

Contextualizing the Kongzi of the “Kongzi Shilun” 孔子詩論¹

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The “Sweet Pear-Tree” paradox

The authorship question has dogged the analysis of the “Kongzi *Shilun*” 孔子詩論 (“Confucius on the *Odes*”; hereafter “Shilun”) since its introduction to the scholarly world by Ma Chengyuan 馬承源 in August 2000.² By now a rough consensus has emerged that Kongzi 孔子 himself could not have been the author of the text because most scholars agree that Kongzi’s statements (prefaced by the standard *Kongzi yue* 孔子曰 marker) are incorporated into a larger treatment of the *Shi* 詩 by some unnamed author. A number of theories have been advanced to explain the text’s origin, with some attributing it to one of Kongzi’s disciples, typically Zixia 子夏 or Zigao 子羔, and others to an anonymous *ru* 儒 master or disciple of Kongzi in the third or fourth generation.³ But no matter what the theory, the figure of Kongzi has loomed large over this debate, for a majority of scholars continue to interpret the “Shilun” author’s decision to quote Kongzi as evidence of a close affiliation with, and even strict ideological adherence to, a Kongzi “school of

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2. The bamboo slip bundles of which the “Shilun” was one part were purchased by the Shanghai Museum on the Hong Kong antiquities market in 1994. The Shanghai Museum published the first reconstruction of the “Shilun” in 2001 under the direction of Ma Chengyuan. See *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* 2001, vol. 1.

3. See Chen Tongsheng 2004, chap. 2, for a thorough and insightful discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of these various theories.

thought” (*jia* 家 or *xuepai* 學派).⁴ Worked out to its logical conclusion, this single assumption sustains several corollary views, e.g., that the “Shilun” author must have adapted these Kongzi statements from “records” (*jilu* 記錄) of Kongzi’s teachings that were created and maintained by generations of devoted disciples, or that the author himself must have been one of Kongzi’s famous disciples.⁵ Applied to the *Lunyu* 論語, this same logic guarantees that text’s privileged status as “the most reliable source for the study of Kongzi’s teachings” (研究孔子學說最可靠的資料),⁶ with the result that the *Lunyu* has come to dominate efforts to contextualize Kongzi’s statements in the “Shilun.” The *Lunyu* is appealed to not just as a basis of comparison for Kongzi’s various *Shi* teachings, but also to reinforce the very assumptions that justify scholars’ “Shilun” methodology, e.g., when *Lunyu* 7.1 is cited as a “commandment” (*jielü* 戒律) for Kongzi’s disciples to faithfully transmit their master’s teachings,⁷ or when Zizhang’s 子張 act of writing down Kongzi’s words on his sash at *Lunyu* 15.6 is taken as evidence that Kongzi’s words were actually recorded.⁸ As much as any controversy facing the field today, the question of the origin of the “Shilun” (as well as other excavated manuscripts that quote Kongzi) foregrounds an individual

4. For example, Liu Xinfang (2002, p. 3) articulates this assumption on the very first page of his *Kongzi shilun shuxue*. For additional examples, see the opinions of Ma Chengyuan, Li Xueqin, and Chen Li quoted by Liu on p. 287.

5. For an example of this view, see Xing Wen’s (2008, pp. 5–7) introduction to the controversies surrounding the “Shilun.” Not once does he raise the possibility that the author may not have been one of Kongzi’s disciples.

6. Chen Tongsheng 2004, p. 62.

7. Liu Xinfang 2002, p. 4.

8. Chen Tongsheng 2004, p. 51.

scholar's views of Kongzi, his teachings, and the texts that serve as sources for those teachings. Regardless of one's stake in these debates, a critical examination of these views is crucial to understanding the place of the "Shilun" in Warring States intellectual history.

My own perspective on Kongzi is informed by my research into the corpus of Kongzi sayings in received and excavated texts from the pre-imperial and early imperial periods.⁹ The picture that emerges from this research challenges the dominant narrative of the evolution of the *Lunyu* and the transmission of Kongzi's teachings generally. Taking a bird's-eye view of early textual traditions, one observes that the corpus of Kongzi sayings is marked by severe attribution confusion (e.g., attributing the same saying to Kongzi in one text but his disciple or another master in another), shifting speech contexts, and an extremely high degree of variation, if not outright improvisation. Moreover, the lack of overlap in sayings attributed to Kongzi in early Western Han and pre-Han texts undermines the claim that the *Lunyu*, a proto-*Lunyu*, or some other collection of Kongzi sayings enjoyed widespread acceptance as the sage's authentic teachings before the second half of the Western Han. Not until the latter half of the Western Han did the range of variation in Kongzi quotations begin to narrow as the *Lunyu* gained currency in elite circles.¹⁰ By the first century of the Eastern Han, authors who quoted Kongzi tended to quote the *Lunyu*. These observations lend credence to the argument advanced by John Makeham, Mark

9. I would be happy to distribute my dissertation prospectus to anyone who might be interested in reading a more detailed version of these arguments.

