

# Thinking Beyond the “Sayings”: Comments About Sources Concerning the Life and Teachings of Confucius (551–479)\*

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A vast number of people have written about Confucius and so much has been written about him. These articles, the majority of which are very much indebted to the traditional positions of Chinese culture, have increasingly been questioned by sinological research in recent years.<sup>1</sup> The most important, and perhaps the only truly “authentic” source for his life and teachings, remains the *Lun-yü*, also called “The Sayings of Confucius”. The translation of the name is problematic, as is the more commonly used “Analects,” but the purpose of this paper is not to delve into such relatively minor details, particularly so because nobody knows exactly who gave this name to this particular collection of writings and when this happened.

The *Lun-yü* has twenty chapters, with a total of 500 or 501 sections (the standard editions vary slightly), and most of these sections are only a few characters in length: totalling 15.935 characters, which is not very much. Most of them are short sayings of a/this “Master,” while some are explicitly prefaced with: “Master

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1 The – contradictory – state of research about these general problems was latterly described by Christiane Haupt in her Ph.D. thesis. Cf. Haupt 2006. Christiane Haupt examines portrayals of Confucius in the texts/collections *Tso-chuan*, *Meng-tzu*, *Hsün-tzu*, *Han-shih wai-chuan* and *Shih-chi*. While doing this, she appears to have focused on some of the following sayings by Confucius. However, because her inspiring and illuminating dissertation uses a different methodology, there were no overlaps.

K'ung said". Some are brief notes about conversations between the Master and disciples or other people. There are a few sections that do not fall into either of these two categories, but these can be disregarded for the time being.

As previously mentioned, the key source for information about the life and teachings of Confucius is the *Lun-yü*, which is widely considered the only authentic source. I do not know what this assessment is based on. In Western sinology it may be the fact that the *Lun-yü* was one of the canonical Thirteen Classics of the later Chinese imperial dynasties. Not even the two-volume *Dictionary of Confucianism*, published in 2003, states when the *Lun-yü* was elevated to this venerable status,<sup>2</sup> and I fear that it cannot be found anywhere in the general Western literature on Confucius.

The lack of interest in this date highlights one of the shortcomings of sinological research, at least as far as oral and written sources or documents about the Ancient era are concerned. Research appears only marginally interested in the quality of texts or collections of texts about ancient Chinese history – and I deliberately use “about the Ancient era” here, and not “from the Ancient era”. There is a marked tendency to quite simply accept these texts as given facts, and to merrily undertake all manner of interpretations associated with this. It is only in recent years that steps have been taken to eradicate this defect, including the *Lun-yü* – but more about that later.

We have only very few literary sources that have come directly down to us from the Ancient era, which ends in 221 BCE with the start of Imperial China. Most of what we know about the Ancient era is based on reconstructions and conjecture from the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE). This applies both to the reconstruction of ancient history by the historiographer Ssu-ma Ch'ien (around 100 BCE), without whose writings we would not even have a chronological framework. This also applies to the collections of “philosophical” writings which were catalogued in their traditional form by the scholar and imperial librarian Liu Hsiang (79–8 BCE) or by unknown compilers. The backgrounds of these reconstructions are, for the most part, obscure. This also applies to the division of the old ways of thinking into the “Nine Streams” of thought of the Ancient era by the historian Pan Ku (32–92 BC). Some aspects of these early reconstructions of the Ancient era can be disregarded as obviously absurd if they are compared with other sources or if internal criteria are applied.

Somewhere along the line, the sources about the life and teachings of Confucius were also reconstructed. The *Lun-yü*, the “Sayings,” is one result of these attempts to reconstruct the past. In the Han dynasty the scholars presumed that the immediate disciples of the philosopher had written down these memoirs of their

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2 Yao 2003.

master’s teachings. A few centuries later, critical scholars, such as the writer Liu Tsung-yüan (773–819), took a more sceptical approach, believing that it was in fact the generation of the disciples’ disciples that was responsible. Even later – and enduring until the present – the date of the compilation of this collection was brought even further forward, with the earliest date put at around 250 BCE, but with the majority believing it more likely to be around 150 BC. Several similarly early collections are known by title, but the fragments that have been passed down through the ages do not permit conclusions to be drawn as to their character or content.

The *Lun-yü* as we know it was compiled at the very earliest around 250 BCE, which is more than 200 years after the death of the great scholar and master. This is a fact we should not lose sight of! What doctrine did the advocates of these teachings follow until then? Most of the canonical biblical texts and other oral traditions and lore about the Occidental luminary, Jesus of Nazareth, date back to only few decades after his death – and what a wealth of exegetic and critical analyses have been dedicated to these writings, overall and in detailed papers! We have none of this for the “Sayings,” not even a critical edition deserving the name.

A few years ago, the US-Japanese sinologists Bruce and Taeko Brooks published a book called “The Original Analects”.<sup>3</sup> The two scholars argue radically, but also display an astounding degree of carelessness with regard to the basic principles of philological argumentation. Both assume, as do others, the chapters 3–9 are the most “authentic”. This may be the case, but need not be so. Based on this concept, they then highlight certain chapters and sections of the remaining 13 chapters which they consider relevant or noteworthy and discard the rest from the classic text. The book is a confusing tangle of unacceptable circular statements and assumptions; assumptions that spawn new assumptions, all held together by the authors’ unshakable conviction that their view of Confucius’ teachings is the only valid one and the last word on the matter. A younger generation of sinologists – John Makeham, Bryan Van Norden, Bernhard Führer and Wojciech Jan Simson, to name but a few – have presented impressive studies, but they remain in thrall to *Lun-yü*. The remarkable texts that Chinese archaeologists have been finding in the past few decades in ancient tombs and graves also give us a wider, more detailed view of *Lun-yü* and Confucius.

In other words, we have only very few actual facts about this classic work, which is our only or at least most important source for the life and teachings of Confucius. As mentioned above, the *Lun-yü* contains around 500 sections: the majority are simple dictums or brief conversations. All appear unconnected, and it takes considerable effort to find a common theme in neighbouring sections. In

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3 Brooks and Brooks 1998.

light of these considerations, it makes sense in future to focus on seeking the greater common wording context, for these sections in whatever form this could be possibly defined.

Alongside the sayings in the *Lun-yü*, we also find in classical and late classical literature around 500 additional documents pertaining to be by Confucius. The majority of these display the same form as in *Lun-yü*: succinct dictums and short conversations. However, wider contexts can also be seen, for example the so-called “Records of the Three Audiences of Master K’ung” with Duke Ai, the ruler of his native state of Lu, where he is believed to have held official positions in at least two phases of his life. The collections of writings which contain these additional teachings ascribed to Confucius are sometimes quite a bit older than the time in which *Lun-yü* is thought to have been compiled.

If the *Lun-yü* is considered the authentic source of information about his life and teachings, where does that leave all these documents, most of which remain unstudied? There is no question that they are also authentic, but the question is how authentic? This also applies to the very different and occasionally contradictory versions of the *Lun-yü*. In terms of quality, there is no great difference between these two version groups. Anyone who takes a serious interest in Confucius must include all the versions and must find his or her path through them.

