

10. Mencius and the Classics in the Service of Exemplar Historiography

10.1 *The Second Sage and Confucian Discipleship*

Mencius (385/372?–304/289? BC) is accorded by scholastic tradition and imperial fiat the supreme honor of serving as the Second Sage (*Yasheng* 亞聖) in the Confucian pantheon of canonized saints; only Confucius himself stands higher. The scholarly tradition commenced with the earliest commentator on the collected essays by Mencius, one Zhao Qi 趙岐 (ca. AD 108–201), and the imperial imprimatur was conferred by the Yuan court in 1333.¹ D. C. Lau pairs Confucius and Mencius together for another reason, that of linguistic association:

Only two Chinese philosophers have the distinction of being known consistently to the West by a latinized name. The first is Confucius. The second is Mencius, whose name is Meng Ke. That Mencius should share the distinction is by no means an insignificant fact, for he is without doubt second only to Confucius in importance in the Confucius tradition, a fact officially recognized in China for over one thousand years.²

This distinction, although meaningful only from the outside perspective of the West, still emphasizes the roles played by these two philosophers in founding what is commonly referred to as normative Confucianism and, affectionately, as “the Way of Confucius and Mencius” (*Kong-Meng zhi dao* 孔孟之道), a wholesale reorientation from a pre-Song period pairing of Confucius with the Duke of Zhou.³

With the career of Mencius, we see a departure from the heavy emphasis of Confucius on the socialization of ethics and the proper performance of the rites toward the internalization of morality, including the process of self-cultivation on

¹ Thomas A. Wilson, in *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, ed. Xinzhong Yao, 2 vols. (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 2:725.

² D. C. Yao, *Mencius*, revised ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1970), vii.

³ Chün-chieh Huang, “Chinese Hermeneutics as Politics: The Sung Debates over the *Mencius*,” in *Classics and Interpretations: The Hermeneutic Traditions in Chinese Culture*, ed. Ching-I Tu (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 195–211; p. 196.

the level of the mind and the *qi*. Teaching settings are no longer ritualized with formalized directions of rising and sitting, even when Mencius is addressed by his disciples. We see this development in the Shanghai Museum manuscript *Min zhi fumu*, 民之父母, in which Confucius and Zixia engage in a dialogue bereft of any ceremonial preamble.⁴ In *Mencius*, these settings are now fully “intellectualized,” in terms of the focus being on the rhetoric of a drawn-out discourse. These chapters, despite being couched in the pro forma format of catechisms and dialogue, are highly polished literary essays with developed argumentation and proof. When the rites are at issue, they are now regarded as expressions of inherent moral qualities. Witness *Mencius* 6A6, in Legge’s translation: “Benevolence, righteousness, propriety [i.e., ritual], and knowledge are not infused into us from without. We are certainly furnished with them” 仁義禮智，非由外鑠我也，我固有之也 and *Mencius* 7A21: “What belongs by his nature to the superior man are benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and knowledge. These are rooted in his heart” 君子所性，仁義禮智根於心. Mencius does treat the rites in many traditional ways, including the order they bring to society, and the term does appear in his work on par with the number of times it appears in the *Analects*: 64 times for the former and 70 times for the latter. The issue, of course, is the overall emphasis Mencius places on the inner psychology of moral commitment versus the traditional attention paid to outer ritualized behavior.⁵

10.2 The Life and Works of Mencius

The time of Mencius’s birth and death are not clear. Two specific sets of dates have been proposed by modern scholars: Yang Bojun suggests 385 to 304 BC; Feng Youlan proposes 372 to 289 BC.⁶ Sima Qian’s biography of Mencius

⁴ For a translation of this text, see Matthias L. Richter, *The Embodied Text: Establishing Textual Identity in Early Chinese Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 49–54.

⁵ For a penetrating analysis of how the rites figure in Mencian thought, see Noah Edward Fehl, *Rites and Propriety in Literature and Life: A Perspective for a Cultural History of Ancient China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1971), 92–103.

⁶ Anne Cheng, in *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, 1:421. Cheng’s entry on pages 420–23 is a convenient synopsis of Mencius’s life and thought. Another recent treatment is Wang Bo 王博, “Xian-Qin juan” 先秦卷, in *Zhongguo Ruxueshi* 中国儒学史, ed. Tang Yijie 汤一介 and Li Zhonghua 李中华 (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2011), 307–64, which takes into account the implications of recently discovered manuscripts. Pages 308–9 briefly introduce the problem of

in the *Records of the Historian* commences with a synopsis of his life and work before examining aspects of his thought and interactions with political leaders of the day. This opening synopsis is presented here in the translation of D. C. Lau, with the romanization modified to pinyin:

Meng Ke (Mencius) was a man from the state of Zou. He studied under a disciple of Zisi, and when he had mastered the Way he travelled to Qi where he took office at the court of King Xuan who, however, was unable to entrust him with affairs of state. He then went to Liang. King Hui of Liang found Mencius’s views, before he had fully listened to them, to be impracticable and remote from reality.

At that time, Qin had put Lord Shang into power, greatly enhancing the wealth and military power of the state; Chu and Wei in turn entrusted Wu Qi with the government of the state and were able to be victorious in war, weakening their enemies; while King Wei and King Xuan of Qi made the feudal lords turn east and pay homage to Qi by employing Sunzi, Tian Qi and others. When the Empire, busily engaged now in vertical, and now in horizontal alliances, valued only military prowess, Meng Ke preached the virtuous tradition of Tang, Yu and the Three Dynasties. For this reason he never secured a sympathetic hearing no matter where he went. He then retired and, together with Wan Zhang and others, wrote the *Mencius* in seven books, giving an exposition of the *Odes* [*Poems*] and the *History* [*Documents*] and developing the ideas of Confucius.

孟軻，騷人也。受業子思之門人。道既通，游事齊宣王，宣王不能用。適梁，梁惠王不果所言，則見以為迂遠而闊於事情。當是之時，秦用商君，富國彊兵；楚、魏用吳起，戰勝弱敵；齊威王、宣王用孫子、田忌之徒，而諸侯東面朝齊。天下方務於合從連衡，以攻伐為賢，而孟軻乃述唐、虞、三代之德，是以所如者不合。退而與萬章之徒序詩書，述仲尼之意，作孟子七篇。⁷

dating the life of Mencius. The earliest articulation of the issues involved is by Yan Ruoku 閻若璩 (1636–1704), *Mengzi shengzu nianyue kao* 孟子生卒年月考, (HJJ ed.), 1:247–49.

⁷ *Shiji* 121.2343; Lau, *Mencius*, 168. Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990), *Mengzi yanjiu* 孟子研究 (Shanghai: Kaiping Shudian, 1948), 1–12, analyzes Sima Qian’s biography in depth. Pages 13–17 include a traditional biography in the format of a

Sima Qian concludes with Mencius “transmitting the intent of Confucius,” what Lau loosely renders as “developing the ideas of Confucius.” But this translation obscures Mencius’s role as participant in the process of “transmission without creation.” Zhu Xi also happily stresses this role by quoting Sima Qian’s same formulation in his preface to his authoritative commentary on *Mencius*.⁸ But even more important than mere transmittal of teachings is Mencius’s imitation of Confucius’s work, as he too “ordered the *Poems* and *Documents*” in strict imitation of what Confucius had done earlier when he “ordered the *Documents* and traditions” 序書傳.⁹ The terminology of discipleship and intellectual transmission is purposefully adopted and used with precise significance by Sima Qian and should be reflected faithfully.

A few additional facts in Sima Qian’s biography of Mencius may be culled with profit. Sima Qian actually concludes the above passage with the words, “Afterwards came the various Masters Zou” 其後有騶子之屬. He then introduces three masters surnamed Zou in the state of Qi 齊 who figure in the Ruist intellectual lineage between Mengzi and Xunzi. The first is Zou Ji 騶忌 (385–319 BC), a lute player who became prime minister because, when his performances provided him proximity to the throne, his discussions of policy impressed King Wei of Qi 齊威王 (r. 379–320 BC). Zou Ji’s counsel helped convert the young king from being a detached wastrel to dedicating himself to administering his realm; he is credited with ultimately strengthening Qi to a considerable degree. The hoary aphorism “courtyard like a marketplace” (*menting ruoshi* 門庭若市) alludes to how his court became a bustling scene of earnest ministers freely offering up advice without fear of reprisal.¹⁰ The second Master Zou is the noted cosmologist Zou Yan 騶衍 (ca. 305–245 BC), whose treatment by Sima Qian exceeds even that of Mengzi and Xunzi.¹¹ The third Master Zou is

chronological biography or *nianpu*. *Xian-Qin zhuzi nianpu*, 4:35–5:584, reprints fifteen traditional *nianpu* of Mencius, one more than the fourteen devoted to Confucius in vols. 1–3. See also Lang Qingxiao 郎擎霄, *Mengzi xue’an* 孟子学案 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1937), 1–13. An exhaustive treatment by a modern author is Yang Zebo 杨泽波, *Mengzi pingzhuan* 孟子评传, *Zhongguo sixiangjia pingzhuan congshu* 中国思想家评传丛书 (Nanjing: Nanjing Daxue Chubanshe, 1998), 1–109.

⁸ *Shiji* 74.2343; Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), “Mengzi xushuo” 孟子序說, *Mengzi jizhu*, 2a.

⁹ *Shiji* 47.1935.

¹⁰ *Shiji* 74.2344.

¹¹ *Shiji* 74.2344–46. See the short intellectual epitome by Debora Sommer in Xinzhong Yao, ed., *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, 2:855.