10. See Csikszentmihalyi 2002, pp. 144–149, for a discussion of the use of the *Lunyu* by Western Han elites.

Csikszentmihalyi, and Zhu Weizheng that the *Lunyu* did not exist before the Western Han,¹¹ and the high degree of attribution confusion in sayings associated with Kongzi's disciples also challenges the notion that Kongzi's teachings were filtered and transmitted through clearly defined disciple lineages. Needless to say, this perspective necessitates a far more skeptical approach to the *Lunyu* and to other Han dynasty efforts (most notably, Sima Qian's 司馬遷 "Kongzi shijia" 孔子世家 and "Zhongni dizi liezhuan" 仲尼弟子列傳 and Ban Gu's 班固 "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志) to canonize, systematize, and rationalize Kongzi material inherited from the Warring States period. Above all, it is an approach that steers clear of questions of authenticity and original authorship and instead seeks to understand the form and function of a Kongzi comment within its own context.¹²

The "Shilun" happens to provide a wonderful case study for the kinds of problems one typically encounters within the corpus of pre-Han Kongzi sayings. Consider the following comments on the "Gan tang" 甘棠 ("Sweet Pear-Tree") ode:

strip #15: "Gan tang" longs for the man and respects and cares for his tree. Its protection is profound. The care of "Gan tang" is due to the Duke of Shao.

《甘棠》〔思〕及其人，敬愛其樹。其保厚矣。《甘棠》之愛，以邵公〔之故也〕。¹³

11. See Zhu Weizheng 1986, Makeham 1996, and Csikszentmihalyi 2002.

12. In his refutation of the idea that Kongzi edited or authored the Six Classics, Chen Tongsheng (2004, p. 60) also warns against taking every instance of *Kongzi yue* as an authentic record of Kongzi's teachings.

13. I follow Huang Huaixin's reconstruction of the "Shilun" except where noted. In this line, I prefer 保 where Huang Huaixin has 報, but choosing between these alternatives is no easy matter. As I read it, the more obvious interpretation is that the "protection" or "care" shown for the sweet pear-tree in the ode ("Do not lop it or knock it" 勿翦勿伐) mirrors the "protection" the Duke of Shao showed to his people. On the other hand, that mirroring is also a good example of "reciprocity" (*bao* 保). A third possibility is

strip #24: “[Kongzi said,...]‘In “Gan tang” I obtain¹⁴ respect for the ancestral temple. People’s nature was ever thus: when they greatly esteem the man they invariably respect his position; when they delight in the man they are invariably fond of his actions. When they hate the man it is also thus [i.e., they disrespect his position and dislike his actions].”

[孔子曰：...]吾以（於）《甘棠》，得宗廟之敬。民性固然：甚貴其人，必敬其位；悅其人，必好其所為。惡其人者亦然。

Focusing on the two underlined eight-character lines from strips #15 and #24, these lines’ parallel structure (X其人，敬其Y), parallel meaning (“long for” *si* 思 versus “esteem” *gui* 貴; “respect and care for” *jing ai* 敬愛 versus “respect” *jing* 敬; and “tree” *shu* 樹 versus its metaphorical extension “[official] position” *wei* 位),¹⁵ and joint association with the “Gan tang” ode strongly suggest that they are two different versions of a single saying. Yet there is one crucial difference between these passages: the latter (#24) appears in a section prefaced by “Kongzi said” (*Kongzi yue* 孔子曰) but the former (#15) does not. The “Shilun” author’s decision to attribute one of these versions to Kongzi but not the other gives rise to what I shall refer to as “the ‘Sweet Pear-Tree’ paradox.” If the version from strip #24 derives from some record of Kongzi’s teachings, then what of the saying from strip #15? If it also belongs to a tradition that stretches back to Kongzi, then why is it not attributed? Conversely, if strip #15 is rightly unattributed, then what about the strip #24 version warrants its attribution to Kongzi?

that the word *pû? (reconstructed in Schuessler 2007) was intended as a pun to invoke both meanings.

14. I prefer to translate *de* 得 as ambiguously as possible given its ambiguity in the original. The substitution of *jian* 見 (“see”) for *de* 得 in later texts (see p. 6 below) suggests one possible interpretation, but “obtain” leaves open the possibility that one can perceive, understand, or even experience this respect for oneself by learning the *Shi*.

