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Through the Lens of Archaeology: Data Cross-Referencing between Received and Manuscript Sources Related to Confucius and the *Lunyu* 論語

1 The *Lunyu*–Centered Interpretations of Confucius

The most recent studies on the historical Confucius¹ (Kongzi 孔子, ca. 551–479 BCE) and on the corpus of early Confucius-centered sources highlight two dominant interpretative approaches, distinct and apparently irreconcilable. But, as I will attempt to demonstrate, these are united by one specific trait. On the one hand, some scholars strive to find enough solid evidence to provide a truly original and ultimately authentic reconstruction of Confucius, free from posthumous and biased interpretations, whether from inside or outside of the Ru 儒 tradition, of which Confucius embodies the highest expression.² On the other hand, a ‘ka-

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1 In this article I use ‘Confucian’ to refer to anything that can be directly traced back to the figure of Confucius or to his self-identified followers, while I prefer the term ‘Ru 儒’ in place of its conventionally but imprecisely translation – ‘Confucian’ or ‘Confucianism’ – to specify those thinkers who emerged during the Spring and Autumn period (770–453 BCE) as guardians of cultural heritage during the first phase of the Zhou 周 dynasty (c. 1045–256 BCE). The Ru constituted a broad category of experts that performed public religious ceremonies and carried out bureaucratic tasks at a low to middle-range level. These were related to education, rituals and the transmission of a textual corpus which, according to early lore, Confucius and his followers compiled, edited and also partly composed. In such a sense, following Nylan (2001) 2–3 and Scarpari (2010) 11 and (2020) 209, ‘Ru’ might be translated more accurately as ‘Classicists’, or even ‘Traditionalists’, as Pines (2002) 35–37 suggests. While not indicating Confucius as the founder of a genuine ‘school’, Ru celebrated his example by imputing to him the status of supreme guardian and defender of ancient tradition.

2 Among those who trust in the possibility to distinguish, within the *Lunyu*, the original words of Confucius from the later comments made by his disciples, I will mention Chin (2008), who attempted a reconstruction of Confucius’s psychological profile based on elements of the Mas-

leidoscopic' approach inspires a process of historicization in revealing the role of the Master. The latter approach allows for the separate analysis of individual motivations behind the composite portrait of Confucius and the far-from-convergent iconic profiles of him that have been depicted over the centuries.³

Beyond the distinct aims that animate these two interpretative approaches, I am convinced that there is a precise link between them. This lies in the centrality assumed by the problem of identifying the most reliable sources from which to start. In one way or another, this remains the crucial point: the foundational sources to be referenced in building, consolidating or dismantling the various hypotheses. It is from this point of view that the sense of the two preliminary questions that Michael Hunter poses should be understood, both valid as methodological premises for the research trajectories mentioned above: "(1) what are the earliest sources for Kongzi; and (2) which, if any, of these sources can be relied on for accurate information about him?"⁴ In highlighting how closely these two questions are fused, Hunter concludes that "how one goes about answering the latter question determines to a large extent the version of Kongzi one ends up with".⁵

Obviously, any attempt to approach Confucius needs to be correlated with the *Lunyu* 論語 ('The Analects'), a work that has influenced the ways East Asian literary and intellectual traditions have absorbed and, in turn, re-projected polychromatic representations of the Master.

The *Lunyu* entry of the *Yiwenzhi* 藝文志 ('Records of Arts and Letters'), attributed to Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), offers a paradigmatic description of its nature:

ter's biography emerging from the *Lunyu*-related anecdotal tradition; Li (2007), (2008) is confident at long last of sketching a de-glorified 'true image' (*zhenxiang* 真相) of Confucius; Brooks/Brooks (1998), whose philological approach has fueled a widespread debate, have solicited replies from Makeham (1999), Simson (2000), Slingerland (2000), Schaberg (2001b), Mair (1999), Henderson (1999), Weingarten (2011), and Zhang (2018) 140.

3 The majority of the supporters of a 'kaleidoscopic' interpretation of Confucius tend toward the view that *Lunyu* is essentially a Western Han (206 BCE–9 CE) text, as intimated by the following scholars: Zhao (1961); Zhu (1986), (1987); Tsuda (1946); Makeham (1996); Csikszentmihalyi (2001), (2002); Haupt (2006); Scarpari (2007); Weingarten (2010); Hunter (2017a), (2017b), (2018); Zhang (2018) 93–174; Li (2019). The attempt to evade an exclusively *Lunyu*-centered analysis of Confucius is motivated by the idea that this text is no more than a portion – and not necessarily the most authoritative one – of a wider repository of Confucian lore preserved in several further sources. It is worth pointing out some key contributions that highlight the complexity and richness of inferences to be made regarding Confucius and the *Lunyu* through an array of insights from divergent angles: Van Norden (2002); Nylan/Wilson (2010); Olberding (2014); Goldin (2017); Hunter/Kern (2018).