Zou Shi 騶奭, who “mostly adopted the techniques of Zou Yan in arranging his compositions” 亦頗采騶衍之術以紀文.¹²

The most relevant aspect of this short excursus into the Mencius-Xunzi interregnum is the fact that Zou Yan and several other figures associated with him are identified as members of the Jixia Academy: “With Zou Yan and the various masters of Jixia, such as Chunru Kun, Shen Dao, Huan Yuan, Jiezi, Tian Pian, and Zou Shi, they all composed books and spoke of things concerning quelling disorder to discomfort the lords of the age. How can we talk enough about this!” 自騶衍與齊之稷下先生，如淳于髡、慎到、環淵、接子、田駢、騶奭之徒，各著書言治亂之事，以干世主，豈可勝道哉！¹³ A Han period source, contemporaneous with the *Historian’s Records*, posits Mencius’s inclusion in this grouping of masters in residence at the Jixia Academy: “Such adherents as Meng Ke and Chunyu Kun accepted the emolument of high ranking ministers. They held no position yet discoursed on state affairs. They most likely were masters at Jixia” 孟軻淳于髡之徒，受上大夫之祿。不任職而論國事。蓋齊稷下先生。¹⁴ This passage seems to be based on related sentiments, though not similar phraseology, elsewhere in the *Historian’s Records*, so it may not count as an independent source. At any rate, the *Yantielun* account suggests a historical possibility and does not assert a historical fact.¹⁵

Back to the work *Mencius* itself. Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), the great prose stylist, credits the authorship of *Mencius* to the posthumous editorial work of Mencius’s disciples Wan Zhang 萬章 and Gongsun Chou 公孫丑; but Zhu Xi prefers the account of self-authorship preserved by Sima Qian.¹⁶ The Yuan era

¹² *Shiji* 74.2347.

¹³ *Shiji*, 74.2346. An overview of the influence exerted on the intellectual development of Qi during the 150 year operation of this academy is provided by Li Xueqin 李學琴, *Yanjiang lu: Zhuixun Zhonghua wenming de qi yuan* 演講錄：追尋中華文明的起源 (Changchun: Changchun Chubanshe, 2012), 143–48.

¹⁴ “Lunru” 論儒, *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論 (ZZJC ed.), 12. This source preserves court debates mandated in 81 BC by Emperor Zhao 昭帝 (r. 94–74 BC).

¹⁵ Cf. *Shiji* 46.1875: “King Xuan delighted in scholars and persuaders. Such men as Zou Yan, Chunyu Kun, Tian Pian, Jiezi, Shen Dao, Huan Yuan, and 76 other advocates, all were bequeathed status and rank, and became high ministers. But they deliberated and discoursed instead of working in the government. By this means the scholars of Jixia flourished again, and numbered in the hundreds and thousands.” 宣王喜文學游說之士，自如騶衍、淳于髡、田駢、接子、慎到、環淵之徒七十六人，皆賜列第，為上大夫，不治而議論。是以齊稷下學士復盛，且數百千人。

¹⁶ Han Yu is cited in Zhu Xi, “Mengzi xushuo”, *Mengzi jizhu*, 2a.

classicist Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223–1292) notes some of the commentarial observations of Zhu Xi scattered about his version of the *Mencius* that undermine Zhu Xi's own reasoning. He also provides the basis of Han Yu's conclusion, stating, "When carefully reading the seven chapters of the *Mencius*, we see that his writing style was refined by much polishing, and not something that collating and editing could produce" 熟讀七篇，觀其筆勢，如鎔鑄而成，非綴輯所就。¹⁷ His prose, refined into highly etched, damascened dialogues, reached soaring heights not seen again until the equally high-flung and eloquently argued essays of Xunzi. As for Mencius's argumentation, Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777) applauds his orderly approach: "Sometimes proceeding from general principles to specific concepts, and sometimes from specific concepts to general principles. It was devastating" 由合而分，由分而合，則無不可為。¹⁸

James Legge collects many traditions concerning the childhood of Mencius and the pervasive influence exerted by his mother on the course of his education.¹⁹ These stories are "charmingly edifying, whether or not they are true," observes Bryan W. Van Norden.²⁰ Like Confucius, Mencius early on had lost his father (which is debatable in light of a statement in *Mencius* 1B16 about Mencius burying his father), so Mencius's mother's moral influence and strict attitude toward his studies became proverbial. The saying "Mencius' mother moved thrice" (*Mengmu sanqian* 孟母三遷) derives from the following episode in the life of young Mencius narrated by Legge:

It was his misfortune, according to Chao Qi, "to lose his father at an early period; but in his youthful years he enjoyed the lessons of his kind mother, who thrice changed her residence on his account." At first they lived near a cemetery, and Mencius amused himself with acting the various scenes which he witnessed at the tombs. "This," said the lady, "is no place for my son;"—and she removed to a house in the market-place. But

the change was no improvement. The boy took to playing the part of a salesman, vaunting his wares, and chaffing with customers. His mother sought a new house, and found one at last close by a public school. There her child's attention was taken with the various exercises of politeness which the scholars were taught, and he endeavored to imitate them. The mother was satisfied. "This," she said, "is the proper place for my son."²¹

The second Mencius-derived saying is "Mencius' mother broke her loom" (*Mengmu duanji* 孟母斷機). It is based on an early anecdote preserved in a commentary on the *Poems*: the *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳.²²

Mencius as a child was once reciting his lessons when his mother happened to be spinning. Breaking off suddenly, he stopped in the middle, then started up again. His mother knew his mind was wandering, and called out to ask, "Why do you stop in the middle?" He replied, "I had forgotten part of it, and then I remembered it again." His mother took a knife and cut her thread. She did this as a warning to him. After that Mencius did not let his mind wander again.²³

These and similar anecdotes prove interesting reading but shed little light on Mencius's career as a classicist. The development of the young defender of Confucian doctrine is naturally foregrounded. Legge does explore one facet of interest, that of Mencius's teacher. He assumes that it could be plausible that Mencius had studied with disciples of Zisi: "This may have been the case. There is nothing on the score of time to make it impossible, or even improbable; but this is all that can be said about it. No famous names out of the school of Zisi have been transmitted to posterity, and Mencius nowhere speaks as if he felt under special obligation to any instructor."²⁴ Zisi does appear in seven separate scenarios in his work; he is certainly not promoted, but neither is he hidden out of the way. Mencius is clearly familiar with his history: he invokes the example of Zisi as the way an advisor should be treated (*Mencius* 2B11), he notes Zisi's bravery in staying behind to help resist plunderers (4b31), he quotes Duke Hui of

¹⁷ Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223–1292), *Kunxue jiwen* 困學紀聞, 3 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2008), 2:984 (*juan* 8). In 2:1003, Wang notes similar sentiments by the Tang period scholiast Lin Jinsi 林謹思 in his lost work *Xu Mengi shu* 續孟子書; Lin just mentions the "collective recording" of Mencius's words by his disciples instead of crediting Wan Zhang and Gongsun Chou with the work.

¹⁸ Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777), *Dai Zhen wenji* 戴震文集, ed. Duan Yucai (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980), 248.

¹⁹ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 5 vols. (1895; repr., Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 2:14–38. See also Lau, "Appendix 2: Early Traditions about Mencius," in *Mencius*, 177–82.

²⁰ Van Norden, *Mengzi*, xxiii.

²¹ Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2:17.

²² James Robert Hightower, *Han Shih Wai Chuan: Han Ying's Illustrations of the Didactic Application of the Classic of Songs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952).

²³ Hightower, *Han Shih Wai Chuan*, 290. Legge recounts the story in *The Chinese Classics*, 2:17.

²⁴ Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2:19.

Bi 費惠公 claiming Zisi as his teacher (5b3), he commends Zisi for refusing to be kept like a dog or a horse by constantly being presented with gifts from Duke Mu (5B6), he praises Zisi for not being willing to be befriended by Duke Mu 繆公 instead of insisting that the duke serve him (5B7), and he served to exemplify what happened to the state of Lu when Duke Mu failed to properly employ him as minister (6B6). Mencius once compared Zisi positively with Zengzi at 4B31:

Mencius said, "The philosophers Zeng and Zisi agreed in the principle of their conduct. Zeng was a teacher;—in the place of a father or elder brother. Zisi was a minister;—in a meaner place. If the philosophers Zeng and Zisi had exchanged places, the one would have done what the other did."

孟子曰：曾子、子思同道。曾子，師也，父兄也；子思，臣也，微也。曾子、子思易地則皆然。

Although there is no evidence that Mencius studied with a disciple of Zisi, there are some indications that he was intellectually aligned with the school of Zisi and with the thought of Zengzi. An argument from statistics can be made that of eleven major disciples of Confucius mentioned in the *Mencius*, the names of Zengzi and Zisi appear with the most frequency, twenty-two and sixteen times respectively. The next highest frequencies are Zigong and Yan Hui with seven times each; Zilu appears six times, and Zixia, three times. Ziyou, Zizhang, Ran Niu, and Minzi bring up the rear with two occurrences each.²⁵ In terms of intellectual affinity, Yang Zebo isolates nine instances where Mencius's teachings seem to sympathetically align with Zengzi's words or deeds, and six instances where they align with Zisi's words or deeds.²⁶ I would add Mencius's unyielding attitude toward rulers that is traceable to Zisi's precedent in 5B7 cited earlier. But it is not surprising that Mencius does not cite any master to whom he owed his training since he stresses another far more important allegiance—this was to Confucius himself. Confucius is cited twenty-six times by Mencius, most often through direct quotes; this is a greater number than Mencius cites either Zengzi or Zisi. It would be surprising if Mencius concealed his direct intellectual connection to the grandson of his self-appointed exemplar, Confucius, if he had any such connection.