When doing this it is also necessary to define one’s own research goal. My ultimate goal would be to grasp Confucius as a person as a historical figure in the context of his teachings, to understand him as a historical phenomenon, at least by approximations. Along the path it is essential to reflect upon and take into consideration the forms of the earlier versions of both in order to establish the specific characteristics of their authenticity.

It is also essential to take a much closer look at the descriptions of and writings about the first generation of Confucian disciples, which again amounts to around 500 short documents or texts. It is almost inconceivable that Western sinology has never examined them in any detail, with the laudable exception of Gustav Haloun.<sup>4</sup> We know the names of around one hundred of Confucius’ early disciples. For roughly one third of them we know or can assume that they were related to Confucius and that they continued his teachings and their own teachings as a family tradition. This is also the case for his great successor, Meng K’o, who lived approximately 150 years after Confucius and who was probably the son of a noble family in Lu whom Confucius had served and to whom he was indebted for his first disciples or whatever other name these followers went by.

I was mildly appalled to note that the *Dictionary of Confucianism* mentioned further above neglects to include Tseng Ts’an, also called Tseng Shen, who was

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4 Haloun 1933.

possibly Confucius’ most important early disciple. I will return to him at the end of this paper. The dictionary also provides only a few, very sparse details about Yu Jo, who supposedly after Confucius’ death became the head of his school; the dictionary focuses mainly on the honours he received in the Confucius temples, stating that he was appointed the head of the school because his physical appearance was similar to that of the master.<sup>5</sup> The book fails to mention that the name itself translates as “is similar to”. The authors also appear not to realise that some “historical” traditions, for instance those about the early Chou kings, are simply interpretations of names.

There are many other fundamental points that could be raised, but this must suffice as an introduction. In the following I wish to attempt to come to a closer understanding of the person and the teachings of the actual, historic Confucius and will be doing so with the aid of some examples using slightly different methodologies. Naturally, I will not be losing sight of *Lun-yü*, but intend to start right there:<sup>6</sup>

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*Lun-yü* 16.10 quotes a saying by Confucius, which is very interesting on several levels:<sup>7</sup>

Confucius said, “The gentleman has nine things he thinks of.  
 He thinks – is my vision clear?  
 He thinks – is my hearing acute?  
 He thinks – is my expression genial?  
 He thinks – is my manner courteous?  
 He thinks – are my words loyal?  
 He thinks – am I respectful in the way I serve?  
 He thinks – when in doubt, do I seek advice?  
 He thinks – when angry, do I think of the troubles that may ensue?  
 He thinks – when I spy gain, would I be right to take it?”<sup>8</sup>

5 The note about Yu Jo/ You Ruo can be found in Yao 2003, 783.

6 All texts of classical and late classical Chinese literature are quoted here in accordance with the classification and the text versions of the ICS Concordances (The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series. Hongkong: Commercial Press 1992 ff.), unless stated otherwise. I have opted for this procedure because it is the most convenient.

7 *Lun-yü* 16.10 – This and the following translations of the “Sayings” have been taken from Watson 2007. The line break in the list of the nine thoughts is by me. Here, I am following a short essay I published a number of years ago. Cf. Stumpfeldt 1990. – As this private printing is not widely available, I have taken the liberty of summarizing it here.

8 孔子曰：“君子有九思：視思明，聽思聰，色思溫，貌思恭，言思忠，事思敬，疑思問，忿思難，見得思義。”

When reading these thoughts of a gentleman (*chün-tzu*), an ideal character who in the Confucian tradition displays exemplary proper and moral behaviour, an odd fracture becomes obvious in the middle of the list: the first five thoughts appear to relate to the person's communicative faculties: the face, hearing, expression, appearance, language. The following four thoughts appear almost to have been added at random: in anger, the gentleman should consider the impact of his actions. But what is he to do when he experiences joy, for example? A number of further passages in the "Sayings" seem to be related:

*Lun-yü* 14.13:

And he (i.e. The Master) said, "But the complete person of our times need not necessarily be like this. If he spies gain, he remembers what is right; when he spies danger, is ready to risk his life; when faced with old promises, does not forget his past words; then he can be termed a complete person."<sup>9</sup>

*Lun-yü* 19.1:

Zizhang said, "When a man of station spies danger, he is prepared to give his life. When he spies gain, he thinks of what is right. At a sacrifice, he thinks of respectfulness; at a funeral, he thinks of grief. If he does this much, he will get by."<sup>10</sup>

*Lun-yü* 5.16:

The Master said of Zichan, "He exemplified the way of the gentleman in four respects. In conducting himself, he was prudent. In serving his superiors, he was respectful. In looking out for the common people, he was caring. And in employing the common people, he followed what was right."<sup>11</sup>

*Lun-yü* 3.26:

The Master said, "Standing above others but without tolerance, carrying out rites but without reverence, conducting funeral proceedings but without grief – how can I bear to view such as these?"<sup>12</sup>

*Lun-yü* 7.38:

The Master was both mild and sharp-spoken, dignified but not oppressively so, respectful but released.<sup>13</sup>

9 曰：“今之成人者何必然？見利思義，見危授命，久要不忘平生之言，亦可以為成人矣。”

10 子張曰：“士見危致命，見得思義，祭思敬，喪思哀，其可已矣。”

11 子謂子產，“有君子之道四焉：其行己也恭，其事上也敬，其養民也惠，其使民也義。”

12 子曰：“居上不寬，為禮不敬，臨喪不哀，吾何以觀之哉？”

13 子溫而厲，威而不猛，恭而安。

*Lun-yü* 19.9:

Zixia said, “The gentleman has three changes of appearance. Seen from a distance, he is austere. Approach more closely, and he is mild. Listen to his words, and he is sharp-spoken.”<sup>14</sup>

*Lun-yü* 8.4:

Master Zeng spoke these words: “[...] With regard to the Way, there are three things, the gentleman prizes: in his actions and manners, that he be far from harshness or arrogance; in ordering his appearance, that he stick close to trustworthiness; in his utterances, that they be far from crude or unseemly.”<sup>15</sup>

Reading through these passages carefully, it is soon clear that there are obvious similarities in wording. As a rule, two characteristics are presented in relation to each other, but at the same time it is suggested that behind these statements lie triple chains of terms that stand in relation to each other. It is surprising, then, to note that a famous ancient Chinese text is closely related to these wordings: the text *Hung-fan*, “Great Plan,” in the classic *Shu-ching*, “Book of Documents”. This is the relevant passage, in James Legge’s translation:<sup>16</sup>

Second, of the five businesses. The first is called demeanour; the second, speech; the third, seeing; the fourth, hearing; and the fifth, thinking. The *virtue of the* demeanour is called: respectfulness; of speech, accordance *with reason*; of seeing, clearness; of hearing, distinctness; and of thinking, perspicaciousness. The respectfulness becomes manifest in gravity; accordance *with reason*, in orderliness; the clearness, in wisdom; the distinctness, in deliberation; and the perspicaciousness, in sageness.<sup>17</sup>