15. See p. 11 below for a more detailed discussion of the relationship between *shu* 樹 and *wei* 位.

Unfortunately, an examination of this saying's parallels in the received literature yields no simple solutions.¹⁶ Two texts from the Han period or later, the *Shuiyuan* 說苑 and *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語, attribute versions of the saying to Kongzi as a comment on “Gan tang.”¹⁷ However, discrepancies between and within these texts muddy the waters even further:

Shuiyuan (*Sibu congkan* [hereafter *SBCK*] 5/1b): Kongzi said, “In ‘Gan tang’ I see respect for the ancestral temple. When there is great reverence for the man there is respect for his position.”

孔子曰：「吾於《甘棠》，見宗廟之敬也。甚尊其人，必敬其位。」¹⁸

Kongzi jiayu (*SBCK* 2/18a; *ICS* 10.4): Kongzi said, “In ‘Gan tang’ I see that the respect for the ancestral temple is great indeed. Longing for the man one invariably cares for his tree; revering the man one invariably respects his position. This is the Way.”

孔子曰：「吾於《甘棠》，見宗廟之敬也甚矣。思其人，必愛其樹；尊其人，必敬其位，道也。」

Kongzi jiayu (*SBCK* 8/5b; *ICS* 34.2): Kongzi said [responding to a question from Zigao], “...The *Ode* says: ‘Young and tender is this Sweet Pear-Tree-tree/ Do not lop it or knock it/ For the Duke of Shao took shelter under it.’ The attitude of the Zhou people towards the Duke of Shao was to care for the man and to respect even the tree where he stayed...”¹⁹

孔子曰：「...《詩》云：『蔽芾甘棠，勿翦勿伐。邵伯所憩。』周人之於邵公也，愛其人，猶敬其所舍之樹。...」

16. For a far more thorough collection of references to “Gan tang” in the early literature, see Zhu Yuanqing 2002.

17. The *Shuiyuan*'s dating is far less problematic than the *Kongzi jiayu*'s because of its association with Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE). For the dating of the *Kongzi jiayu*, see Robert Kramers' discussion in Loewe 1994, pp. 258–262.

18. The comparison with the *Kongzi jiayu* version below led the *ICS* (5.1/31/25) and *Shuiyuan shuzheng* (9.105) editors to add eight additional characters to this passage: “In ‘Gan tang’ I see that respect for the ancestral temple {is great indeed. Longing for the man one loves his tree;} revering the man one respects his position” (吾於《甘棠》，見宗廟之敬也。甚〔矣，思其人，必愛其樹，〕尊其人，必敬其位。). However, this emendation is not based on any other evidence and the unaltered passage reads perfectly fine as is.

19. For these *Shi* translations see Waley 1996.

Confusingly, the *SBCK Shuiyuan* passage seems to quote a close variation of strip #24, the second *Kongzi jiayu* passage a variation of strip #15, and the first *Kongzi jiayu* passage includes both “Shilun” versions in sequence. Although Liu Xiang’s 劉向 handling of the “Gan tang” comment seems to corroborate the “Shilun” author’s decision to credit Kongzi with the strip #24 version, the *Shuiyuan* reveals nothing about the status of the strip #15 version in Liu Xiang’s time. But the *Kongzi jiayu* compilers did have a ready solution to the “Sweet Pear-Tree” paradox: Kongzi was responsible for the strip #15 version, the strip #24 version, their association with “Gan tang,” and even their linkage in a sequence which has no precedent in the “Shilun.”

But this solution is unsatisfactory on three counts. First, the *Shuiyuan* and probably also the *Kongzi jiayu* postdate the “Shilun” by centuries and should not be taken as reliable sources for pre-Han realities. Second, even if the *Kongzi jiayu* compilers were willing to credit Kongzi with every variation of the saying in question, that still does not explain the “Shilun” author’s unwillingness to do the same. Third, the *Kongzi jiayu* solution is not endorsed by any other extant text. If the *Shuiyuan* validates the “Shilun” author’s handling of strip #24, the *Zuozhuan* 左轉, the only other pre-Han text to make use of either “Gan tang” comment, validates the “Shilun” author’s handling of strip #15. There it is the anonymous “noble man” (*junzi* 君子)²⁰ who appeals to a “Gan tang” couplet and a close variant of strip #15 to castigate Si Chuan 駟讞 (a.k.a.

20. Chen Tongsheng (2004, p. 68) argues that the *junzi* here must be Zhongni 仲尼 based on the comparison with the *Shuiyuan*. However, I accept Eric Henry’s argument (1999) that Kongzi and the *junzi* are two distinct voices in the *Zuozhuan*.

Ziran 子然), a prime minister of Zheng 鄭 who executed Deng Xi 鄧析 for formulating new laws on his own initiative only to later adopt Deng Xi's proposals:

...The Ode says: 'Young and tender is this Sweet Pear-Tree tree/ Do not lop it or knock it/ For the Duke of Shao took shelter under it.' One longs for the man and cares even for his tree; how much more should one take pity on the man whose Way he adopts!