²⁵ See the table in Yang Zebo 楊澤波, *Mengzi pingzhuan* 孟子評傳, *Zhongguo sixiangjia pingzhuan congshu* 中國思想家評傳叢書 (Nanjing: Nanjing Daxue Chubanshe, 1998), 26.

²⁶ See the tables in Zebo, *Mengzi pingzhuan*, 27–28.

10.3 "Private Improvement" as Self-Cultivation

Mencius's famous formulation in 4B22 stresses the importance of being an intellectual disciple of Confucius, notwithstanding lacking any direct contact with him or his descendants:

Mencius said, "The influence of both the gentleman and the small man ceases to be felt after five generations. I have not had the good fortune to have been a disciple of Confucius. I have learned indirectly from him through others."

孟子曰：君子之澤五世而斬，小人之澤五世而斬。予未得為孔子徒也，予私淑諸人也。²⁷

The operative term "learned indirectly" is what I prefer to translate as "privately improved" (*sishu* 私淑), an understanding reached as well by Bryan W. Van Norden: "I was improved by others."²⁸ *Shu* appears in numerous poems. In the "Airs of the States," it appears in "Guanju" 關雎 (Mao 1), "Yanyan" 燕燕 (Mao 28), "Junzi xielao" 君子偕老 (Mao 47), "Dongmen zhi chi" 東門之池 (Mao 139), referring to the virtue of a chaste woman (or lack thereof); in "Zhonggu you tui" 中谷有蕓 (Mao 69) and "Shijiu" 鳴鳩 (Mao 152) it refers to the virtue of a husband (or lack thereof). In the "Minor Elegentiae," it appears in "Guzhong" 鼓鍾 (Mao 208) referring to virtuous lords. In the "Major Elegentiae," it appears in "Yi" 抑 (Mao 256) as a moral quality that a lord is exhorted to strive toward; in "Sangrou" 桑柔 (Mao 257), it is used to refer to the general improvement in a state, and in "Han Yi" 韓奕 (Mao 261), it describes the excellence of the fine dragon banner bestowed by the king on the Marquis of Han. In the "Eulogia" section, it appears in the Lu lauds in "Panshui" 泮水 (Mao 299) describing the good qualities of the examiners of prisoners of war. In the *Documents*, Old Text "Bi Ming" 畢命 chapter, it is a generic term for the "good" versus "bad" officers;²⁹ it is explained by the pseudo Kong Anguo 孔安國 commentary as "good" (*shan* 善). When *shu* is eventually glossed by Zhao Qi as "good," he is drawing on a long history of archaic usage. Here in *Mencius*, it is used verbally, implying "striving after goodness." Zhao Qi explains it as follows: "*Shu* means

²⁷ Lau, *Mencius*, 92. Legge's translation of the first part is erroneous: "Mencius said, 'The influence of a sovereign sage terminates in the fifth generation. The influence of a mere sage does the same.'" Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2:328.

²⁸ Bryan W. Van Norden, *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), 108–9.

²⁹ *Shangshu zhengyi* 19.8a; Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 3:573.

'good;' I privately improve myself through the means of worthies, and simply lament that I could not study with a great sage" 我私善之於賢人耳。蓋恨我不得學於大聖人也。³⁰ Kong Yingda makes Mencius's statement more pointed by clarifying that this was the way he could claim to have received the residual influence (*ze* 澤) of Confucius, the great sage himself, without having been a member of his circle of disciples.³¹ Zhu Xi adds some interesting points:

Si is the same as "surreptitiously;" *shu* means "good." Mr. Li takes the phrase as a dialectal term; this is correct. People say that [Mencius] was a disciple of Zisi. From the death of Confucius until the period of Mencius' travels throughout the state of Liang, it was a little more than a hundred forty years. By then Mencius had already grown old, but his birth was less than a hundred years after the death of Confucius. Hence Mencius stated that, although "I was not able to personally receive the teachings of Confucius as a member of his following," the influence of the sage still remains. So some still exist who were able to transmit his learning. Hence I was able to hear about the way of Confucius from others and privately, surreptitiously improve myself." This statement probably was designed to venerate Confucius and humble himself. This statement also continued the previous three periscopes in successively narrating the history of Shun and Yu all the way up to Confucius during the Zhou, and concluded with this statement. Although his statement was humble, still what he appointed unto himself was very burdensome. It is something that he could not avoid doing.

私。猶竊也。淑。為方言是也。人。謂子思之徒也。子孔子卒至孟子遊梁時。方百四十餘年。而孟子已老。然則孟子之生。去孔子未百年也。故孟子言子雖未得親受業於孔子之門。然聖人之澤尚存。猶有能傳其學者。故我得聞孔子之道於人。而私竊以善其身。蓋推尊孔子而自謙之辭也。此又承上三章。歷敘舜禹。至於周孔。而以是終之。其辭雖謙。然其所以自任之終重。亦有不得而辭者矣。³²

Mencius was not only a supporter of Confucius's political program; he was committed to following his example of personal cultivation toward sagehood. After all, he held in common with Confucius the fundamental belief that the basis

³⁰ *Mengzi zhengyi* 8A.13a.

³¹ *Mengzi zhengyi* 8A.13a.

³² *Mengzi jizhu* 8.8b.

of good government was the fully cultivated person; it also was the foundation of order in society and in the family. In the words of Kwong Loi Shun, "Like Confucius, Mencius regarded the transformative power of a cultivated person as the ideal basis for government. In addition, he spelled out more explicitly the idea that order in society depends on proper attitudes within the family, which in turn depends on cultivating oneself."³³ From this angle, political effectiveness was a product of the effectiveness of self-cultivation. The ancient sages and worthies all provided powerful precedents for morally authentic behavior in various types of straitened circumstances. But Confucius was the paramount ideal for Mencius, a marmoreal figure of peerless sagacity, and it was his brooding residual influence (*ze*) that he sought. Once while discussing various ancient sages such as Bo Yi 伯夷 and Yi Yin 伊尹 with his disciple Gongsun Chou 公孫丑, Mengzi granted the validity of their approaches to government service. But his conclusion was, "These were all sages of antiquity, and I have not attained to do what they did. But what I wish to do is to learn to be like Confucius" 皆古聖人也，吾未能有行焉；乃所願，則學孔子也。³⁴ He could only accomplish this through his conception of "private improvement."

Mencius once associated private improvement toward goodness with rulers who had to "set their wills on benevolence" 志於仁 to avoid later personal ruination. The quote Mencius selected from the *Poems* to confirm his point connects the process of private improvement with the more public effort to associate with men of humaneness to collectively cultivate virtue:

If the princes do not set their wills on benevolence, all their days will be in sorrow and disgrace, and they will be involved in death and ruin. This is illustrated by what is said in the *Book of Poetry*, "How otherwise can you improve the kingdom? You will only with it go to ruin."

苟不志於仁，終身憂辱，以陷於死亡。詩云，其何能淑，

³³ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Mencius," by Kwong Loi Shun, accessed July 10, 2012, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mencius/>. For more expansive treatment, see Kwong-loi Shun, "Self-Cultivation and the Political Order," in *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 163–79, and Huang Junjie 黃儒傑, *Mengxue sixiang shilun* 孟子思想史論, vol. 1 (Taipei: Dongda Tushu Gongsi, 1991), 161–80. For Mencius's position within the Confucian tradition of self-cultivation, see Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 15–28.

³⁴ *Mencius* 2A2; Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2:194.

載胥及溺，此之謂也。³⁵

This group effort, characterized in *Analects* 12.24 as “aiding the cultivation of humaneness” 以輔仁 is stated by Zengzi: “The philosopher Zeng said, ‘The superior man on grounds of culture meets with his friends, and by friendship aides in the cultivation of virtue’” 曾子曰：君子以文會友，以友輔仁。That is, one should look to friends for support along the path of self-cultivation. Through the use of the specialized vocabulary of self-cultivation, the earlier search for humaneness of Confucius through his disciple Zengzi, and the improvement of goodness that he himself advocated, Mencius allies his efforts with past precedents, thus legitimizing and strengthening his own conceptualization of the process.

Jiao Xun 焦循 (1763–1820), compiler of the authoritative commentary on Mencius, the *Orthodox Meaning of Mencius* 孟子正義, interestingly describes Mengzi as having been born with a “good character” (*shuzhi* 淑質).³⁶ His moral burden is depicted as coming at the end of the line of legitimate sages that culminated with Confucius: “Mencius grieved that the enterprise of Yao, Shun, Tang, Wen, Zhou, and Kong would soon fall into obscurity ... so he then imitated Confucius and circulated around, anxious over the age. He subsequently travelled among the feudal princes, imparting the Ruist way” 孟子憫悼堯舜湯文周孔之業。。。於是則慕仲尼，周流憂世，遂以儒道遊與諸侯。³⁷

This original focus on Confucius and “private improvement” perhaps has been obscured by Mencius’s theory of “befriending and evaluating men of antiquity (*shanglun guren* 尚論古人) or “judging people and discoursing on the age” (*zhiren lunshi* 知人論世) as he explained to his disciple Wan Zhang 萬章:

Mencius said to Wan Zhang, “The scholar whose virtue [literally “scholars of goodness” *shanshi* 善士] is most distinguished in a village shall make friends of all the virtuous scholars in the village. The scholar whose virtue is most distinguished throughout a State shall make friends of all the virtuous scholars of that State. The scholar whose virtue is most distinguished throughout the kingdom shall make friends of all the virtuous scholars of the kingdom. When a scholar feels that his friendship with all the virtuous scholars of the kingdom is not sufficient to satisfy him, he proceeds to ascend to consider

³⁵ *Mencius* 4A9; Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2:301.