4 Hunter (2017b) 15.

5 *Ibid.*

《論語》者，孔子應答弟子、時人及弟子相與言而接聞於夫子之語也。當時弟子各有所記。夫子既卒，門人相與輯而論纂，故謂之《論語》。

The *Lunyu* consists of a set of records of Confucius replying to his disciples and contemporaries, and it refers to the discussions among his disciples or the words that they had heard from the Master. At that time each disciple held his own records, and when the Master died his followers arranged their notes together in order to create a compilation which, for all the reasons explained above, has been called “*Lunyu*”.⁶

In stating that the *Lunyu* is “a set of records of Confucius replying to his disciples and contemporaries, and it refers the discussions among his disciples or the words that they had heard from the Master”, Ban Gu was merely confirming what had previously been expressed by both Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE), the official charged by Emperor Cheng 成帝 (r. 33–7 BCE) in 26 BCE with cataloging the imperial library, and Liu Xiang’s son Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE), according to whom “all 20 chapters of the Lu 魯 version of the *Lunyu* testify how Confucius’s disciples have recorded [it] as his fine sayings” (孔子弟子記諸善言).⁷ In the minds of the most influential Han 漢 (206 BCE–220 CE) bibliographers was a deeply rooted conviction that the Master’s ‘sayings’ (*yan* 言) and ‘talks’ (*yu* 語) were authentically transcribed in the *Lunyu*, and considered so precious due to its vividly preserving the voice of Confucius himself. Moreover, the special significance attributed to the *Lunyu* would also reside in its ability to penetrate into an intimate, everyday, familiar dimension of the Master’s existence, to the point of infusing a sense of familiarity-based trust in the reader. As Levi underlines, it is indeed difficult not to acknowledge a mysterious enchanting power in this text.⁸ A further consideration, often taken for granted, must be added, namely the perception that the transmitted *Lunyu* reflects the structure and spirit of the ‘original’ *Lunyu*, if not of the ‘archaic, ancient’ (*gu* 古) version recovered from the wall of Confucius’s house and arranged by Kong Anguo 孔安國 (d. c. 100 BCE).⁹ The narrative based on the belief that there exists an unbroken thread

6 *Hanshu* 漢書 (“The History of the [Former] Han Dynasty”) 30.1717.

7 See the preface (*xu* 序) to the *Lunyu jijie* 論語集解 (“Collected Explanations of the *Lunyu*”) attributed to He Yan 何宴 (ca. 190–249), annotated with sub-commentaries by Xing Bing 邢昺 (932–1010) and included in the Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) edition of the *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (“The Thirteen Classics with annotations and sub-commentaries”), 2454.

8 Levi (2003) 2018.

9 Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 100) states that the *Lunyu* started to be presented with such a title and took a unitary shape only after Confucius’s descendant Kong Anguo assembled disconnected textual units into a formal collection of sayings attributed to Confucius in order to teach it to his student, Fu Qing 扶卿 of Lu, probably in the early years of Emperor Wu’s 武 武 reign (r. 141–87 BCE). See *Lunheng* 論衡 (“Discourses Weighed in the Balance”) 28.1138. According to *Hanshu*

along which the *Lunyu* unfolded itself over the centuries can be traced to scholars such as Huang Kan 黃/皇侃 (488–545), Liao Yan 廖燕 (1644–1705) and others thereafter, who believed that every word of the *Lunyu* had been either written, or at least approved, by the Master himself.¹⁰

But, paraphrasing the title of an article by Maurizio Scarpari, the Master really said all that has been attributed to him – or didn't he?¹¹ To what extent can we believe what the *Lunyu* proclaims? And what effect has the voice that resounds in it had on those who have listened to it? Can we say that it was really understood? How can we to justify, then, the rich derivative and often conflicting exegetical traditions concerning interpretation of the Master's words?

2 Questioning the Received *Lunyu*

Before addressing these questions directly, it is worth recalling Philip J. Ivanhoe's queries, because these were similar to Hunter's own premises: "Whose Confucius, which Analects" should we address? Ivanhoe observed that the natural plurality of interpretations that accompanies every single passage of the *Lunyu* is a direct consequence of the status the text has assumed in history. Being an authentic classic, it cannot but have been read in such ways as to lead multiple generations of scholars to pass on ever-expanding speculative horizons, evidently producing a variety of conflictual interpretations which nonetheless congeal and entangle themselves around a pivotal corpus: the center of an exegetical system in perpetual augmentation. The various representations of Confucius and the readings of *Lunyu* provided by He Yan 何宴 (ca. 190–249) and others, through Song dynasty thinkers Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–85), Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), up to late imperial erudites Dai Zhen 戴震 (1723–1777) and Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801), express only the most well-known voices within a much larger chorus, a chorus which is,

30.1706, the sensational discovery of the material used by Kong Anguo to create the so-called *Gu Lun* 古論 ('ancient version of the *Lunyu*' or 'the *Lunyu* in ancient scripts') is a classic case of serendipity. The local ruler Prince Gong of Lu 魯共王 (153–128 BCE) damaged the lecture hall of Confucius's family mansion while he was expanding his own palace and due to this some texts that had been hidden in a wall were discovered, including the *Shangshu* 尚書 ('Book of Documents'), *Liji* 禮記 ('Record of Rites'), *Xiaojing* 孝經 ('Classic of Filial Piety') and *Lunyu*, all written in 'ancient scripts' (*guwen* 古文).

¹⁰ Zhang (2018) 141; Zhao (1961) 1.

