

“The Master Said:”—Confucius as a Quote*

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the phenomenon of quoting Confucius, the classical Chinese thinker of the Western Zhou Dynasty. Firstly, it approaches the core issue of quotes and historicity of the “master said” narrative which marked the tradition of quoting Confucius and understanding his heritage through the form of quotes. In the core part of the paper, a selection of ten quotes that most commonly circulate on the Internet are analysed and traced to their most probable sources, while the paper then concludes by approaching the problem of misquoting from a historical and philosophical point of view.

Keywords: Confucius, quote, misquote, internet, authorship

»Mojster je dejal«: – Konfucij kot citat

Izvleček

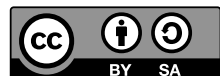
Članek je posvečen fenomenu citiranja Konfucija, klasičnega kitajskega misleca iz obdobja dinastije Zahodni Zhou. Najprej prouči osrednjo problematiko citatov in zgodovinskosti narativnega pristopa tipa »mojster je rekel«, ki je zaznamovala tradicijo citiranja Konfucija in razumevanja njegove dediščine v obliki citatov. V osrednjem delu članka sledi analiza desetih na internetu najpogosteje citiranih navedkov. Članek identificira vire, iz katerih najverjetneje izvirajo, nato pa v sklepnem delu ponudi še premislek o problemu napačnega citata z zgodovinskega in filozofskega vidika.

Ključne besede: Konfucij, citat, napačni citat, internet, avtorstvo

“There is nothing new under the sun.” Did Solomon say that or was it Arthur Conan Doyle? Was it John Piper or Nas? All these attributions and many more can be found in the vast landscape of the World Wide Web, and this misquoting actually proves what the “original” in *Ecclesiastes 1:9* expressed—that every deed has been done before, and that by the same necessity every new idea is nothing but a quote.

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This paper focuses on the very topic of quotes, more precisely on the phenomenon of quoting Confucius, the classical Chinese thinker of the Western Zhou Dynasty China. I chose to focus on Confucius to approach the topic of quotes, because it could be said that even the image of Confucius itself is nothing but a quote, just as is true for many axial thinkers of his time, to name only Siddhartha Gautama and Socrates as two other obvious examples. We know the ideas of historical Confucius to a great extent by what we could call the "Master said" narrative, organised and thought of in the form of quotes written down by the lineage of his disciples. Furthermore, quoting (and misquoting) the historical quotes themselves seems to be the preferred way that the ancient Master is known to this day. More than three centuries after the first wave of China-enthusiasm in Europe, the reading of the *Analects* still remains mostly a matter of specialist scholars and educated readers. For the large majority of the lay public, on the other hand, Confucius is represented not by his works, but by secondary sources and especially in the form of "quotes," or rather, quotes of his quotes.

The purpose of this paper is to assess the status of the "Master said" narrative through a selected sample of "Confucius quotes" that circulate on the Internet at present, and to use this sample to trace the heterogeneous components of the elusive popular image of Confucius today. The aim of the analysis is to see what the fame of the old wise man is at present, not only within what Du Weiming called the Cultural China (see Du 1991), but beyond that. The paper starts with an insight into the "Master said" narrative as the characteristic formative structure of ascribing authorship in early Chinese textual traditions. I continue with an analysis of the contemporary sample of Confucius thought in the intercultural or rather transcultural medium of the World Wide Web, while identifying some of the ways quotes and misquotes can be formed. Following the analysis of this sample, I will return to the "Master said" narrative in order to reflect on the impact this type of authorship might have had for the perception of Confucius to this day. Finally, I analyse this issue from two partly contrasting angles: through the cultural and historical relativisation of the concept of authorship.