³⁶ *Mengzi zhengyi* (ZZJC ed.), 4.

³⁷ *Mengzi zhengyi*, 6.

the men of antiquity. He repeats their poems, and reads their books, and as he does not know what they were as men, to ascertain this, he considers their history. This is to ascend and make friends of the men of antiquity.”

孟子謂萬章曰：一鄉之善士，斯友一鄉之善士；一國之善士，斯友一國之善士；天下之善士，斯友天下之善士。以友天下之善士為未足，又尚論古之人。頌其詩，讀其書，不知其人，可乎？是以論其世也。是尚友也。³⁸

Despite Mencius’s general extension of his common humanity and sociality back into antiquity to connect with all “scholars of goodness,” he often singled out two particular sages for emulation, Yao and Shun. For instance, when he was visited by Duke Wen of Teng, “Mencius discoursed to him how the nature of man is good, and when speaking, always made laudatory reference to Yao and Shun” 孟子道性善，言必稱堯舜。³⁹ Nevertheless, Confucius was superior even to these two ancient sages, as Mencius explained to his disciple Gongsun Chou 公孫丑 with reference to a quote from one of Confucius’s disciples:

Mencius replied, “Zai Wo, Zigong, and You Ruo had wisdom sufficient to know the sage. Even had they been ranking themselves low, they would not have demeaned themselves to flatter their favorite. Now, Zai Wo said, ‘According to my view of our Master, he was far superior to Yao and Shun.’”

曰：宰我、子貢、有若智足以知聖人。汙，不至阿其所好。宰我曰：『以予觀於夫子，賢於堯舜遠矣。』⁴⁰

Typical studies of Mencius’s program of self-cultivation miss this crucial component, that of imitating Confucius. For example, Qian Mu distills Mencius’s program into four distinctive emphases: (1) setting the will on the way and being content 志道自得, (2) realizing the sense of shame and reducing desires 知恥寡

³⁸ *Mencius* 5B8; Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2:391. For this Mencian theory, see Lang Qingxiao, *Mengzi xue'an*, 177–91. Chen Chao-ying approaches this passage in terms of its utility in explaining Mencius’s insistence on the key to understanding texts, including the *Poems*, is proper historical contextualization. See his “Text and Context: Mencius’ View on Understanding the Poems of the Ancients,” in *Interpretation and Intellectual Change: Chinese Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*, ed. Ching-I Tu (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 33–45.

³⁹ *Mencius* 3A1; Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2:234.

⁴⁰ *Mencius* 2A2; Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2:195.

慾, (3) illuminating goodness and achieving self-sincerity 明善誠身, and (4) developing one's nature and understanding fate 盡性知命.⁴¹ This schema of Mencius's program of self-cultivation is valid as far as it goes. But each part is merely one path toward an ultimate goal. And the catalyst behind committing to all of these admirable psychological exercises is the determination to make improvement in the pervading realm of personal goodness (*shan*), the end goal. This can only be accomplished by imitating Confucius. It is this very attitude of "private improvement," following the distant example of Confucius that is one of Mencius's main legacies bequeathed to later classicists. We may credit Mencius, then, with canonizing the concept of Confucian discipleship and self-cultivation through classical scholarship.

10.4 Use of the Documents

Mencius's overwhelming historical profile has always been that of a moral philosopher. Despite the unrelieved attention his brand of virtue ethics has attracted and the crucial historical role his psychological insights on the mind, *qi*, and human nature played in the development of Confucian thought, his thinking on other issues included the philosophy of history.⁴² He of course utilized the lessons of history, as he creatively interpreted them, to advocate his own moral and political philosophy. Lü Simian crystalizes the merit of Mencius as a political thinker by advocating the doctrine that the people are more important than rulers. Lü credits this intellectual stance to the Confucian school of thought on the *Documents*.⁴³ This leads us naturally to Mencius's use of this ancient classic.

Mencius quotes the *Documents* some seventeen times: eight times he cites the generic term *Documents*, and nine times he cites the names of specific chapters.⁴⁴ All told, he alludes to the *Documents*, directly and indirectly, some twenty-nine times, on par with his citation of the *Poems* some thirty-five

⁴¹ Qian Mu 钱穆 (1895–1990), "Mengzi zhi xiuyang lun" 孟子之修養論, in *Mengzi yanjiu* 孟子研究 (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1948), 96–110; see also Kwong-loi Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), chapter 5, "Self-Cultivation."

⁴² Consult David S. Nivison, "Mengzi as Philosopher of History," in *Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations*, ed. Alan K. L. Chan (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 282–304.

⁴³ Lü Simian 吕思勉 (1884–1957), *Xian-Qin xueshu gailun* 先秦学术概论 (Kunming: Yunan Renmin Chubanshe, 2005), 84.

⁴⁴ Chen Mengjia 陈梦家 (1911–1966), *Shangshu tonglun* 尚书通论, 2nd ed. (1963; rpt., Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1986), 12–15, conveniently presents these quotations.

instances.⁴⁵ This is in contrast with Confucius, who, apart from being described as chanting the *Documents* along with the *Poems* and ritual directions in the classical manner (*Analects* 7.18), only quotes the *Documents* twice, once on his own initiative (2.21), and once in response to a question posed by Zizhang (14.40). This new emphasis by Mencius of including the *Documents* in the curriculum is an important innovation in early classical education.

Chen Mengjia categorizes Mencius's use of the *Documents* into three types: (1) narrating the events contained in the work, (2) explaining the significance of these events, and (3) criticizing the historicity of these events.⁴⁶ This typology, however, focuses on the semantic content of these quotes, not their functions in forming Mencius's narrative argumentation. An examination of the way Mencius utilized quotations from the *Documents* to support his argumentation reveals three general types: (1) confirmation, (2) secondary support, and (3) explication.

With type 1, the quoted passage is directly related to the theme of Mencius's argumentation; such a quote serves to confirm the validity of the argument. In *Mencius* 1B11 Mencius twice quotes from the *Documents* in the same paragraph. The first quote is an example of type 1:

Mencius replied, "I have heard of one who with seventy *li* exercised all the functions of government throughout the kingdom. That was Tang. I have never heard of a prince with a thousand *li* standing in fear of others. It is said in the *Book of History* [*Documents*], 'As soon as Tang began his work of executing justice, he commenced with Ge.' The whole kingdom had confidence in him. 'When he pursued his work in the east, the rude tribes on the west murmured. So did those on the north, when he was engaged in the south. Their cry was "Why does he put us last?"' Thus, the people looked to him, as we look in a time of great drought to the clouds and rainbows. The frequenters of the markets stopped not. The husbandmen made no change in their operations. While he punished their rulers, he consoled the people. His progress was like the falling of opportune rain, and the people were delighted. It is said again in the *Book of History*, 'We have waited for our prince long; the prince's coming will be our reviving!'"

孟子對曰：臣聞七十里為政於天下者，湯是也。未聞以千里畏人者也。書曰：湯一征，自葛始。天下信之。東面而

⁴⁵ Wang Bo 王博, "Xian-Qin juan," 355.

⁴⁶ Chen Mengjia, *Shangshu tonglun*, 14.

征，西夷怨；南面而征，北狄怨。曰，奚為後我？民望之，若大旱之望雲霓也。歸市者不止，耕者不變。誅其君而弔其民，若時雨降，民大悅。書曰：徯我后，後來其蘇。

The second quote is an example of type 2, which is explained next.

Type 2 is a quote from a passage not obviously relevant to the theme of the narrative, but, given the context of the argumentation or the context of a previous quote from the *Poems* or *Documents*, it can be utilized to support the earlier citation. In the example above, the second quote from the *Documents* is elicited for its general value in elevating the people's esteem for a generic prince; the first quote is centered on an explicitly identified prince, the Sage King Tang, who is the subject of Mencius's discourse. Given this context, the anonymous ruler (or "prince") in the second quote would obviously be associated with King Tang. Of course, knowledgeable readers of the *Documents* would know who unstated historical figures were, but the point is that the entire quote is not obviously relevant to the theme of the argumentation. The unidentified quote "Why does he put us last?" is another citation from the *Documents* that Mencius utilized three times: once here in 1B11, another time in 3B5 (along with its earlier context), and in 7B4 (also with its context). It, however, does not appear in the current text of the *Documents*. The first two times it is quoted, it is invariably explained by Mencius with a simile: "Thus, the people looked to him, as we look in a time of great drought to the clouds and rainbows." This example illustrates Mencius's skill in persuasive writing in that he is able to use quoted passages differently in a given passage of narrative for different rhetorical ends—in this case, both types 2 and 3.