¹¹ Scarpari (2007).

above all, not always ‘in tune’.¹² This, after all, is inevitable. Philosophical hermeneutics helps us grasp how exegesis could deal with such a dynamic context, one in which no written text can come to life unless its interpreters themselves revive it, since the richness of the message it contains is such as to continually germinate new meanings. Within the hermeneutic perspective there is no contradiction between the expectation of univocality of scripture and its proclivity for multiple interpretations, precisely because the hermeneutic condition is nourished by the tension between the past and present, between the singularity of a given text and its openness in regard to meaning. The real purpose then becomes grasping the *sensus plenior* of a written work. In the case of the *Lunyu* and, in a broader sense, of Ru philosophy, Ivanhoe indeed stresses how *true* understanding “requires that one understand the history of the tradition”.¹³ The cultural milieu to which any given reader unavoidably belongs is actually infused with pre-existing interpretative orientations, yet, by contrast, every tradition is sustained by the inevitable tension that arises from an injection of alternative perspectives. From such premises, the claim to be able to unveil a *sensus unicus* consequently shatters when confronted with the realization that to return to a pre-critical stage is an utter impossibility. And, above all, even if it were possible to go back to such a precise stage, nothing assures us that we would be in the ideal condition to formulate interpretations that are ultimately authentic and true. In fact, the weight of tradition can be less oppressive than the apparent lightness of a direct ‘naked and raw’ reading of a text, yielded by an ‘immaculate’ eye (the very concept of which is highly dubious).

However, the hermeneutic level does not exhaust the perspective of an analysis of any text. In fact, the plurality of interpretations deriving from the expansion of meaning that a text assumes within the exegetical tradition is flanked by a plurality of forms through which it manifests itself in history. Every discrepancy only expands and accelerates the proliferation of further levels of interpretation that are no longer based on the ‘same’ text but on different versions of what we sometimes find difficult to recognize as such. Indeed, in the case of the *Lunyu*, up to now its exegesis has been based substantially on the received version manifest in twenty *pian* 篇 (‘chapters’), but in the very near future our perception of the text might well be drastically changed following the acquisition of new elements which, as we will see shortly, are poised to exert a profound influence on the field’s research methods.

¹² For a detailed examination of the exegesis of the *Lunyu*, see Makeham (2004).

¹³ Ivanhoe (2002) 129.

3 Which *Lunyu*?

Twenty *pian* ('chapters') distinguish the received version of the *Lunyu* from what, as we have seen above, Liu Xin and Liu Xiang identified as the *Lu Lun* 魯論, namely a redaction according to the tradition typical of the Lu 魯 state. However, the fact that the two versions had the same number of chapters does not prove that they actually concur. Such a conclusion should not be surprising, since the existence of multiple versions in early periods have been confirmed by numerous sources, beginning with the *Yiwenzhi*, which, in addition to the *Lu Lun*, lists two more redactions: a *Gu Lun* 古論, the 'ancient' version of twenty-one *pian* recovered from the wall of Confucius's house, and a version of twenty-two *pian* known as the *Qi Lun* 齊論 ('the *Lunyu* version transmitted in Qi 齊 state'). The twenty-one *pian* ('ancient') edition had a chapter entitled *Zizhang* 子張 ('Disciple Zizhang', chapter 19 according to the received version) divided into two parts and the second part included some passages traditionally associated with chapter 20, *Yao yue* 堯曰 ('Emperor Yao said'). Instead, what distinguished the Qi version were two extra chapters, namely *Wen wang* 問王 ('Asking about Rulership') and *Zhi dao* 知道 ('Knowing the *dao*'), which were soon lost.¹⁴ Currently we are not in a position to ascertain the exact degree of uniformity of these three versions with respect to the received version, nor can we say precisely to what extent the sequence of sections/chapters and the wording of sentences contained within were different. He Yan, who assembled all the commentaries written up to his time in the *Lunyu jijie* 論語集解 ('Collected Explanations of the *Lunyu*'), stated that the scholar Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) had the opportunity to consult all the three versions when writing his *Lunyu* comparative commentary, the *Lunyu zhu* 論語注.¹⁵ According to Huang Kan's *Lunyu yishu* 論語義疏 ('Elucidation of the Meaning of the *Lunyu*'), Huan Tan 桓譚 (ca. 43 BCE–28 CE) mentions substantial textual variations between the 'ancient version' on the one hand, and both the *Qi* and *Lu* versions on the other. Discrepancies affected the structure of several chapters and a substantial aggregate of words (around four hundred).¹⁶

¹⁴ *Hanshu* 30.1716. Chen Dong 陳東 argues that the Lu and Qi versions did not exist before the Han, when they were fabricated in response to the growing favor enjoyed by the 'ancient' *Lunyu* version, which Chen Dong believes to be of late-Warring States origins. See Chen (2003a) and Chen (2003b).

¹⁵ See *Lunyu zhushu* 論語注疏 ('The *Lunyu* with Annotations and Sub-commentaries'), *Shisanjingshushu* ed. 2455.

¹⁶ Nevertheless, the *Xinlun* 新論 ('New Discussions') attributed to Huan Tan testifies how "the archaic *Lunyu* has twenty-one *juan* 卷 ['scroll', sometimes corresponding to *pian* 'chapter', in the sense of a textual unit used to count the main sections that ancient books were divided into],

Obviously, each version was supported by specific exegetical approaches. In fact, *Yiwenzhi* mentions which scholars were experts on specific versions, including Zhang Yu 張禹 (d. 5 BCE), a figure who played a decisive role in the stabilization of the text.¹⁷ Zhang Yu's biography in *Hanshu* asserts that he studied with some *Qi Lun* specialists, first with Wang Ji 王吉 (also known as Wang Yang 王陽, d. 48 BCE) and later with Master Yong 庸生 (fl. 1st century BCE), and finally tried to reconcile the Qi and Lu editions in order to create his own, the so-called *Zhanghou Lun* 張侯論 ('the *Lunyu* version of Marquis Zhang'), which became dominant as the others slowly faded.¹⁸ Zhang Yu seemed to have taken the Lu version as his main basis and then integrated references from the *Qi Lun* at any point he felt justified in doing so.¹⁹ As proof of the appreciation showed for the *Zhanghou Lun* among the Han literati, suffice it to say that precisely this version was chosen in 175 AD to be engraved in stone, together with other canonical scriptures.²⁰