"The Master Said" Narrative

The structure of a quote, the narrative in the form of the "Master said," was a very typical way of organising early philosophical and/or religious traditions. As in the well-known cases of Socrates or Siddhartha Gautama, but for many others in just the same way, it represented a link between the spoken transmission and the beginnings of a written one, often accompanied by a certain reluctance to write down in a condensed form what was initially expressed as part of a lively dialogue or debate. The written form was widely seen as too formulaic and rigid to grasp

the fine nuances of points expressed in speech, their many versions and contexts. As we can read in what are allegedly Socrates' words, written down by Plato in his dialogue *Phaedrus* (257c–279c) (Plato 2005), the written word is limited to its expression, and unlike a living person, the written text is deaf to our questions. When Plato was reconstructing Socrates' words in *Phaedrus*, his teacher had already passed away, and Socrates' preference for oral transmission is thus being transmitted in writing in the text of his student—which puts the whole written/spoken dilemma into an even more complex perspective.

The Confucius that we know of is himself also a similar historical quote. The debates about the chronology and dating of the parts of the *Analects* are many, and several criteria can be applied to group the passages in the book by temporal order from those closer to Confucius, to those which are further away from him. An interesting and perhaps the most thorough analysis of the historical and developmental layers of the composition of *Analects* can be found in the analyses appended to the 1998 translation of the book by E. Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks. They succeed in making a synthesis of previous scholarly attempts in order to explain the making and development of the text (Confucius 1998, 205). Apart from this perspective, they also approached the problem of the gradual composition of the *Analects* from viewpoints so varied as to include an analysis of Confucius' modes of transport (*ibid.*, 251), the references to hunting and animals (*ibid.*, 252), and so on. They contextualise the text into the transition between oral and written transmission. In the oldest layers of the text they find references to oral transmission and also recognise the mnemonic structure of the sayings, intended to be memorised by heart. On the other hand, they identify later segments, which already mention written transmission, which was apparently used to form the basis for a still existing practice or memorisation (*ibid.*, 256). A teacher would use the written text to have students learn it by heart, thus opening a new type of gap between the text and its transmission.

The later development of Chinese thought referred to Confucius by using his quotes perhaps more often than was the case for any other author of Classical China. The logic of the earliest periods was now reversed, since the written classics started to function as the solid ground and a reference point in the process of argumentation, which could be either oral or written. The authority of Confucius quotes and similarly of any other canonical classics became the cornerstone of any valid argument. In their analysis of the development of Chinese rhetoric, for example, Kirkpatrick and Xu analyse this shift on the case of the “Discourse on Salt and Iron” (盐铁论) between Legalists and Confucians in Western Han (Kirkpatrick and Xu 2012, 17). A practical application of Confucius quotes in order to achieve the lifting of tax on salt and iron, as banal as it might perhaps seem, signifies an important shift in the use of the “Master said” narrative, where

the quote is raised to the status of perennial truth and enters a life independent of its historical and textual context.

It is well beyond of the scope of this paper to explore the entire history of the uses of Confucius quotes in Chinese intellectual history with the full spectrum between the Han dynasty references and the recent uses, such as Yu Dan's *Confucius from the Heart* (论语心得). Today Confucius quotes are not only present in this almost pop-cultural approach, but also form a key element, a "cultural anchor" (see Pernet-Liu 2017) in the scholarly discourse (see Rošker 2017), even more so in the atmosphere of the revived interest in Chinese tradition seen in the past decade.

In the European representations of Confucius, quotes—and misquotes—also played an important role since the very beginning. Jesuits, who brought the comprehensive knowledge of Confucian philosophy to Europe for the first time, were also responsible for the first circulation of the translation of the *Analects*. As was analysed in detail in works such as Rule's *K'ung-tzu or Confucius?*, Jensen's *Manufacturing Confucius* and Standaert's critical comment on the latter (Rule 1986; Jensen 1997; Standaert 1999), the image that the Jesuits created of the Chinese Sage was in many ways a fabrication, fashioned for the desires and intellectual framework of a particular audience in Europe. As not unusual in the Early Modern period, the process of this representation was scholarly, but also quite vague. This was the time when it could be said that Confucius or "Confucius Sinarum Philosophus" became a trope for Chinese philosophy in general and for any given "Wise Man of China." This fame went beyond the actual community of people that had read Confucian texts, and it almost became a part of common knowledge. The translations were still only rare, while the ideas of Confucius came to be partly mistaken for those of the Neo-Confucian schools and other Chinese traditions of thought or—even more often—the other way around. Leibniz, who got most of his fairly wide knowledge of Chinese philosophy by correspondence with Jesuits in Beijing, ascribed to Confucius' words the status of having "*sensu maxime obvio et naturali*" (Leibniz 1994, II, §37), namely, to possess the maximally obvious and natural sense. While himself not always completely consistent in whether he ascribed certain thoughts and ideas to Confucius or his successors, he was very harsh on the position of those that criticised Confucius for what was written in later commentaries on his work. Judging a classic by its commentaries was for Leibniz a failure in theological approach: since for him the apodictic status of Confucius sayings was independent of the allegedly erroneous views of his philosophical descendants (ibid., §39).