Another instance of a secondary supporting role is in *Mencius* 1B3. Here Mencius cites the *Documents* not to confirm the main argument concerning the righteous valor of a king but to support an earlier quote from the *Poems*:

"I beg your Majesty," was the reply, "not to love small valor. If a man brandishes his sword, looks fiercely, and says, 'How dare he withstand me?'—this is the valor of a common man, who can be the opponent only of a single individual. I beg your Majesty to greatness. It is said in the *Book of Poetry* [*Poems*], 'The king blazed with anger, And he marshalled his hosts, To stop the march to Chu, To consolidate the prosperity of Zhou, To meet the expectations of the nation.' This was the valor of king Wen. King Wen, in one burst of his anger, gave repose to all the people of the kingdom. In the *Book of History* [*Documents*] it is said, 'Heaven having produced the inferior people, made for them rulers and teachers, with the purpose that they should be assisting to God, and therefore distinguished them throughout the four quarters of the land. Whoever are

offenders, and whoever are innocent, here am I to deal with them. How dare any under heaven give indulgence to their refractory wills?' There was one man pursuing a violent and disorderly course in the kingdom, and king Wu was ashamed of it. This was the valor of king Wu. He also, by one display of his anger, gave repose to all the people of the kingdom. Let now your Majesty also, in one burst of anger, give repose to all the people of the kingdom. The people are only afraid that your Majesty does not love valor."

對曰：王請無好小勇。夫撫劍疾視曰，彼惡敢當我哉！此匹夫之勇，敵一人者也。王請大之！詩云：王赫斯怒，爰整其旅，以遏徂莒，以篤周祜，以對于天下。此文王之勇也。文王一怒而安天下之民。書曰：天降下民，作之君，作之師。惟曰其助上帝，寵之四方。有罪無罪，惟我在，天下曷敢有越厥志？一人衡行於天下，武王恥之。此武王之勇也。而武王亦一怒而安天下之民。今王亦一怒而安天下之民，民惟恐王之不好勇也。

Despite the slightly belligerent tone of the quote from the *Documents*, it is doubtful that an application relevant to Mencius's argument could be discerned without first reading the passage from the *Poems*. At best this lends the quote from the *Documents* a supporting role. In *Mencius* 3A1, the concluding quote from the *Documents* is an example of a type 2 quote in that it has nothing ostensibly identifiable with the theme of the passage: "Now, Teng, taking its length with its breadth, will amount, I suppose, to fifty *li*. It is small, but still sufficient to make a good State. It is said in the *Book of History*, 'If medicine does not raise a commotion in the patient, his disease will not be cured by it'" 今滕，絕長補短，將五十里也，猶可以為善國。書曰：若藥不瞑眩，厥疾不瘳。

The third type, that of explication, is illustrated in *Mencius* 3B5. The theme reverts to Tang and the lead up to his conquest of the neighboring state of Ge, whose miscreant ruler refused to offer the requisite sacrifices. When Tang sent a supply train to provide the necessary sacrificial livestock, Ge had the train intercepted. At this point, the *Documents* is quoted to the following effect: "There was a boy who had some millet and flesh for the laborers, who was thus slain and robbed. What is said in the *Book of History*, 'The chief of Ge behaved as an enemy to the provision-carriers,' has reference to this" 有童子以黍肉餉，殺而奪之。書曰：葛伯仇餉。此之謂也。⁴⁷ Here Mencius sets up the citation from the *Documents* with a historical introduction that provides the context for the quote.

⁴⁷ Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2:272.

After citing it, he makes sure his readership realizes its referent by pointing out that the quote “has reference to this” historical episode.

Continuing with his historical exposition about King Tang, Mencius supports it with another citation from the *Documents*, which reads, “It is said in the *Book of History*, ‘We have waited for our prince. When our prince comes, we may escape from the punishments under which we suffer’” 書曰：俟我后，後來其無罰。 This instance of secondary support is followed by a passage of expository prose, which Legge explains is a commentary: “From 其君子 onwards, Mencius explains the meaning of the *Shujing*. ... This quotation from Pt. V.I, Section II 8, is to illustrate the last clause of the preceding paragraph.”⁴⁸ Immediately after his commentary, Mencius quotes another passage from the *Documents*, this time referenced by the name of the chapter, “Taijia” 太甲, the name of King Tang’s grandson and successor:

In the “Great Declaration” it is said, “My power shall be put forth, and, invading the territories of Shang, I will seize the oppressor. I will put him to death to punish him—so shall the greatness of my work appear, more glorious than that of Tang.” Song is not, as you say, practicing true royal government, and so forth. If it were practicing royal government, all within the four seas would be lifting up their heads, and looking for its prince, wishing to have him for their sovereign. Great as Qi and Chu are, what would there be to fear from them?

太誓曰：我武惟揚，侵于之疆，則取于殘，殺伐用張，于湯有光。不行王政云爾，苟行王政，四海之內皆舉首而望之，欲以為君。齊楚雖大，何畏焉？⁴⁹

This quote is a quasi example of the secondary support quotation in that it is not directly related to the theme of King Tang, yet his grandson gives voice to his hope to not only emulate his grandfather Tang but to exceed his exploits. It therefore can partly function to confirm Mencius’s original point, that of the greatness of King Tang.

To map the distribution of these different types of quotations, Mencius directly mentions the *Documents* seventeen times; sixteen of these include a quote: nine are type 1, confirmation; five are type 2, secondary support; and two are type 3, explication. One quote can be regarded as functioning as both types 2 and 3.

⁴⁸ Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 274n1.

⁴⁹ This chapter is among the spurious portions of the *Documents*, now entitled “Taijia” 太甲.

Chen Mengjia isolates one other example of passive explication when Mencius rewrites quotes from the *Documents* to clarify their meaning: “We are waiting for our sovereign 俟我后” of “Taijia” to be changed to 奚為後我, the thrice-appearing phrase noted above.⁵⁰ This effort to clarify by rewording an archaic phrase is the “earliest example,” according to Chen Mengjia, “of a commentary (*zhuanzhu* 傳注).”⁵¹

The above examples demonstrate Mencius’s overall approach to citing the *Documents*. His main concern is the use of ancient historical anecdotes to exemplify moral lessons—righteous conquests, upright rulership, concern for the people, and, most importantly, the moral role of the Sages, especially Yao, Shun, King Wu, and the sage-minister Yi Yin.⁵² We have not seen any interest in the *Documents* as a classical text that needs linguistic explication. Rather, he is an exemplar historian, utilizing an ancient source for its value for exemplar historiography. This is the approach to historical writing of seeking moral examples, good and bad, from the pages of history to guide contemporary ethical behavior. It was the earliest formulation of the function of history that held sway until the nineteenth century, and ultimately gave way to the Rankean concern for historical political narrative *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (as it really happened). National historiography itself yielded to the modern paradigm of solving historical puzzles with publication of the journal *Annales d’histoire économique et sociale* in 1929 in Strasbourg by Marc Bloch (1886–1944) and Lucien Febvre (1878–1956), later moving to Paris.⁵³

One passage in *Mencius* (4B12) isolated by David Nivison reveals three aspects of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* that are applicable to any historical source and includes the function of exemplary historiography: its matter (*shi* 事), its form (*wen* 文), and its moral significance (*yi* 義); the last aspect is the most

⁵⁰ The quote from “Taijia” is found at *Shangshu zhengyi*, 8.22a; Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 3:208.

⁵¹ Chen Mengjia, *Shangshu tonglun*, 14.

⁵² See Mencius’s treatment of these mythico-historical figures in Nivison, “Mengzi as Philosopher of History,” 287–94.

⁵³ For these three historical paradigms, see Traian Stoianovich, *French Historical Method: The “Annales” Paradigm* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976). For historical variations on each paradigm, such as the marked differences between the mythic historiography of the Greeks and the Romans, and the complexities of the Christian commonwealth of medieval times, see Ernst Briesach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). The national historiography of Leopold Von Ranke (1795–1886) is introduced by Leonard Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

pertinent.⁵⁴ In this, Mencius follows the lead of Confucius. What actually happened—that is, the historical validity of a particular event—is not usually the issue. In fact, Mencius held the *Documents* at a healthy distance, even stating that “it would be better to be without the *Book of History* than to give entire credit to it. In the ‘Completion of the War’ chapter, I select two or three passages only, which I believe” 孟子曰：盡信書，則不如無書。吾於武成，取二三策而已矣。⁵⁵ Legge’s interpretive addendum, “which I believe,” is not found in the original. The sentence could just as easily be parsed to read, “I select two or three passages only, for their value as moral exempla.”

This approach to history was read back into Confucius’s historical attitude by Ruist tradition, which created and transmitted legends of the Sage. The best illustration of this reworked and retrospectively transplanted historical attitude that I have found is a catechism between Confucius and Zizhang preserved in the *Kong congzi* that hinges on the *Documents*:

Zizhang asked, saying: “When the sage receives the mandate he must receive it from Heaven, yet the *Documents* states ‘He received [Yao’s] retirement [from his duties] in the temple of the Accomplished Ancestor.’⁵⁶ Why is this?” Confucius said, “Those who received their mandates from Heaven were Tang and Wu. Those who received their mandates from man were Shun and Yu. Now, if one does not read the *Poems*, *Documents*, *Changes*, and *Spring and Autumn Annals*, then he does not understand the heart of a sage and further has no means to distinguish the abdications by Yao and Shun and the conquests of Tang and Wu.”

子長問曰：聖人受命必受諸天而書云受終于文祖，何也？
孔子曰：受命於天者湯武是也。受命於人者舜禹是也。夫
不讀詩、書、易、春秋則不知聖人之心。又無以別堯舜之
禪，湯武之伐也。⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Mencius never quoted from the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, yet made a great impact on how later classicists viewed it by attributing its authorship to Confucius. His other major contribution was to view this work as replacing the *Poems* in revealing the mores of the people. See the treatment by Wang Bo, “Xian-Qin juan,” 361–63.

⁵⁵ *Mencius* 7B3; Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2:479.