Although the belief is widely shared among scholars that the basis of the received version of the *Lunyu* was set by the 'systematized' text produced by Zhuang Yu, the evidence at our disposal does not allow us to sketch the genesis of the work. That genesis, moreover, certainly does not represent an isolated case in the wide panorama of ancient texts, especially if we consider those assumed to have been written during the Warring States period (453–221 BCE) but actually underwent a radical reshaping or, in some cases, even an *ex-novo* compilation in

with more than 640 dissimilar characters from the *Qi Lun* and *Lu Lun*" (古論語二十一卷與齊魯異六百四十餘字). See *Xinlun* 9.35. Furthermore, early commentators had noted differences not only concerning the number of *pian*, but also their sequence. He Yan, for example, points out that the *pian* sequence of the ancient *Lunyu* "is not the same as the *Qi* and *Lu Lunyu*" (篇次不與齊魯). See *Lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義 ('Correct Meaning of the *Lunyu*') 24.777. He Yan also notes that, beyond the actual number of chapters, the text of Qi's version itself was in any case more extended than that of Lu's. See *Lunyu zhengyi* 24.774.

17 *Hanshu* 30.1716–1717. In this regard, according to Zhang Hanmo, the *Zhanghou Lun* 張侯論 'has been passed down to us without major changes. The *Zhanghou lun* is the tip of an iceberg, with the archaic, *Qi*, and *Lu Lunyu* hidden from our view beneath the water.' Zhang (2018) 139.

18 *Hanshu* 81.3347–3352. Along the lines of *Yiwenzhi*, He Yan's *Lunyu xu* 論語序 also mentions in detail names and titles of those in charge of transmitting both the *Qi Lun* ('Wang Qing from Langye and Yong Sheng from Jiaodong as well as the Changyi Commandant-in-ordinary of the Nobles, Wang Ji', 琅邪王卿及膠東庸生昌邑中尉王吉) and the *Lu Lun* ('Grant Mentor of the Heir Apparent, Xiahou Sheng, the former General Xiao Wangzhi, Counselor-in-chief Wei Xian and his son Xuancheng', 太子大傅夏侯勝前將軍蕭望之丞相韋賢及子玄成). See *Lunyu zhengyi* 24.771–775.

19 *Suishu* 隋書 ('History of the Sui Dynasty') 32.939.

20 The *Lunyu* version included in the so-called Xiping 熹平 stone classics was actually written over the years 175 to 183 and is said to have been based on the *Lu Lun* according to Zhang's recension.

the Han period or even later. For many scholars, the non-homogeneity of structure, style and content that characterizes the *Lunyu* is irrefutable evidence of its layered and composite nature, a highly plausible conclusion. This is the reason why the main challenge for contemporary *Lunyu* scholarship is delimiting its pristine core portions. The point is that in order to reach such an ultimate goal we must be able to establish with sufficient certainty the dating of each single pericope, isolating those elements of the text which date to the early phase of the Warring States period and which may reflect the authentic teaching of the historical Confucius. Such a goal, however, risks being thwarted by objective lacunae, as well as by the implicit limits in the investigative methodologies adopted. For example, it is imperative to come to a conclusion regarding the legitimacy of any investigation through micro-dating – that is, fragmenting chapter by chapter, pericope by pericope, the content of the *Lunyu* – in the hope of discovering unequivocal proof in some hidden recess of the text. Likewise, it is worth verifying whether or not, in the face of a lack of firm footholds in terms of chronology, correspondence to criteria both internal and external to the *Lunyu* is able to produce anything but a circular argument whose solidity is nothing more than chimerical.²¹

As hard as it may be to admit, at present we cannot track the oscillation of individual sub-*pian* textual units from the time of their actual composition (by whom and on what date) to the moment when we presume they were concealed along with other archaic-script classics in the walls of Confucius's house, finally to be discovered and subsequently arranged to create the so-called 'ancient' version of the *Lunyu*.²² In the face of such ineluctable lacunae we can only conclude

21 Here I simply mention the criticism made by Zhang (2018) 140–141 of Brooks/Brooks (1998) 201–248 (*Appendix 1*) on their 'accretion theory' of the *Lunyu*. According to Brooks and Brooks, *Lunyu* passages were written and gathered together in different periods, but in the view of Zhang (2018) 141, "their methodology for dating and categorizing passages on the basis of scattered and minimal historical information is highly problematic". Li Zehou and Schaberg have also been very critical of the Brooks/Brooks approach, as emerges from Li (1998) 448–450 and Schaberg (2001a) 131–139. For a more recent reformulation of the 'accretion theory', see Eno (2018). In Eno's interpretation, "an accretion approach can accommodate ranges of dating solutions that fit available evidence while addressing the critical issue of textual disorder in the *Lunyu*". See Eno (2018) 65.