Here, we also find triple chains, and quite a number of the characteristics are identical to those of the various speakers in the “Sayings”. At present we can only speculate on the reasons or the background for this, but there appears to be a connection

14 子夏曰：“君子有三變：望之儼然，即之也溫，聽其言也厲。”

15 曾子言曰：“[...] 君子所貴乎道者三：動容貌，斯遠暴慢矣；正顏色，斯近信矣；出辭氣，斯遠鄙倍矣。籩豆之事，則有司存。”

16 I quote here from the version in Nylan 1992. Michael Nylan reproduces this part of the Legge translation on p. 157 ff. She appears not to have noticed these connections between *Lun-yü* and *Hung-fan*. I am grateful to her for drawing my attention on p. 122 to the fact that there is a further connection with the *Shih-ching*, “Book of Songs,” with Song 195. It is interesting that predecessors of Confucius have already been connected with the “Great Plan” and the “Book of Songs,” or can be brought into connection. See also Unger 2009a.

17 二、五事：一曰貌，二曰言，三曰視，四曰聽，五曰思。貌曰恭，言曰從，視曰明，聽曰聰，思曰睿。恭作肅，從作乂，明作哲，聰作謀，睿作聖。

between the passages from the “Sayings” and this passage in the “Great Plan,” a wording connection which goes further than the textual boundaries.<sup>18</sup>

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*Lun-yü* 17.18 contains the following dictum, as translated by Burton Watson:

The Master said, “I hate the way the color purple detracts from red. I hate the way the tunes of Zheng throw the Ya music into confusion. I hate the way clever talkers bring ruin to the state and the leading families.”<sup>19</sup>

I do not wish to offer an off-the-cuff interpretation here, for how could I ever know what significance “purple” and “red” had for him, or the “clever talkers”. He preferred the venerable Ya songs in the Shih-ching, “Book of Songs” – other sources indicate this – to sweeter, more melodious sounds from the merchants’ state of Cheng/Zheng.

The collection of writings dedicated to Meng K’o also contains a comparable saying by Confucius (as translated by D. C. Lau)<sup>20</sup>:

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18 The sequence of the terms in the “Great Plan” can be schematically shown as follows:

demeanour	–	respectfulness	–	gravity	貌 – 恭 – 肅
speech	–	accordance	–	orderliness	言 – 從 – 乂
seeing	–	clearness	–	wisdom	視 – 明 – 哲
hearing	–	distinctness	–	deliberation	聽 – 聰 – 謀
thinking	–	perspicaciousness	–	sageness	思 – 睿 – 聖

If the terms in the “Sayings” are viewed according to the same pattern on the basis of wording sequence and several other factors, including further testimonies, then the following provisional reconstruction can be made:

seeing	–	clearness	–	wisdom	*tjat	視 – 明 – 哲
hearing	–	distinctness	–	deliberation	*mjuŋ	聽 – 聰 – 謀
appearance	–	mildness	–	harshness	*liad	色 – 溫 – 厲
demeanour	–	respectfulness	–	gravity	*sjôk	貌 – 恭 – 肅
speech	–	accordance	–	orderliness	*ngjäd	言 – 從 – 乂

Depending on the date set for the version of Confucius and that of the “Great Plan” different conclusions as to the wording context will be reached. Why should Confucius not have written didactic poems?

19 子曰：“惡紫之奪朱也，惡鄭聲之亂雅樂也，惡利口之覆邦家者。”

20 Lau 1984, 305. – Meng K’o quotes this saying of Confucius to his disciple Wan Chang, when asked by him why Confucius had described a person “praised for his honesty in his village” as “an enemy of virtue”.

Confucius said, “I dislike what is specious. I dislike the foxtail in case it should pass for seedlings; I dislike flattery in case it should pass for what is right; I dislike glibness in case it should pass for the truthful; I dislike the music of Cheng in case it should pass for proper music; I dislike purple in case it should pass for vermilion; I dislike the village honest man in case he should pass for the virtuous.”<sup>21</sup>

The dictum here is twice as long as in the version presented in the “Sayings”; “The village honest man” does not appear in this version, but he does in *Lun-yü* 17.13:

The Master said, “The self-righteous villager is the thief of virtue.”<sup>22</sup>

And in *Lun-yü* 15.11, in a different connection, Confucius is said to have uttered a thought that is very similar:

The Master said, “[...]. Do away with the Zheng [=Cheng] tunes and stay away from artful talkers. The Zheng tunes are excessive, and artful talkers are dangerous.”<sup>23</sup>

It is widely known that we often find comparable statements in *Lun-yü*, and in this connection the rarely read text *Yin Wen-tzu*, “Master Yin Wen,” quotes a dictum:<sup>24</sup>

“I dislike the fact that purple detracts from red, and I dislike the false tongues that damage the state and the families.”<sup>25</sup>

Five text fragments appear to belong to this same, larger context. The similarities and differences between the two main versions in *Lun-yü* and *Meng-tzu* are obvious. The statements seem to belong together in pairs, and the version in the *Lun-yü* only provides a part of the whole. The sequence can be conjectured: first comes a general statement inspired by the natural world: foxtail and corn, purple and red; then there follows a statement about public life in general, then two about speech and its negative effect on the state and society. This clear structure has become slightly muddled in *Meng-tzu*, and there are also small wording differences.

If one considers these aspects and looks at how the differences are balanced, one soon notices that there are six verses which are held together by the rhyme patterns a/b/c/b/d/d. I will not go into detail here, but this has all the features of a didactic poem, or at least a part of one.

21 *Meng-tzu* 14.37: 孔子曰：“惡似而非者：惡莠，恐其亂苗也；惡佞，恐其亂義也；惡利口，恐其亂信也；惡鄭聲，恐其亂樂也；惡紫，恐其亂朱也；惡鄉原，恐其亂德也。”

22 子曰：“鄉原，德之賊也。”

23 子曰：“[...]放鄭聲，遠佞人。鄭聲淫，佞人殆。”

24 *Yin Wen-tzu* 2/8/14. – The use of *yü* 語 to introduce a quotation can be understood generally to mean “speech,” “word,” “dictum,” but it can, of course, also be an abbreviation of *Lun-yü*.

