*'s two expository essays “Explaining Lao” (“Jie Lao” 解老) and “Illustrating Lao” (“Yu Lao” 喻老),<sup>45</sup> nor does he suggest any other particular connection between Han Fei and Laozi. Remarkably, Han Fei's story ends similarly to those of Mengzi and Xunzi, only worse: after his arrival at the court of Qin, he gets slandered (including by his own student Li Si 李斯) and forced into suicide. Yet there is one important difference: Han Fei did not write out of personal suffering or frustration: “Fei was a stutterer and could not expound or persuade, but he was good at writing” (非為人口吃，不能道說，而善著書), and thus when “Fei saw how [the state of] Han gradually weakened, he repeatedly used his writings to admonish the King of Han” (非見韓之削弱，數以書諫韓王).<sup>46</sup> While the King had no use for him

<sup>44</sup> Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 32.1062.

<sup>45</sup> Chapters 20 and 21 of the received *Han Feizi*; their authorship has remained in question. For an excellent study of the two chapters, see Sarah A. Queen, “*Han Feizi* and the Old Master: A Comparative Analysis and Translation of *Han Feizi* Chapter 20, ‘Jie Lao,’ and Chapter 21, ‘Yu Lao,’” in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei*, ed. Paul R. Goldin (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 197–256. Queen touches briefly on issues of authorship and origin of these chapters, and their relation to the received *Laozi*.

<sup>46</sup> *Shiji* 63.2146–47.

(不能用), Han Fei was later called to the Qin court (though ultimately distrusted there) because his writings "Solitary Resentment" and "Five Vermin" were admired by the King of Qin. In other words, he had managed to garner high esteem before meeting his violent end.

A thinker who had a successful career (and whose death is not recorded in the *Shiji*) is Shen Buhai, whose mini-biography is included alongside those of Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Han Fei in *Shiji* 63. In the mid-fourth century BCE, Shen advanced to the position of prime minister under Marquis Zhao of Han 韓昭侯 and brought prosperity and security to the state of Han; according to Sima Qian, his teachings were based on the Yellow Emperor and Laozi, and his writings comprised two chapters which were titled *Shenzi* 申子.<sup>47</sup>

The biography that opens *Shiji* 63 is Laozi's,<sup>48</sup> "that puzzling litter of odds and ends"<sup>49</sup> for which, in Arthur Waley's words, "no materials existed at all."<sup>50</sup> Not a biography but a romance, it briefly identifies the protagonist by his name, place of origin, and official position as a Zhou archivist before offering a version of the anecdote of Laozi's meeting with Kongzi, the single piece of narrative that is the core of the Laozi legend across early sources.<sup>51</sup> This is followed by a statement that Laozi "cultivated the Way and Virtue" (修道德), the principal characterization of Laozi's thought. When he saw the state of Zhou decline, he left westward; at the pass, the guard requested his writings, which he therefore composed on the spot, leaving behind a text of more than five thousand words in two parts expounding on the meaning of the Way and the Virtue. Thereafter, "nobody knew where he finally ended" (莫知其所終).

This is where the first version of Sima Qian's Laozi biography ends, and it is the only account of Laozi's writing.<sup>52</sup> So why did Laozi write?

<sup>47</sup> *Shiji* 63.2146.

<sup>48</sup> *Shiji* 63.2139–43.

<sup>49</sup> A.C. Graham, "The Origins of the Legend of Lao Tan 老聃," in Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), 111.

<sup>50</sup> Arthur Waley, *The Way and its Power* (London: Allan and Unwin, 1934), 108; here quoted after Graham, *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> For an analysis, see Graham, "The Origins of the Legend of Lao Tan," 110–24.

