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Introduction

> Modern scholars are justifiably excited whenever a bronze vessel bearing an inscription is unearthed. But earth is not the only thing that can bury authentic records.
>
> —SHAUGHNESSY, *BEFORE CONFUCIUS*

The *Dialogues of Confucius*[1] is a rich source of the thoughts of Confucius (Kong Qiu 孔丘, 551–479 BCE), but it is also a mysterious book with a checkered past. For centuries it lay in obscurity, disdained as a forgery, and yet it was also appreciated enough by a significant number of people that it was passed down generation after generation while other less appreciated books were lost entirely. While some scholars publicly derided the book, other scholars privately esteemed it.

The mystery that lies at the heart of the *Dialogues*' textual history is how the manuscript suddenly burst onto the scene in the third century, conveniently

1. The title of this book in Chinese is *Kongzi jia yu* 孔子家語. The Chinese characters now pronounced *Kongzi* are how early Confucians generally referred to the person we know today as Confucius. *Jia* means home or family, and *yu* means conversation, dialogue, or discussion. Ever since the work of James Legge in the nineteenth century, *jia* in the title has been interpreted in English as school of thought, and *yu* has been understood to mean sayings. The first of these is correct but requires a bit of explanation. The second does not do justice to the Chinese. Legge says that the title should be translated, "Sayings of the Confucian Family" and explains, "Family is to be taken in the sense of sect or school" (Legge [1893] 2012, 132). The word *jia* (family or home) was a metaphor for a group of like-minded people bonded around a single philosophy. For this reason, the best rendering of *jia* is *school*. The word translated by Legge as "sayings" is *yu* 語. However, the word for *saying* in Classical Chinese, the language of the *Dialogues*, is more often *yan* 言 than *yu*. *Yu* typically involves one or more people in conversation. The term *yu* occurs as a word on its own thirty-three times in the *Dialogues*, and in only one of them (19.8) could it conceivably be interpreted as saying, in the sense of apothegm. Twenty-seven times it refers to two or more people in dialogue. The most clear-cut case is in 8.13: "Confucius encountered Chengzi. They pulled their carriages alongside each other and began to chat [*yu*]." Most

providing Confucius' own thoughts on hot-button philosophical concerns of the day. Where had it been prior to that? And if it really contained genuine thoughts of the sage from 700 years earlier, why had it remained hidden for so long?

It is impossible to know for certain the textual history of the *Dialogues*, but in what follows we lay out what we think is the most plausible scenario, a scenario that is supported by a growing body of evidence. We believe the *Dialogues* can provisionally be accepted as largely genuine and accurately portraying the activities and thoughts of Confucius. While some of it remains suspect, it can nevertheless be used as a resource for understanding Confucius, his interactions with his students, and his philosophy. After we describe the textual history of the *Dialogues*, we outline key philosophical ideas and terminology. There is much more philosophical work to be done on the *Dialogues* with respect to its placement in the intellectual sphere of the Warring States period and its relevance for philosophical theory today. We propose our outline as a useful starting point.

The Extant Account

The *Dialogues* has been handed down to us with three explanatory documents. They are translated at the end of this book as separate appendices, in purported chronological order. The first is self-identified as a postface, by Kong Anguo 孔安國 (late second century BCE; see figure 1).[2] Kong Anguo was a descendant of Confucius and a standout scholar of his day. According to this postface, there was originally a large set of manuscripts related to Confucius' interactions with his followers, rulers, and other dignitaries. From this set of manuscripts, the *Analects* was selected.[3] The remainder was preserved as the *Kongzi jia yu*, the dialogues of the school of

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often in the *Dialogues*, *yu* acts as a verb, meaning to say to—one person speaking to someone else. Even a cursory reading of the book reveals that it belongs in the literary genre of the dialogue. (See further along in the introduction for a more nuanced discussion of *dialogue*.) Legge most often refers to the book not by its full title but as the *Narratives of the School*, apparently preferring a pithier, more descriptive translation. We follow Legge in this preference but substitute the more accurate *dialogues* for *narratives*. "Confucius" rather than "school" clarifies that the book is centered on the ideas and opinions of Confucius and not his students, and signals the book's synergy with—rather than its distance from—the *Analects* of Confucius.

2. The exact dates of Kong Anguo are unknown. Recent scholarship places his dates in a sixty-six-year range, his birth no earlier than 156 BCE and his death no later than 90 BCE (Sun 2007; Chen and Bai 2014; Huang 2017). Absent compelling reasons to the contrary, we accept that Kong Anguo is the author of this postface. See Kramers (1950) and Huang (2017) for arguments in favor of this position.

3. It came to be known in Chinese as *Lun yu* 論語, *Selected Dialogues*, which was translated by Legge ([1893] 2012) as *Analects*, a title that has largely stuck.

Five Chiefs, dates unknown
Xia Dynasty, ?–c. 1570 BCE
Shang Dynasty, c. 1570–1045 BCE
  Zhou King Wen, r. 1099–1050 BCE
Zhou Dynasty, 1045–256 BCE
  Western Zhou Dynasty, 1045–771 BCE
    King Wu, r. 1049–1043 BCE
    Duke of Zhou, r. 1042–1036 BCE
    King Cheng, r. 1035–1006 BCE
    Documents
    Poems
  Eastern Zhou Dynasty, 770–256 BCE
    Spring and Autumn Period, 770–481 BCE
      Confucius, 551–479 BCE
    Warring States Period, 481–221 BCE
      Early Warring States, 481–401 BCE
        Zuo zhuan
        Mozi, c. 468–c. 376 BCE
      Middle Warring States, 400–301 BCE
        The *Mozi*, c. 376 BCE
        Shanghai Museum manuscripts, mid- to late 4th cent. BCE
        Guodian manuscripts, mid- to late 4th cent. BCE
        Mencius, c. 372–289 BCE
        Zhuangzi, c. 369–c. 286 BCE
      Late Warring States, 300–221 BCE
        The *Mencius*, c. 289 BCE
        The *Zhuangzi*, c. 286 BCE
        Xunzi, c. 313–238 BCE
        Zou Yan, fl. 250 BCE
        Han Feizi, c. 280–233 BCE
        The *Xunzi*, c. 238 BCE
        The *Han Feizi*, c. 233 BCE
Qin Dynasty, 221–206 BCE
Han Dynasty, 202 BCE–220 CE
  Former Han Dynasty, 202 BCE–8 CE
    Kong Anguo, c. 156–c. 90 BCE
    Sima Qian, c. 145–86 BCE
    Liu Xiang, 79–8 BCE
    Dai Sheng, fl. 1st cent. BCE
Xin Dynasty, 9–23 CE
  Wang Mang, 45 BCE–23 CE
  Liu Xin, 46 BCE–23 CE
[Han Dynasty]
  Later Han Dynasty, 25–220 CE
    Zheng Xuan, 127–200 CE
Wei-Jin Period, 220–420 CE
  Wang Su, 195–256 CE
  Kong Chao, 3rd cent. CE
  Ma Zhao, fl. 240–249 CE
Sui Dynasty, 581–618 CE
Tang Dynasty, 618–906 CE
  Yan Shigu, 581–645 CE
Song Dynasty, 960–1279 CE
  Sima Guang, 1019–1086 CE
  Su Zhe, 1039–1112 CE
  Chao Gongwu, 1105–1180 CE
  Hong Mai, 1123–1202 CE
  Zhu Xi, 1130–1200 CE
  Shi Shengzu, fl. c. 1241 CE
  Ye Shi, 1150–1223 CE
  Wang Bai, 1197–1274 CE
Yuan Dynasty, 1279–1368 CE
  Ma Duanlin, 1254–1323 CE
Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644 CE
  He Mengchun, 1474–1536 CE
  Lu Zhi, 1496–1576 CE
Qing Dynasty, 1644–1911 CE
  Fan Jiaxiang, d. 1768 CE
  Qian Fu, fl. c. 1800 CE
  Duan Yucai, 1735–1815 CE
  Sun Zhizu, 1737–1801 CE
  Chen Shike, fl. 1800 CE

FIGURE 1: Timeline of eras, persons, and texts in the introduction. Texts are arranged by estimated date of completion of earliest layer in public form, dates that are often speculative but still useful for comparing texts of possibly prior date. Key figures in the development and critique of the *Dialogues* are in bold. There is no standard periodization of the Warring States period into three phases. Ours divides it into roughly equal thirds around the century breaks.

Confucius. Some of the material of the *Dialogues*, Kong says, was of comparable quality to the contents of the *Analects*, while some was of lesser quality.

Kong says further that the *Dialogues* collection was passed down from teacher to student, and in the mid-third century BCE Xunzi 荀子 conveyed a collection to the king of Qin that contained 100 chapters (*pian* 篇) of the aforementioned material—the complete collection. After the empire was unified by Qin, Kong continues, the collection passed to the subsequent dynasty, the Han.

Sometime before 180 BCE, the new copy was absconded with by a member of the ruling elite. After he was chased out of power, the collection was dispersed into private collections. In 141 BCE, Kong continues, the collection was reacquired in pieces and stored in the imperial archives, where it was mixed in with other collections. Between 110 and 105 BCE, Kong says, he himself, in his official capacity, acquired the collection, organized it, and transcribed it from the ancient script into contemporary characters.

Kong Anguo's postface is followed by a second postface (appendix 2) by an anonymous author who must have lived some time contemporaneously with or just after Kong Yan 孔衍,[4] a grandson of Kong Anguo. It provides an extensive lineage and a brief biography of Kong Anguo, then says that after Kong Anguo finished his work on the *Dialogues*, turmoil among the ruling elite led him to set it aside, and that he passed away without ever officially submitting it to the crown. The statement mentions Han Emperor Cheng's 漢成帝 commissioning Liu Xiang 劉向 (in 26 BCE) to provide new editions of the classics and includes a petition to the throne written by Kong Yan justifying the need for recognition and study of the *Dialogues*. The petition, which is included, says that parts of the *Dialogues* had been poached by Dai Sheng (戴聖, fl. 1st cent. BCE) for use in his *Li ji* 禮記 compilation. Postface 2 concludes by saying that, although the petition was successful and the emperor ordered that the *Dialogues* be included in Liu's work, both the emperor and Liu passed away before it could be accomplished.