25 語曰：“惡紫之奪朱，惡利口之覆邦家。”

For three sections of the *Lun-yü* we can identify an older wording context. It is important to emphasize the fact that this once took the form of a poem, and that the poem was a didactic poem. This is the literary form that is most stable in the historical and source context; several recent papers have shown that didactic poems or fragments from such poems are ubiquitous in classical and late classical literature; only fragments of poetical texts from the same period have survived, with the exception of the older “Book of Songs”. A number of these songs are quoted frequently in classical and late classical literature, but none as often as the item from the “Praising the State” which starts:

“Whosoever has a kingdom and shepherds a people [...]”<sup>26</sup>

This is the opening line of the *Kuan-tzu* (“Master Kuan”) collection, and the first few chapters have the collective headline “Canonical Statements”.<sup>27</sup>

In seeking a possible older common wording context for the three passages from *Lun-yü* I have, for simplicity’s sake, selected an example that became manifest through a Confucius quote in *Meng-tzu*, meaning that it has a frame. Such “frames” in other texts can be found for other passages in *Lun-yü*. What I am saying is that the statements *Lun-yü* documents the Master as having said were probably never said like that at all – or that the Master was quoting an abbreviated version of things he had previously said.

Countless other passages in the *Lun-yü* reveal similarities in terms of form and content, without a comparable greater framework being immediately obvious. Nevertheless, one can presume that they are all based on similar wording contexts. For example, passages which formally start with the noticeably odd doubling of adjectival verbs, or adjectival verbs that have *ju* (just like) attached to them or wordings that end with the set phrase *erh-pu*, “but not”; in terms of content this would include the descriptions of noble behaviour which can be easily combined in such wording contexts. These are the starting point for further didactic poems.

As an aside, allow me to emphasize that many of the Master’s sayings in *Lun-yü* are not just simple statements: they consist of a short dictum from a literary source or a reference to this to which a formulaic comment has been added. The *I Chou-shu*, “The Lost Records of the Chou,” a collection that has been neglected in sinology, contains numerous pieces of evidence supporting this, while the translations of *Lun-yü* do not even hint at it. However, in order to come to an understanding of the meaning of Confucius’ sayings and words it is essential to gain an impression of the original form. And by-the-by, I do not mean the sayings about violet and red etc.

26 凡有地牧民者, [...]。

27 *Kuan-tzu* 1.1/1/7. – “The first section is largely in rhyme,” says Rickett (1985, 52) correctly.

are by Confucius; my intention is to pinpoint a wording context and similarities which require further, more in-depth comparative interpretation.

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In my third comment I would like to draw attention to a completely different type of wording context. In the Burton Watson translation, *Lun-yü* 13.10 states:

The Master said, “If someone were to employ me in government, in one year I could show what I can do. And in three years, I could bring things to completion.”<sup>28</sup>

This is a very general statement, but the Confucius biography in Ssu-ma Ch’ien in *Shih-chi* 47 allows us to view it in context. This passage says:<sup>29</sup>

Duke Ling of Wei, who was very old, neglected his government duties. He had no use for Master K’ung. With a deep sigh, Master K’ung said: “[see above quote].” He then moved away [from Wei].<sup>30</sup>

With this remarkable variant, the *Shih-chi* puts this saying from *Lun-yü* in a historic context, as the *Shih-chi* often does. This occurs for quite a number of notes in this Confucius biography, which is the first and to date the most authoritative reconstruction of Confucius’ life.

Perhaps Ssu-ma Ch’ien took this passage from *Lun-yü* 13.10 and “historicised” it for his biography, and perhaps he used the same approach in other parts of this biography. This may be the case, but it is equally possible that the compiler of *Lun-yü* was no longer aware of the historical context or removed it for a specific reason. If Ssu-ma Ch’ien obviously follows an older source, then he does so fairly literally. Another case that is comparable is *Lun-yü* 9.29:

The Master said, “When the year-end cold comes, then we know that the pine and the cypress are the last to lose their leaves.”<sup>31</sup>

Several sources put this dictum in a specific context. While travelling through the kingdoms of Ch’en and Ts’ai, Confucius encountered a dangerous situation. He and his pupils appear to have feared for their lives, but the Master displayed great

28 子曰：“苟有用我者。期月而已可也，三年有成。”

29 *Shih-chi* (Ed. Chung-hua shu-chü) 47.1924. – Ulrich Unger (2009b) has written a paper about the travels and places that Confucius stayed. He was, however, primarily interested in other aspects of the records of these travels and stays.

30 靈公老，怠於政，不用孔子。孔子喟然嘆曰：“苟有用我者，暮月而已，三年有成。”孔子行。

31 子曰：“知者不惑，仁者不憂，勇者不懼。”

calmness and played the Ch'in. Several worried pupils asked him how he could face what appeared to be certain death and the end of his life with such equanimity.<sup>32</sup>

Confucius answered: "For a gentleman to gain access to everything with the Dao is called 'making headway', and to make no headway with the Dao is called 'getting nowhere'. Now I, Qiu, have held to the way of humanity and justice and on account of this have met with troubles of a disordered age. What indeed has any of that to do with getting nowhere? I assure you that in examining myself, I am in no way deficient in the Dao and in confronting difficulties, have not lost the Power that is in me. It is when the great cold has already culminated and the frost and snow have fallen that I know the pines and cypresses are flourishing. (...)"<sup>33</sup>

Again, the wording from *Lun-yü* is embedded in a historic context, in a longer speech by the Master into which it fits well. Naturally, in this case one could also presume that the person who made up this anecdote also inserted the words from *Lun-yü* intentionally. But to me this does not appear probable. I assume that this anecdote, which is well documented, was the original text. A further ten words from *Lun-yü* also tie into similar anecdotal tales, and some of these are again connected to Duke Ling of Wei.

Classical and late classical Chinese literature is full of such anecdotes. Until now, very little thought has been given to their origins and what significance they have. At least some of these anecdotal stories can be associated with longer historical accounts which the collections present in a closed context or which can be read as such. Allow me to mention in this connection the travelogue of Prince Chi-cha, recounting his travels through the countries of the north; the ambassadorial trip undertaken by Confucius' disciple Tzu-kung to several kingdoms in the south for which three parallel versions exist; the travels of the exiled Chin prince Chung-erh, who later became an important ruler, through several countries; and the flight of the vengeful Wu Tzu-hsü from his native kingdom; or the ambassadorial journeys of the dignitary Yen Ying, for which four versions exist

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32 *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 14.6/76/24. Quoted from Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 326. Further versions of this incident can be found, with variants, in: *Chuang-tzu* (ed. Harvard-Yenching Institute Index Series) 79/28/66 and *Feng-su t'ung* 7.1/50/4. Several minor parallels to this Confucius dictum can be found scattered around classical and late classical literature, as well as numerous further anecdotes about what happened during this dangerous situation. See also Makeham 1998. Unfortunately, I was not able to get hold of this paper at this moment.

33 孔子曰：“[...]君子達於道之謂達，窮於道之謂窮。今丘也拘仁義之道，以遭亂世之患，其所也，何窮之謂？故內省而不疚於道，臨難而不失其德。大寒既至，霜雪既降，吾是以知松柏之茂也。[...]”

and which very likely never actually took place.<sup>34</sup> There are connections between nearly all of these accounts of journeys and anecdotes in the Confucian tradition.

Most of the instances where a simple saying or dictum by Confucius in *Lun-yü* has a direct or indirect parallel in an anecdote refer to Confucius’ travels outside of his native kingdom of Lu. Is it not possible that travel accounts or similar stories were the original context in which these were embedded? Such stories are easy to memorise, just like didactic poems.