<sup>52</sup> Sima Qian's account continues further, beginning with a note that "some people say" (或曰)—a clear sign of Sima Qian's doubt—that a certain Lao Laizi 老萊子 was also (like Laozi) from Chu and had composed writings in fifteen chapters, as if suggesting the identity of

Why do we have his book, and how did it make its way back east? Because of the whimsical request of a border official who managed to talk Laozi into composing, and then felt the duty to transmit the text? Unlike in almost all other cases, Sima Qian fails to offer any rationale for Laozi's authorship: the untitled text is simply there, and the biography seems entirely driven by its existence. Well known in Sima's time, as is amply confirmed by the Guodian 郭店 and Mawangdui 馬王堆 finds as well as the recently published unprovenanced manuscript now in the possession of Peking University, it was a text in search of an author. Whoever composed the Laozi biography most likely knew the text in a form similar to the one we have.<sup>53</sup> The biography's patchwork of anecdotes and hearsay, constructed in fits and starts and repeatedly called into question by Sima Qian himself, provided this prominent text of uncertain origin with an author—or rather, it provided a transparently fictional romance of authorship that nevertheless came to hold sway over Chinese intellectual history for more than two millennia. While in the *Shiji*, all other authors and their texts are placed within the political framework of their times, the *Laozi* and its purported author are not, except for being the inspiration for the *Han Feizi*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Shenzi*.<sup>54</sup>

\* \* \*

In all cases from *Shiji* 63 and 74 discussed above, the expression of ideas and, extending from there, the authorship of texts are the defining features of the biographies' subjects; they appear as the single reason why these subjects have their biographies recorded (or are just summarily mentioned by name) in the first place. But this is not true of all authors

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Laozi and Lao Laizi. What follows is a random sequence of unrelated comments on Laozi, including the claim that Laozi (whose style was Dan 聃) the archivist was identical with another Zhou scribe named Dan 詹 (see Graham, "The Origins"): "Some say Dan is Laozi, some say he is not; in our times nobody knows whether or not it is the case" (或曰詹即老子，或曰非也，世莫知其然否).

<sup>53</sup> The Mawangdui and Peking University manuscripts both show the *Laozi* as remarkably complete and stable already in Western Han times, compared to the received version. Moreover, *Laozi* quotations in sources from the third and second centuries BCE (most of them in *Han Feizi* chapters 20 and 21 and *Huainanzi* 淮南子 chapter 12) to a high percentage match the received version. See Hunter, *Confucius Beyond the Analects*, ch. 1.

<sup>54</sup> As noted in the *taishigong yue* comment; see *Shiji* 63.2156.

named in the *Shiji*. Sima Qian also attributes authorship to a number of successful strategists who are not defined by their writings but by their deeds, and whose writings are mentioned merely as an afterthought. This includes the military strategists Marshal Rangju 司馬穰苴 in *Shiji* 64, Sun Wu 孫武 (Sunzi), Sun Bin 孫臏, and Wu Qi 吳起 in *Shiji* 65, as well as Wei Gongzi in *Shiji* 77. For Marshal Rangju, his authorship is only mentioned in the final two sentences:

King Wei of Qi ordered his ministers to seek out and select from the *Marshal's Art of War* of old, and to add Rangju's to it, and then named it *Marshal Rangju's Art of War*.<sup>55</sup>

齊威王使大夫追論古者司馬兵法而附穰苴於其中，因號曰司馬穰苴兵法。

In his immediately following *taishigong yue* comment, however, Sima Qian expresses doubts about Rangju's involvement with the earlier *Art of War*, stating that the text was too elaborate in its rituals to be followed even by the Three Dynasties, and that Rangju, as the military leader of only a minor state, could not have been involved with the text. After mentioning Rangju's recognition by King Wei, Sima Qian downplays his stature as a thinker, as if to call the book title a misnomer in need of rectification.

Notably, none of the motives of textual composition remarked above (political and personal frustration) are at play here. The same is true for Sun Wu, whose biography is rather curious in being focused on a single anecdote:<sup>56</sup> Sun Wu is received by the King of Wu because of his *Art of War* (兵法), of which the King claims to have "exhaustively contemplated all thirteen chapters" (子之十三篇吾盡觀之矣). The King then asks Sun Wu to use women to demonstrate his art of drilling troops; Sun Wu obliges but ends up executing the King's two favorite consorts, against the King's will, for their disobedience. Sun then concludes: "The King is merely fond of words but is not able to put them into practice" (王徒好其言，不能用其實). This is a remarkable statement: it

<sup>55</sup> *Shiji* 64.2160. It appears that in the title *Sima bingfa* 司馬兵法, *sima* cannot have been used as a surname but only as "marshal." Considering that the book title is then merely extended by the name Rangju, I assume that *sima* remains as meaning "marshal," and is not to be taken as Rangju's surname.