22 Admitting, with this, that the narrative of the discovery of the twenty-one *pian Lunyu* found within the walls of Confucius's mansion is plausible, despite the contradictory details regarding the event that emerges, for example, from Wang Chong. In the *Zhengshuo* 正說 ('Correcting Interpretations') chapter of his *Lunheng* he says that the event took place during Wudi's reign (r. 141–87 BCE, *Lunheng* 28.1136), but when he talks about the discovery of a *Shangshu* version in ancient script, he dates the facts back to Jingdi's 景帝 reign (r. 157–141 BCE, *Lunheng* 28.1125). Elsewhere, in discussing the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 ('Zuo Tradition of Interpretation of the Spring and

that any *Lunyu*-centered interpretation of the historical Confucius risks being undermined by the fact that the dating and transmission of the *Lunyu* itself are effectively grounded on quicksand. This is simply because the problem of producing a stable chronology of Confucius-related sources is only one aspect of a broader framework in which the dating of ancient texts in general becomes highly uncertain.

What has been said so far should not be taken as capitulation to this apparent dead-end, whither all research on Confucius and *Lunyu* supposedly leads. Far from it. Perhaps never before has the scenario been so rich and enticing. On the contrary, the obstinacy which accompanied the attributions of the *Lunyu* – in entirety or in part – to some obscure author through the imposition of an early date on the text should be seen as the main obstacle to an open and unprejudiced debate. In order to overcome this, there are some preliminary issues that should be subjected to a thorough review. For example, the examination of the tradition of a given text is usually conceived as requiring a sharp distinction between its basic compilation process and its exegesis (produced by later commentators over time). These two stages are kept at arm's length from one another, because they are intended to assess different phases and different agents. However, unless there is certain evidence of actual authorial intervention by a specific number of discrete individuals who operated within a well-circumscribed time span, we can see that the process of textual production was often protracted across time and, in many cases, overlaps with interpretative but also selective activity of exegetes who were not themselves 'authors' *stricto sensu* but who became 'pseudo-authors' by deeply affecting the configuration of the text.

In the case of the *Lunyu* we should perhaps accept the idea that the beginning of exegesis in the Han period coincides with the integration of different recensions into a unified text, without necessarily assuming that its writing had already been completed centuries earlier. From this perspective, the flowering of exegetical literature on the *Lunyu* during the Han dynasty would be contextual to the project of gradually shaping the text that would later be identified as such. It seems highly probable that the exegetes did not limit themselves to commenting on work already 'closed', i.e. established and fully-formed, but rather that they selected and edited textual material according to their own hermeneutical agenda and, by doing so, not only constrained *Lunyu* interpretations produced by later scholars but also conditioned the structure and content that the text

Autumn), Wang Chong mentions that Prince Gong of Lu damaged Confucius's home when Wudi was in power (*Lunheng* 29.1161–1162).

took on over the span of history. In fact, as in the case of Zhang Yu, it seems plausible to assume that exegetical-hermeneutical preferences might have guided his decision to implement extensive interventions throughout the text, thus determining its future transmission.

4 *Lunyu* in the Light of Archaeological Data

How new archaeological findings have affected our perception of the *Lunyu* is a topic that has been scrupulously examined in recent years.²³ Here we will simply explore to what extent the elements already known from the received literature about the nature of the *Qi Lunyu* can be integrated with a series of new clues which emerged after the discovery of the tomb of Liu He 劉賀 (92–59 BCE), excavated in 2011. Liu He was a grandson of Emperor Wu 武 (Han Wudi 漢武帝, r. 141–87 BCE) and the ninth emperor of the Western Han dynasty, deposed 27 days after his enthronement and exiled to the Haihun 海昏 Kingdom (located around present-day Nanchang 南昌, modern Jiangxi 江西 Province), where he died as the Marquis (侯 侯) of Haihun. A full archaeological report has not yet been published, but preliminary accounts of parts of an astounding funerary array describe a lacquered ‘dressing’ or ‘covered’ mirror with the earliest known portrait of Confucius²⁴ and some two hundred wooden tablets and five thousand bamboo strips on which several classical texts had been transcribed. Among them, the archeologists found a bamboo strip labelled M1:2564 A-B, on the *verso* of which (M1:2564 B) the characters *zhi dao* 智道 appear, while on the *recto* (M1:2564 A) a pericope directly addressing Confucius and including the renowned formula *zi yue* 子曰 (‘the Master said...’) had been brushed on.

Such a direct quotation from the Master – with no parallel either in the received *Lunyu* or in other early texts – is written as follows:

孔子智道之易也易=云者三日子曰此道之美也莫之御也...²⁵

23 Hebeisheng Wenwu Yanjiusuo (1981) and (1997); Lee *et al.* (2009); Kim (2011), (2019); van Els (2009), (2018).

24 For an in-depth examination of the nature and function of the object in question, see Guo (2019).

25 The second part of the pericope is quite similar to *Kongzi jiaoyu* 孔子家語 (‘The School sayings of Confucius’) 18.8. “=” is the marker indicating the repetition of the previous graph, so “易=” is intended to convey “易易”. By reading the manuscript ‘literally’, we would have to follow Sanft (2018) and attribute to *yang* 易 its basic meaning ‘brilliant’, which is a perfectly consistent interpretation. However, among those who have already studied strip M1:2564 the belief prevails that 易 should be taken as standing for *yi* 易 ‘easy’, since writing 易 for 易 might be fully compatible

When Confucius realized how easy it could be [to practice] the *dao*, he spent the following three²⁶ days repeating that it was easy, so easy. The Master [finally] said, “In this lies the beauty of the *dao*, but [unfortunately] no one can master it...”