...詩云：『蔽芾甘棠，勿翦勿伐，召伯所茇。』思其人，猶愛其樹。況用其道，而不恤其人乎！²¹

Yet another *Zuozhuan* passage takes its audience's familiarity with "Gan tang" and its stock interpretation for granted without ever mentioning Kongzi:

Wuzi's virtue depended on the people, just as the people of Zhou longed for the Duke of Shao. If they cared for his sweet pear-tree, how much more [do the people care for Wuzi's] son?.

武子之德在民，如周人之思召公焉。愛其甘棠，況其子乎。²²

Notice the way in which this passage echoes the "Shilun" strip #15 with the phrases "longed for the Duke of Shao" (*si Shao gong* 思召公) and "cared for his sweet pear-tree" (*ai qi gan tang* 愛其甘棠). With substitutions of *Shao gong* for *ren* 人 and *gan tang* for *shu* 樹, this is an even more specific and concrete version of strip #15. In a memorial submitted at the beginning of Aidi's 哀帝 reign (7–1 BCE), Liu Xin 劉欣 (46 BCE–23 CE) also makes no mention of Kongzi when he quotes "Gan tang" and applies the strip #15 "Gan tang" comment to argue against abolishing Emperor Wu's ancestral temple:

The Ode says: 'Young and tender is this Sweet Pear-Tree tree/ Do not lop it or knock it/ For the Duke of Shao took shelter under it.' If in longing for the man one cares even for his tree, how could one venerate a man's Way yet demolish his temple?

詩云：『蔽芾甘棠，勿翦勿伐，召伯所茇。』思其人猶愛其樹，況宗其道而毀其廟

21. Ding gong 9 (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 4.1572).

22. Xiang gong 14 (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 3.1010).

乎？²³

Moving into the Eastern Han, the great commentator Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE) leaves the “Shilun” strip #24 saying unattributed in his late Eastern Han commentary on “Gan tang”: “The people were covered by [the Duke of Shao’s] virtue and they rejoiced in his transforming influence; they longed for the man and respected his tree” (國人被其德，悅其化；思其人，敬其樹。)^{24,25}

Given this context, the *Kongzi jiayu*’s attribution of the strip #15 saying to Kongzi begins to look like an outlier, and the “Shilun” author’s handling begins to look like the mainstream position. Why, then, does the *Kongzi jiayu* attribute both the “Gan tang” comment and its elaboration to Kongzi? Assuming that the compiler(s) of the *Kongzi jiayu* had access to some version of the “Shilun,” the similarity between the strip #15 and #24 comments might have led the compiler(s) to credit Kongzi with both versions. In the Western Han, when scholars were becoming increasingly interested in compiling (*Lunyu*) and rationalizing (Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 “Kongzi shijia” 孔子世家 and “Zhongni dizi liezhuan” 仲尼弟子列傳 chapters in the *Shiji* 史記) Kongzi lore, a compiler might be forgiven for preserving previously unattributed material as Kongzi’s own words.

23. *Hanshu* 73.3127.

24. *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 詩三家義集疏 (comp. Wang Xianqian 王先謙) p. 86

25. Two other texts, the *Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳 (*SBCK* 3/3b) and *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓氏外傳 (*SBCK* 3/7b), contain a distant cousin of the “Gan tang” saying that is not connected to either “Gan tang” or Kongzi. The *Hanshi waizhuan* version reads as follows: “Taigong said [to King Wu]: ‘Loving a man means loving the crows on his roof; hating a person means detesting the walls of his village’ (太公曰：愛其人，及屋上烏；惡其人者，憎其冑餘).

But the question still remains: what about the strip #24 saying warrants its attribution to Kongzi?

Resolving the paradox

An examination of these “Shilun” parallels may not answer all of the questions prompted by the “Sweet Pear-Tree” paradox, but a comparison with these other texts is still helpful insofar as it highlights the distinctiveness of the “Shilun” strip #24 version. Therein lies one possible solution to the paradox. Not only is the strip #24 version significantly longer than the strip #15 version, it also operates at a higher level of abstraction. The first such clue is the phrase “people’s nature was ever thus” (*min xing guran* 民性固然), which clarifies the relationship between “Gan tang” and everything that follows that phrase.²⁶ The choice of *xing* 性 (“nature”) is also noteworthy given the mid- to late Warring States debates over the nature of human nature. The second is the use of the word *bi* 必, whose insertion creates a general rule or maxim out of the more situation-specific version in strip #15 (“when [people] greatly esteem the man they invariably respect his position” [甚貴其人，必敬其位] versus “‘Gan tang’ longs for the man and respects and cares for his tree” [〔思〕及其人，敬愛其樹]). Also notice that 民性固然 is repeated three times