⁵⁶ A quote from the Old Text *Documents*, “Shundian” 舜典; the New Text version includes it as part of the previous chapter, the “Canon of Yao” 堯典. See *Shangshu zhengyi*, 3.4b, and Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 3:32.

⁵⁷ “Lunshu” 論書, *Kong congzi* 孔叢子, *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1985), 1.6.

This passage reflects the concern for reading the classics for historical examples of moral behavior—in this case, how the heart of a sage operates—and for the concrete historical reasons for the actions of sages—namely, the different circumstances of the abdication of two early sages. This new historiographical mindset is indebted to Mencius’s initial adoption of the *Documents* as an important part of the curriculum, and specialized use of this and the other classics as repositories of moral wisdom. Ultimately, Mencius’s advocacy and varied rhetorical utilization of the *Documents* are other important legacies of the Second Sage in the development of early classical scholarship.

10.5 Use of the Poems

When citing the *Documents*, Mencius more often than not referred to individual chapter names. This reflects his familiarity with the text, which most likely circulated independently as separate works. But the *Poems* are seldom referred to by name. And when citing both classics in the same pericope, the quote from the *Poems* invariably comes first, indicating its higher status in his estimation.⁵⁸

Mencius quotes from the *Poems* thirty-five times. One of these is a lost poem that does not appear in the extant version, and twelve of these poems vary in wording from the received version.⁵⁹ Five poems are from the “Airs,” six from the “Minor Elegentiae,” three from the “Eulogia,” and twenty from the “Greater Elegentiae.” The preponderance of quotes from this last section illustrates Mencius’s concern with promoting the “Royal Way” based on humaneness, the “flourishing virtue” of the early Zhou being the “intention” of the poems of the “Greater Elegentiae,” according to “Confucius’ Discourse on the *Poems*.”

In Mencius’s treatment of the *Poems*, we see a complete transformation from the old approach of “break off a line to get the meaning” to a new paradigm: that of “engaging the intention with one’s own faculties (*yi yi ni zhi* 以意逆志).” The entire formulation of this paradigm is translated from *Mencius* 5A4 by Paul R. Goldin as follows: “One who interprets the *Odes* does not take the words to distort the lyric or the lyric to distort the [poet’s] intention. To engage this intention with one’s own faculties—that is to comprehend it” 故說詩者，不以

⁵⁸ These insights are taken from Wang Bo, *Xian-Qin juan*, 360.

⁵⁹ For a complete tabulation of these citations, see Qian Peiwen 錢佩文, “Mengzi yinshi shuoshi yanjiu” 孟子引詩說詩研究, *Zhongyuan xuebao* (*Chung Yuan Journal*) 23, no. 2 (1995): 71–79.

文害辭，不以辭害志。以意逆志，是為得之。⁶⁰ This “exhortation to avoid literalism,” as it is put by Goldin, was an additional step away from the level of literal linguistic message, a step back that was also enjoined by Confucius, albeit unconsciously and exemplified by his practice of “breaking off lines to get the meaning.” Bryan Van Norden’s characterization of Mencius’s hermeneutic principle is a “holism of meaning.”⁶¹ Mencius’s attempt to harness the resources of the mind to interpret the *Poems* is of a piece with his internalization of the process of self-cultivation. At any rate, literalism is of little value with Mencius, given the fact that he often made errors in his quoting of the actual wording of individual lines—if we take the received version as sacrosanct. In contrast to Wang Bo’s conjecture about the circulation of the *Documents* as individual chapters, Zhu Xi explains this orthographical fluidity as the natural effect of the lack of written texts and the unavoidable dependency on Mencius’s memory of the corpus of both the *Poems* and *Documents*, as orally imparted by his own master.⁶² To be hung up by his orthography is therefore to be hung up by a superficiality.

The teaching setting that gave rise to Mencius’s introduction of his novel approach to the *Poems* is *Mencius* 5A4. His student Xianqiu Meng interprets a point of history by appealing to the evidence of a poem, “Boshan” 北山 (Mao 205):

Xianqiu Meng said, “On the point of Shun’s not treating Yao as a minister, I have received your instructions. But it is said in the *Book of Poetry*, ‘Under the whole heaven, Every spot is the sovereign’s ground; To the borders of the land, Every individual is the sovereign’s minister;’—and Shun had become sovereign. I venture to ask how it was that Gu Sou was not one of his ministers?”

⁶⁰ Paul R. Goldin, “The Reception of the *Odes* in the Warring States Era,” in *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 35. Van Norden’s translation is similar: “Hence, in explaining an ode, do not interpret a character to the detriment of the phrase, and do not interpret a phrase to the detriment of the poem’s intent. Let your thought meet the poem’s intent. In this manner you will understand it,” *Mengzi*, 122. For traditional views of Mencius’s formulation, see Lei Qingyi 雷庆翼, “‘Yi yi ni zhi’ bianxi” 以意逆志辨析, *Hengyang Shizhuan xuebao* 4 (1987): 66–69, and Cai Zongqi 蔡宗齐, “Cong ‘Duanzhang quy’ dao ‘yi yi ni zhi’—Mengzi fuyuanxhi jieshi lilun de chansheng yu fazhan” 从‘断章取义’到‘以意逆志’——孟子复原式解释理论的产生与发展, *Zhongshan Daxue xuebao, shehui kexueban* 6 (2007): 44–50.

⁶¹ Van Norden, *Mengzi*, 122.

⁶² Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Taipei: Hanjing Wenhua Shiye, 1980), 10.8b.

咸丘蒙曰：舜之不臣堯，則吾既得聞命矣。詩云：普天之下，莫非王土；率土之濱，莫非王臣。而舜既為天子矣，敢問瞽瞍之非臣，如何？⁶³

Mencius corrects him for being overly dependent on the apparent historical message of a few lines of the poem, bereft of the leavening context of the rest of the poem; in other words, Xianqiu Meng was engaging in the thoughtless practice of “breaking off a line.” But to an advanced thinker like Mencius, this is not the way to read a poem. Mencius explains that one should not let the meaning of either individual words or entire lines get in the way of apprehending the intention of the poem.⁶⁴

Another possible level of reading Mencius’s new poetic apothegm—that of figurative language—is suggested by Han dynasty commentator Zhao Qi. He glosses the word *wen* as *wenzhang* 文章, or “rhetorical ornaments.”⁶⁵ With this lead, Lewis explains that the poem initially cited by Xianqiu Meng was “an example of rhetorical hyperbole, and not to be taken at face value.”⁶⁶ To hyperbole, Mencius’s modern biographer Yang Zebo adds metaphor, symbolism, and other forms of tralatitious tropes.⁶⁷ From this perspective, Mencius’s argument then revolves not around the futility of philological exegesis on the “word” in question but around the possible obscurity engendered by rhetorical flourishes, or the expressive “ornament”; each could inhibit the unobstructed intuiting of the intent.⁶⁸

For the poetic intention to be apprehended, it requires the engagement of the auditor’s “mental faculties” (*yi* 意):

⁶³ Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2:352.

⁶⁴ Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 165, reads *words* (*wen* 文) as “rhetorical ornaments,” following the gloss of *wenzhang* 文章 by Zhao Qi at *Mengzi zhengyi*, 9a.10b. Lewis explains that the poem initially cited by Xianqiu Meng was “an example of rhetorical hyperbole, and not to be taken at face value.” From Lewis’s perspective, Mencius’s argument then revolves not around the futility of philological exegesis but around the possible obscurity engendered by rhetorical argumentation.

⁶⁵ Jiao Xun 焦循, *Mengzi zhengyi* 孟子正義 (SBYJ ed.), 9a.10b.

⁶⁶ Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 165.

⁶⁷ Yang Zebo, *Mengzi pingzhuan*, 380.

⁶⁸ A recent study posted January 2, 2010, by Yang Haiwen 杨海文 regards *wen* as “words.” See Yang Haiwen, “‘Yi yi ni zhi’: cong dushu fangfa dao jieshi xue jingjie” 以意逆志：從讀書方法到解釋學境界. See bibliography for web address. He swiftly surveys historical critics of Mencius’s new poetic conceptualization from Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077) to Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927).

Mencius answered, "That ode is not to be understood in that way—it speaks of being laboriously engaged in the sovereign's business, so as not to be able to nourish one's parents, as if the author said, 'This is all the sovereign's business, and how is it that I alone am supposed to have ability, and am made to toil in it?' Therefore, those who explain the odes, may not insist on one term so as to do violence to a sentence, nor on a sentence so as to do violence to the general scope. They must try with their thoughts to meet that scope, and then we shall apprehend it."

曰：是詩也，非是之謂也；勞於王事，而不得養父母也。
曰：此莫非王事，我獨賢勞也。故說詩者，不以文害辭，不以辭害志。以意逆志，是為得之。

Yang Zebo's summary of what it means to "engage this intention with one's own faculties" is that "it is to grasp the intent and emotions of the author in composing his work through employing the readers' own impressions, experiences, and understanding."⁶⁹ In the case of Mencius, his "understanding" is his theory of the way, as is evinced by his pattern of heavily quoting from the "Greater Elegentiae," not to mention the obvious political themes of much of his discourse.⁷⁰

Based on Mencius's exchange with Xianqiu Meng, modern scholar Ming Dong Gu divides Mencius's conception of reading into a four-step process:

First, he proposed that the meaning of a text should be decided in its own context, not on a few separate elements. ... Second, Mencius emphasized the importance of proper contextualization in the reading of a text. ... Third, he argued against understanding words literally and allowing literary embellishment to hurt the intention of the author. Fourth, he believed that a poet's original intention could be recovered through adequate and sensible reading. His proposed method: "one uses one's own understanding to trace it back to what was originally in the writer's mind" constituted the core of his positive thesis on reading.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Yang Zebo, *Mengzi pingzhuan*, 380–81.