Without wishing to jump to premature conclusions I note with pleasure and amusement that according to these stories Confucius departed the kingdom of Ch’i for the same reasons as he left Wei: the king had become old and a weak ruler and no longer wished the assistance of the energetic Confucius, as was the case with Ling of Wei. The anecdotes of his journeys and the periods in these kingdoms also have other parallels. In all probability one of these travel accounts was modelled on the other, and perhaps these two trips never even took place.<sup>35</sup>

What I wish to say is that numerous textual connections can be found between *Lun-yü* and the other accounts of Confucius and the accounts associated with his name – throughout all classical and late classical Chinese literature. For the anecdotes we need a thorough and comparative reading, including linguistic criteria, in order to reach a conclusion regarding the authenticity of these sayings; such an in-depth reading would also allow us to put the partially contradictory stories and accounts of his life into some kind of order and let us reassess them.

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Until now, everything I have written has been based on Confucius’ sayings as quoted in *Lun-yü*, and I have tried to identify more general, wider wording and

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34 For the travels of Prince Chi-cha see *Tso-chuan* B 9.29.13; the three main versions of the ambassadorial trip of Tzu-kung and several other records have been compiled in Li and Wang 1991, esp. 360, 396, 400. Material about the travels of Wu Tzu-hsü and Chung-erh can be found scattered across numerous sources; for Chung-erh, see Thiel 1963. For the four versions of the travels of Yen Ying see Stumpfeldt 2002.

35 Like the records about the ambassadorial travels of Tzu-kung and Yen Ying, the scattered records about the travels of Chi-cha, Prince Chung-erh of Chin, Wu Tzu-hsü and others probably belongs to several versions of earlier contexts, which could very likely be reconstructed. Before such reconstructions have been completed it is difficult to conjecture any hypotheses about the origins of these versions. Often it can be observed, for instance for Yen Ying, that this is related to the differences in the kingdoms in China’s ancient era. There are also several versions of tractates/sermons in the *Mo-tzu* collection, which have also not yet been satisfactorily explained. This also applies to the large number of parallel versions of the so-called anecdotes. For a true understanding of old Chinese literature and thus ancient Chinese philosophy it is essential to have at least sound, proven hypotheses.

documentation contexts for these. These kinds of sayings and quotations by Confucius can be found in several classical and late classical collections of texts. Now I would like to take a different path and will start with the brief series of sayings which can be found in *Shuo-yüan* 17.45.

The *Shuo-yüan* was compiled shortly before the start of the Common Era by the royal librarian Liu Hsiang. However, for the examination of written records of Confucius the time of the compilation is of secondary importance. It is also apparent that the *Shuo-yüan* contains much older stories and material. The exact examination of parallel versions of these texts often shows that *Shuo-yüan* offers the older version. Section 17.45 of the *Shuo-yüan* says:<sup>36</sup>

Master K'ung said: "If you do not know someone's son then look at his friends; if you do not know a ruler, then look at whom he employs."

He also said: "To spend time with a good person is like entering a house full of orchids. After a while you no longer smell their scent because you have absorbed it. Staying with a bad person is like entering a shop full of dried fish; after a while you no longer smell the fish because you have also been immersed in it."

And this is why it is said: "It is the red that is hidden in vermillion; it is the black that is hidden in the crows. A nobleman pays attention to what is hidden."<sup>37</sup>

This section consists of three parts. The first part about the son and the king is also known from an anecdote in the *Chia-yü*, the so-called "School Sayings" of Confucius. In this anecdote, Confucius is speaking with his disciple Tseng-tzu about how two other students are likely to develop after his death. In the *Chia-yü* this dictum is two phrases longer.

We find slightly altered wording in the *Hsün-tzu* 23/117/19 as an anonymous "record" (*chuan*) and in an anecdote about the Marquis Wen of Wei in *Ta-Tai li-chi*, "The Record of Rites by Tai the Elder". This marquis played an important role for the early Confucian canon; here, the dictum is introduced with the words: "and so it is said".

The second quotation (also *Chia-yü* 15.15, but starting with "which is why it is said / I say") returns in a saying that is uttered by Tseng-tzu on his deathbed, also recorded in the *Ta-Tai li-chi*; the *Chia-yü* anecdote is also about death.

36 For the most important parallels with *Shuo-yüan* 17.45 see *Chia-yü* 15.15, *Hsün-tzu* 23/117/19, *Ta-Tai li-chi* 5.4/34/18, *Shuo-yüan* 12.6, 17.31 and *Shuo-yüan* 16.44. The exact examination of this and further testimonies would probably show that at least a further part of *Shuo-yüan* 17.45 is echoed in the partial parallels.

37 孔子曰：“不知其子，視其所友；不知其君，視其所使。”又曰：“與善人居，如入蘭芷之室，久而不聞其香，則與之化矣；與惡人居，如入鮑魚之肆，久而不聞其臭，亦與之化矣。”故曰：“丹之所藏者赤，烏之所藏者黑。君子慎所藏。”

In both cases the anecdotes may very well be the older version; for both sayings there are almost ten further passages in late classical literature that appear to be slightly similar. Of particular interest is an anecdote in which the Confucian disciple Yen Hui says that he has heard that orchids and dried fish are never kept in the same box, literally “hidden”.

In the third passage the introduction to the saying “which is why it is said” is problematic. First, it can be read as a deduction, meaning “this is why I, Confucius, say”; in this case, the phrase would belong to the second saying. Second, Confucius could be quoting an older text to prove his own words. Third, someone else could be making a connection between the words of Confucius and his own words or those of another authority. The content and meaning of this saying does not appear to crop up anywhere else, but there are echoes of it in the *ts’ang* (hidden) of Yen Hui, and it is also distinctly present in Tseng-tzu’s passage “the noble man pays attention to that which he turns to and that which he turns his back on” (similar to *Chia-yü* 15.15), almost as if the two had been familiar with the wording context from *Shuo-yüan* 17.45.

Without wishing to get tangled up in details and enlightening subtleties, let me say that the late *Shuo-yüan* shares wording similarities with the “Sayings” of Confucius, some of which the anecdotes use for their own wording. The fact that there are numerous sources alongside and beyond the “Sayings” – and particularly when viewed in the context of their connections – allows astounding conclusions to be drawn. Also, let us not forget that he spoke of vermilion and red, of black and crows, of orchids and dried fish, that earlier he spoke of violet and purple, ryegrass and wheat – and then of pines and cypresses.

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The *Tso-chuan* narrates the history of the ancient Chinese feudal states between 722 BCE and 468 BCE, the year in which Duke Ai of Lu died who is mentioned as a conversation partner of Confucius. It also records the death of Confucius. There are a number of good reasons why the chronicle ends with this particular year. However, it does not truly end then. In fact, the *Tso-chuan* ends with an oddity.