The third explanatory document (appendix 3) handed down to us with the *Dialogues* is designated as a preface, authored by Wang Su 王肅 (195–256 CE). In this preface, Wang Su says that he acquired the contents of the *Dialogues* from the Kong family home by way of one Kong Meng 孔猛, a descendant of Confucius. Finding it valuable and consistent with his own (at the time, controversial) interpretations of the classics, he presented it to the public along with his own explanatory notes. The preface concludes with two examples of how the *Dialogues* clears up opaque statements in the *Analects* and the *Chunqiu wai zhuan* 春秋外傳, respectively, the first involving the identification of an interlocutor of Confucius and the second pertaining to a statement describing the governing of the early ruler Yao.

4. This Kong Yan is distinct from the more well-known Kong Yan, who lived just after Wang Su.

The Controversy

When Wang Su brought the *Dialogues* to the public in the third century, it was broadly accepted as authentic. It was received as an important text, and its reputation was perpetuated through the Tang and into the Song dynasty. However, doubt was presumably first cast on it quite early, when Ma Zhao 馬昭 (fl. 240–249 CE), a younger contemporary of Wang Su and a defender of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE) against Wang Su, claimed that one poem in it had been fabricated.[5]

Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), one of the most important and influential philosophers of the last millennium, refers to the *Dialogues* positively and even uses a passage of

5. The book where Ma Zhao's quote is purported to appear has been lost. The title of the lost book is *Sheng zheng lun* 聖證論. It is recorded as having been written by Wang Su, but only scattered quotations of it remain in other works. The surviving quote from Ma Zhao is found in Kong Yingda's 孔穎達 recension of the *Li ji* (Kong and Zheng 1866). Kong records Zheng Xuan's comment on a passage of the "Yue ji" chapter, along with Wang Su's opposing comment that adduces the *Dialogues*, and then Ma Zhao's accusation against Wang Su that his quotation from the *Dialogues* is an interpolation. The passage in the *Li ji* mentions a poem attributed to Shun, entitled "The Southern Wind" (*nan feng* 南風). Zheng Xuan's note says that the wording of the poem is "unknown" (*wei wen* 未聞). Kong then says:

> *Sheng zheng lun*, challenging Zheng, quotes from the *Shizi* 尸子 and the *Dialogues of Confucius*, as follows:
>
> In the past, Shun, playing the five-string zither, created a poem called "The Southern Wind." It goes:
>
> The soft blowing of the southern wind
> Can ease the tension of our people.
> The timeliness of the southern wind
> Can increase the prosperity of our people.
>
> Zheng had said that the words were unknown and that the meaning had been lost. Recently Ma Zhao says that they were added by Wang Su to the *Dialogues* and Zheng had not seen them. As for the *Shizi*, it belongs to miscellaneous theories and cannot be verified. This is why it was said that it was unknown.

The sequence of the debate is as follows: The *Li ji* mentions a poem; Zheng Xuan comments in his annotation of the *Li ji* that the poem is lost; Wang Su, in the *Sheng zheng lun*, says that the poem actually survives in two texts—the *Shizi and the Dialogues*; then Ma Zhao, also in the *Sheng zheng lun*, discounts both sources. The *Shizi* was a Warring States text that has not survived to the present but is mentioned in the *Bie lu* and is described briefly by Liu Xiang. There is evidence that it survived into Wang Su's time and then gradually disappeared over the course of the Tang and Song dynasties (Fang et al. 1994). No one is sure what exactly the contents of the *Sheng zheng lun* were, but with passages like that above, it clearly involved some kind of debate. According to Kramer's reconstruction of events, a debate was held during Wang Su's time between the followers of Zheng Xuan (one of whom was Ma Zhao) and Wang Su and his followers, and the *Sheng zheng lun* is a record of that debate. (Kong and Zheng 1866; Kramers 1950; Cheng 2013; Yang and Song 2013; Guo and Zhang 2019)

the *Dialogues* to emend a passage in the "Zhong yong 中庸."[6] However, it was in Zhu Xi's time, about 900 years after the *Dialogues* had come to light, that its authenticity was first doubted in a comprehensive way. And the *Dialogues* wasn't alone in this respect; it was a period when the core Confucian texts were being reevaluated on a large scale.[7]

Wang Bai 王柏 (1197–1274) was a leading scholar of *Li Xue* 理學 (Neo-Confucian) attempts to question the status of ancient texts. Of his forty-one works, his *Doubting the Poems* (*Yi shi* 疑詩) and *Doubting the Documents* (*Yi shu* 疑書) were the most widely circulated and commented on. These books have since been criticized for taking the doubting agenda too far; Wang Bai suspected, for example, that whole sections of the *Poems* classic were Han-dynasty interpolations. And yet Wang Bai's conclusion that Wang Su had forged the *Dialogues* proved to be influential.

Criticism of the *Dialogues* intensified during the Qing dynasty. Yao Jiheng 姚際恒 (b. 1647) included the *Dialogues* in a study of forged texts. Cui Shu 崔述 (1740–1816), a biographer of Confucius, denounced the *Dialogues* as a forgery. In 1767, Fan Jiaxiang 范家相 completed a monograph arguing against the authenticity of the *Dialogues* based in large part on two circumstantial claims: (1) that Wang Su leaned heavily on the *Dialogues* in his refutations of Zheng Xuan in the *Sheng zheng lun* and (2) that the *Dialogues* overlaps considerably with other texts. A few decades later, Sun Zhizu 孫志祖 (1737–1801) produced another lengthy critique of the *Dialogues*.

The three books by Wang Bai, Fan Jiaxiang, and Sun Zhizu largely settled the matter in China up until only recently, but there was never universal agreement. In addition to Zhu Xi, scholars such as Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (1105–1180), Ye Shi 葉適 (1150–1223), Shi Shengzu 史繩祖 (fl. c. 1241), Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (c. 1254–1323), He Mengchun 何孟春 (1474–1536), Lu Zhi 陸治 (1496–1576), Qian Fu 錢馥 (fl. c. 1800), and Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815) all averred that the *Dialogues*, in whole or in part, was genuine. Chen Shike 陳士珂 (fl. c. 1800) annotated the *Dialogues* and defended its authenticity.

The earliest extant mention of the *Dialogues* is in Liu Xiang's (79–8 BCE) *Bie lu* 別録, the first comprehensive bibliography of Chinese texts, which is preserved in *Han shu* 漢書, "Yi wen zhi" (c. 92 CE). This record is consistent with the supplementary material handed down in the *Dialogues* and suggests that the *Dialogues* existed some two centuries before Wang Su could have forged it (although the accusers say that Wang Su purloined the title for his forgery).

6. In addition to his positive comments and his use of the *Dialogues* in emending the "Zhong yong," Zhu Xi also said: "The *Dialogues* is merely a miscellaneous collection of old records put together by Wang Su. There are many problems with it. And yet, it is not a fabrication by Wang Su" (Huang 2017, 308). According to Huang Huaixin (2017), this ambiguity in Zhu Xi is what prompted his student Wang Bai's study of the *Dialogues* (see just below). Wang intended to set the record straight.

7. The summary of events in this paragraph and the subsequent two paragraphs draws from Kramers (1950), Yang and Song (2013), Huang (2017), and Li (2020).

A text with an intriguing history that parallels that of the *Dialogues* is the *Zhou li* 周禮, which appeared around 150 BCE. The *Zhou li* and the material that eventually made up the *Dialogues* are said to have passed through the hands of Xunzi (*Dialogues*) or one of his students (*Zhou li*). They then fell into the hands of collectors and were eventually donated to the imperial archives, where they languished until being rescued from obscurity when they were cited in a matter of contemporaneous importance. The *Zhou li* was raised from obscurity by Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE) in support of Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE–23 CE). Finding it suspicious that each of the texts came to prominence coincidentally to support a contemporaneous position, Song-dynasty Neo-Confucians—principally the scholars Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202), and Su Zhe 蘇轍 (1039–1112) in the case of the *Zhou li*, declared them forgeries.[8]

The *Zhou li* was reputed to have been authored by the Duke of Zhou (周公, r. 1042–1036 BCE), and in the Tang dynasty it was made an official Confucian Classic. For these reasons, it had many defenders, who pointed out that the text contained passages that predated Liu Xin and so could not have been an outright forgery by him. William Boltz says that "the conclusion that the [*Zhou li*] is a genuine pre-Han text remains convincing" (Loewe 1993, 29). Below, we shall see that a similar rationale can be applied to the *Dialogues*: passages predating Wang Su and even Kong Anguo, especially from excavated texts, add to a body of evidence justifying an earlier dating for the text.

Before getting to that, however, a complicating factor must be raised: namely, the ancient-script version of the *Documents* (*Shang shu* 尚書). The postface to the *Dialogues* was not the only such document attributed to Kong Anguo; the preface of the ancient-script *Documents* was as well. The *Documents*, as explained in the glossary, is an immensely important Confucian classic, the earliest strata of which date among the earliest of all Chinese transmitted expository texts. However, the version of the text that surfaced about the time of Wang Su had acquired many additional chapters. Although that version was heralded in subsequent centuries as authentic, later textual scholars surmised that the extra chapters had been forged. Although Wang Su never adduced those chapters, and although mention of them precedes their appearance in the Jin dynasty (after Wang Su's time), the certainty with which scholars have pronounced them to be forgeries has tarnished the *Dialogues* by association. Inevitably, whenever the possible forgery of one is raised, the possible forgery of the other is not far behind.[9]

8. See William Boltz's entry for the *Chou li* in Loewe (1993).

9. For overviews of the complicated controversy of the ancient-script *Documents*, see Nylan (2001), Edward Shaughnessy's entry on the *Shang Shu* in Loewe (1993), and Huang (2017). A similar guilt by association is found in discussions of the *Kong cong zi* 孔叢子, which is also often considered a forgery attributed to Wang Su, even though he never adduced it. See Ariel (1989) and Huang (2017) for lengthy discussions of the issues involved. Ariel concludes that the book is likely a forgery originating from circles related to Wang Su. Nevertheless, he says, "The ascription of the authorship of the [*Kong cong zi*]

The Most Plausible Scenario

The first scholar to make an extended argument in English justifying the genuineness of the *Dialogues* was Robert Paul Kramers (1950).[10] More recently, Chinese scholars have used new evidence from recently excavated texts that date back to the relevant time period to likewise argue for the genuineness of the *Dialogues*. Let us begin by discussing Kramers along with Yang Chaoming and Song Lilin (2013) as representatives of current Western and Chinese scholarship[11] on the matter before entertaining opposing viewpoints.