Unfortunately, except for one example which I will analyse later, the quotes and misquotes of Confucius that were used by the Enlightenment thinkers do not seem to have had much impact on the way Confucius is quoted today. We could list a number of reasons for this gap in the transmission of Confucius thought from China to Europe, most notably the shift from sinophilia to sinophobia along with the

military conflicts in the 19th century, the linguistic shift from Latin translations to those in modern European languages, and the systematic organised study of China and Chinese language, which also starts at the same time as the previous two.

“10 Confucius Quotes That Will Change Your Life”

In order to assess the representation of Confucius through the medium of quotes I analysed several Internet pages that collect quotes by famous people. This would of course need to be quantified with more research, but what is evident without much further analysis was that the medium of the Internet seems to work as a form of error reinforcement—the quotes largely match between different quote-pages, while mistakes, misattributions, wrong translations and just plain fake quotes are very often repeated.

I will start by an analysis of a seemingly coherent sample, which includes several most frequently cited “quotes” by Confucius. On a page with a suggestive title—*Higher Perspective: Connect. Reveal. Transcend*—Confucius is presented with a collection of quotes “10 Confucius quotes that will change your life” (Higher Perspective 2019). The 10 “Confucius” quotes are:

1. “Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.”
2. “Real knowledge is to know the extent of one’s ignorance.”
3. “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.”
4. “Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it.”
5. “The Superior Man is aware of Righteousness, the inferior man is aware of advantage.”
6. “Wheresoever you go, go with all your heart.”
7. “Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in getting up every time we do.”
8. “He who learns but does not think, is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger.”
9. “He that would perfect his work must first sharpen his tools.”
10. “If you look into your own heart, and you find nothing wrong there, what is there to worry about? What is there to fear?”

The first obvious question is, of course, how many of these correspond to passages in the *Analects* and are therefore what we might call “real” quotations of Confucius, if we leave aside the issues of the authorship of the *Analects* mentioned above. Surprisingly, six quotes out of ten closely match the wording of the classical text. The first quote, the famous Golden Rule, is found as “己所不欲，勿施于人”¹

1 All quotes from the *Analects* and Mencius are taken from the internet database of Chinese texts: ctext.org.

twice in the *Analects*, first in the Yan Yuan chapter (2) and second in the Wei ling gong chapter (24). The second quote, a historical parallel to Socrates' famous statement² about knowledge and ignorance, can be found as “知之为之，不知为不知，是知也” in the Wei zheng chapter (17). The fifth quote about the attitude of the superior man towards righteousness and advantage forms a part of the Li ren chapter (16) as “君子喻于义，小人喻于利”. The eighth quote from the list, which talks about the proper relationship between studying and thinking, is also present in the same formulation in Wei zheng (15): “学而不思则罔，思而不学则殆.” The didactic advice about sharpening one's tools before attempting to perfect one's work is also quoted fairly accurately from Wei ling gong (10): “工欲善其事，必先利其器.” In the last, tenth quote, we can see some culturally specific phraseological adaptation, changing the “内” to “heart,” but the quote is otherwise true to the original phrasing: “内省不疚，夫何忧何惧?”