Jumping three years, it records for the year 464 how two dignitaries of the Chin kingdom quarrelled during a military campaign: Hsün Yao, also called Count Chih, and Chao Hsiang-tzu. Ten years later, in 453, this quarrel led to the death of Hsün Yao. Now, this may not seem particularly significant, and in fact the *Tso-chuan* does not mention just why this occurrence was so important. What makes this event so significant is the fact that it marked the start of the division into three parts of the honourable kingdom of Chin. The kingdom was divided up amongst the families of three dignitaries, including the Chao family of the

aforementioned Chao Hsiang-tzu.<sup>38</sup> So why was this isolated note included? The answer is fairly obvious:

Several sources, including the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*, narrate the following anecdote:<sup>39</sup>

Viscount Xiang of Zhao ordered Xinzhi Muzi to attack the Di. When he had conquered Zuoren and Zhongren, he sent a messenger to the Viscount to announce the victory. When the messenger arrived Viscount Xiang was eating dumplings, but upon hearing the news, he pushed away his food and had a worried look on his face. His attendants said, "In a single morning a pair of cities has fallen. This would normally make a man happy. Why, then, does your Lordship look so worried?"

Viscount Xiang answered, "The crest of the flood of the Yangzi and Yellow rivers does not last more than three days; whirlwinds and violent storms do not last out the morning; the sun is at high noon for no more than a moment. Now there has not been an accumulation of virtuous acts on the part of the house of Zhao, so if in one morning a pair of cities has fallen to it, ruin will surely come to us!"

When Confucius learned this he said, "Will not the house of Zhao surely attain glory? Namely:

Such concern is responsible for glory;

Mere contentment leads to ruin.

To conquer is not the difficult task; it is holding on to what one has won that is difficult."<sup>40</sup>

There are four versions of this anecdote, with and without the Confucius quotation; several separate sentences, specifically about high tides and violent storms, can be found in other documents. So what does this correlation between historical anecdote and Confucian saying signify? Confucius says that the political actions and decisions of Chao Hsiang-tzu (= Viscount Xiang of Zhao) are shaped by his prudent, moral behaviour, which is similar to the teachings of Confucius himself. This may have been necessary, for instance as political propaganda: numerous historical records and documents show that Chao Hsiang-tzu pursued the annihilation of the

38 *Tso-chuan* B 12.27.5.

39 *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 15.1/80/20, translated by Knoblock/Riegel p. 342 ff. – The parallel version *Huai-nan tzu* 12/107/6 also includes the Confucius quotation as *K'ung-tzu wen chih yüeh*, as does *Lieh-tzu* 8/47/22; in the parallel version *Kuo-yü* 4/123/95/26 this quotation is missing.

40 趙襄子〔使新稚穆子〕攻翟，勝（老）〔左〕人、中人，使使者來謁之，襄子方食搏飯，有憂色。左右曰：“一朝而兩城下，此人之所以喜也，今君有憂色何？”襄子曰：“江河之大也，不過三日；飄風暴雨〔不終朝〕，日中不須臾。今趙氏之德行，無所於積，一朝而兩城下，亡其及我乎？”孔子聞之曰：“趙氏其昌乎！”夫憂所以為昌也，而喜所以為亡也；勝非其難者也，持之其難者也。” Text in brackets inserted by Knoblock and Riegel according to parallel passages in *Lieh-tzu* and *Kuo-yü*.

marquise of Chin in an almost unheard of manner. A few words from Confucius may have been considered useful to legitimise this ruthless behaviour. This justification was all the more necessary as other sources document disparaging remarks made by Confucius about Chao Chien-tzu, the father of Hsiang-tzu. By the way, the saying ascribed to Confucius here could actually be from the *yin-yang* doctrine of natural philosophy.

The legist Han Fei does not rebuke Confucius for this remark in favour of Chao Hsiang-tzu, but he does for a similar one. What he fails to remark, though, is the most important aspect: when Confucius is said to have made these remarks about Chao Hsiang-tzu he had already been dead for almost thirty years. An Anonymous noticed this chronological discrepancy, which in those days really would not have been easy for people to discover: in *K'ung ts'ung-tzu*, “The K'ung Family Master's Anthology,” an early document that is important for Confucianism but which remains to a large extent unstudied, he writes:<sup>41</sup>

In the past, Chao, Han, and Wei joined forces and annexed the territory of Mr. Chih. Afterwards, when Hsiang-tzu of Chao rewarded his staff, he first rewarded ordinary officials and only later rewarded those among his staff who showed merit on the battlefield. According to the book of Han Fei, Confucius lauded this. Han Fei used Confucius as a frame of reference, with which he immediately found difficulty. Surely the case was nothing like this – it was really a fraud. How do we shed light on this? According to the *Ch'un-ch'iu*, my forefather died in the fourth month of the sixteenth year of Duke Ai's reign (479 B.C.) It was only the twenty-seventh year of Duke Ai (468 B.C.) that Hsün Yao led an attack on Cheng together with Han, Chao and Wei. They met in Tung-yüan and then returned. At that time, Confucius had already been dead for eleven years, and the four noblemen of Chin were all alive. Only later, in the fourteenth year of Duke Tao (454 B.C.), was Chih destroyed. This shows that chronology establishes too great a lapse between what came first and what came later. Yet, Han Fei openly professed this without any sign of shame. If so, the excessive number of people in the world who indulge in mere tales is all Han Fei's fault.<sup>42</sup>

41 *K'ung ts'ung-tzu* 6.4/65/27: 乃者趙、韓、魏共并知氏，趙襄子之行賞，先加具臣而後有功，韓非書云：“夫子善之。”引以張本然後難之，豈有不似哉，然實詐也，何以明其然。昔我先君以春秋哀公十六年四月巳醜卒，至二十七年荀瑤與韓、趙、魏伐鄭，過東垣而還，是時夫子卒已十一年矣，而晉四卿皆在也，後悼公十四年，知氏乃亡，此先後甚遠，而韓非公稱之，曾無忤意，是則世多好事之徒，皆非之罪也。Quoted from Ariel 1998, 88.

42 *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 14.4/74/9 is the oldest version of this anecdote, but it gives – like *Shuo-yüan* 6.2 – the Confucius quotation as *Chung-ni wen chih yüeh*, as does Han Fei's criticism of Confucius because of this comment in *Han Fei-tzu* 36/114/9. A further version in *Huai-nan tzu* 18/191/20 includes in this place a quotation from *Lao-tzu*.

This way, a distant descendant of Confucius or someone else for that matter, makes use of the ominous last entry in *Tso-chuan* – and not the *Ch'un-ch'iu*, as he states – to reject criticism of Confucius, and he substantiates this with the chronological impossibility of Confucius praising Chao Hsiang-tzu. It must be presumed that this otherwise so insignificant entry in the *Tso-chuan* was added for the same reason, as such positive praise for Chao Hsiang-tzu appears to have been fairly common. At the same time, the reply in *K'ung ts'ung-tzu* also shows that although there is fairly limited material, there are quite direct cross references throughout the documents.