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to Wang Su will remain a matter of conjecture, and one must always be prepared to be proved wrong when suggesting such a probability" (Ariel 1989, 62). In a review of Ariel's conclusion linking Wang Su to the *Kong cong zi*, Kramers says, "The case Ariel makes for the [*Kong cong zi*] to be a third century Confucian response to the new 'Neo-Taoistic' developments which replaced the orthodox Han synthesis seems to me to go too far. . . . It is a hypothetical exercise carried out with the greatest ingenuity, but to me it remains extremely unconvincing" (Kramers 1991, 156–57). Huang Huaixin agrees with Kramers that the *Kong cong zi* likely contains early matter, but with more additions and reworking by later contributors in the Kong family. Huang says, *Kong cong zi* "is definitely not the work of Wang Su. Although some of its contents are not genuine, unlike what others have said before, it is not entirely untrustworthy" (Huang 2017, 246). Huang's analysis goes so far as to attribute authorship and two layers of editorship to all twenty-three chapters of the *Kong cong zi*, with the earliest layer dating to the Qin dynasty.

10. Prior to Kramers, James Legge adduced the *Dialogues* many times in his prolegomena to the *Analects*, writing that it is "a very valuable fragment of antiquity, and it would be worthwhile to incorporate it with the *Analects*" (Legge [1893] 2012, 132). A. B. Hutchinson (1878, 1879, 1880) echoes this sentiment in the first partial English translation of the *Dialogues*.

11. Huang Mengshan (2014) summarizes a flurry of activity on the authenticity of the *Dialogues* up to 2014. Liu Jinyou (2019) provides an exhaustive literature review of contemporary work on the *Dialogues*. See also Ning Zhenjiang's (2017) introduction to his own collection of essays about the *Dialogues* for a literature overview. Two other book-length studies are worth mentioning. Liu Wei (2014) and Huang Huaixin (2017) both attempt comprehensive evaluations of claims in the history of the controversy involving the *Dialogues*. Liu divides arguments in the controversy into four "cases (*gongan* 公案)," evaluating their merits and influence. He finds that the arguments against the authenticity of the *Dialogues* stem, by and large, from misunderstandings, decontextualization, or their own motivations ancillary to the actual controversy. Huang's study is the most detailed and nuanced, beginning with an in-depth examination of the Kong family, first during the Former Han and then during the Later Han. He examines Kong Anguo and works attributed to him and his descendants, as well as works about the Kong family, such as *Kong cong zi*. He continues into the Wei-Jin period, examining the scholarship of the Kong family and then the advent of Wang Su and the *Dialogues*. These steps comprise most of the seven chapters of the book, from which Huang concludes that the contents of the Wang Su preface and the Kong Anguo postface relating to their relationship to the book are likely to be accurate. Huang goes on to examine the relationships between the *Dialogues* and other texts, including excavated texts, that have parallel passages, concluding that Kong Anguo's description in the postface

Kramers begins with the Kong family itself, prompted by Wang Su's preface. Wang Su says that he obtained the *Dialogues* material from his pupil Kong Meng, who is not attested elsewhere, and some have suspected that his existence was a fabrication by Wang Su. Kramers argues that this is highly improbable because (1) the Kong family was prominent at the time and would surely have objected to such an egregious fabrication, (2) the family actually sided with Wang Su at the time, and (3) Wang Su's foremost student was Kong Chao 孔晁, a leading member of the Kong family. The only way to make sense of these facts and still maintain that the *Dialogues* was forged by Wang Su is to assume the forgery represented a grand conspiracy involving the prestigious Kong family, which defies common sense.[12]

From here, Kramers moves on to the two postfaces (which he refers to as a single postface). He examines in detail each of the historical claims as well as the Kong family lineage. He tentatively concludes that the first postface is by the hand of the compiler of the *Dialogues* in the early Han dynasty (i.e., Kong Anguo) and that the second is of a later date, perhaps as late as Wang Su himself. However, Kramers insists that evidence in the preface and the postfaces should not count as evidence for or against the authenticity of the *Dialogues* itself.

Looking at evidence internal to the *Dialogues*, Kramers divides his examination into four parts. In the first part, Kramers examines numerous passages that are slightly different from parallel passages in other texts and that are so consistent with Wang Su's arguments in the *Sheng zheng lun* as to suggest intentional tampering on Wang Su's part. In the second part, Kramers examines suspicious consistencies between Wang Su's commentary in the *Dialogues* and the pseudo-Kong Anguo commentary in the ancient-script *Documents*. In the third part, Kramers examines "peculiarities" of the *Dialogues* that in some way suggest tampering by Wang Su. These three discussions are consistent with—and adduce many of the arguments from—historical critiques of the *Dialogues*.

In the fourth part, Kramers explains why one should refrain from drawing any kind of general conclusion from the first three. He says that there are other parts of the text that strongly suggest that Wang Su was working with an independent text. He points out that Wang Su's commentary corrects graphical errors in the text, which would not make sense if Wang Su had created the text himself. Nor would it make sense, unless Wang Su were utterly diabolical, that he forged the

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still stands and that although the *Dialogues* is not an entirely pristine Warring States text, it is largely the edited form of a collection of Warring States material.

12. Paul Goldin pushes back against this objection: "We can say with some confidence, however, that in forging the [*Kong cong zi*] 孔叢子, Wang Su (or someone in his camp) displayed just the kind of cleverness that Kramers finds it impossible to attribute to him" (Goldin 1999, 135n53). Goldin himself cites Ariel (1989). See above our discussion of Ariel's work, and see below Goldin's five objections to Kramers.

text and then corrected apparent anachronisms in it (as Wang Su does, for example, in correcting Yan Hui's purported age).

The bulk of the fourth part is devoted to examining relationships between the *Dialogues* and other texts, including proto-texts and common source texts, that existed at the beginning of the Han dynasty: *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, *Guo yu* 國語, *Xunzi* 荀子, *Shuo yuan* 說苑, *Li ji*, and so on. Kramers says that the contents of the *Dialogues* are consistent with the description in Kong Anguo's postface, and that there is a large overlap with accounts of Confucius in extant historical records ("mixed up with events of the various states" [see appendix 1]). The *Dialogues* contains nearly all accounts of conversations between Confucius and his students that existed at that time ("words of the seventy-two students" [see appendix 1]), with the exception of stories in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 that were considered apocryphal. There is very little overlap with the *Analects* or other focused collections such as the *Xiao jing* 孝經.

Kramers concludes that the *Dialogues* should be distinguished into two parts:

a. A collection made up from the main early traditions about Confucius handed down by later followers of his school, with the purpose of providing a complement to the [*Analects*]. Excluded were, for the reason that they had their own transmission, the [*Xiao jing*], [*Kongzi san chao ji*], and [*Zengzi wen*]. All this constitutes the bulk of the collection.
b. A series of texts, passages, and sentences, which are in agreement with theories propounded in the third century A.D. by Wang Su, of which he made use as evidence against the tenets of the influential school of [Zheng Xuan]; this is a minor portion of the collection. (Kramers 1950, 192)

What does Kramers make of the value of the *Dialogues* for the present day? He says:

> We may learn from it some more about Confucius as he was conceived in the early Han and also in pre-Han times; for [my] hypothesis would entail that part of the direct sources out of which the [*Dialogues*] was compiled have been lost themselves. . . . It does not make a great deal of difference whether the [*Dialogues*] was entirely compiled in the third century A.D. or partly also in the second or first century B.C.; to us it mainly represents the Confucian lore existing in the third century B.C., as Waley rightly has pointed out. (Kramers 1950, 198)

While Kramers refutes some of the claims of the accusers of Wang Su, he also accepts some. But many of these claims rest on certain questionable assumptions, such as that there was a distinct divide between Daoist and Confucian schools. For example, with reference to passages connecting Confucius to Laozi 老子, Kramers says, "trends provening from [Daoist] origins were placed within the Confucian frame-work" (168). Although a distinct line separating Daoism from Confucianism was popular in twentieth-century scholarship, recent archaeological evidence has

thrown it into doubt. The affiliation between so-called Daoist and Confucian theory present in the *Dialogues* can now be seen as pointing in the direction of its authenticity rather than the opposite. This point will become clearer below.

Several archaeological discoveries over recent decades provide evidence that at least some parts of the *Dialogues* are of early origin (Liu 1981; He and Liu 1981). Yang and Song (2013) summarize these finds and their relevance to the *Dialogues*. In 1973, a set of bamboo manuscripts dating to the year 55 BCE were found in a tomb in Ding County, Hebei Province. Some of these bamboo slips constitute the *Analects*, and some overlap with portions of the *Dialogues*. Li Xueqin, a leading scholar in contemporary China, called these the "Bamboo [*Dialogues*]" (X. Li 1987, 61) since they were written on bamboo, the common writing medium of the period.

Yang and Song also cite an even earlier source. In 1977, a Han tomb dating to 165 BCE was excavated in Fuyang, Anhui Province (Wang and Han 1978). It contained another set of bamboo slips that overlaps with the *Dialogues*. The dating of 165 BCE puts it just before Kong Anguo's time.

These two finds contain passages that overlap passages scattered across the *Dialogues*. A more recent archaeological find includes a large portion of an entire brief essay (chapter 27) of the *Dialogues* and dates to an even earlier time. In 1994, the Shanghai Museum purchased a collection of ancient bamboo slips on the antiquities market. These have since been authenticated and found to date to the fourth century BCE (Ma 2001; Shaughnessy 2005).[13] This stunning discovery puts to rest any theory that the *Dialogues* is entirely a product of the Han dynasty or later.[14] But it does more than that. It also shows that terminology once associated only with Daoism also appeared in overtly Confucian texts. The text in question is called "Parent of the People" (*Min zhi fumu* 民之父母). Overlap between the Shanghai Museum text and *Dialogues* 27.2 is not complete, but there is a significant amount of identical wording, including passages about the "three absences." The Chinese for *absence* is *wu* 無, a term that, indeed, means an absence of something at a basic level. In Daoism, it gains a supererogatory meaning, which is also apparent in the essay in question. There is

13. Ma estimates a late-fourth-century date for the physical manuscripts, and Shaughnessy concurs. Because it is unlikely that an original manuscript would be buried, it is most likely that the essay had circulated for some time before it was copied and buried. That would likely position it toward the mid-fourth century at the latest.