This is, however, where the obvious references end. Four out of ten of these “Confucius” quotes were much more difficult to track down, and for some there have been earlier scholars who attempted the task. An interesting systematic take on the topic of (mis)quoting was made by the author behind the webpage Quote Investigator (2019), Garson O'Toole, who published a book version of his findings under the title *Hemingway Didn't Say That* (O'Toole 2017). O'Toole lists several most common distortions which contribute to a misquote (ibid., 6–11):

1. Synthesis/streamlining—the result of memorisation process, where unnecessary parts are omitted and a more concise or even wittier formulation gets remembered and transmitted
2. Ventriloquy—someone summarises the ideas or attitudes of a certain person in the words of his own
3. Proverbial wisdom—when a quotation is transmitted, but the ascription is lost, therefore it obtains a status of popular wisdom
4. Textual proximity—when a quote (especially if said by a less known person) is ascribed to a more famous person whose name or image appears close to that quote in a publication, book, collection of quotes etc.
5. Real-world proximity—a quote shifts from one person to the other, because of a real life connection these two persons had
6. Similar names—a quote is mistakenly ascribed to a person with a similar name
7. Concoctions—deliberate misquotes or fabrications, e.g. for literary, theatrical or real-life reasons

2 Itself often (mis)quoted in an abbreviated form: “I know that I don't know,” the Socrates claim most probably comes from a passage in Plato's *Apology*: “Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is—for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows. I neither know nor think that I know.” (Plato 2009)

8. Historical fiction—when a real life of a person is dramatized and the dramatized quotes are understood as something that the person said in real life or wrote in their books
9. Capture—when somebody (especially if more well-known) borrows a quotation from a less known author (or person) and presents it as his or her own
10. Hosting—personas who are “quotation superstars” (ibid., 10) are ascribed quotations that they never said.

With personas such as Confucius almost any scenario from the list could be possible, and many of these can be identified in various Internet lists of “Confucius quotations.” We can also recognise some of these in the remaining four mysterious quotes from the list of ten.

Quote number three, for example, usually phrased as “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand,” could by its short sentences and repetitive structure indeed be a borrowing from a text from the *Analects*’ time. We find a sentence with a similar phrasing and structure in the Yong ye (20) chapter of the *Analects*, but the idea is different:

子曰：「知之者不如好之者，好之者不如乐之者。」

The Master said, “They who know the truth are not equal to those who love it, and they who love it are not equal to those who delight in it.”

A much closer passage can be found in *Xunzi* (Ru xiao, 23), where a similar pragmatic idea is expressed, although not in exactly the same words:

不闻不若闻之，闻之不若见之，见之不若知之，知之不若行之。学至于行之而止矣。行之，明也；明之为圣人。（儒效，23）

Not hearing is not as good as hearing, hearing is not as good as seeing, seeing is not as good as knowing, knowing is not as good as acting, learning should only stop when it can be put in action. Action is clarity, and clarity makes a sage.

A later Confucian text, *Zhongshuo*, however, seems to express the idea in more exact wording, although the text itself was often labelled a falsification (see Ding 2014). It reads:

子曰：「知之者不如行之者，行之者不如安之者。」《卷六 礼乐篇》（Wang 2016.）

The Master said: “They who know the truth are not equal to those who act upon it, those who act upon it are not equal to those that are at peace with it.”

It is of course difficult to assess whether any of the three is actually the source for this quote or if it is just a case of false attribution, perhaps loosely based on either of the three quotes or some later Chinese reworking thereof.

The fourth quote was the most suspicious of the listed ten. Already the use of the term "beauty" and the idea it expresses seem inconsistent with the interpretations in the Confucian classical texts, especially because the term *mei* used for "beauty" today might have more of an ethical connotation in the classical context. There are many speculations already in different sources about the quote, and posters in several Chinese forums in particular pointed out the similarity with a quotation by the French sculptor Auguste Rodin³:

In short, Beauty is everywhere. It is not she that is lacking to our eye, but our eyes which fail to perceive her (Rodin 2009, 48).⁴

How could Rodin's quote be mistaken for something by Confucius, we can only speculate. The phrasing of a very common idea still seems almost too similar to the Rodin's to be a mere coincidence. Perhaps the fact that this resemblance was noticed by Chinese commentators might hint at a similarity between the Chinese translation of Rodin's quote and the English translation of what is allegedly Confucius' quote, but this idea would require more historical verification. This possibility, however, opens another realm in the debate about quotes and misquotes that happen in the relation between two languages and different traditions of thought. It is not necessarily always a translation, but it can be the reverse-translation or second translation that can also cause similar results. As in the mentioned case, it is interesting to see how the misattributed English "quotes" of Confucius get translated back into Chinese and then how new matches are sought on this basis between the Classical Chinese material and this false quote.