This also implies that for whatever reasons, possibly political, some individuals deliberately fabricated Confucius sayings, or at least the two about Chao Hsiang-tzu mentioned above.

Of course, it must be presumed that many details and sayings about and allegedly by Confucius are not really authentic; the fact that sinological research on Confucius focuses largely on the *Lun-yü* means that it is assumed that practically everything else written about Confucius in the earlier material and records is not authentic and that it served misleading purposes. This may be the case, but that is precisely why these documents are so significant for the development of early Confucian doctrine. Without decoding these documents we simply have no way of truly understanding the Confucian doctrine and tradition, except very vaguely and superficially. But there is something else in this Confucian statement about Chao Hsiang-tzu which serves to guide our thoughts about this “fabricated” Confucian statement in another direction. Allow me to reiterate this quotation:

When Confucius learned this he said, “Will not the house of Zhao attain glory?  
Namely:

Such concern is responsible for glory;

Mere contentment leads to ruin.

To conquer is not the difficult task; it is holding on to what one has won that is difficult.

This fairly rare designation of Confucius as Master K'ung is conspicuous, and it is linked to the phrase “when he heard this, he said”. At the beginning of his statement he then mentions the object of the anecdote, and he does this in a prognostic way. There follows, introduced by *fu* – which has been translated here as “namely” – a saying that is reminiscent of the “Book of Changes” or the *yin-yang* doctrine and which is written in rhyme form. A concluding remark brings back the protagonist of the preceding anecdote.

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Such responses of Confucius to historical events are commonplace in classical and late classical literature.<sup>43</sup> This literary form is equivalent to the so-called anecdote commentary, which forms a connection between a historical event and a quotation from an authoritative text. Examples of such authoritative texts to which anecdotal commentaries were dedicated include the “Book of Songs” and the writings of Lao-tzu. Up to fifty correlations between historical anecdotes and sayings by Confucius can be found in the literature. In one group of these I am confident that I recently found in an essay fragments of an early anecdote commentary about the *Lun-yü*.<sup>44</sup>

In the ominous anecdote quoted above about Chao Hsiang-tzu and Confucius’ remarks about it, the connection between the anecdote and Confucius’ words is highly unusual. I would like to quote a comparable allocation to elucidate this.<sup>45</sup> Paraphrased, the anecdote recounts the following: Hou Ch’eng-tzu, an ambassador of Lu, is travelling to Chin and stopped off in Wei, where a local dignitary received him in a manner that was unusual. Upon returning, he did not pay his respects to him, as would have been polite. He explains to his driver that these details had shown him that internal unrest was imminent in Wei. Shortly after, this turns out to be the case. Now literally:

When Master K’ung heard this, he said: “Namely (*fu*): one can reach an agreement with a dignitary through allusion, / to a gracious man one can entrust treasures. – This applies to Hou Ch’eng-tzu.”<sup>46</sup>

This text reveals several features that are striking: it offers an unusual connection between anecdote and Confucian quotation, which has all the characteristics of a dictum, and there is a concluding allusion to the protagonist of the anecdote. There is a small group of texts which are held together by this kind of formal feature, most of which can be found in *Lü-shih ch’un-ch’iu* as well as in other collections; almost all of them display varying parallels with other collections. What is remarkable about these correlations is what Confucius says. Here are some further examples:

- (1) [When Master K’ung heard this,] he said: “The paths of King Wei were great! Nothing can be added to them. – Without moving, he made changes; / without doing anything, he perfected. He was attentive and heedful, respectful and careful, and Yü and Jui balanced themselves of their own accord.”<sup>47</sup>

43 Christiane Haupt (2006, 39ff.) calls these correlations between Confucian sayings and anecdotal historical reports “exempla”.

44 Stumpfeldt 2006.

45 *Lü-shih ch’un-ch’iu* 20.8/137/17

46 孔子聞之曰：“夫智可以微謀、仁可以託財者，其耶成子之謂乎！”

47 *Shuo-yüan* 1.10: 孔子曰：“大哉文王之道乎！其不可加矣！不動而變，無為而成，敬慎恭己而虞芮自平。” The parallel version *Chia-yü* 10.10 gives a different Confucius quotation.

The saying at the core of this Confucian dictum is well known. It can be found in *Lao-tzu* 47.

- (2) When Master K'ung heard of this, he said: "Namely (*fu*): What one honors in ancestral temples and halls, this shall break the battering rams beyond a thousand miles. – Does this not refer to the master builder Tzu-han?"<sup>48</sup>
- (3) When Master K'ung heard of this, he said: "Master Yen was indeed excellent! Without leaving the vicinity of the shrines and the sacrificial vessels, he broke the battering rams over a distance of a thousand miles."<sup>49</sup>

Again, there is a clear correlation between this Confucian dictum and *Lao-tzu* 47:

"Without going outside, you may know the whole world. Without looking through the window, you may see the ways of Heaven."<sup>50</sup>

- (4) When Master K'ung heard of this, he said: "To make use of subterfuge and deceit in the face of danger / is enough to repel the enemy. / Conversely, to honour the honourable, / is sufficient to reward virtue. / Although Duke Wen did not understand the end and the beginning, it was sufficient to become the supreme power."<sup>51</sup>

The set phrases in this saying are fairly unspecific, but "end" and "beginning" – in this particular sequence – are important terms in the *yin-yang* doctrine, which is closely related to Taoism.

It is both clear and corroborated by details in the text that these correlations between anecdotes and Confucian sayings form a wording context as described above. There are many more. But what about the Confucian sayings that cannot be satisfactorily linked to the dictums in the "Sayings"? The narrative content of the anecdotes does not reveal the protagonists in a light that makes them deserving of Confucius' praise.

48 *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 20.4/132/24 and (nearly identical) *Hsin-hsü* 6.9/34/17: 孔子聞之曰: "夫脩之於廟堂之上, 而折衝乎千里之外者, 其司城子罕之謂乎?"

49 *Han-shih wai-chuan* 8.18: 孔子聞之, 曰: "善乎! 晏子不出俎豆之間, 折衝千里。" Here the Confucius saying still follows the pattern of the text, along the lines of the quotation from the "Book of Songs". Cf. the parallel versions *Yen-tzu ch'un-ch'iu* 5.16 and *Hsin-hsü* 1.14: 仲尼聞之曰: "夫不出于尊俎之間, 而知千里之外, 其晏子之謂也。可謂折衝矣! [...]" Here the quotation is introduced with *Chung-ni wen chih yüeh*, "When Chung-ni heard of this," i. e. they use Confucius' courtesy name.