14. Some might downplay this significance by saying that if, as some accusers have said, the *Dialogues* was merely copied from other texts, like the *Li ji*, then any such archaeological finds speak to the authenticity of the other texts, not to that of the *Dialogues*. As Kramers and others have shown, however, the most likely scenario is that it was not merely a matter of the *Dialogues* being a pastiche of other texts. It is more likely that the *Dialogues* and other related texts were instead based on an independent set of underlying texts. The excavated material supports the theory that there were independent lines of texts that formed the bases of the transmitted texts that we have today.

also mention in the passage of *qi* 氣, a term that, despite one anomalous passage in the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), has been widely considered a notion adopted by Daoists and other metaphysicians but eschewed by the earliest Confucians. The adoption of these putatively Daoist ideas would have once marked the *Dialogues* as unequivocally late. The Shanghai manuscript version of this passage, along with other excavated texts (such as "Xing zi ming chu 性自命出"), turns that notion on its head.[15]

Xia Dekao (2012) quotes a common view of the development of literary styles in Warring States period China from a standard history of Chinese literature:

> The development of prose styles related to pre-Han thinkers can be divided into three stages. The first stage is composed of the *Analects* and the *Mozi*, the former being prose purely in the form of reported dialogues and the latter being a mix of reported dialogues and debates. The second stage is composed of the *Mencius* and the *Zhuangzi*, the former also based on the dialogue form but already developing into a dialogic form of essay; the latter has already developed from the dialogue form into a transitional form of thematic essays of focus arguments. With only a few exceptions, the *Zhuangzi* almost entirely transcends the dialogue form and has developed into the thematic essay. The third stage is composed of the *Xunzi* and *Han Feizi*, both of which represent the height of the pre-Qin thematic essay. (69)

According to Xia, this theory has been overturned by the several essays of the Shanghai Museum manuscripts, which predate the *Mencius* and *Zhuangzi* but already have the form of the thematic essay.

Do the preceding arguments and insights settle the matter of the authenticity of the *Dialogues* once and for all? Not entirely. Some scholars (e.g., Wu Kejing 2015) still believe that Wang Su, or someone of his time, created the *Dialogues* by pasting together passages from already existing texts and then altered them to suit their own philosophical position. Their main argument rests on comparing linguistic features of one passage to another. These scholars say that aspects of the language in the passages that overlap with other texts, including excavated texts, point to the *Dialogues* being a later text. But this kind of argument, relying as it does on tentative assumptions about (1) what kind

15. Scholars who have closely examined the relationship of the Shanghai Museum text with its parallels in the *Dialogues* and *Li ji* have differing opinions about ultimate provenance, but the predominant opinion appears to be that the Shanghai Museum manuscript predates the *Dialogues* and *Li ji* versions (Richter 2013; Ning 2017; Cook 2021). As Scott Cook reminds us, however, this does not devalue the transmitted texts. On the contrary, the existence of the manuscript version gives us reason to reevaluate the transmitted texts. Qi Dandan (2012) summarizes the already copious literature on just this topic and classifies newer scholarship into four categories: the relationship of Confucian ideas with Daoist ideas; the development of intellectual history and literary history; political philosophy; and *junzi* studies.

of linguistic features count as early and (2) when such features made their way into a text, amounts to little more than a series of ad hoc just-so stories.[16]

Although it would be an overstatement to say that Western scholars largely accept Kramers' conclusions, it is safe to say that few have challenged them in print. The most extensive example in English comes only in a long footnote to an excursus on the *Xunzi* from Paul Goldin. Goldin expresses confidence that the *Dialogues* is a forgery by "the infamous Wang Su" (Goldin 1999, 135n53). Goldin offers five brief arguments for his rejection of Kramers' work and his own refusal to believe "that anything in the [*Dialogues*], which purports to contain those sayings of Confucius not selected for incorporation into the *Analects*, can be taken without outside confirmation as an authentic document from the Warring States."

First, he appeals to the large overlap with other extant texts, offering a false dichotomy to account for the overlap: "[Either] Wang Su stole from everyone or . . . everyone took from a real [*Dialogues*]" (136n53). As we've seen above, there is a more

16. Wu Kejing cites as support for his theory a dissertation by Siu King Wai (2004) that purports to demonstrate, by so-called forensic linguistics, that the *Dialogues* is a heterogenous text, with parts dating from the late Warring States period to the late Han. While attempting to proceed from a comparative basis employing the entire set of early texts, the work provides no dating schema for texts and no statistical framework for linguistic analysis, and instead merely examines whether certain characters, or strings of characters, occur across certain texts, with single citations (if any) substantiating the dating for each text in his massive set. There are two further flaws with this approach. First, the number and length of texts of the Han dynasty (by traditional dating) far exceeds the number and length of texts of the pre-Qin period, and so it will be statistically more probable that any random string of characters will be present in the larger set of texts than the smaller set of texts. Without independent statistical analysis or other criteria for selecting strings of characters, finding them to be more common in the later and larger set of texts is not informative. There must first be a reason to select a character, or string of characters, for analysis (as we show in our own examples later in this introduction). Otherwise, one can be accused of cherry-picking examples. Second, if Kong Anguo did indeed edit the *Dialogues*, as we provisionally accept, he did it by transposing Warring States script into Han dynasty script (using manuscripts that were not entirely pristine), and anyone can see by looking at excavated bamboo strips that this was not a perfectly straightforward process. In cases of difficult-to-understand passages or illegibility, his reconstructed word choices could have occasionally reflected Han dynasty syntactic constructions. So, the mere presence of a small number of such constructions is not evidence that the text was originally a Han dynasty production. Something similar can be said for Wang Su's recension (though his edits would have been based on hermeneutics, not script). What's more, the *Dialogues* is a relatively large text, five times as large as the *Analects*. So, of course, there is more likely to be overlap of specific syntactic constructions with other texts. Siu doesn't say that there are 50 or 100 examples of such-and-such a construction in the *Dialogues*. He says there are 2, or 6, or even just 1, and from there makes sweeping generalizations. Such a small number of examples is likely statistically insignificant. But we can't know for sure without some sort of statistical framework or set of eligibility criteria, which, where available, are thinly justified in Siu's work.

nuanced position—namely, that there were multiple lines of transmission of the material now contained in the *Dialogues* and found elsewhere. The multiple-lines-of-transmission theory accounts for the many divergences in parallel passages across manuscripts; Goldin's theft theory does not.

Second, Goldin says that parallel passages in the *Dialogues* and the *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 "seem" to originate in the latter rather than the former, "although this probably cannot be proved" (136n53).

Third, Goldin says that a single statement of more than one formulation—namely, *dao bu shi yi* 道不拾遺 (lost items were let lie), which is found twice in the *Xunzi* and in parallel passages in the *Dialogues* (1.1 and 1.3)—was a late Warring States cliché, implying that the *Dialogues* could not date from the early Warring States. This line of reasoning is similar to the vocabulary evidence adduced below with respect to the dating of *Zuo zhuan* and the *Art of War* (Sunzi *Bing fa* 孫子兵法). It is true that, outside of the *Dialogues*, the earliest extant use of this phrase was in the Warring States period. Does that demonstrate that the two uses of it in the *Dialogues* are evidence that the *Dialogues* was forged by Wang Su? Certainly not. At most, it shows that that one part of the two passages in question dates from the late Warring States period at the earliest (400 years before Wang Su's time). But even this conclusion is premature, for the argument rests on a fallacious appeal to ignorance. Just because there are no extant early Warring States texts that use the phrase in question does not mean that it was never used in that time period. (We have to remember that most of the texts of the period have been lost.) It could also, as a cliché, have been added later. We see in other evidence below that, based on periodization of vocabulary, the *Dialogues* is likely a product of the early or middle Warring States period, though later additions cannot be ruled out.

Fourth, Goldin says, "the language of the [*Dialogues*] is not like that of Confucius's day" (136n53). Goldin offers one piece of evidence for this sweeping claim—the use of the term *Ru* (see in the philosophical lexicon below), which occurs in one chapter of the *Analects* and in one chapter of the *Dialogues*, although in the *Dialogues* the entire chapter is devoted to the concept. Goldin says that such an interest in the term occurred "only after the development of rival schools—that is to say, long after the time when Confucius' disciples would have decided what to include in the [*Analects*] and what in the [*Dialogues*]." In fact, however, the description of the *Ru* in the *Dialogues* has no association with rivalry among schools and is instead a description of *Ru* as the very kind of *shi* 士 (see below) that Goldin says did occupy Confucius' thinking. If Kong Anguo's description of the contents of the *Analects* and *Dialogues* is correct, then the brief treatment in the *Analects* and the lengthier treatment in the *Dialogues* is what we should expect (see further discussion below).

In his final argument, Goldin says that Wang Su's justification for bringing the *Dialogues* to light was to supplement his own philosophical positions of the time. But, Goldin asks, given the overlap of the *Dialogues* with other texts, why could

Wang Su not simply appeal to those other texts? Wang Su implies, Goldin says, that material in the *Dialogues* is new, and yet most of it is not. Isn't this a contradiction?

Again, the situation is more complicated than Goldin makes it out to be. Wang Su himself, in his preface, points out two pieces of information in the *Dialogues* that are indeed new. But it is not the newness of the *Dialogues* that is important; what is important is the authority. Most of the ideas in the *Dialogues* can indeed be found in other texts, but their originating in the lineage of Confucius confers on them a degree of certainty—lacking from quotations in other texts—that they are in agreement with Confucius' own thinking. Further on in this introduction, we cite many examples of fresh perspectives offered by the *Dialogues*.

In fairness to Goldin, it is important to emphasize that his argument comes in but a single footnote, so extensive evidence and discussion should not be expected (although he repeats his accusation with equal certainty in Goldin [2020], citing his own note). Because it is the most extensive challenge to Kramers' conclusions that we have found in English, we feel that it deserves the foregoing lengthy discussion.

Before moving on, there are two further minor points worth mentioning. Consistent with Goldin's position, Wu Kejing (2015) points out that approximately 8 percent of the *Dialogues* is unique and does not overlap with any known text. An example is *Dialogues* 9.11, about hiding a piece of jade. Nothing about this passage points to Wang Su's anti–Zheng Xuan agenda, so Wu Kejing and other opponents of the authenticity thesis have to say either that it is a passage taken by Wang Su from a text that has since been lost or that the forger made it up to throw us off his scent. This latter claim is also employed when certain linguistic elements appear that would be anachronistic for a later text. For example, Wu Kejing notes that the word *ju* 居, which had gone out of style by Wang Su's time, still appears repeatedly in the *Dialogues*. His argument is that it must be the forger's intentional way of making the text look older than it really is. In our opinion, neither of these arguments is convincing. The more plausible account is Kramers'—that the compiler (most likely Kong Anguo) was working with a set of Warring States texts.