<sup>56</sup> *Shiji* 65.2161–62.

downplays any relevance of the text itself unless it is put to use by the reader, whether or not this reader has “exhaustively contemplated”—clearly an ironic twist here—the entire work.

Sun Bin's biography is far more substantial, relating in considerable detail his strategic abilities.<sup>57</sup> As with Marshal Rangju, it is only in the final sentence that he is identified as the author of another *Art of War*, which is said to have remained in circulation. Wu Qi's biography, about as long as those of Sun Wu and Sun Bin taken together,<sup>58</sup> does not even mention any writings. It is only in the *taishigong yue* comment that Sima Qian puts the focus back on the three strategists as authors:

When the common people of our time refer to armies and brigades, they all speak of the thirteen chapters of Sunzi and Wu Qi's *Art of War*. Many in our times possess these; thus, I have not discussed them [but instead] discussed the accomplishments of their actions. A saying goes: “Those who can do it cannot necessarily speak of it, and those who can speak of it cannot necessarily do it.” Sunzi was brilliant in his moves against Pang Juan, and yet earlier he could not save himself from the calamity of physical mutilation. Wu Qi persuaded the Marquis Wu that taking advantage of the circumstances was inferior to acting on virtue, and yet when he acted in Chu, he destroyed himself because of his harsh brutality and lack of empathy. How sad!

世俗所稱師旅，皆道孫子十三篇、吳起兵法。世多有，故弗論，論其行事所施設者。語曰：“能行之者未必能言，能言之者未必能行。”孫子籌策龐涓明矣，然不能蚤救患於被刑。吳起說武侯以形勢不如德，然行之於楚，以刻暴少恩亡其軀。悲夫！

The final biography depicting an author of a military treatise is the one of Wei Wuji (Wei Gongzi) in *Shiji* 77,<sup>59</sup> which is about as extensive as each of the group biographies *Shiji* 63, 65, or 74 (without the text of “Shui nan”). And yet, here is all Sima Qian has to say about Wei Wuji's authorship:

At the time, the Noble Scion's<sup>60</sup> power shook All Under Heaven. Retainers from the many lords presented [their own writings on] the art of war, and the Noble Scion

<sup>57</sup> *Shiji* 65, 2162–65.

<sup>58</sup> *Shiji* 65, 2165–68.

<sup>59</sup> *Shiji* 77, 2377–85.

<sup>60</sup> For *gongzi* as “Noble Scion,” I follow the translation in Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, vol. 7: *The Memoirs of Pre-Han China*, 215–21.

gave titles to all of them; thus, in our times [their collection] is commonly called *The Noble Scion of Wei's Art of War*.<sup>61</sup>

當是時，公子威振天下，諸侯之客進兵法，公子皆名之，故世俗稱魏公子兵法。

If anything, Sima Qian appears to have considered the writing of military treatises an almost accidental byproduct of these strategists' accomplishments. In no case does he place their composition or knowledge before or above military planning or action, nor does he define any of the strategists as men who wrote books. In the case of Sun Wu, Sima Qian even seems to ridicule the King who is fond of reading but cannot act on it—at least this is what he has Sun Wu himself say. There also is something impersonal about the military texts, as opposed to the writings by the philosophers motivated by political and moral crisis. Repeatedly, Sima Qian notes that the military texts are widely available; and twice—with Marshal Rangju and Wei Wuji—he speaks of entire repertoires and collections of texts that were brought together and arranged anew. In all these cases, the textual material is labeled “art of war,” and it is often unclear whether or not this refers to an actual title. Most likely it does not; “art of war” (*bingfa* 兵法) is the generic term for all writings on military strategy, and these could be easily combined, recompiled, and presented under a new title, thus erasing all earlier authorial claims or attributions. This, too, suggests the general availability of such texts, however brief some of them may have been.