50 不出戶知天下; 不闕牖見天道。

51 *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 14.4/74/3: 孔子聞之曰: "臨難用詐, 足以卻敵。反而尊賢, 足以報德。文公雖不終始, 足以霸矣。" The parallel version *Huai-nan tzu* 18/191/11 does not give the Confucius quotation. A largely different version is given in *Han Fei-tzu* 36/113/9: 仲尼聞之, 曰: "文公之霸也宜哉! 既知一時之權, 又知萬世之利。"

Is it possible that someone has irreverently inserted maxims from one or two other doctrines in Confucius’s dictums? This is not completely unthinkable, particularly in light of the fact that even the remarks about Chao Hsiang-tzu were a historical forgery. On the other hand, Confucius may deliberately have included maxims from other doctrines and appropriated them for himself, provided that they had passed the test of time! The frequent use of the word *fu* (translated here as “namely”) indicates that he is quoting. This is probably not the historical Confucius who is speaking here, but the Confucius of this specific wording context of several anecdotes with all their parallel versions. For the development of Confucian doctrine this complex remains enlightening, but it needs to be compared with many other such correlations.

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But there’s another factor, and with it I am approaching the end of this paper: according to the “Sayings,” Confucius praises the mythical emperor Shun because he practiced non-action. This is a central concept in the Taoist doctrine of *Lao-tzu*; a little later in the *Lun-yü* Confucius speaks of the “sharp weapons” of the state, which is also something that is lauded by *Lao-tzu*.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, *Lao-tzu* repeatedly and obviously plays on remarks made by Confucius, and the later Confucian book *Chung-yung*, “The Doctrine of the Mean,” also refers to *Lao-tzu* in the same way.

The next major Taoist collection of writings, *Chuang-tzu*, “Master Chuang,” also displays wording that is similar to the dictums of Confucius in *Lun-yü* and elsewhere, and also has similarities to the Confucian collection of writings *Meng-tzu*, “Master Meng”. This, in turn, is repeatedly reminiscent of *Chuang-tzu*, and not only because it makes almost casual mention of the two words that head its most important chapter: *ch’i-wu*, “Making all things equal”.

Allow me in passing to recall here that Yen Hui, Confucius’ favourite disciple, is said in the “Sayings” and other sources to have led a “Taoist” life, and that Tseng-tzu, the first great disciple, is said to have uttered statements that sound very much like the teachings of the natural philosophical doctrine of *yin-yang*. Taoist concepts have often been discovered in the Confucian *Chung-yung*, “The Doctrine of the Mean,” and the great Confucian successor Meng K’o (see above) is known to have written a short document which was ascribed by Pan Ku to the *yin-yang* tradition. This

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52 For the “non-action” of Shun see *Lun-yü* 15.5, for the “sharp weapons” see *Lun-yü* 15.10. In *Lao-tzu* 36 and 57 the “sharp weapons” are also mentioned, the concept of “non-action” is examined in *Lao-tzu* 37 and 57. I have refrained from giving further instances of wording similarities between Confucian and Taoist texts and text collections; I will be dealing with them in greater detail in a later paper.

background shines a different light on the wording and canon traditions of the Confucius comments mentioned above. Seemingly, the nine teaching traditions of the Ancient Era reconstructed by Pan Ku mentioned at the beginning of this paper seem to have only limited application. What I wish to get at here is:

1. The life and teachings of Confucius can only be adequately understood in a historic context if all early material is read and compared with this aim in mind. The compilation of wording and material contexts can be helpful.
2. In light of the many intertextual correlations in classical and late classical literature, individual sayings or dictums can seldom be fully understood unless these correlations are identified and interpreted.
3. To come to a fuller understanding it is also essential to examine the material about the disciples and other successors of Confucius beyond the well-known collections *Meng-tzu* and *Hsün-tzu*.

For the textual readings I have – cunningly – selected some that despite their differences have certain content and formal aspects in common: all use dictums, rhymed or unrhymed, and all use examples taken from the natural world and everyday life: violet and foxtail – which is a species of spiked grass – orchids and dried fish, pines and cypresses, halls and battering rams, etc. These are things that occur in the “Sayings” only very rarely, and I could have chosen other examples that have more in common and are closer to the wording style of the “Sayings”. However, I am convinced that after such an in-depth examination our image of Confucius would be a lot more nuanced, and perhaps even completely different. Here he appears, to put it in slightly exaggerated terms, to be more a natural philosopher or Taoist than the moral teacher we are familiar with.

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In classical and late classical literature, neither of which are very extensive, Confucius occupies a highly prominent position. This also applies to texts and collections of texts which differed from or even were directly opposed to his doctrine and tradition, such as the Taoist or Legist doctrines. This finding is all the more surprising if we consider that he is unlikely to have been an important or influential person during his lifetime. The sheer wealth of material about the man and his teachings, with numerous sayings attributed directly to him, appears so contradictory that it seems only natural that sinologists should attempt to reconstruct his exact doctrine, primarily on the basis of the “Sayings”. In the past two decades, however, it has been recognised that the material in the “Sayings” is highly heterogeneous in nature and of varying authenticity.

This diversity is probably also influenced by the fact that his doctrine split up into several “schools”. All efforts to paint a more precise picture of the actual person K’ung Ch’iu from the small kingdom Lu in eastern China as a historical figure and to pinpoint with greater precision what his exact teachings were, leaving behind the realm of mere speculation, appear to me to require several approaches. First, all the material about Confucius would need to be meticulously examined; second, all the people associated with him in the early records, and particularly those named as his disciples, should also be examined with the same attention to detail.

All of these documents share a high degree of intertextual correlation, and these also take on many different forms. I hope that my remarks succeed in providing a certain insight into this specific aspect, while at the same time indicating that an analysis of these intertextual correlations will reveal references to older material. Depending on their exact form they allow conclusions to be drawn about the backgrounds of the dictums ascribed to him and to the approaches of the “schools” that succeeded him when compiling the texts that described him and his doctrine. Without a doubt, this is a very broad field for research.

As enlightening as the analysis of the intertextuality of Confucian traditions may be, to get closer to the actual individual or Confucius as a historic person, requires a more sophisticated methodology, something that modern sinology – which often remains deeply in thrall to traditional Chinese scholarship – is only very slowly starting to embrace. Important aspects here include a true understanding of the historic links of the dictums ascribed to him and the doctrines associated with him, including the “place in life” that the individual records doubtless had. Many of the concepts and terms used by Confucius – starting with the central *jen*, “humanity,” and including terms like *chung*, “crowd,” and many other words from everyday language – had a completely different meaning in the linguistic and social context of his lifetime than the commonly used translations would suggest. An explanatory interpretation of these words, an essential task for the philologists, would also shine a different light on his doctrine and the records of it. A precise understanding of many of Confucius’ terms, and particularly the central ones, needs to be based on an exact idea of the social structures of his age and the following centuries. These also remain largely unexamined to date.

We have a long way to go until we can truly claim to have a suitably judicious portrayal of Confucius’ doctrines and the early records thereof, and much detailed research with varying approaches and focuses will be needed. The reconstructions of Chinese tradition in connection with Confucius and his age, and also the very early ones – many of which are highly ideological in nature – should gradually be replaced with new academic reconstructions. The many archaeological finds of recent decades, including the texts and manuscripts, will make rich contributions to this new understanding.

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