A final niggling point has to do with the whereabouts of the *Dialogues* after Kong Anguo purportedly created the text out of the pile of manuscripts that he found in the imperial archives. The story is that Kong Anguo kept a version of the manuscripts in the Kong family home, and Wang Su eventually brought them to light. But Kong Anguo wouldn't have taken a version home without also leaving a version, or at the very least the original manuscripts, in the archives. When Liu Xiang was later charged with producing texts out of the archival material and produced the *Shuo yuan*, which substantially crosses over with the *Dialogues*, why does he mention neither the *Dialogues* as a text he found in the archives (the one that Kong Anguo had put together) nor the manuscripts that Kong Anguo purportedly used?

Kramers provides an answer to this question. First, Liu Xiang *does* mention the *Dialogues*. It is listed right there in the *Bie lu* (preserved in *Han shu*, "Yi wen zhi"). It

is true that the length listed is different from the current length (on one interpretation) and that the Tang-dynasty cataloger Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645 CE) said that the *Dialogues* mentioned in the *Bie lu* was not the same as the one circulating in his day. According to Kramers, a solution to this riddle can be found in the second postface to the *Dialogues*, which suggests that when Liu Xiang came across both the *Dialogues* and the *Da Dai li ji* 大戴禮記 and noticed the parallels, he mistakenly suspected that the former copied from the latter, and so he excised all the common passages from the *Dialogues*, shortening it substantially. If the second postface of the *Dialogues* is accurate, Liu Xiang passed away before completing work on his truncated version of the *Dialogues*, which Yan Shigu may have seen but which has since been lost.

The Authenticity of the Text

From the very beginning of classical studies in the Han right up to today, scholars have been sensitive to the possibility of the existence of forgeries among the classics. Whenever it was noticed that a text had suddenly been plucked from obscurity, suspicion would fall upon the plucker for the too-serendipitous discovery. But perhaps we can look at this process in a different way.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of texts were committed to writing during the Warring States period, and only a small fraction have come down to us today. Why were those few texts preserved? Because they were found to be relevant to the readers of their day. If that is the case, then it should not surprise us when one of those texts skidded along the precipice of the abyss like so many others, but unlike the others was saved by someone who found in it support for their theory of the day. It happened when the *Zhou li* was rescued "from the obscurity of the Han archives" (Boltz, in Loewe 1993, 27) by Liu Xin on behalf of Wang Mang, who wanted to legitimize his rule as a restoration of the Duke of Zhou's wise governance. It happened when Liu Xin rescued the *Zuo zhuan* and used it "for citing the text in arguments on omen interpretation, a form of discourse that was immensely influential in his era" (Durrant, Li, and Schaberg 2016, lviii).[17] And, we believe, it happened when Wang Su latched onto the *Dialogues* in his battle against the theories of Zheng Xuan.[18] All of these texts fell under suspicion as possible forgeries over the centuries, in part because their arrival happened just at the right time for those who deployed them

17. Michael Nylan (2001) adds that after Liu Xin, "the *Zuo* gained steadily in popularity within scholastic circles, no doubt because it was touted as promoting conservative values in this period of gradual reinfeudation" (262).

18. Hao Hong (2011) details aspects of the *Dialogues*' philosophy that are consistent with aspects of Wang Su's own thinking and would therefore have been a convenient supplement to his own position. In addition, Hao discusses aspects of the *Dialogues* that are inconsistent with Wang Su's ideas. These are conveniently ignored by Wang Su's accusers.

in philosophical disputes. But perhaps that convenience should be seen as a point in their favor rather than against them. That is, perhaps they survived simply because they were found relevant.

In his studies of the *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhu shu ji nian* 竹書紀年) and the "Shi fu" 世浮 chapter of the *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書, Edward Shaughnessy (1997) has shown that sometimes authentic classics turn out to be hiding in plain sight. From the Qing dynasty forward, the new text version of the *Bamboo Annals* had widely been considered a forgery. Only in recent decades has it been accepted as genuine. By examining similarities between the new-text *Bamboo Annals* and bronze inscriptions, and by a close examination of the arrangement of the *Bamboo Annals*, Shaughnessy (following David Nivison) has shown that, in his words, "no serious student of early China will be able to disregard the testimony of the *Bamboo Annals*" (93). This same spirit and allied methods, we believe, should be applied to the *Dialogues of Confucius*.

We said above that we believe the *Dialogues* can "provisionally be accepted" to be authentic. What do we mean by that? When working with any premodern text of questionable origin, one has to do a kind of Bayesian calculus and determine one's own confidence threshold for putting it to use as representative of the thought of the particular historical figure in question. What is one's confidence level, for example, that the Gospels are representative of the thought of Jesus, or that the words of Plato's Socrates can really be attributed to Socrates? Similarly, how likely is it that Aristotle's works, discovered underground centuries after his death, are indeed his students' records of his lectures? These questions are impossible to answer definitively. If one seeks 100-percent confidence in attributing a text to an author before using the text as a representative of the author's thoughts, then a vast range of texts—even the plays attributed to Shakespeare (James and Rubinstein 2007)—would be off-limits.

None of Aristotle's own writings survive, and yet Aristotle is one of the most influential philosophers in the Western tradition. How can that be? Historical records tell us that Aristotle produced over 100 writings—letters, essays, dialogues, and poetry—but all of them have been lost (Anagnostopoulos 2013; Hatzimichali 2016). Instead, we have records of his talks recorded by his students that were mysteriously discovered hundreds of years after his death. The traditional story goes as follows:

> Strabo [c. 63 BCE–23 CE] informs us that after the death of Theophrastus all of his and Aristotle's books were bequeathed to [Aristotle's student] Neleus, who took them to his home town of Scepsis in the Troad, where his descendants kept them hidden from the book-thirsty Attalid kings. They made up their minds to sell the books eventually in the early first century [BCE], but to the rich bibliophile Apellicon of Teos, whose library was brought by Sulla [d. 78 BCE] to Rome and received some form of scholarly attention from the grammarian Tyrannio, who then passed them on to Andronicus of Rhodes. (Hatzimichali 2016, 81)

Andronicus made them public around the middle of the first century BCE. Some of Aristotle's other writings were still extant at the time, but the Andronicus corpus gradually eclipsed them until they were lost entirely.

But even the writings that are purported to be transcriptions of his lectures are suspect. According to Georgios Anagnostopoulos (2013), the texts that Andronicus received were unorganized, brief, fractured, and in generally poor condition. On top of this, he says, they were purported to be from Aristotle's library but not necessarily authored by Aristotle. That means, he continues, that they could have been written by members of his school or could instead have been merely outside works that Aristotle had collected.

Furthermore, Aristotle is not the only philosopher for whom determining authorship is a challenge. The fact is that the authorship of many texts of ancient origin is difficult to attribute with certainty. Philosophers, historians, and textual scholars contribute to the long process of reaching consensus in such cases, but the burden of decision-making falls most heavily on the scholar who wishes to position a thinker's ideas not only in the history of the tradition but also in the current conversation. Often, historians and textual scholars can plead ignorance and simply ignore any contemporary relevance a candidate text might have. They can put the decision off for another day, or provide a detailed analysis of various positions, without adopting any one of them. But a scholar hoping to put ancient ideas into conversation today would like to be able to attribute key ideas from the past not just to a particular school or text but to a particular person. How can that be done without full confidence of authorship attribution?

One of the most influential philosophical texts of the European medieval period is that of St. Dionysius the Areopagite. This text appeared in the sixth century, purporting to be the work of this direct disciple of St. Paul in the first century (Rorem 1993; Corrigan and Harrington 2019). The text became extremely influential in Christian philosophy when it was assumed to genuinely be by the first-century saint, and not until the fifteenth century was it determined that the text was a forgery and couldn't have been written until the fifth century at the earliest. Because the true author of the text was completely unknown, the later tradition has referred to the author as simply Pseudo-Dionysius, or False-Dennis.

Many texts from ancient times fall between the poles of confirmed authorship and confirmed forgery. What can we do about them? Some scholars would say that, where we lack absolute confidence, we should refrain from attributing authorship. The fact is, however, that authorship attribution rarely works this way. When scholars today attribute authorship of the *Nicomachean Ethics* or the *Politics* to Aristotle, they—we—are not claiming absolute knowledge of confirmed authorship. Rather, they—we—are claiming sufficient confidence for now. Perhaps later we will learn something new about the authorship. It is also a hermeneutic shorthand for grouping mutually consistent positions. Even if the

historical Aristotle did not write the texts, they are sufficiently alike among themselves and sufficiently similar to what others said of Aristotle's thinking that grouping them under one author permits us certain insights into the texts as a body of work, allowing us to make inferences and fill gaps from one text to another.

Most scholars who work with reconstructions of ancient philosophy prioritize hermeneutic expedience over certainty of authorship, in a provisional rather than neglectful way. Some scholars focus on questions of authorship attribution—a worthwhile enterprise—and some make provisional attributions based on the best evidence available. In a book on the five Confucian classics, Michael Nylan (2001) makes direct, unambiguous attributions to the thoughts and actions of Confucius. For example:

- "Confucius had said little or nothing on questions [about human nature, etc.], possibly because he thought them unanswerable, more likely because in his lifetime such topics did not yet engross educated men" (26).
- "The down-to-earth conversations, relaxed jokes, and individualized question-and-answer sessions used by Confucius himself" (41).
- "Confucius himself was fully confident that the old Zhou culture he faithfully renewed would never die" (348).