\* \* \*

Finally, this leaves us with six pre-imperial authors in the historical and philosophical tradition mentioned in the *Shiji*, all of them well-known: Lü Buwei, Shang Yang, Excellency Yu, Guan Zhong 管仲 (Guanzi), Yan Ying 晏嬰 (Yanzi), and Kongzi. Guanzi and Yanzi are treated together in *Shiji* 62. Both spectacularly successful in their careers, their writings are not mentioned at all in their biographies. The *taishigong yue* comment describes both the *Guanzi* and the *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 as “truly detailed in their exposition” (詳哉其言之也) and states that “after seeing the writings [Guan Zhong and Yan Ying] composed, I wanted to survey

<sup>61</sup> *Shiji* 77.2384.

how they put [their thoughts] into practice and thus arranged their traditions” (既見其著書，欲觀其行事，故次其傳).<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Shang Yang’s biography does not mention his writings either, while the *taishi-gong yue* comment notes:

I once read Lord Shang writings on “Opening up Barriers” and “Plowing and Warfare,” which are similar to how he as a person put things into practice. The ill fame he finally gained in Qin—there was indeed a reason for that!<sup>63</sup>

余嘗讀商君開塞耕戰書，與其人行事相類。卒受惡名於秦，有以也夫！

The biography of Lü Buwei, the successful Qin chancellor who nevertheless met a terrible death, gives the following account of the compilation of the *Lüshi chunqiu*:

At this time, the many lords had many disputers of the kind of Excellency Xun, and their writings filled All under Heaven. Lü Buwei then ordered his retainers to each write down what they had learned, and to compile it to make eight surveys, six discourses, and twelve almanacs of [altogether] more than two hundred thousand words. He considered [the text] to encompass from antiquity to the present the affairs of the myriad kinds of things between Heaven and Earth and called it *The Springs and Autumns of Mr. Lü*. He posted it on the city gate of Xianyang and suspended cash of one thousand *jin* above it. He invited the traveling persuaders, guests, and retainers of the many lords and offered the thousand *jin* to anyone who could add or subtract a single character.<sup>64</sup>

是時諸侯多辯士，如荀卿之徒，著書布天下。呂不韋乃使其客人人著所聞，集論以為八覽、六論、十二紀，二十餘萬言。以為備天地萬物古今之事，號曰呂氏春秋。布咸陽市門，懸千金其上，延諸侯游士賓客有能增損一字者予千金。

At the very end of the lengthy biography of Excellency Yu, another highly successful political strategist, Sima Qian provides the following information:

After Wei Qi had died, [Excellency Yu] could no longer realize his ambition. He thereupon composed writings: for earlier times he selected from the *Springs and Autumns*, for later periods he contemplated [the events of] recent generations. In altogether eight chapters, he wrote on “Restraint and Rightness,” “Appellations and

<sup>62</sup>) *Shiji* 62.2136.

<sup>63</sup>) *Shiji* 68.2237.

<sup>64</sup>) *Shiji* 85.2510.

Designations," "Speculation and Approximation," and "Counsel for Government." With this, he criticized and reproved the successes and failures of the state. Transmitted over generations, it has been called *The Springs and Autumns of Excellency Yu*.<sup>65</sup>

魏齊已死，不得意，乃著書，上採春秋，下觀近世，曰節義、稱號、揣摩、政謀，凡八篇。以刺譏國家得失，世傳之曰虞氏春秋。

The *taishigong yue* comment adds to this:

Had Excellency Yu not gone through hardship and grief, one might say that he also would not have been able to compose writings and reveal himself to later generations.<sup>66</sup>

然虞卿非窮愁，亦不能著書以自見於後世云。

\* \* \*

Brief as all these passages might be, they contain a wealth of diverse information regarding the varied practices of textual composition and Sima Qian's own reading. To begin with, Sima Qian depicts some historical figures primarily as thinkers and speakers, whose writings are then a natural extension of their political engagement; in some cases such as Mengzi, Xunzi, Han Fei, or Excellency Yu, the authors are portrayed as having composed their writings only after experiencing political and/or personal frustration, which ties their writings directly to their lives and potentially endows them with a distinctly personal, even emotional voice. Other cases—mostly the military writings—are the exact opposite: here, the practical use of strategy is depicted as far more important than the words laying it out. Finally, Sima Qian repeatedly attempts to bring writing and practice together: for Guanzi, Yanzi, and Shang Yang, his interest in the biography is stirred by their writings, which he then wishes to compare to their deeds. In these three cases, as well as with the military strategists Sun Wu, Sun Bin, and Wu Qi, the composition of texts is not mentioned in the respective biography but only in the *taishigong yue* comments. In these comments, the focus is not on how the authors were driven by personal feelings (which would have had a place in their biographies). Instead, it is on Sima Qian himself as he portrays

<sup>65</sup> *Shiji* 76.2375.