⁷⁰ For Mencius's political thought, see Yang Zebo, *Mengzi pingzhuan*, 131–94; Wang Bo, "Xian-Qin jian," 346–54.

⁷¹ Ming Dong Gu, *Chinese Theories of Reading and Writing: A Route to Hermeneutics and Open Poetics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 19–20. Mencius's contributions to the Chinese theory of reading is analyzed in pages 18–21

Mencius next illustrates the fallacy of hyperbole run wild with another example from the *Poems*, "Yunhan" 雲漢 (Mao 258):

If we simply take single sentences, there is that in the ode called "The Milky Way,"—"Of the black-haired people of the remnant of Zhou, there is not half a one left." If it had been really as thus expressed, then not an individual of the people of Zhou was left.

如以辭而已矣，雲漢之詩曰：周餘黎民，靡有孑遺。信斯言也，是周無遺民也。

Mencius then returns to the original point of discussion, the true intention of "Boshan." This codifies the crucial point that poems do have their historical intentions but must be construed properly. In this case the intention concerns filial piety and the ill treatment of the filial Shun by his wicked father:

Of all which a filial son can attain to, there is nothing greater than his honoring his parents. And of what can be attained to in the honoring one's parents, there is nothing greater than the nourishing them with the whole kingdom. Gu Sou was the father of the sovereign—this was the height of honor. Shun nourished him with the whole kingdom—this was the height of nourishing. In this was verified the sentiment in the *Book of Poetry*, "Ever cherishing filial thoughts, those filial thoughts became an example to after ages." It is said in the *Book of History*, "Reverently performing his duties, he waited on Gu Sou, and was full of veneration and awe. Gu Sou also believed him and conformed to virtue." This is the true case of the scholar of complete virtue not being treated as a son by his father.

孝子之至，莫大乎尊親；尊親之至，莫大乎以天下養。為天子父，尊之至也；以天下養，養之至也。詩曰：永言孝思，孝思維則。此之謂也。書曰：祇載見瞽瞍，夔夔齊栗，瞽瞍亦允若。是為父不得而子也。

Mencius confirms the intention of "Boshan" by quoting another line from the *Poems*, "Xiawu" 下武 (Mao 243), an interpretation that brooks no misunderstanding, as it calls for a literal reading about filial piety not an application of a lesson from history. To conclude his discourse, Mengzi draws a

and 25–32; Gu's analysis is informed by E. D. Hirsch's intentionalist theory and Edmund Husserl's concept of meaning as an "intentional object."

related lesson from a passage in the *Documents*.

In this exchange with Xianqiu Meng, Mencius illustrates the historical utility of the *Poems* as a source of exemplary historiography. Other historical uses by Mencius of these poetic records have been isolated by Lewis and serve as sources of historical events, fonts of historical and cultural facts, repositories of institutional history, testimonies for protoanthropological practices, and matrixes of moral maxims.⁷² Lewis writes in conclusion, "Thus the odes in the *Mencius* are not treated as a distinctive form of speech, but rather as a body of writing that is authoritative through its antiquity and its role as written testimony to the deeds of the sages."⁷³ I should add that Mencius's theory of "befriending and evaluating men of antiquity" predisposed him to look at the historical contexts of the *Poems*; in this way, his conceptual approach to the *Poems* was on par with that of his approach to the *Documents*.

Another commonly cited example of Mencius's approach to the *Poems* is *Mencius* 6B23:

Gongsun Chou asked about an opinion of the scholar Gao, saying, "Gao observed, 'The "Xiao Pan" is the ode of a little man.'" Mencius asked, "Why did he say so?" "Because of the murmuring which it expresses," was the reply. Mencius answered, "How stupid was that old Gao in dealing with the ode! There is a man here, and a native of Yue bends his bow to shoot him. I will advise him not to do so, but speaking calmly and smilingly; for no other reason but that he is not related to me. But if my own brother be bending his bow to shoot the man, then I will advise him not to do so, weeping and crying the while; for no other reason than that he is related to me. The dissatisfaction expressed in the 'Xiao Pan' is the working of relative affection, and that affection shows benevolence. Stupid indeed was old Gao's criticism on the ode."

公孫丑問曰：高子曰：小弁，小人之詩也。孟子曰：何以言之？曰：怨。曰：固哉，高叟之為詩也！有人於此，越人關弓而射之，則已談笑而道之；無他，疏之也。其兄關弓而射之，則已垂涕泣而道之；無他，戚之也。小弁之怨，親親也。親親，仁也。固矣夫，高叟之為詩也！

Mencius's strictures against Gaozi's footling criticism of this poem was based on Gaozi's "stupidity" in wallowing in the quicksand of linguistic

literalness that blinded his understanding. Mencius explains that in the poem the verb "to complain" should not be immediately ascribed to the personality of a petty person. It is certainly not the complaint of a petty person against his liege but the earnest entreating of one relative to another. In fact, Confucius himself endorsed the proper expression of "complaint" (*yuan* 怨) via the *Poems* in *Analects* 17.9. In reading this poem, such factors as vocal pitch and expression should be accounted for as part of the context, elements not obvious in the orthography.⁷⁴

10.6 Conclusions

Mencius valorizes the *Poems* and *Documents* for their utility in supporting his moral Confucian crusade against the intellectual inroads made by the Yangist and Mohist camps; this valorization overrode any concern for their historicity. Historical exempla of sagely behavior were sought out to illustrate the path to self-cultivation. The focus was on mining the sources for motivation toward ethical behavior, not informing the mind about the facts of history. For Mencius, sacralizing the sources paralleled his almost worshipful discipleship of Confucius. Indeed, he often quoted Confucius in tandem with the *Poems* or *Documents* in his discourse to invoke almost incontrovertible authority. For instance, *Mencius* 2A4 is typical of this format:

Mencius said, "Benevolence brings glory to a prince, and the opposite of it brings disgrace. For the princes of the present day to hate disgrace and yet to live complacently doing what is not benevolent, is like hating moisture and yet living in a low situation. If a prince hates disgrace, the best course for him to pursue, is to esteem virtue and honor virtuous scholars, giving the worthiest among them places of dignity, and the able offices of trust. ... It is said in the *Book of Poetry*, 'Before the heavens were dark with rain, I gathered the bark from the roots of the mulberry trees, And wove it closely to form the window and door of my nest; Now, I thought, ye people below, Perhaps ye will not dare to insult me.' Confucius said, 'Did not he who made this ode understand the way of governing?'"

孟子曰：仁則榮，不仁則辱。今惡辱而居不仁，是猶惡溼而居下也。如惡之，莫如貴德而尊士，賢者在位，能者在職...詩云：迨天之未陰雨，徹彼桑土，綢繆牖戶。今此下

⁷² Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 164–65.

⁷³ Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 166.

⁷⁴ Consult the insightful exegesis of this example by Wang Bo, "Xian-Qin *juan*," 356–57.

民，或敢侮予？孔子曰：為此詩者，其知道乎！⁷⁵

For an example of pairing Confucius and the *Documents*, witness *Mencius* 5A4:

Mencius replied, "No. These are not the words of a superior man. They are the sayings of an uncultivated person of the east of Qi. When Yao was old, Shun was associated with him in the government. It is said in the 'Canon of Yao,' 'After twenty and eight years, the Highly Meritorious one deceased. The people acted as if they were mourning for a father or mother for three years, and up to the borders of the four seas every sound of music was hushed.' Confucius said, 'There are not two suns in the sky, nor two sovereigns over the people.' Shun having been sovereign, and, moreover, leading on all the princes to observe the three years' mourning for Yao, there would have been in this case two sovereigns."

咸丘蒙問曰：語云盛德之士，君不得而臣，父不得而子。舜南面而立，堯帥諸侯北面而朝之，瞽瞍亦北面而朝之。舜見瞽瞍，其容有蹙。孔子曰：於斯時也，天下殆哉，岌岌乎！不識此語誠然乎哉？⁷⁶

Mencius's structural formulation, known as "the *Poems* state and the Master says" (*shiyun ziyue* 詩云子曰), and its variation of "the *Documents* state and the Master says," are an obvious embodiment of Confucius's notion of *wenxian*, sources and worthies, texts and testators. In this sense, Mencius is assuredly following the hoary precedent set by Confucius himself in "transmitting but not creating."⁷⁷ Despite Mencius's creative historical use of the *Documents* and *Poems* as the basis of his exemplar historiography, the Second Sage indeed seconded Confucius's role in transmitting the sage's classics-based curriculum, in advocating his morally based education program and in faithfully fulfilling the role of devoted disciple, even at the removal of several generations. In this role, Mencius's contribution to the history of classical scholarship was of paramount importance as centuries of Confucian scholarly lineages emulated Mencius's example of imitating Confucius. Thus, Mencius's contribution was not limited to

⁷⁵ See also *Mencius* 4A2, where Confucius is quoted first, then the *Poems* 4A7 and 6A6. For a study of this Mencian practice, see Yang Haiwen 楊海文, "Mengzi yu Shi Shu de xianghu quanweixing" 孟子與詩書的相互權威性, *Gansu shehui kexue* 6 (1996): 32–36.

⁷⁶ See also *Mencius* 4A.8, where Mencius first invokes the words of Confucius, then quotes from the *Documents*.