Nylan justifies as follows:

> The source now commonly regarded as most reliable for the life and thought of Confucius is the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), a work that purports to record conversations between Confucius and his disciples. But even the earliest passages in the *Analects* probably date to the fourth century BC, about a century or so after Confucius's death, and the *Analects* contains later traditions and outright interpolations. . . . Scholars cannot reasonably hope to discern precisely what the historical Master really thought or said. . . .
>
> I have tried to follow the formula whereby "Confucius" refers to the semifictional creation of the *Analects*' compilers, supplemented—where this is possible without doing real violence to the *Analects*' account of Confucius—by portraits of Confucius preserved in related canonical works of early date, including the [*Li ji*]. I follow this formula in the full knowledge that Confucius over time came to be "more than a man or a thinker, more even than a school of thought," a veritable "cultural phenomenon intertwined with the destiny of all of Chinese civilization." (364)

In his entry on Confucius in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Mark Csikszentmihalyi (2020) follows a similar formula, and, beyond the *Analects* and *Li ji*, names several other sources of the philosophy of Confucius:

> Expanding the corpus of Confucius quotations and dialogues beyond the *Analects*, then, requires attention to three additional types of sources. First, dialogues preserved in transmitted sources like the *Records of Ritual* [*Li ji*], the *Elder Dai's Records of Ritual* ([*Da Dai li ji*] 大戴禮記), and Han collections like the [*Dialogues*] *of Confucius* (*Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語) contain a large number of diverse teachings. Second, quotations attached to the interpretation of passages in the classics preserved in works like the *Zuo Commentary* to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, or *Han's Intertextual Commentary on the Odes* (*Han Shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳) are particularly rich sources for readings of history and poetry. Finally, a number of recently archaeologically recovered texts from the Han period and before have also expanded the corpus.

The "Confucius" to which Nylan and Csikszentmihalyi refer is, by our reckoning, the same Confucius that appears in the *Dialogues*. A reference to one is a reference to the other. So, when we say that a certain idea or position can be attributed to Confucius, we are not saying that it is a fact that the historical Confucius definitely said it. Instead, we are provisionally claiming that, to our best understanding today, there is a coherent set of positions that we can attribute to the figure known as Confucius in a specific set of texts (primarily the *Analects* and the *Dialogues*), and that the position in question fits into that set.

There are quite a number of criteria used to determine where on the authenticity spectrum any particular text falls. When enough criteria are met to suggest that authorship can be ascribed, one criterion that stands out is coherence, both internal and external. Are the ideas in the text largely consistent throughout, and are the ideas in the text consistent with texts attributed to the same author? Though not all contradictions or inconsistencies have to be ruled out, a text should not come off as tracking back and forth across incompatible positions, as conveying ideas that clearly originate in a later tradition, or as being simply a collection of haphazard and unrelated ideas. There should, as with the purported teachings of Socrates, be some semblance of systematicity or development, or at the very least of persistent questioning or exploration of positions.

One of the tasks of a scholar working with an ancient text is to reconstruct it in a coherent way. That does not mean forcing coherence on it, by taking passages out of context or offering implausible interpretations. Rather, it means looking at passages that, on a surface reading, may seem unrelated or contradictory and showing how they are actually mutually informing. The more mutually informing passages there are in a text, absent contradictory passages, the more coherent it is.

The *Dialogues* is not a systematic text in the sense that it presents a single argument broken into parts. Its chapters, for example, do not build on each other and then culminate in a final conclusive statement. Nor do they work like premises of a single disordered argument. However, many chapters do contain cohesive thematic

statements, and there are few obvious contradictions or serious anachronisms across chapters. The ideas presented are consistent with the ideas discussed in the *Analects* and with other early Confucian positions, such as those of Mencius (Mengzi 孟子) and Xunzi. It is, unquestionably, a Confucian text.

Where some discrepant ideas, such as presumably Daoist ideas, appear in the text, rather than presupposing that they are interpolations or markers of a later text, we can take them as evidence that during the Warring States period there was not a divide between two such schools, as is often assumed. This is one way that the *Dialogues* demonstrates its value.

Skeptics of the authenticity of the *Dialogues* begin with the assumption that it was forged in a time well after the era of Confucius and his students, and that it therefore reflects the language and concerns of the era of its forger. However, if the text is indeed a text of the Warring States period, as we provisionally accept that it is, then it must be looked at instead as a text that reflects the language and concerns of the Warring States period, or even of Confucius' own time, the late Spring and Autumn period. But where in this three-century span of time should we place it? Other Warring States texts pose a similar problem of precise dating, and it will help to look at how dating has been approached in two particular texts, the *Zuo zhuan* and the *Art of War*.

Yuri Pines (2002a, 2002b) takes a fairly conservative approach to dating in his study of the *Zuo zhuan*, a text that, like the *Dialogues*, could range in date from early to late Warring States period, but also possibly reflects ideas of the Spring and Autumn period. Of Pines' dating methods, two are applicable to the *Dialogues*. The first examines the occurrence of specific terminology, including *renyi* 仁義, *wanwu* 萬物 (all things/creatures), *li* 理 (order), *cheng* 誠 (sincerity), *zhi* 智 (wisdom), *wan sheng* 萬乘 (large—a reference to the size of a state), *buyi* 布衣 (commoner), *yin yang* 陰陽, and the words for crossbow (*nu* 弩) or crossbow trigger (*ji* 機, *shu* 樞). Following the Yuan-dynasty scholar Zhao Fang, Pines argues that, because of the rare incidence of these terms in the *Documents* and the *Poems* but their common incidence in middle and late Warring States texts, frequent occurrence of these terms in a text would preclude its dating to the early Warring States period.

Pines (2002b) also distinguishes between a received text and an Ur-text, the latter being a core original text that was modified over time into the received text that we have today. While many scholars despair at the prospect of dating received Warring States texts more precisely than a 300-year range, Pines suggests that it is possible to do so with Ur-texts. He tentatively establishes an early Warring States date for the *Zuo zhuan* text, which contains ideas from the Spring and Autumn period. Pines' overall method seems readily applicable to the *Dialogues*.

Tabulating the occurrence of the above terms in the *Dialogues,* a relatively early dating is suggested, as follows:

The *Dialogues* contains no references to the crossbow or its trigger.

The term *buyi* occurs just once (35.2) in the *Dialogues*.

The term *wan sheng* occurs just once (9.9) in the *Dialogues*.

The terms *ren* and *yi* (see the separate headings below) are pervasive across the text individually but occur in only eight passages as a pair. A similar proportion is seen in the Guodian 郭店 corpus (excavated texts dating to the middle Warring States period or earlier).

Pines highlights the term *li* 理 as a key marker of change in intellectual terminology during the Warring States period. He observes that it is absent in the *Analects*, occurs seven times in three passages of the *Mencius*, and appears "no less than 106 times in the *Xunzi*" (Pines 2002b, 699). The term *li* occurs in thirteen passages of the *Dialogues*, largely in the same sense of to order that it is used in the Guodian essays "Cheng zhi wen zhi 成之聞之" and "Xing zi ming chu 性自命出." Less commonly in the *Dialogues,* it is used as a noun, meaning something like norm or principle, similar to its apparent use in the Guodian essay "Zun de yi 尊德義." The Guodian "Yu cong 語叢" essays seem to use it in both of the above senses.

The term *cheng* occurs in twelve passages of the *Dialogues*, usually in the typical sense of describing a basic personality trait, which is how it is also used in the *Zuo zhuan* ("Wen" 18.7) and in "Cheng zhi wen zhi." *Dialogues* 8.6 and 29.2 could have a more profound sense of a cultivated virtue with cosmic overtones (a purported later usage). In both cases, however, they appear right at the end of the passage, with a clearly explanatory purpose, suggesting that they could be later additions.

The term *wanwu* occurs in 11 passages of the *Dialogues*, a much lower incidence than in the *Xunzi* (40), the *Zhuangzi* (55; 21 in the Inner Chapters), and even the *Laozi* 老子 (a.k.a. *Dao de jing* 道德經, 16). In the *Mozi* 墨子, it occurs in 6 passages. It occurs in 3 of the Guodian documents (*Laozi*, "Tai yi sheng shui 太一生水," and "Tang Yu zhi dao 唐虞之道"). Pines says there are two alternative forms for this cosmological concept: *qun wu* 群物 and *bai wu* 百物. The former appears in the Guodian texts "Xing zi ming chu 性自命出" and "Zhong xin zhi dao 忠信之道," and the latter occurs in the Guodian text "Yu cong." *Bai wu* occurs once (26.4) in the *Dialogues* but not in a cosmological sense. *Qun wu* does not occur in the *Dialogues*.

The term *zhi* 智 occurs in forty passages of the *Dialogues*, but this is the most questionable of Pines' criteria, for the term appears in the "Shao gao" chapter of the *Documents*, which is widely recognized as among the earliest chapters of our earliest Chinese expository text, and the term *zhi* 知 was commonly considered the graphic equivalent of *zhi* 智, making it virtually impossible to use *zhi* 智 as an independent criterion. For example, Stephen Durrant, Wai-yee Li, and David Schaberg (2016) repeatedly translate *zhi* 知 as "wisdom" in their translation of CQZZ (e.g., "Wen" 13.2; "Cheng" 17.6, 17.9; "Xiang" 21.5, 23.8). In addition, the term *zhi* 智 occurs repeatedly in the Shanghai Museum and Guodian manuscripts.

The term *yin yang* is also of questionable utility in dating texts. Pines himself acknowledges that the terminology occurs during the Spring and Autumn period, when it referred to "primary cosmic forces" (701). He adds, however, "it was not related

to political thought or general philosophy; and this situation evidently remained intact until the late fourth century BC" (701). The term *yin yang* appears in five passages of the *Dialogues* (5.3, 26.1, 32.9, 32.10, 32.13). To what extent these instances represent an earlier or later usage and to what extent any later usage is representative of the *Dialogues* Ur-text are both open to interpretation.

A second dating criterion used by Pines (2002a) follows the scholar He Leshi 何樂士 (among others), who posits that the grammatical character *yu* 于 is more common in the Western Zhou and is substituted later for the equivalent *yu* 於, especially in conversation. The fact that *yu* 於 outnumbers *yu* 于 by a factor of eight in the *Dialogues* should be expected, since Confucius lived in the Eastern Zhou. The very presence of the character *yu* 于, by this criterion, may gesture toward an early dating; but then again, the term continues to occur throughout the Han dynasty.

A similar transition, Pines says, occurred with the character *qi* 其 being replaced with *qi* 豈 (岂) in rhetorical questions. *Qi* 其 is the older construction, he says. Pines examines the ratio of one to the other in the *Zuo zhuan*, the *Analects*, and the *Mencius*, finding that the ratio of *qi* 豈 to *qi* 其 in the *Zuo zhuan* (82:64, or 1.28) and the *Analects* (8.3, or 2.6667) closely matches, whereas the *Mencius* ratio (12.5) is much higher. The ratio in the *Dialogues* is 36:9, or 4.0. If this criterion is valid and our tabulations are accurate, it would suggest that the *Dialogues* lies closer in time to the *Zuo zhuan* than to the *Mencius*.