The last two mysterious quotes were actually the most interesting, because they not only tell us where the two specific misquotes came from, but also hint at sources for other possible misattributions. The quote "Wheresoever you go, go with all your heart" appears in many Internet collections of "Confucius quotes," but in two variations, starting either with "wherever" or the more archaic "wheresoever." I could identify the source of this quote in a work which was traditionally ascribed to Confucius, the classic *Shu jing*. In the Announcement to the Prince of Kang, it is said: "往尽乃心" (Kang gao, 4), but the translation of *xin* to mean "heart" in the meaning of emotions is again culturally specific. The missing link I

3 Some of the debates which focus on this topic can be found at: Kongzi shuoguo 2019; Baidu zhidao 2018 etc.

4 In original text: *En somme la beauté est partout. Ce n'est pas elle qui manque à nos yeux, ce sont nos yeux qui manquent à l'apercevoir.*

could identify between early translations and the contemporary references, which most probably also helped to reinforce this misattribution, is a fascinating publication *The Ethics of Confucius* from 1915. The subtitle of this rather lengthy text is *The Sayings of the Master and His Disciples Upon the Conduct of the “Superior Man”* (Dawson 1915). The book was written by Miles Menander Dawson. Dawson spent all his life writing books and articles on insurance and accounting, and was a great expert in the field (among his most popular works, with an amazingly philosophical title, was a treatise on insurance, *Experience of Mortality*). On a completely different note, he also wrote several books on philosophy, on traditions as diverse as Zoroastrianism, Classical Greek philosophy and Confucius. Surprisingly well—researched and with quotations from the Five Classics and Confucian texts, the book went through numerous reprints—interestingly enough one of those even uses the famous illustrations from the 1687 *Confucius Sinarum philosophus*. The book uses quotes from the classical texts, not only *Analects* but several others, to underline the narrative about a coherent Confucian ethics. Under the title *The Ethics of Confucius*, it is perhaps more understandable how all these could be attributed to Confucius in the same way that some classical texts were attributed to him in the Chinese tradition. Although a largely forgotten name today, Dawson provides an interesting insight into the early 20th century connections between United States and China, which—apart from the 18th century Jesuit connections—might be among the most important periods for the popular knowledge of Chinese philosophy that prevails today.

A key into why (and how) Dawson, an accounting and insurance expert, dedicated so much attention and precise scholarly work to the topic of Chinese philosophy, is hidden within the book itself. *The Ethics of Confucius* is organised in seven chapters and covers a large span of topics from *junzi* and self-cultivation (chapters I. and II.), to human relations, family and the state (chapters III. to V.), with the last two chapters dedicated to fine arts (VI.) and “universal relations,” namely, the topics of death and immortality, ancestors and cosmology (VII.). The foreword was written by Wu Tingfang (伍廷芳), who was at the time of the publication of Dawson’s book the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the republican government of China. Wu studied law in the United Kingdom and was the first person of Chinese origin to be called to the English bar in the prestigious Lincoln’s Inn in 1876 (see Lincoln’s Inn 2019). A year before Dawson’s book he published an interesting text with the title *America, Through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat* (Wu 2004). Wu refers to Confucius several times in this book, most often to reprimanding the American way of doing things, e.g. the lack of filial piety, the military orientation, etc. He even compares Confucius’ hardworking habits to those of Thomas Edison (Project Gutenberg 2019). Nevertheless, the main link between Dawson and the Chinese philosophical tradition was probably another author who Dawson mentions in the introduction. He expresses particular gratitude to “Chen Huan Chang.” Chen