<sup>66</sup> *Shiji* 76.2376.

himself as their reader: repeatedly, he laments that even a superior strategist was unable to help himself in the face of injustice and execution.

Another perspective from which to look at these various records of textual composition is to consider their modes of creation. Only very few texts are described as having clear boundaries: the *Lüshi chungiu* (eight surveys, six discourses, and twelve almanacs), the *Yushi chungiu* (eight chapters), the *Laozi* (over 5,000 words in two parts), the *Mengzi* (seven chapters), the *Sunzi* (thirteen chapters), the *Shenzi* (two chapters), and the *Lao Laizi* (fifteen chapters). Others are said to be extensive (“more than one hundred thousand words”), but in cases like *Guanzi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Han Feizi*, only a handful of chapters are actually named, and it is entirely unclear which other parts of the received texts Sima Qian may have had at his disposal. In fact, even for chapters that are named in the *Shiji*, we do not know how they relate to their received versions, especially as Sima Qian does not cite their actual wording (the single exception being the *Han Feizi*’s “Difficulties of Persuasion”) or otherwise says anything about them. As W. Allyn Rickett has noted for the chapters in “The Light and the Heavy” section of the *Guanzi*, “it is questionable whether Sima Qian is referring to these chapters. There is considerable controversy about their date. Most scholars believe they were written during the Han.”<sup>67</sup> It is thus possible that these chapters were only composed later on, and that Sima Qian’s text itself influenced their titling and arrangement within the received text.

Finally, there is a particular mode of composition that seems not at all tied to individual authorship but to the compilation and recompilation of existing materials, with only limited additions by the compiler himself. This model of textual production seems to have applied to most military texts, but it was also seen with the *Lüshi chungiu*. In this respect, the *Yushi chungiu* is an interesting hybrid: it is characterized as driven by personal frustration, but it also was compiled from earlier sources, at least in part.

That larger amounts of anonymous texts were compiled into new, usually smaller works that were then given a new title and a nominal author is more the rule than the exception in early China, and evidence

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<sup>67</sup> Rickett, *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China*, vol. 1, rev. ed. (Boston: Cheng & Tsui Company, 2001), 6, n. 15.

for it abounds in the *Shiji* as well. Kongzi himself reportedly compiled the 305 pieces of the *Shijing* 詩經 by selecting them from a body of “more than 3,000”; he “removed duplicates and selected those pieces that could be applied to the principles of ritual” (去其重，取可施於禮義).<sup>68</sup> In other words, the compilation was an act of reduction and selection, and it involved the removal of “duplicates.” As with Liu Xiang’s removal of some ninety per cent of the text from both his *Xunzi* and his *Guanzi* materials, it is unlikely that “duplicates” (*chong* 重) refers to more or less exact textual parallels; instead, we should assume different versions of a given text, or different realizations of material from a common repertoire. Such a model of textual composition, where we deal with editors and compilers instead of authors, accounts for two mutually related phenomena: first, the existence of parallel but different versions of the same text (say, in the case of the Wu Zixu 伍子胥 legend, or in the case of the *Shijing* poem “Xishuai” 蟋蟀 [“Cricket”] for which we now have a new version in the Qinghua University bamboo manuscript corpus that matches the received text to fairly exactly fifty per cent);<sup>69</sup> and second, how such recompositions of material from a larger repertoire of stories (including poems) then lead to composite or modular texts that easily appear as patchworks, as in the examples of the Laozi or Qu Yuan biographies.

The activity of reducing larger textual repertoires into smaller works is also in evidence elsewhere. The very title of Kongzi’s sayings, *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*), is said to reflect that his disciples “selected” (*lun* 論) the master’s sayings (*yu* 語) from the many utterances and conversations each of them had “recorded” (*ji* 記).<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, in addition to ha-

<sup>68</sup> *Shiji* 47.1936.