Aside from the simplicity of acting according to the guiding moral principles transmitted from antiquity (*dao* 道), the passage above reveals at once a sense of awe at the wonder of *dao* and the regret that, however easy, no one is able to practice it unerringly. By looking at other sources reporting Confucius’s words on these specific topics, the text on strip M1:2564 A seems to reassert the exhortation to be passionately committed to *dao* and to consolidate one’s own intentions in order to act in conformity with it. If this were the case, we would be justified in finding a correlation between this and passage 7.30 from the *Lunyu* about the highest virtue, *ren* 仁 (‘humaneness’), on which Confucius expounded “Is *ren* really so far? If I simply desire *ren*, then I will find that it is already here! (仁遠乎哉? 我欲仁, 斯仁至矣)”. He is saying here that everything we need to live according to virtue is already here, available to us: this is the reason why Confucius seemingly sighed in amazement at the realization that in simplicity resides the supreme wonder of a condition that is within everyone’s reach.

It remains to be explained what is the exact meaning of the two words written on the bamboo strip’s *verso*, *zhi dao* 智道, whose presence is justified in light

with the scribal range of the time. See Yang *et al.* (2016). In conclusion, both readings – 易 (‘brilliant’) and 易 (‘easy’) – are plausible, but the fact remains that the reading *yi* 易 is considered more grounded only because it outlines an interpretation of the whole passage in line with several attestations from the received literature where the *dao* 道 is actually described as ‘easy’ to practice: *Hanshi waizhuan* (‘Outer commentary to Han [Ying’s] recension of the Book of Odes’) 5.184; *Kongzi jiayu* 28.2; *Liji* 61.1683c, 1684b (*Shisanjing zhushu* ed.). A similar passage is also attested in *Xunzi* 荀子 (Master Xun) 14.384. I do not exclude, however, that the graph 易 in the manuscript could stand for the word *dang* 蕩 (where the 易 element is present within its phonophoric ‘?’) ‘vast, large’, ‘easy and plain’, ‘broad and long’, ‘level’, especially in light of the expression *wang dao dang dang* 王道蕩蕩 (‘broad and fair is the *dao* of the king’), attested in numerous ancient sources: *Lüshi Chunqiu* (‘Springs and autumns of Mr. Lü’) 1.4.44; *Mozi* (Master Mo) 16.176; *Shangshu, Hong fan* 洪範 (‘The Great Plan’) 12.190b (*Shisanjing zhushu* ed.); *Shuiyuan* 說苑 (‘Garden of persuasions’) 14.343; *Xinxu* 新序 (‘New arrangements’) 1.5.2/10 (ICS Ancient Chinese text Concordance Series); *Zuozhuan*, Duke Xiang 襄公, third year, 29.1930c (*Shisanjing zhushu* ed.). Instead, Quan (2018) believes that 易 should be read as *yi* 繹, a term that refers to a specific ceremony commemorating the dead, whose protocol included ritual performances held for three days. The meaning of the passage would highlight, according to Quan (2018), the exaltation of the spirit of ‘filial piety’ (*xiao* 孝) that animated the ritual practice defined as *yi* 繹, which consisted of reiterating the offering to the *shi* 尸 (‘the impersonator of the deceased’) of the dishes that were offered the previous day to the deceased themselves. In my view, the interpretation in Quan (2018), although appealing, requires further testing.

26 ‘Three’ actually stands for ‘several’.

of the practice, widely attested in antiquity, of writing the title of a work on the *verso* of such strips. On the basis of the ancient equivalence of the graphic forms 智 and 知 to indicate (depending on context) ‘knowledge’ or ‘to know’,²⁷ *zhi dao* 智道 might actually coincide with *zhi dao* 知道 (‘Knowing the *dao*’), i. e., the title of one of the two extra chapters that early historiographical sources explicitly align with the *Qi Lun*. If so, at this juncture we can see that the *Qi Lun* took place among the bamboo strips from the Haihun site.²⁸

Actually, the content of strip M1:2564 was not new to the scholarly community. In fact, following the excavations conducted in 1973 at the Jinshui Jinguan site 肩水金關遺址 in the northern part of Jinta County 金塔縣 (Gansu 甘肅 Province) by the Gansu Juyan Archaeological Team (Gansu Juyan kaogudui 甘肅居延考古隊), 11,577 fragments of wooden strips were brought to light, thirteen of which have been identified with the *Lunyu*.²⁹ Indeed, except for a few graphic variations – like the form 知 in place of 智 – the contents of strip 73EJT22:6 from Jianshui Jinguan match that which is recorded on strip M1:2564 A found in Liu He’s tomb at Haihun:

- 孔子知道之易也易=云省三日子曰此道之美也...³⁰ (Jianshui Jinguan strip 73EJT22:6)³¹

²⁷ Bai (2008) 118–122.

²⁸ It is no wonder that the first reports about this strip assert that it likely comes from the *Qi Lun*, as stated by Jiangxi sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo *et al.* (2016) 61 and Yang *et al.* (2016). In the Haihun tomb were also reported other wooden tablets defined as *qianpai* 簽牌 (‘inscribed label official tablets’) and *zoudu* 奏牘 (‘memorials to the throne’), among which one – labelled *Lunyu shu dutu* 《論語》書牘圖 (‘wooden board with inscribed passages from *Lunyu*’) – records a few texts matching the received *Lunyu*. According to the excavation team, these passages are assumed to be Liu He’s personal notes (see Wang *et al.* 2016, 70). For an overall discussion on the *Lunyu*-related passages from the Haihun tomb, see Wang (2017).