26. Chen Tongsheng (2004, pp. 68–69) argues that this phrase is actually an interpolation by the “Shilun” author into Kongzi’s comment on “Gan tang,” and he cites as evidence the fact that the “Shilun” is the only extant or excavated text to add 民性固然 to a Kongzi “Gan tang” comment. However, in making this argument Chen lumps together the unattributed strip #15 comment and the more abstract strip #24 comment without noticing their different registers, and he also relies on a late Western Han text — the *Shuiyuan* — to separate the authentic sections from the interpolation. As I argue below, attention to the subtle differences among these different versions of the “Gan tang” comment makes it much harder to dismiss 民性固然 as an interpolation.

and 必 five times throughout the extended Kongzi quotation that begins with strip #16 and ends with #27, but neither appears elsewhere in the “Shilun.”²⁷ Finally, the strip #24 version also replaces *shu* 樹 (“tree”) with *wei* 位 (“[official] position”), a metaphorical extension from “tree” to the idea of “where one plants oneself” or “where one takes one stand,” i.e., one’s official position. Also significant is that way that Kongzi extracts the core structure of the saying to generate a new parallel saying which has no precedent in the received literature: “when [people] delight in the man they are invariably fond of his actions” (悅其人，必好其所為。). He also extends the application of the saying to include the opposite case: “when [people] hate the man it is also thus [i.e., they do not respect his position and they are not fond of his actions]” (惡其人者亦然。). The end result is a far more intellectually sophisticated and rhetorically integrated version of the eight-character line from strip #15.

Not coincidentally, Kongzi’s comments on three other “Bangfeng” 邦風 odes in the same section of the “Shilun” — “Ge tan” 葛覃 (“The Cloth-Plant Spreads”), “Mu gua” 木瓜 (“A Quince”), and “Di du” 杕杜 (“Tall Pear-Tree”) — follow the same pattern, with a similarly structured saying following the phrase *min xing guran* 民性固然: “when [people] see something beautiful they invariably wish to trace it back to its root” (見其美，必欲反其本) for “Ge tan”; “hidden thoughts will invariably find some means of expression” (其隱志，必有以 (俞) 抒也) for “Mu gua”; “when [people] cleave to what they care for they invariably say, ‘How can I abandon this?’” (離其所愛，必曰吾奚捨之) for “Di du.” For “Mu gua” in particular, the relation-

27. This is section two in both Huang Huaixin’s and Li Xueqin’s reconstructions. For a translation of the latter, see Jiang Guanghui 2008.

ship between the Kongzi comment and an unattributed comment from strip #19 closely parallels the difference between the two “Gan tang” comments:

(strip #19): In “Mu gua” there are hidden wishes that are not yet realized.²⁸

《木瓜》有藏願而未得達也。

(strip #20): [Kongzi said, “...] In ‘Mu gua’ I obtain the indispensability of money and silk. People’s nature was ever thus: hidden intentions will find some means of expression. Either the words convey [a intention of friendship] which is then accepted, or a friendship is established after a gift is given. Others cannot interfere [in this custom]....”

〔《木瓜》，得〕幣帛之不可去也。民性固然：其隱志，必有以（俞）抒也。其言有所載而後內（納），或前之而后交，人不可干也。

Once again, Kongzi takes the specific situation depicted in an ode and transforms it into a universal principle.

Considered together with the *Zuozhuan* parallels hinting that the strip #15 “Gan tang” saying circulated independently of Kongzi in the Warring States period, the foregoing analysis leads me to conclude that the “Shilun” author most definitely did not consider Kongzi the source of the “Gan tang” saying. I believe that the “Shilun” author quotes Kongzi not for the content of the saying but for its elaboration and integration in a rhetorically sophisticated sequence of similarly elaborated and integrated *Shi* lore. By including both versions of the “Gan tang” saying, the “Shilun” author appeals to Kongzi as a source of wisdom that comes after both the *Shi* and an earlier layer of commentary. In terms of their content, the wisdom that is on display in the Kongzi comments is of a limited sort, a simple generalization from the concrete situation of strip #15 to the abstraction of strip #24. Thus it would seem that Kongzi teaches his audience not what

28. This translation is adapted from Jiang Guanghui 2008, p. 52.

to think about the *Shi*, but how to demonstrate what has already been learned through abstraction, rhetorical embellishment, and extended application.