<sup>69</sup> See the manuscript “Qi ye” 耆夜 in Li Xueqin 李學勤, *Qinghua daxue cang zhanguo zhujian* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2010), 150, and plates 67–68. Instead of asking—as has been done extensively in recent Chinese scholarship—which version of “Xi shuai” is earlier, and which is then later derived from that, I consider the two poems to be just two (of potentially many more) separate actualizations of material from a common repertoire.

<sup>70</sup> *Hanshu* 30.1717. While the story of Confucius’ disciples being the compilers of the *Analects* is certainly an idealized account, new research on the text confirms its nature as being a selection from a vastly larger body of “Confucius sayings,” likely compiled around the mid-second century BCE; see Hunter, “Sayings of Confucius, Deselected,” and his forthcoming *Confucius Beyond the Analects*.

ving selectively compiled the *Poetry*, Kongzi is also said, again in the *Shiji*, to have “relied on archival records to create the *Springs and Autumns* [*Annals*]” (因史記作春秋) where he “abbreviated the patterned phrasing while signifying broadly” (約其文辭而指博).<sup>71</sup> This passage has itself a parallel within the *Shiji* that gives a more specific account: here, Confucius “selected from archival records and oral accounts of old knowledge” (論史記舊聞), “abbreviated the patterned phrases” (約其文辭), “removed the superfluous duplicates” (去其煩重), and leaving to oral instruction what “was not permissible to be made manifest in writing (不可以書見).<sup>72</sup> Next, Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 is said to have relied on Confucius’ archival records and comprehensively selected from his conversations (因孔子史記具論其語) to compile *Mr. Zuo’s Springs and Autumns* (*Zuoshi chunqiu* 左氏春秋).<sup>73</sup> Likewise, Duo Jiao 鐸椒, tutor to King Wei of Chu (r. 339–329 BCE) believed that the king could not exhaustively contemplate the *Springs and Autumns*; therefore, Duo Jiao “selectively chose accounts of success and failure” (采取成敗) to create his own version of a text for historical guidance.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, as noted above, Excellency Yu “selected from the *Springs and Autumns*” (采春秋) and “contemplated recent circumstances” (觀近勢) to create *Mr. Yu’s Springs and Autumns*;<sup>75</sup> and when Lü Buwei compiled *Mr. Lü’s Springs and Autumns*, he likewise “cut and chose from the *Springs and Autumns*” (刪捨春秋).<sup>76</sup> Moreover, as noted by Sima Qian, “Excellency Xun, Master Meng, Gongsun Gu, Han Fei, and the like all frequently collected [material] selectively from the *Springs and Autumns* to compose their writings; such cases are more frequent than can be counted” (荀卿、孟子、公孫固、韓非之徒，各往往摭摭春秋之文以著書，不可勝紀).<sup>77</sup>

In sum, all these accounts present the creation of texts as part authoring, part compiling, and all agree on the same vocabulary of “selecting,” “cutting,” “choosing,” and “removing,” that is, the forming through a process of reduction from a larger repertoire. What is missing in this view of

<sup>71</sup> *Shiji* 47.1943.

<sup>72</sup> *Shiji* 14.509.

<sup>73</sup> *Shiji* 14.510.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* Compare the slightly different wording cited above from *Shiji* 76.2375.

<sup>76</sup> *Shiji* 14.510. Compare the different account cited above from *Shiji* 85.2510.

<sup>77</sup> *Shiji* 14.510.

textual production is Sima Qian's emphasis, forcefully claimed elsewhere in the *Shiji*, of authorship as being driven by personal experience and emotion.

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The presentation of composition as compilation profoundly destabilizes the identity of texts as it renders their points of origin invisible. It also destabilizes the identity of authorship which, as has been noted repeatedly for virtually every text of pre-imperial China, is extraordinarily weak and conflicted. Few scholars but the most ardent traditionalists would assume single-person authorship as a plausible model for pre-Qin philosophical writings. It is precisely against this background of textual fluidity that the *Hanshu* "Yiwen zhi" is organized mostly around authors, imposing bibliographic order and distinctions on a much more diffuse textual heritage. It is also against the same background that in the *Shiji*, we find some of the most strenuous claims for authorship that extend Sima Qian's depiction of Mengzi, Xunzi, Han Fei, and Excellency Yu in more radical ways:

When the Earl of the West was incarcerated in Youli, he expanded the *Classic of Changes*; when Confucius was in a desperate situation between Chen and Cai, he made the *Springs and Autumns Annals*; when Qu Yuan was banished, he composed "Encountering Sorrow"; when Zuo Qiuming lost his eyesight, there were the *Discourses of the States*; when Sunzi got his feet chopped off, he discoursed on the *Art of War*; when Lü Buwei was banished to Shu, his contemporaries transmitted *Lü's Survey*; when Han Fei was imprisoned in Qin, [he made] the *Difficulties of Persuasion* and *Resentment about Solitude*. Most of the three hundred *Odes* [in the *Classic of Poetry*] were made by worthies who gave expression to their rage. All these men had something eating away at their hearts. They could not carry out the Way, and hence they wrote about the past while thinking of those to come.<sup>78</sup>

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；孫子膺腳，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。

In this passage from the *Shiji*'s final chapter 130, the "The Lord Archivist's Self-Narration" (太史公自序), and its parallel version in the famous

<sup>78</sup> *Shiji* 130.3300.

“Letter in Response to Ren Shaoqing (“Bao Ren Shaoqing shu” 報任少卿書) which is transmitted only in later sources, Sima Qian depicts authorship as the direct response to personal suffering. This may ultimately be a reflection of his personal experience, having been mutilated by his emperor. But perhaps more importantly, it is the most compelling way to bind texts to authors, namely, as the individual’s emotional response to physical, existential suffering from incarceration, starvation, banishment, and mutilation. Nothing carries a stronger claim for truth and authenticity,<sup>79</sup> and nothing anchors the text and its meaning more firmly in specific historical circumstance. This is the tragic model behind Sima Qian’s biography of Qu Yuan as well as his depiction of Kongzi;<sup>80</sup> nowhere else does Sima Qian speak of authors, their fate and motivation, with similar force, and allows authors to speak with similar emotion.

Echoes of these depictions run through some of the accounts discussed above, albeit in less extreme terms. One motif in particular seems to play a major role in how Sima Qian presents Mengzi, Xunzi, Han Fei, and Excellency Yu: the need, and experienced lack of, recognition. In *Mengzi* 3B.9, Kongzi is made to say that “those who recognize me will do so for the *Springs and Autumns*; those who condemn me will do so for the *Springs and Autumns*” (知我者其惟《春秋》乎！罪我者其惟《春秋》乎！). Those who lack recognition in their own time turn to the writing of texts that, at last, hold the promise for a more receptive posterity. Notice the cases of Guanzi, Yanzi, and Shang Yang above where Sima Qian declares that he first read their texts and only then explored their lives to see how their actions matched their writings; for Shang Yang he even concluded that the writings confirmed why Shang finally came to a bad end in Qin.

<sup>79</sup> As continued in scenes of poetic composition in both *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, where the protagonists turn into impromptu poetic authors in moments of existential crisis and often imminent demise; see Kern, “The Poetry of Han Historiography,” *Early Medieval China* 10–11 (2004): 23–65.

<sup>80</sup> For a detailed analysis of how Qu Yuan and Kongzi are constructed as authors in the *Shiji*, see Ke Mading, “*Shiji* li de ‘zuozhe’ gainian”; for Kongzi’s case, see also Kern, “Kongzi as Author in the Han,” in *The Analects Revisited: New Perspectives on the Dating of a Classic*, ed. Michael Hunter, Martin Kern, and Oliver Weingarten (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

One of the anecdotes in Kongzi's biography, subsequently also found in *Kongzi jiyu* 孔子家語, depicts Kongzi practicing the zither:

Kongzi studied the zither with Master Xiang but did not proceed [to the next piece] in ten days. Master Xiang said: "You may move on now." Kongzi said: "I have practiced its melody, but have not attained its technique yet." After a while, [the Master] said: "You have practiced its technique and may move on now." Kongzi said: "I have not yet attained the purpose." After a while, [the Master] said: "You have practiced the purpose, you may move on now." Kongzi said: "I have not yet attained who [the composer] was as a person." After a while, he said: "Commanding respect, there is profound thinking in him; giving rise to joy, there are a vision from up high and far-reaching ambition in him." He said [further]: "I have attained who he is as a person. Dark he is and tall, with eyes gazing broadly as if ruling the kingdoms of the four directions—if not King Wen, who else could be like this!" Master Xiang rose from his mat, bowed twice, and said: "Indeed, it is a piece by King Wen."<sup>81</sup>