Huanzhang (陈焕章) was an official at the very end of the Qing Empire, when he also became a friend of Kang Youwei. He was a student of economics at Columbia University, and wrote a PhD thesis in 1911, which was later printed in a 756-page book, *The Economic Principles of Confucius and His School* (Chen 1911). Upon his return, he became a figure in the attempt to make Confucianism a state religion. Kang Youwei's students pursued many such initiatives, of which the *Confucian Association* (孔教会) (*The Analects* 2014), presided over by Chen was the most prominent. Dawson also praised his Chinese colleague for trying to "restore public recognition of Confucian ethics and observances" (Dawson 1915, xiii), and was himself a member of the Confucian Association. As of present, I could not find what the personal connection was between these two scholars who both crossed the disciplines of economics and philosophy, but no doubt Chen's assistance contributed a lot to the composition of Dawson's scholarly book.

The last in the list of 10 Confucius quotes sounds even more modern by its phrasing, which could almost be imagined in some sort of self-help manual. As hinted on Garson O'Toole's webpage Quote Investigator, however, the quote is actually much older. It was attributed to Confucius in a book from 1762 with a title *The Citizen of the World: or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher, Residing in London, to His Friends in the East* (Goldsmith 2010.). The trope of the so-called "Turkish spy," a foreigner who comments on the situation in a European country from the viewpoint of an outsider, was a popular genre trick in 18th century France and England.

The alleged author of this critical text was a fictional Chinese man called "Lien Chi Altangi," but the real author was Oliver Goldsmith. The existence of Lien Chi Altangi, however, was obviously taken very literally in Goldsmith's time. Although he mostly writes about England, he mentions Confucius constantly, even swearing "by the head of Confucius." We find the last quote from our list mentioned in Letter no. 7. In it, the fictional Lien Chi Altangi wants to provide a soothing piece of wisdom for the hardest of times. He claims to find the solace by "submitting to the stroke of Heaven" and "holding the book of Confucius" (*ibid.*, Letter VII.). He continues by randomly listing several "wise" sayings, implying that he is reading them from the same book of Confucius he had just mentioned. The section ends with the tenth quote from the analysed list, "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in getting up every time we do."

Surprisingly, this same paragraph, which corresponds very well to the genre of "Confucius quotes that will change your life," contains three sayings that also circulate as "Confucius quotes" today, while other passages of the book contain even more (*ibid.*):

- We should feel sorrow but not sink under its oppression.
- The heart of a wise man should resemble a mirror, which reflects every object without being sullied by any.

- The wheel of fortune turns round incessantly, and who can say to himself, I shall today be uppermost?
- We take greater pains to persuade others that we are happy than in endeavouring to think so ourselves.
- They must often change, who would be constant in happiness or wisdom.

Surprisingly this 18th century fictional travelogue seems to be one of the richest sources of misattributed or “fake” Confucius quotes, falling entirely into O’Toole’s category of concoctions, listed above.

Who Is the Author of Confucius Quotes?

If we follow O’Toole’s classification, we see that the misquotes attributed to Confucius could mostly be characterised as either concoctions or hosting, as they are either deliberate fakes or ascribed to Confucius because of the comparative prestige of his persona. Reconstructing of the ways in which misquotes were shaped, transmitted and popularised is of course a fascinating exercise in intellectual history. It does, however, also shed light on another interesting problem.

What is evident from the analysed list is that when people are quoting Confucius, they are often enough actually quoting somebody else: other Chinese classical texts, French sculptors, English writers and so on. But one particular type of misquoting Confucius is also “nothing new under the sun.” To illustrate this, let’s look at this sentence:

There are not two suns in the sky, nor two sovereigns over the people.

We cannot find anything similar in the *Analects*. The (mis)quote however, is not from any of the webpages we saw before. In its original form, it looks like this: 孔子曰：‘天无二日，民无二王。 It comes from Meng Zi (Wan zhang I.), so the misattribution could be a result of Mencius referring to a perhaps lost fragment of *Analects*, but as it is today, it is a misquote. Compared to the four misquotes among the analysed list of ten Confucius quotes, is Meng Zi’s misquote somehow more accurate than a contemporary fake quote by “Confucius?” Is the false attribution of a classical passage to Confucius somehow more correct than, for example, the fictional Lien Chi Altangi’s words by a British author? If so, why? These questions bring us to a completely different debate. As we touched upon before, the “Master said” narrative was a crucial element in the making of the Confucius tradition and the image of Confucius. What would then traditionally be the status of a misquote or, even more, a deliberate falsification? How can we interpret the decision of a later author to put his own words in the mouth of his Master? Was it done out of respect or to solidify the lineage of tradition? Or was it simply to provide his own ideas with a stronger historical authority?