Kongzi as Distiller and Elaborator (but not Originator) of Wisdom

Admittedly, this is a lot to hang on the analysis of one set of Kongzi sayings in a single fragmentary text of dubious origin. In this section I examine a few Kongzi comments from other pre-Han texts, specifically, the *Zuozhuan* and *Lüshi chunqiu*, in an effort to show that the Kongzi of the “Gan tang” saying is by no means unique to the “Shilun.” Two types of Kongzi material in particular show a Kongzi abstracting rhetorically sophisticated comments from pre-existing sources in a manner similar to the “Gan tang” comments. The first involves the use of Kongzi comments to cap historical anecdotes, comments typically prefaced by some variation of the phrase “Kongzi learned of this and said” (孔子聞之曰). The second is the surprisingly large subset of Kongzi sayings in which Kongzi explicitly or implicitly restyles and reapplies a pre-existing saying. Here, too, the word *wen* 聞 (“hear” or “learn of”) often signals that Kongzi himself was not the original source of the material being repeated.

It must also be noted that the corpus of extant Kongzi material is far more diverse than this very limited discussion would suggest. Looking beyond the “Shilun” to the rest of the Shanghai Museum bamboo text collection, one finds a very different Kongzi in the “Min zhi fumu” 民之父母, “Zigao” 子羔, “Zhongong” 仲弓, and “Lu bang da han” 魯邦大旱 texts. From the perspective of the *Lunyu*, this is a more familiar Kongzi whom others engage in dialogue on various topics. Of these texts, only “Min zhi fumu” might be considered a proper commentary

insofar as it has Kongzi discussing on a line from the “Jiong zhuo” 洞酌 ode. Because it is not immediately clear to me what, if anything, ties these various Kongzis together, for present purposes I shall leave these other Kongzis aside to focus on the “Shilun” Kongzi and his parallels.

Most texts that invoke Kongzi do so without commenting on the function of the Kongzi quotations within those texts, but the following passage from the *Lüshi chunqiu* comes very close to offering an explicit comment on Kongzi’s role in pre-Han rhetoric:

A man of Chu who had lost his bow and was unwilling to search for it said, “A man of Chu lost it and a man of Chu will find it, so why should I search for it?” When Confucius learned of this, he said, “Omit ‘Chu’ and the comment will be proper.” When Lao Dan learned of this, he said, “Omit ‘a man’ and it will be proper.” Thus, it was Lao Dan who attained perfect impartiality.

荆人有遺弓者，而不肯索，曰：『荆人遺之，荆人得之，又何索焉？』孔子聞之曰：『去其「荆」而可矣。』老聃聞之曰：『去其「人」而可矣。』故老聃則至公矣。²⁹

I have encountered no better example of the use of Kongzi to create more abstract and memorable sayings out of pre-existing material. In the “Gan tang” example, Kongzi generates abstraction through elaboration, but here he takes the opposite approach and eliminates words to achieve the same effect. *Gong* 公, which can be translated as “impartial,” “common,” or “general,” is an altogether appropriate choice of words in this context. Read back into the “Shilun” Kongzi comments, *gong* also aptly characterizes the kind of generalization Kongzi performs on the strip #15 comment. As the addition of the even more abstract and “impartial” Laozi comment demonstrates, this strategy was by no means unique to Kongzi comments, and sayings attributed to other early masters may have fulfilled a similar function. That *Kong* 孔 [*khônʔ] and *gong* 公

29. For the translation and source, see Knoblock & Riegel 2000, p. 71 (1/4.2).

[*kôŋ] are near homophones further suggests that Laozi has “out-Kongzi-ed” Kongzi in this anecdote.³⁰

The Kongzi comment that caps the following *Lüshi chunqiu* anecdote is striking for the way that it extracts a single nine-character phrase from a 106-character story:

A man from Chu named Ci Fei obtained a precious sword at Gansui. On his way home, he had to ford the Yangzi and at midstream a pair of scaly flood-dragons closely encircled his boat. Ci Fei said to the boatman, “When you have in the past seen these two scaly flood-dragons closely encircling your boat, have both the dragons and your passengers survived?”

“I have never seen them before,” answered the boatman. Ci Fei then laid bare his arms and pulled up his clothes. Drawing out his sword, he declared, “This body of mine may become rotting flesh and decaying bones floating in the Yangzi, but if by losing my sword I keep myself intact, why should I begrudge its loss?” He thereupon jumped into the river, stabbed the scaly flood-dragons and, when he had killed them, climbed back aboard the boat. All the passengers survived.

When the king of Chu heard about his exploit, he knighted Ci Fei “holder of the jade baton.” When Confucius learned about it, he said, “Excellent indeed! Not worrying about becoming rotting flesh and decaying bones or the risk of losing his sword — does this not refer to Ci Fei!”