孔子學鼓琴師襄子，十日不進。師襄子曰：“可以益矣。”孔子曰：“丘已習其曲矣，未得其數也。”有間，曰：“已習其數，可以益矣。”孔子曰：“丘未得其志也。”有間，曰：“已習其志，可以益矣。”孔子曰：“丘未得其為人也。”有間，（曰）有所穆然深思焉，有所怡然高望而遠志焉。曰：“丘得其為人，黯然而黑，幾然而長，眼如望羊，如王四國，非文王其誰能為此也！”師襄子辟席再拜，曰：“師蓋云文王操也。”

The idea expressed here is that through perception and appreciation of an aesthetic composition, one can discover its original purpose (*zhi* 志) and ultimately even attain direct access to the personality of its author.<sup>82</sup> This is also Sima Qian's approach to Guanzi, Yanzi, and Shang Yang, and it further underlies his evaluation of authors such as Mengzi, Xunzi, Han Fei, and Excellency Yu whose literary activities he is able to trace back to their purposes, which in turn are derived from their real-life experiences. But nowhere is Sima Qian more explicit than in his *taishigong yue* comments on what clearly are his principal models of ambition, morality, and authorship—Kongzi and Qu Yuan:

<sup>81</sup> *Shiji* 47.1925.

<sup>82</sup> Note the parallel thought in *Mengzi* 5A.4 regarding the interpretation of the ancient *Odes*: in order to explain a poem, "one must not allow the aesthetic patterns do harm to the phrases, or the phrases do harm to the purpose. From one's understanding one traces the intent, and this is how one attains [the meaning]" (不以文害辭，不以辭害志。以意逆志，是為得之)。Here, however, the final step toward discovering the author himself is not taken. It is by no means clear that *zhi* 志 ("intent") refers to authorial intent as opposed to what the poem is supposed to signify in general.

When reading the writings of Master Kong, I see him before me as the person he was!<sup>83</sup>

余讀孔氏書，想見其為人。

When reading *Li sao*, *Tian wen*, *Zhao hun*, and *Ai ying*, I grieve over [Qu Yuan's] purpose. Ever since I traveled to Changsha and saw where Qu Yuan had drowned himself in the abyss, I never can help shedding tears, and I see him before me as the person he was!<sup>84</sup>

余讀離騷、天問、招魂、哀郢，悲其志。適長沙，觀屈原所自沈淵，未嘗不垂涕，想見其為人。

Sima Qian's response is as emotional as it is formulaic. At stake are not the texts but the authorial figures who reveal their true selves through forceful and authentic expression. Further at stake is the author Sima Qian who in turn reveals himself as their supremely perceptive reader and biographer, and more generally as a historian in Kongzi's mold. Thus, as with Qu Yuan's works, he is often deeply moved by the texts he is reading; in four instances, he "could never put the writings away without a sigh" (未嘗不廢書而歎) or even "without crying" (而泣).<sup>85</sup> Considering how much of Sima Qian's response to, and depiction of, pre-Qin authorship is based on the formulaic expression of intense emotion, we may well ask to what extent his characterization of authors and texts is less a function of truth-seeking historiography and more one of personal choice, perhaps shaped by Sima Qian's own experience. The uneven—and certainly highly incomplete—coverage of pre-Qin writings in the *Shiji* is not a reliable guide to the world of early Chinese thought, texts, and authors. It under-represents significant parts of the textual heritage and appears to privilege certain models of authorship that seem to mirror Sima Qian's self-perception. This is true for authors like Xunzi, Mengzi, and Qu Yuan, and particularly for the figure of Kongzi, the most prominent of authors depicted in the *Shiji*, and the ultimate model for representing Sima Qian's own authorship.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>83</sup>) *Shiji* 47.1947.

<sup>84</sup>) *Shiji* 84.2503.

<sup>85</sup>) *Shiji* 14.509, 24.1175, 74.2343, 80.2436, 121.3115.

<sup>86</sup>) See Kongzi's biography in *Shiji* 47, and Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1995), chs. 1 and 2; and Kern, "Kongzi as Author in the Han."