²⁹ The transcription and critical edition of the Jianshui Jinguan corpus are included in the five volumes of Jianshui Jinguan Hanjian 肩水金關漢簡 (Gansu Jiandu Baohu Yanjiu Zhongxin *et al.* 2011–2015). The (hypothetical) *Lunyu*-related texts found at Jianshui Jinguan were excavated together with other manuscripts that recorded the reigning years of Emperor Xuan 宣帝 (74–49 BCE), such as Benshi 本始 (73–70 BCE), Dijie 地節 (69–66 BCE), Yuankang 元康 (65–62 BCE), Shenjue 神爵 (61–58 BCE), Wufeng 五鳳 (57–54 BCE), and Ganlu 甘露 (53–50 BCE). For an analysis of such *Lunyu*-related passages found among the Jianshui jinguan material, see Kim (2019) 220, 226, where the thirteen passages are divided into two groups: nos. 1–5 include those passages that can be found in the transmitted version of the *Lunyu*, while nos. 6–13 are passages absent in the received *Lunyu*. Wang/Zhang (2017a), (2017b) take for granted that this last group of passages belongs in its entirety to *Qi Lun*.

³⁰ The strip is physically damaged, therefore the text following the graph 也 – which is partially visible – remains unknown. The main difference compared to the content of M1:2564 A lies in 省 *versus* 者: at first, the graph in *Jianshui Jinguan* 73EJT22:6 was taken as 省, but after the paleographers re-examined the text on the wooden strip it was re-transcribed as 者.

孔子智道之易也易=云者三日子曰此道之美也莫之御也 (Haihun strip M1:2564)

With astounding timing, there had already been those who, even before the discovery of M1:2564 was made public, had been able to identify the contents of strip 73EJT22:6 from Jianshui Jinguan as an excerpt from the long-lost *Qi Lun*.³² The convergence of the two pericopes is surprising, but this, should not tempt us to draw any hasty conclusions, especially now that archaeological discoveries seem to shed a glimmer of light on the *Zhi dao* chapter and, more generally, on the *Qi Lun*. In fact, the greatest risk now is in over-interpreting the fragmentary data at our disposal and allowing ourselves to enter a frenzied race of precipitously identifying all the presumed *Lunyu*-related passages from Jianshui Jinguan. Some of them were even already classified as surviving excerpts from the other missing chapter of the *Qi Lun*, *Wen wang*.³³ In this regard, there are some things that deserve further consideration. Zhao Jiancheng 趙建成³⁴ recently undertook a detailed – as well as daring – disquisition on the nature of the *Qi Lun* chapter entitled *Wen wang* 問王 (‘Asking about rulership’), or rather, as suggested by the author, *Wen yu* 問玉 (‘Asking about jade’). Zhao Jiancheng is not the first critic to have believed that the evident graphic proximity between *wang* 王 (‘rulership, kingship’) and *yu* 玉 (‘jade’) misled even the most learned ancient commentators. Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223–1296),³⁵ later followed by Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709),³⁶ Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815),³⁷ Feng Dengfu 馮登府 (1783–1841),³⁸ Chen Hanzhang 陳漢章 (1864–1938),³⁹ and Ma Guohan 馬國翰 (1794–1857),⁴⁰ had already suspected that *Wen yu* was indeed the title of one

31 In early Chinese manuscripts, the round, black dot ‘•’ at the beginning – i.e., at the top – of the strip is there to mark the opening of a textual unit (usually a sub-*pian* unit).

32 Xiao Congli 蕭從禮 and Zhao Lanxiang 趙蘭香 argued that 73EJT22:6 was an exact fragment of the chapter *Zhi dao* from the *Qi Lun*; however, the justifications cited remain unconvincing. See Xiao/Zhao (2014). I fully concur with the perplexities expressed by Sanft (2018) 191–193 and I especially endorse his cautioning against the risk of drawing rash conclusions about the identification of these manuscripts.

33 Zhao (2017).

34 Zhao (2017).

35 Wang (2011) 182.

36 Zhu (1988) 1084, 1323.

37 Duan (1988) 15.

38 Feng (1890) 1.

39 Unfortunately, I could not verify this information, which I derive from Wang Zhang (2017b) note 5.

40 Ma (1990) vol. 4, 227.

of the lost chapters of *Qi Lun*.⁴¹ A legitimate doubt does actually arise when we look at the content of another strip among the alleged *Lunyu*-related texts from Jiangshui Jinguan:

[...] 之方也思理自外可以知 [...] (Jianshui Jinguan strip 73EJH1:58)

... as a model⁴² of the [...] Through the veins that run on its surface it will be possible to understand [...]

Despite this strip being broken, the writing is clear and the pericope overlaps with a portion of the description through which the entry *yu* 玉 ('jade') is articulated in *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 ('Explaining graphs and analyzing characters'):

石之美。有五德。潤澤以溫。仁之方也。聽理自外，可以知中。義之方也。其聲舒揚。專以遠聞。智之方也。不撓而折。勇之方也。銳廉而不技。絜之方也。象三玉之連。⁴³

The beauty of this stone comes from its fivefold virtue. It is, with its smoothness and its glossiness, a symbol of what is mild and gentle; therefore it stands as a model of humane-ness. Through the veins that run on its surface it will be possible to understand its intimate nature; therefore it stands as a model of moral rectitude. Its light sound rises joyfully – it stretches and can be heard far away; therefore it stands as a model of sagacity. It does not give in to pressure and breaks cleanly; therefore it stands as a model of bravery. Neither its sharp point nor its sharp edge hurts; therefore it stands as a model of integrity. The graph 玉 depicts three jade-stones tied together.