荆有次非者，得寶劍于干遂，還反涉江，至於中流，有兩蛟夾繞其船。次非謂舟人曰：『子嘗見兩蛟繞船能兩活者乎？』舟人曰：『未之見也。』次非攘臂祛衣拔寶劍曰：『此江中之腐肉朽骨也。棄劍以全己，余奚愛焉！』於是赴江刺蛟，殺之而復上船，舟中之人皆得活。荆王聞之，仕之執圭。孔子聞之曰：『夫善哉！不以腐肉朽骨而棄劍者，其次非之謂乎？』³¹

Notice that Kongzi does not introduce any new terms or concepts to elucidate the moral of the story, and that almost every single word in the comment can already be found in the *Lüshi chunqiu* anecdote. All he has done is to select and rearrange the words into a pithy, encapsulating formulation. The use of the phrase “does this not refer to Ci Fei?” (其次非之謂乎), and particularly

30. See Schuessler 2007 for these reconstructions

31. Knoblock & Riegel 2000, pp. 518–519 (20/3.2).

the word *wei* 謂, also establishes these nine characters as an independent saying in its own right that can now be applied to other situations.

One of the more famous Kongzi comments from the *Zuozhuan* also builds on a pre-existing saying in a manner reminiscent of the “Gan tang” Kongzi comment:

Zhongni said, “There is a record that says, ‘the words are to be adequate to what is on the person’s mind, and the patterning is to be adequate to the words.’ If a person does not use language, who will know what is on his mind? And if the language lacks patterning, it will not go far. When Jin was hegemon Zheng’s invasion of Chen would not have been successful had its words had not been patterned. Heed your words!”

仲尼曰：志有之：言以足志，文以足言。不言誰知其志？言之無文，行而不遠。晉為伯，鄭入陳。非文辭不為功。慎辭哉！³²

Once again, one struggles to pinpoint what it is that Kongzi contributes to the original saying beyond its rhetorical elaboration and application to a new context. The question 不言誰知其志？ simply rephrases the first four characters of the source text, and the two parallel tetrametric phrases (言之無文，行而不遠) reworks the second four characters. And for anyone who fails to grasp the gist of the comment, Kongzi inserts a pithy and punchy yet redundant conclusion that summarizes everything that came before: “Heed your words!” (*shen ci zai* 慎辭哉). Here we also see a rather different elaboration strategy compared to our earlier examples. Whereas the “Shilun” and the first *Lüshi chunqiu* passage have Kongzi extracting general comments from specific situations, here the *Zuozhuan* shows Kongzi beginning with a sufficiently abstract or *gong* 公 maxim and applying it to a concrete situation. Whether working from specific to general

32. Xiang gong 25 (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 3.1106); translation adapted from Owen 1992, p. 29.

and the coincidence of beauty in him is sufficient to make men live in accordance with propriety. He engenders fitness in people sufficient to keep them in harmony with righteousness, and his constance is firm enough to serve as the trunk for human affairs. The noble man is someone who practices these four virtues. This is why it says: “*Qian* consists of fundamentality, prevalence, fitness, and constancy.”³⁴

元者善之長也；亨者嘉之會也；利者義之和也；貞者事之幹也。君子體仁，足以長人；嘉會足以合禮；利物足以和義；貞固足以幹事。君子行此四德者，故曰乾元亨利貞。

Divining the precise referent of *ci* 此 (“this”) in the “Shilun” is impossible given the fragmentary nature of the text, but if the parallel with the *wenyan* is any guide, the section to which 行此者，其有不王乎 belongs likely describes the promise of the text for those who master its content. More significant is the way that the Master expands upon, and specifies the referent for, enigmatic line statements, as in the following passage:

The first *yang* says: “A submerged dragon does not act.” What does this mean? The Master says: “This refers to one who has a dragon’s virtue yet remains hidden. He neither changes to suit the world nor seeks fulfillment in fame. He hides from the world but does not regret it, and though this fails to win approval, he is not sad. When he takes delight in the world, he is active in it, and when he finds it distresses him, he turns his back on it. He who is resolute in his unwillingness to be uprooted, this is a submerged dragon.”

初九曰：潛龍勿用。何謂也？子曰：龍德而隱者也。不易乎世，不成乎名，遯世無悶，不見是而無悶，樂則行之，憂則違之，確乎其不可拔，潛龍也。³⁵

One can easily imagine an alternate version of the “Shilun” text in which the strip #15 saying is followed by the prompt “what does this refer to?” (何謂也) and Kongzi’s elaborated comment. But the comparison with the “Shilun” is not a perfect one, for nowhere in the “Shilun” does Kongzi elucidate individual lines from the *Shi*. However, as in Kongzi’s “Gan tang” comment

34. Lynn 1994, p. 130.

35. Translation from Lynn 1994, p. 132. Chen Tongsheng (2004, p. 60) also compares the “Shilun” Kongzi comments with the *wenyan* to the *qian* hexagram and the *Xici* to suggest that Kongzi *yue* statements represent “the principal form of an early stage of pre-Qin *ru* canonical commentary” (先秦儒家早期解經的主要形式).

and the other comments discussed above, here Kongzi generalizes (*gong* 公) the application of the enigmatic hexagram statement so that “submerged dragon” (*qian long* 潛龍) comes to refer to any virtuous man who is “hidden” (*yin* 隱) to the world. In Wang Bi’s 王弼 words, “This entire section uses the affairs of men to clarify what is meant” (此一章全以人事明之也。).³⁶

The “Shilun” also appears to share with the received *Zhouyi* a shared commentarial hermeneutics evident in the saying at “Shilun” strip #1 and two *zi yue* statements from the received *Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳:

(“Shilun” strip #1:) Kongzi said, “*Shi* have no hidden intentions; Music³⁷ has no hidden emotions; patterned expression has no hidden words.”