By Pines' two methods, the *Dialogues* Ur-text would seem to be of quite early dating: that is, from the early Warring States period, reflecting the thoughts and ideas of the time of Confucius in the late Spring and Autumn period. Some passages were likely added or embellished over time, as reflected in the few instances of late Warring States terminology.

The dating of Sunzi's *Art of War* ranges, in scholars' estimations, from the late Spring and Autumn (possibly Confucius' lifetime) to the late Warring States period. In tracing prior scholarship, Samuel B. Griffith (1971) discusses two avenues of dating. The first, like Pines' analysis, focuses on terminology in the text.[19]

The crossbow, as discussed above, is one such term; as noted, it does not appear in the *Dialogues*.

Another is the term *dai jia* 帶甲(armored), which should not appear in a text of the Spring and Autumn period, Griffith says. This term does not appear in the *Dialogues*.[20]

19. Pines (2002b), without citing Griffith, also applies his lexical method to Sunzi's *Art of War* (which contains a term for crossbow trigger and the terms *li*, *yin yang*, and *renyi*), and concludes with a tentative date of mid-fourth century BCE.

20. It's unclear whether other references to *jia* (armor) would also be criteria for later dating. The term *jia* in reference to soldiers appears seven times in the *Dialogues* (1.3, 5.4, 22.5, 31.5, 35.3, 37.2, 41.17), but it also appears in the same sense countless times in CQZZ (e.g., "Yin" 1, "Huan" 6, "Min" 2, "Xi" 15, "Wen" 1, "Xuan" 2).

Jin 金, referring to counted money, as in *bai jin* 百金 or *qian jin* 千金, does not come into wide circulation, Griffith says, until the Warring States period. This usage is also absent from the *Dialogues*, despite many references to payments and to expensive or luxurious items. Five passages (5.1, 10.18, 16.2, 33.3, 41.17) refer specifically to payments or gifts in the form of *bi* 幣. Though the term later came to mean money, it earlier referred to goods used as payment, most commonly silk.

The division of generals into *shang* 上, *zhong* 中, and *xia* 下 did not occur until the Warring States period, Griffith says. These terms do not occur in the *Dialogues*, despite references to military campaigns.

The terms *ye zhe* 謁者 and *she ren* 舍人 (both of which indicate functionary roles), have meanings specific to the Warring States period, Griffith says. These terms do not appear in the *Dialogues*.

Griffith distinguishes between two senses of *wu xing* 五行, referring to changing phases and to elemental substances (the latter use being the earlier one, he says). However, he offers no textual support, and this is likely an outmoded theory (Major 1976).[21] The earliest known use of *wu xing* is either in the CQZZ ("Zhao" 25 and 32) or in the *Documents* ("Gan shi" and "Hong fan"). In both of these texts, correlative relations are established between the five phases and other "fives." We see a very similar correlative arrangement in the *Dialogues* (24.1–5, 32.9–10).

Following the Qing-dynasty scholar Yao Nai, Griffith says that the term *zhu* 主, while common across all early texts, comes to refer specifically to the sovereign only during the Warring States period, having previously referred, as a noun, to a minister (or other leadership role) but not to a head of state. The term *zhu* appears in the sense of sovereign in ten passages of the *Dialogues*. One wonders, however, how accurate this criterion is for dating texts, given that the same sense also appears in a Western Zhou layer of the *Documents* ("Duo fang") (Nylan 2001).

Finally, Griffith comments on the scale of warfare and how it steadily grew from a small, knightly affair during Confucius' time to massive battles of hundreds of thousands of soldiers, with siege machines, cavalry, and tax levies to fund it all, in the late Warring States period. In the *Dialogues*, we see a number of depictions of

21. A. C. Graham (1986) and John Major (1991), following Graham, distinguish between an early meaning of five processes and a later meaning of five phases. The former refers to materials put to use, and the latter to substances transforming into one another. Major says that the latter gets its textual expression in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (139 BCE). In addition to its similarity of usage with the *Zuo zhuan* and *Documents*, the use of *wu xing* in the *Dialogues* seems to also overlap with later uses, as in the *Huainanzi*, in that we see correlations of materials with rulers, colors, musical tones, and so forth, and we see clear references to phases passing one into the other, but without a sense of one overcoming (*sheng* 勝) another, as we see in the *Huainanzi* (derived from Zou Yan 鄒衍, fl. 250 BCE). We suggest that *Dialogues* chapters 24 and 32, where *wu xing* appears, represent an intermediate and distinctively Confucian stage that predates the *Huainanzi* (as well as Zou Yan's *wu de* 五德).

battle and preparation for battle (1.3, 22.9, 37.2, 41.2, 41.6, 42.9, 42.11, 42.16), none of which indicate a massive scale, instead describing fairly limited confrontations. For example, 41.2 and 42.16 depict different parts of the same battle. Section 41.2 begins, "Guo Shu, a high minister of Qi, attacked Lu. Ji Kangzi sent Ran Qiu [his household manager] as lead general to defend against the attack, with Fan Chi as second in command." This is obviously not a large-scale, well-planned battle of specialists with tactical and technical expertise. Similarly, 42.16 says: "A Qi army invaded Lu. Gongshu Wuren met a man entering the fortress leaning on his staff and out of breath. In tears, Wuren said, "We exhaust them with labor and burden them with taxes. It is impermissible for a *junzi* to not participate, for an official to not be willing to die. This being the case, dare I shrink from battle?" At that, he and his beloved servant boy Wang Yi rode forth on a chariot, rushed the enemy, and died in battle." Section 42.11 depicts a battle between Chu and Wu, which fielded comparatively large armies during Confucius' time. The scene we are shown is of ad hoc participation by members of the highest levels of the government. Shang Yang, the minister of labor, did his very minimum by shooting three Wu soldiers with his bow and arrow (covering his eyes as they fell) and then promptly left the battlefield. In the largest tactical preparation for battle that we see in the *Dialogues* (37.2), Yue pledges "the 3,000 soldiers within its borders" to Wu.

Taken together, the criteria that Pines and Griffith put forward to date the *Zuo zhuan* and Sunzi's *Art of War* and applied to the *Dialogues* reveal that the *Dialogues* can be considered of quite early date, closer to the beginning of the Warring States period than to its middle or end and describing events that could very well date to the time of Confucius.[22]

As raised above, one of the key intellectual historical questions relating to philosophy of the Warring States period is the dating of the rise of correlative cosmology founded on the metaphysical concepts of *qi* 氣, *yin yang* 陰陽, and the five phases (*wu xing* 五行). A. C. Graham (1986), in an influential study of this topic, summarizes his conclusions as follows:

22. Ruan Guoyi (2010) compared the *Dialogues* to Zhou- and Han-dynasty texts along two linguistic dimensions. He found that with regard to the percentage of disyllabic words, the *Dialogues* belongs in the middle Warring States period, and with regard to the proportion of compound words that are attributive as opposed to coordinate, the *Dialogues* resembles later Warring States texts. Tang Haipeng (2011) performed a linguistic analysis of the *Dialogues* along three dimensions. He found that the vocabulary of the *Dialogues* does not match the specific characteristics of the vocabulary of texts of Wang Su's time, that copulative constructions (*ye* 也 vs. *wei* 爲) are characteristic of Archaic Chinese (Zhou dynasty) rather than Middle Chinese (Wang Su's period), and that passive constructions (*yu* 于, *wei* 爲, *jian* 見) are characteristic of Archaic rather than Middle Chinese. He concludes that the *Dialogues* "is primarily a text of the archaic period, but not ruling out the possibility that Wang Su polished or rearranged portions, confined to a minority of chapters, namely chapters 5, 7, and 8" (95).

(1) Down to 300 BC philosophers had only a bare cosmological scheme, the Way, Heaven and Earth, the Four Seasons, the 10,000 things. But outside the philosophical schools, the court astronomers, physicians, musicmasters and diviners had a cosmology in which colours, sounds and tastes correlate with the Six [*Qi*] of Heaven (which included *yang* "sunshine" and *yin* "shade"), and the Five [*Xing*] (processes) of Earth give way to each other in the conquest cycle. There was a state cult of the Five Processes which may already have correlated them with the centre and Four Directions.

(2) After 300 BC the philosophical schools came to accept the Yin and Yang as the [*qi*] which are the assimilating and differentiating influences behind chains of pairs.

(3) Outside the philosophical schools, [Zou Yan] (c. 250 BC) explained the rise and fall of dynasties by the conquest cycle of the Powers ([*de*]) behind the Five Processes, and advised rulers who aspired to found the coming dynasty to correlate their ritual acts with the Power of Water. This required a shift of fours and fives from the Six [*Qi*] to the Five Powers, with the result that the placing of the Powers in the Four Directions implied motion in a generation cycle corresponding to the Four Seasons.

(4) During the third century BC cosmology enters philosophical literature in [*Guanzi*] and the [*Lü shi chunqiu*]. From the unification in 221 BC the First Emperor reigning by the Power of Water, the surviving schools took over the whole system of correspondences now indispensable to influence at court. The Five [*xing*] (now translatable as "Five Phases") took next place to Yin and Yang, as the [*qi*] which assimilate and differentiate chains of fours and fives, and move all of them through the generation and conquest cycles. (91–92)

All of this very good scholarship should come with one large caveat—namely, that the textual record is woefully incomplete. What Graham attempts to do here is akin to reconstructing the dating of a fifty-two-card deck of playing cards with just ten randomly appearing cards, only five of which are datable. Suppose the cards of the fifty-two-card deck had evolved and accumulated over several centuries, and suppose there were no face cards in the datable set of five but there was a jack in the other group of five. One might infer that the jack was a late invention. But if so, one would be committing the fallacy of argument from ignorance. As the old saw goes, absence of evidence does not equal evidence of absence. Just because we don't know there was a jack in the period represented by the datable set does not entail that there was never a jack at that time.[23]

23. This fallacy is pervasive in scholarship over the last century, and although the recent revelations of excavated texts have given many scholars pause, the pause has often been too brief. Dirk Meyer

The sinological case is more complex than this, but the same logical principles apply, and from the limited information we have, the same proportions appear to apply also. The "Yi wen zhi" section of the *Han shu* is the earliest catalog we have of extant literature, and it records some 13,000 scrolls during the Former Han dynasty. But many texts that have been excavated from the Warring States period are not recorded there, and only about 20 percent of those Former Han texts survive today. To reconstruct the intellectual history of the Warring States and Han periods with any kind of specificity regarding which concepts occurred when—relying almost entirely on textual evidence, as Graham does—is a fraught enterprise. And it risks misdating other texts that don't fit the incomplete scheme.[24]

The fact is that there is a lot we don't know about cosmological beliefs in the Warring States period. A case in point is the recent emergence of the importance of the concept of the Great Inchoate (*tai yi* 太一). This concept appears prominently in the *Huainanzi* and the *Lü shi chunqiu* 吕氏春秋, texts that date to the early Han dynasty, the Qin, or the very late Warring States period. Because of this, any other text of ambiguous dating where the term occurs, such as the *Dialogues*, would be, on this basis, dated no earlier than these two texts. However, in the excavated Guodian manuscripts, which date to about 300 BCE at the latest, and probably significantly earlier than that, contain an essay ("Tai yi sheng shui") dedicated entirely to the cosmological concept of the Great Inchoate. It turns out that the *Dialogues* discussion of the concept parallels the one in the excavated text, another hint suggesting the authenticity of the *Dialogues*.