Wang Chuning 王楚寧 and Zhang Yuzheng 張予正⁴⁴ along with Zhao Jiancheng⁴⁵ assert that Xu Shen 許慎 (c. 58–c. 148) absorbed this passage concerning the fivefold virtue of jade, which was originally part of *Qi Lun*, into the *Shuowe jiezi*. The first two scholars go so far as to state that the text on strip 73EJH1:58 from Jiangshui Jinguan corresponds to the *incipit* of chapter *Wen yu* 問玉. However far-fetched such conclusions may seem, there is a further element that argues

⁴¹ Building on Wang Yinglin's doubts, Zhao Jiancheng offered the hypothesis that the quotations from *Yi Lunyu* 逸論語 ('Scattered *Lunyu*') preserved in *Shuowen jiezi*, *Chuxue ji* 初學記 ('Notes to First Learning'), *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 ('Imperial Overview from the Taiping [xing-guo] reign') and Li Shan's 李善 (630–689) commentary on *Wenxuan* 文選 ('Selections of Refined Literature') derive precisely from the *Wen yu* chapter which, together with the *Zhi dao* chapter, would have been expunged by Zhang Yu. In Zhao Jiancheng's eyes, the fact that five surviving texts of *Yi Lunyu* are all related to jade does nothing but reinforce this assumption. See Zhao (2017) 15–17.

⁴² *Fang* 方 means 'model', but also 'direction, orientation', 'scope, sphere', 'method'.

⁴³ Duan (1988) 10.

⁴⁴ Wang/Zhang (2017b).

⁴⁵ Zhao (2017).

in favor of a ‘Confucian’ origin of the passage in the *Shuowen jiezi* concerning *yu* 玉. In fact, it is echoed in various Ru sources⁴⁶ which, in a more extended form and with significant variants, all rework the same plot. It is a scenario focused on a dialogue between Confucius and his disciple Zigong 子貢 upon the parallelism between the virtues of the exemplary person (*junzi* 君子) and those of jade.

By way of example, herein follows a translation of the version of the event recorded in *Liji* 禮記 (‘Record of Rites’):

子貢問於孔子曰：「敢問君子貴玉而賤珉者何也？為玉之寡而珉之多與？」

孔子曰：「非為珉之多故賤之也、玉之寡故貴之也。夫昔者君子比德於玉焉：溫潤而澤，仁也；縝密以栗，知(智)也；廉而不劌，義也；垂之如隊，禮也；叩之其聲清越以長，其終詘然，樂也；瑕不掩瑜、瑜不掩瑕，忠也；孚尹旁達，信也；氣如白虹，天也；精神見於山川，地也；圭璋特達，德也。天下莫不貴者，道也。《詩》云：『言念君子，溫其如玉。』故君子貴之也。」

Zigong asked Confucius, saying: “Allow me to ask why the exemplary person sets a high value on jade, but little on soapstone? Is it because jade is rare, and soapstone plentiful?” Confucius replied: “It is not because the soapstone is plentiful that the exemplary person thinks but little of it, and because jade is rare that he sets a high value on it. In ancient times exemplary persons used to compare their inner virtue to jade. **Smooth and glossy, a symbol of what is mild and gentle – like humaneness**; fine, compact, and strong – like sagacity; it is sharply angular, as though punctilious, yet does not cause injury – like moral rectitude; hanging down (in beads) as if it would fall to the ground – like ritual propriety; when struck, yielding a note, clear and prolonged, yet terminating abruptly – like music; its flaws not concealing its beauty, nor its beauty concealing its flaws – like conscientiousness; with an internal radiance issuing from it on every side – like trustworthiness; bright as a brilliant rainbow – like the sky; exquisite and mysterious, appearing in the hills and streams – like the earth; standing out conspicuous in the symbols of rank – like inner virtue; none under Heaven fails to esteem it – like the *dao*. As is said in the *Ode* (I, xi, ode 3, 1), ‘I am thinking of my lord; how refined he will look, like a jade.’ This is the reason why the exemplary person sets the highest value on it”.⁴⁷

Unknowns surrounding Confucius and the *Lunyu* tradition are still numerous. We only have to wait until the content of the bamboo texts from Haihun become available in order to evaluate their impact on our understanding of the nature of the *Qi Lun*. Should we finally acquire relevant information in regard to the questions outlined above, perhaps we will be able to recover that which is preserved in one of the many missing pieces of this intricate puzzle that is the history of *Lunyu*: namely, the answer to the question: what might have been the subject

⁴⁶ See *Kongzi jiyay* 36.1 (chapter *Wen yu* 問玉 ‘Asking about jade’); *Liji* 63.1694a-b; *Xunzi* 3.535.

⁴⁷ The translation is slightly based on Legge (1885) 463–464.

matter of one of the long-lost *Lunyu* chapters? Confucius's take on the nature of virtuous rulership (*wang* 王) or his reply to disciple Zigong's question about the qualities of jade (*yu* 玉)?

After all, it has been clear since the very beginning that the Devil – as much as God – is in the details.