孔子曰：詩亡（無）隱志，樂亡（無）隱情，文亡（無）隱言。

(*Xici zhuan shang*:) The Master said, “Writing does not completely express one’s words, and words do not completely express one’s meaning. This being the case, is the meaning of the sages undiscernable?” The Master said, “The sages established the figures [i.e. the hexagrams] to completely express their meaning; they set forth the hexagrams to completely express what is and what can be made to be; and they appended phrases to completely express their words”

子曰：書不盡言，言不盡意，然則聖人之意，其不可見乎？子曰：聖人立象以盡意，設卦以盡情偽，繫辭以盡其言。

A number of editors have proposed rearrangements of the “Shilun” text since Ma Chengyuan published the very first reconstruction in 2001. Whether or not the strip numbered #1 by Ma Chengyuan truly belongs at the head of the text, its placement there seems reasonable given that the idea expressed in this saying lays the theoretical groundwork for *Shi* interpretation just as the *zi yue* comments in the *Xici zhuan* licenses that text’s interpretation of the *Yi* hexagrams. But the

36. *SBCK* 1/4a; for the translation, see Lynn 1994, p. 140.

37. Here I follow Scott Cook’s suggestion in his translation of the “Yue ji” 樂記 (“Record of Music”) (1995, p. 21–22) to capitalize “Music” (*yue* 樂) in contrast with less morally edifying “music” (*yin* 音).

“Shilun” takes this idea one step further than the *Xici zhuan* by using the figure of Kongzi to prove the readability of the *Shi*, specifically, in those Kongzi comments that make use of the first-person pronoun *wu* 吾. In the “In X I obtain Y” (吾以 (於) 《X詩》得Y) formula that introduces Kongzi’s “Gan tang” comment, and in the sequence of Kongzi comments that begins “‘Wan qiu’: I praise it” (《宛丘》吾善之。) on strips #21, 22, & 6,³⁸ Kongzi demonstrates the interpretive mastery to which the “Shilun” audience subsequently has access, and his performance in the “Shilun” licenses others to approach these texts with a similar confidence.

Conclusion

Let us return to the assumption with which I opened the paper. Does the “Shilun” author’s use of *Kongzi yue* comments indicate a strong ideological commitment to a Kongzi school of thought? Was that commitment so great that he simply transmitted his master’s teachings to his audience, teachings that had been passed down generation after generation by similarly devoted disciples? While nothing in this paper completely disproves that possibility, I believe that this analysis of the “Gan tang” comments in the “Shilun” renders it far less plausible. The available evidence points to a far more dynamic picture, one in which *Kongzi yue/zi yue* statements were used to generate new layers of commentary that integrated older material into new contexts. I would even go so far as to question whether the “Shilun” Kongzi comments are “teachings” in the nor-

38. See Huang Huaixin 2004, pp. 282–315, for a cogent discussions of the significance of this formula and its parallels in the early received literature, particularly in the *Kong congzi* 孔叢子.

mal sense of the word (although the “Shilun” itself may have been intended as a teaching text). As a close analysis of Kongzi’s “Gan tang” comments shows, the Kongzi that emerges from these passages is the master of a derivative wisdom. The “Shilun” author cites Kongzi not to guarantee the source of those comments, but to demonstrate the masterful elaboration of an early layer of anonymous *Shi* commentary. Given this context, I doubt that either the “Shilun” author or his audience was much bothered by the “Sweet Pear-Tree” paradox. For the author of the “Shilun,” citing Kongzi was simply a useful way “to speak intelligibly and with authority” when he reworked an inherited tradition of *Shi* material.³⁹ For the audience of the “Shilun,” the interest of the text likely lay not in what it said about the *Shi*, but in how it said it.

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39. This echoes a point Andrew Ford (1985, pp. 83–84) has made with respect to ancient poetry in the Greek context: “[T]he ‘utterances’ of archaic Greek poetry, even its personal lyrics, were traditional and shared to such a degree as to make a modern conception of the author as the ‘original writer’ irrelevant...This is the *sophiē* “skill” of the archaic poet; he does not seek novel or idiosyncratic self-expression but desires to speak intelligibly and with authority.”

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