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provides an illustrative example. In a 2012 publication he writes, "To date, no single [excavated] manuscript has been found that contains [poems] alone. They exist only in quotations" (Meyer 2012, 248). This observation makes up part of an argument that the poems in Confucius' time and during the Warring States period were primarily oral, and so without firm graphic instantiations. Seven years after Meyer made this statement, an early- to mid-Warring-States-period manuscript containing only a collection of fifty-seven poems (also found in the transmitted *Poems*) came to light (Shaughnessy 2021; for a discussion of orality versus writing in the history of the *Poems*, see Shaughnessy 2015). We're not claiming that this manuscript entirely invalidates Meyer's conclusion, merely that the conclusion was based at least in part on an argument from ignorance (because we have no text, therefore . . .). Such an argument is fallacious, and any conclusions drawn from such an argument, absent more substantial arguments, must be viewed with skepticism.

24. Note the distinction we are making here between general terminology vs. philosophical terminology. Given a dearth of textual sources, it is safer to make dating generalizations with regard to common terminology (e.g., grammatical particles and terms from everyday language) and terms that can be tied to the historical or archaeological records. The size of armies are stated in texts, for example, and examples of crossbows have been found in tombs. Philosophical terminology, such as *wu xing*, because it is neither common nor datable historically or archaeologically, is much more difficult to pin down chronologically.

The "Tai yi sheng shui" essay also uses the terms *yin* and *yang* unequivocally as cosmogonic principles. Graham says this doesn't happen until after 300 BCE, by which he means that Zou Yan was the major progenitor of the idea. However, Graham offers a rare caveat, saying that although this is our first textual record of the idea, it probably was circulating earlier. The "Tai yi sheng shui" shows that he was correct in his caveat but that he didn't push the date far enough back. If the same principle—that an idea typically circulates before it is recorded—applies to the appearance of the *yin/yang* principle in the Guodian manuscripts, then it could go back at least to 400 BCE.

A concept Graham discusses elsewhere using the same logic is *qing* 情. Canvassing early literature, he concludes that, in pre-Han texts, *qing* never means emotions (his word is *passions*) as it comes to mean in the Han dynasty (Graham 1990b, 59). A corollary of this claim is that any text of ambiguous dating that contains the word *qing* with a connotation of emotions would have to date to no earlier than the Han. Here again we see the fallacy of appeal to ignorance. Just because we don't have a Warring States period text in which *qing* clearly has emotional connotations (Graham discounts its association with emotions in the *Xunzi* and ignores a relevant occurrence in the *Poems*) does not mean there never was one. It turns out that several of the Shanghai Museum and Guodian essays contain the word *qing*, with clear emotional connotations, likewise mirroring its use in the *Dialogues* (see, e.g., chapter 32).

Other concepts follow a similar pattern. Concepts once thought to be markers of late Warring States or post–Warring States arguments have turned up in the Shanghai Museum and Guodian manuscripts and may mirror usages in the *Dialogues*. These include, for example, an emphasis on affection, or closeness (*qin* 親), between the people and the leadership, a preference for education and *li* over legal punishments, and an emphasis on meritocratic succession.[25]

According to Shaughnessy (1997), "In attempting to determine the authenticity of a transmitted document three factors must be considered: the history of the text's transmission, its linguistic usage, and whether the content is consistent with the purported historical context" (37). Let us summarize our conclusions according to these three criteria.

First, the title of the *Dialogues* is found in the earliest Han bibliography of existing texts dating from the Warring States period received into the Han archives. It

25. Scott Cook (2012, 97–176) provides an overview of some of the main themes of the Guodian texts. The overlap in themes with the *Dialogues* is noteworthy and deserving of further exploration. Sarah Allan (2015) translates and analyzes four excavated texts, all having to do with early sages and meritocratic succession, revisiting her earlier work on the subject (1981), which looked only at transmitted texts (excluding the *Dialogues*). According to her, "This paradigm of abdication is the only alternative to the idea of dynastic cycle found in the Chinese tradition, and it did not survive the Qin and Han dynasties as an idea for an alternative form of succession" (2015, 11).

remained obscure until Wang Su, one of the "greatest scholars of the third century" (Shaughnessy 1997, 80), is made aware of a copy in the home of the descendants of Confucius. That copy includes two postfaces, one by the great scholar Kong Anguo, explaining its origins in the Warring States period and its subsequent journey up to its arrival in his hands, and relating how it was introduced to the Han emperor but, for political reasons, languished thereafter. Although there is more than one current version of the *Dialogues* text, the differences among them are minor, and so it is widely believed that our current *Dialogues* is essentially the one that Wang Su brought to light.

Second, the linguistic usage in the text has been shown above to be largely consistent with texts dating prior to the middle of the Warring States period, and, more importantly, largely different from texts dating after that period. As Shaughnessy demonstrated in his examination of the *Bamboo Annals*, and as Pines argues in reference to Warring States texts generally, minor textual anomalies do not delegitimize an entire text. We know with certainty that texts were commonly modified after their original recording. We also know with certainty that many characters were homographically interchangeable.[26] Therefore, some apparent anachronisms are to be expected.

Third, we also saw above that the contents of the *Dialogues* are largely consistent with what we know from textual and archaeological sources of the time of Confucius. (More detail is provided in specific footnotes to this translation.) Many criticisms of the *Dialogues* argue that it primarily reflects concerns of the Han-dynasty philosophical debates, but this is simply not the case. One method used by Shaughnessy that is implicit in his three criteria is the comparison of transmitted texts with archaeological finds. Such finds from the Warring States reveal substantial crossover of exact content, of language use, and of general subject matter between the *Dialogues* and manuscripts that date to the mid-Warring States period at the latest.[27]

26. Shaughnessy (2006) provides a thorough examination of what he calls the "instability" of texts during the Warring States period at the level of "the word, the pericope, and perhaps even the whole text" (60). See also Boltz (1997).

27. As we noted above, the archaeological finds themselves don't prove the authenticity of the *Dialogues*, but they raise the question of the ultimate value of the practice of doubting antiquity that began in the Song dynasty, gained steam during the Qing dynasty, and then accelerated in the twentieth century. Michael Loewe and Edward Shaughnessy offer a reasonable and sobering assessment:

> This archaeological verification of some received texts has given rise, especially in China, to a scholarly view which affirms the antiquity of most significant aspects of Chinese culture. This view is now referred to as that of the *Xingu pai* 信古派 (Believing in Antiquity School), in conscious distinction from the *Yigu pai* 疑古派 (Doubting Antiquity School). . . . In some of its expressions this belief in antiquity is doubtless exaggerated, owing as much to contemporary cultural chauvinism as to scholarly evidence; but such opinions are probably no more biased than

Whatever concerns Wang Su found in the text that supported his views are there not because he put them there but because his view was more consistent with an early Warring States view than was Zheng Xuan's, whose "propensity to exalt and mystify" (Nylan 2001, 41) Confucius was itself anachronistic. Because of Zheng Xuan's syncretism, "the classical traditions were impoverished, deficient in the play necessary to fire scholars' imaginations and prevent scholastic ossification" (Nylan 2001, 53). It was Wang Su who turned opinion away from Zheng Xuan and back to a more down-to-earth depiction of Confucius and his philosophy.

It is increasingly recognized that the *Analects* was not known as a completed text until the Han dynasty (Makeham 1996). A recent advocate for this recognition has been Michael Hunter (Hunter 2012, 2017; Hunter and Kern 2018). In contrast to the work of scholars who filter through passages attributable to a historical Confucius, Hunter works in the opposite direction, combing through the entire early corpus for all passages having to do with Confucius and working with them to see how Confucius was envisioned, not what Confucius thought. He argues "that the single-serving [Confuciuses] who emerge from [early] dialogues and anecdotes . . . are best read as literary projections of the values and virtues implicit in associated [Confucius said] material. In other words, [Confucius] was the figure he had to be in order to legitimate [Confucius said] discourse" (Hunter 2017, 97). Although Hunter agrees that the *Dialogues* contains "a large amount of material" from early sources (22), he maintains that "all [Confucius] texts are on an equal footing such that there is no a priori reason to read some sayings or stories before others" (19–20). This leads to his most controversial claim: that not enough evidence can be found "to justify continuing to read the [*Analects*] as the most authoritative [Confucius] text from the Warring States era and, thus, as a foundational work of pre-imperial Chinese thought" (11).

In this way, Hunter blows up our traditional model of viewing the *Analects* as an early—and thus more authoritative—Warring States Confucius-related text and all other Confucius-related texts as later and thus less authoritative. One need not go as far as Hunter and place the *Analects* as late as the Former Han. After all, as even Hunter admits, there are quotations from the *Analects* that predate the Han. As Edward Slingerland (2018) and Paul Goldin (2018) point out, there are other reasons to believe that the source material of the *Analects* is a product of the Warring States period.

The implications of the work of Hunter, Makeham, and others is that, conservatively speaking, the *Analects* should not be considered to be entirely a product of the

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those of many Western attempts to negate this view, and each of its proposals needs consideration on its own merits. Despite all these reservations, it is hard to deny the conclusion that the archaeological discoveries of the past generation have tended to authenticate, rather than to overturn, the traditional literary record of ancient China. (Loewe and Shaughnessy 1999, 10)

(continued...)

INDEX

This index provides locators for significant names and terms. For items already listed in the glossary or the introduction's philosophical lexicon (which provide locators only for the main text), locators are provided here for pages outside the main text—in the front matter, back matter, and footnotes. For items not appearing here, please go directly to the glossary. Locators in italics refer to figures.