Different methodological frameworks could be used to address this problem. One customary way to elaborate on this issue would be to say that cases such as falsifying of Confucius by Meng Zi cannot be judged by "our," "Western" standards, since the Chinese tradition of authorship is completely different from that of the "West." Many authors have for the last few decades claimed that the concept of authorship cannot be applied to China, or even to Asia in general, due to the virtual absence of the idea of author as the original creator of the text. As pointed out by authors such as, for example, Reynolds (Reynolds 1986, 22–28) and Huang (Huang 1994, 41–67), what would be considered the "author function" in theoretical frameworks such as that of Foucault, is structured very differently in the Asian traditions. In asserting this, the importance is stressed of the collective authorship of a learned community and power structures which, so to speak, "author" a body of text. Authorship, despite the fact that an individual name is used to signify it, is thus actually a collective undertaking of a power-determined lineage of writers, scholars and disciples. In this regard, the author of Meng Zi's phrase *is* Confucius, as far as this signifies the orthodoxy of the Confucian school. What Huang adds to this argument, is also an important insight into the blending of the border between the original text and its commentary. Even Confucius considered himself a transmitter of or a commentator on the ideas of antiquity, a claim which must be taken seriously. The distinction between Meng Zi commenting on Confucius thought and the ventriloquy of his phrase could therefore also be more blurred than it seems from today's perspective.

This, however, brings us to another view on this topic. While these claims about the different views on authorship in Chinese tradition and commentary-authorship as the traditional norm might be true for the early periods in Chinese literary history, giving this characteristic an essential cultural validity would be a grave anachronism. Although this would of course require a separate body of research, it can be observed that even within Chinese tradition the difference between the collective lineage authorship of the "Master said" narrative and the concept of individual authorship is primarily a historical one. Also in Europe, individual authorship is a conceptual phenomenon of modernity, just as well as the "death of the author" with Barthes or Foucault is historically grounded in a response to modernity. For the Vietnamese tradition this argument was very well drawn by Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox (Gadkar-Wilcox 2017, 7–33) in his analysis on authorship and authority in Vietnamese historical writing. His main point, which could be fairly adequately also be applied to China, is that the claim on the absence of the concept of authorship in Vietnamese "culture" is in itself a particularistic assertion with an evident political agenda. For the case of China, this type of—if we can use this term—orientalist claim is nothing new, the essential difference between alleged Chinese culture and that of the "West" often being described by the ideas of ahistoricity and the anti-individualism. Again, what is hidden under the claims

of alleged cultural difference is the relations of power, both when the anachronic claims of Chinese cultural difference are critical of China and when they are, in the inverted orientalist fashion, favourable. The use and abuse of these alleged cultural differences, however, seem not to alter substantially the processes of the new stage in the transformation of authorship which we witness at present.

What then is happening with the “authorship” of Confucius quotes today? If we observe the life of these sayings within the World Wide Web as a living laboratory where a new paradigm of authorship is being formed, the first thing we can notice is that the living environment of these quotes is increasingly transcultural. The quotes of “Confucius” seem to jump over the linguistic gap from Chinese to English and back (or the other way around) without much trouble. Although the label of “Confucius” still seems to carry a certain added credibility, the same process can be observed with quote “traditions” by other ancient authors. Not only are these quotes detached from their cultural traditions, in this case Chinese, but they are also becoming almost completely detached from the text of their origin. These fragments, loosely tied to their ascribed “author,” take on a new life, and are constantly in motion, not unlike the fragments of the early orally transmitted traditions. The label of the author, be it Confucius or Rodin, merely serves as a passport which helps them travel faster.

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