⁷⁷ Yang Haiwen, "Mengzi yu Shi Shu de xianghu quanweixing," 34.

transmitting the classical texts or their applied hermeneutics; his personal example dynamically conducted the spiritual inspiration of Confucius to fuel the acolyte on his lonely path toward self-cultivation. Classical teachers and disciples both found motivation in the person of Mencius and his model of "private improvement," a model perhaps more approachable than the recondite, archetypal sage himself.

Zhu Xi's borrowing of Sima Qian's initial evaluation of Mencius clinches my argument here about *wen* and *xian*: Mencius's writings "order the *Poems* and *Documents*, and transmit the intent of Confucius."⁷⁸ Finally, the prestige of Chengzi is invoked by Zhu Xi to underscore the role of Mencius as the inheritor of Confucius's mantle: "Since the death of Confucius," says Chengzi, "only the tradition of Mr. Meng Ke inherited his legitimacy. Hence, for those seeking to view the Way of the Sages, they must start with Mencius." 自孔子沒，獨孟軻氏之傳得其宗。故求觀聖人之道者，必自孟子始。⁷⁹

Mencius's final pericope, in 7B38, concerns the appearance of sages every five hundred years, a cycle that ended with Confucius. Mencius laments that there was no one to succeed Confucius. Yet he also observes that it had only been one hundred years or so since the time of Confucius and that his former dwelling was nearby. His concluding question is, "In these circumstances, is there no one [to transmit his doctrines]? Yes, there is no one to do so." 若此其甚也，然而無有乎爾，則亦無有乎爾。⁸⁰ Legge's translation might be better phrased as, "Given such favorable circumstances, is there none to succeed him? No, there is none to succeed him." Might we see in this plaintive query and forlorn answer an implied invitation to his disciples and later generations to add him to this storied lineage?⁸¹ Chengzi and Zhu Xi accepted this invitation, as did all later generations of Confucian classicists and moralists. Prominent among them is Dai Zhen, who chooses this sentiment of Han Yu to conclude his great work of philologico-philosophical commentary on Mencius, the *Explanation and Verification of the Meaning of Words in Mencius* (*Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* 孟子義疏證)—I also choose it in conclusion:

To follow the doctrines of Yang Zhu, Mo Di, Laozi, Zhuang Zhou, or the Buddhists and at the same time to hope that one

⁷⁸ Cited by Zhu Xi, *Mengzi jizhu*, "Mengzi xushuo," 2a.

⁷⁹ Zhu Xi, *Mengzi jizhu*, "Mengzi xushuo," 2b–3a.

⁸⁰ Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2:562.

⁸¹ On Mencius as the inheritor of this lineage that culminated in Confucius, see the insightful discussion by Watanabe Taku 渡邊卓, *Mōshi* 孟子 (Tōkyō: Meitoku Shuppansha, 1971), 209–14.

will arrive at the way of the sages is like sailing into a harbor or a cove which has no outlet and hoping in this way to reach the open sea. Therefore, if one wishes to perceive the way of the sages, he must begin with Mencius.

道於楊墨老莊佛之學而於之聖人之道，猶航斷港絕潢以望至於海也。故求觀聖人之道，必自孟自始，嗚呼不可易矣。⁸²

11. Xunzi and the Culmination of Confucian Transmission in the Zhou

According to Neo-Confucian theory, the line of legitimate descent from the ancient sages came to an end with the passing of Mencius, not to be reconstituted for over a thousand years, until the private beautification of Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) by his younger brother Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107).¹ According to Cheng Yi, Cheng Hao had discovered the “un-transmitted learning” (*buchuan zhi xue* 不傳之學) that had been obscured for fourteen hundred years since the time of Mengzi.² Zhu Xi rather traced the beginnings of this restoration to Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073) and then to the Cheng brothers in his formal codification of an official “succession of the way” (*daotong* 道統)—that is, the succession and subsequent transmission of the Way from the ancient line of sages beginning with Yao and Shun, and culminating in Mencius.³ This neat Neo-Confucian formulation of the roots of its intellectual legitimacy was embossed in the glow of mythic sage kings and the unrecognized claimant to the throne, Confucius himself; it was to hold sway over the history of Confucianism in China and in neighboring Asian nations until modern times. What this means for our study of Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 313–ca. 238), the next great Confucian master after Mencius, is that we must approach him on the very mundane, terrene realm of the human, without the ameliorating blinders that are customarily worn when viewing the sages. And, according to many, Xunzi was no sage.

11.1 Xunzi's Reputation in Comparison to Mencius

Xunzi is traditionally regarded as the third great early Confucian master, after Confucius and Mencius. Quan Zuwang 全祖望 (1705–1755) expressed it about right in his literary anthology, *Jieqiting ji* 鮚埼亭集: “Xunzi was a mixture of purity and defect. Still, no one can say that he wasn't a notch below Mencius”

⁸² Dai Zhen, “Xu” 序, *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* 孟子字義疏證 (Zhonghe, Taipei: Guangwen Shuju, 1978), 1b; Ann-ping Chin and Mansfield Freeman, trans., *Tai Chen on Mencius: Explorations in Words and Meanings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 66.

¹ But according to the classical Confucians before the rise of Neo-Confucianism, Mencius was not the true successor of Confucius; see John Williams, “Confucius, Mencius, and the Notion of True Succession,” *Philosophy East and West* 38 (1988).
² Quoted by Thomas Selover, in Xinzhong Yao, ed., *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, 2 vols. (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 1:59.
³ Hoyt Tillman, in *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, 2:841.

荀子醇疵相間，然不可謂非孟子而下一人。⁴ This was Xunzi's default reputation in pre-Song China before the chief concern came to center on the cultivation of the mind and the internalization of morality. His early eminence was witnessed by Sima Qian and reiterated by Ban Gu: "By the time of Kings Wei [r. 379–320 BC] and Xuan [r. 319–301 BC] of Qi, men of the rank of Mencius and Sun the Minister both venerated the teachings of the Master and embellished it, making his learning prominent in the contemporary world" 至於威、宣之際，孟子、孫卿之列咸遵夫子之業而潤色之，以學顯於當世。⁵ Despite his greatness as a scholar, he was never accorded sagehood for his personal embodiment of Ruist moral principles. In fact, he was studiously overlooked over the ages due to the dark shadow of the flawed, almost unforgivable, philosophical solecism of his negative stance on human nature. For those who could overlook this aspect, he is praised for his flexible, almost expedient, defense of Confucianism in an age of power politics, his mastery of the classical curriculum, and his personal authority as a teacher.

Xunzi's transmittal of the Confucian Way was not limited to the conveyance of doctrines through oral transmission but included the passing down of textual explanations; it was through his teaching that the Han received much of the classical canon through the work of his students.⁶ For this contribution alone, he should be regarded as one of the most influential figures in the history of classical scholarship. In fact, his role as linchpin between the Zhou past and the Han future as the orthodox Confucian *par excellence* for his age is colorfully depicted by Noah Edward Fehl as follows: "Winds of change and of false doctrine blow from the hundred schools, but wrapped in the cape of Confucius, he is a *viator indefessus*, the undaunted, either as the last champion of an age at its end or the leader who marches toward the Han wherein the Confucian conquest was

⁴ *Jieqiting ji waibian* 鮒埼亭集 外編 (SBCK *chubian* ed.), "Jibu," 95:500.

⁵ *Shiji*, "Biographies from the Grove of Confucians" 儒林列傳, 121.3116; repeated at *Hanshu* 88.3589. In one early manuscript of the *Shiji*, the word *rank* is written as *peers* (*lun* 倫), which does not substantially change the meaning. Takigawa Kametarō 瀧川龜太郎 (1865–1946), *Shiki kaichū kōshō* 史記會注考證 (1934; rpt. Taipei: Hongye Shuju, 1987), 1253 (*juan* 121.4).

⁶ For a specialized monograph devoted to this issue, see Xu Pingzhang 徐平章, *Xunzi yu liang Han ruxue* 荀子與兩漢儒學 (Taipei: Wenjin Chubanshe, 1989). A brief review of the influence exerted by Xunzi on later ages and historical appraisals of him is Kong Fan 孔繁, *Xunzi pingzhuan* 荀子評傳, *Zhongguo sixiangjia pingzhuan congshu* (Nanjing: Nanjing Daxue Chubanshe, 1997), 279–313.

almost complete."⁷

Two more contributions may be laid at Xunzi's feet. Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1902–1982) clarifies Xunzi's importance to the development of formal classical scholarship by describing his influence as helping to lend it a coherent form: "But the reason classical scholarship can be regarded as classical scholarship is that it must also possess a form that has become concrete through how it is organized. With Xunzi, this form started to coalesce in all its essentials." 但經學之所以為經學，亦必具備一種由組織而具體化之形式。此形式，至荀子而始挈其要。⁸ Lofty yet somewhat nebulous praise. Even higher lauds are awarded him by modern researcher Yu Wanli, who praises him as a Confucian *magisterium*, able to determine doctrine *ex cathedra*, phrased in Chinese as a "Gatherer of great accomplishments" (*jidachengzhe* 集大成者), one who inherits all past learning and masters it every whit. Yu demonstrates this exalted status by the simple argument of noting the numerous times Xunzi cites "a commentary states" (*zhuan* 傳曰)—some twenty instances.⁹ This strongly implies that Xunzi possessed the texts of a number of anonymous commentaries; he apparently, then, not only inherited Mencius's mantle of defender of the Confucian faith but also the textual riches of this tradition. Ultimately, his role of conservator was as crucial to the development of the history of classical scholarship as his work as commentator.

Fundamentally, Xunzi returned the focus of the Confucian project back to the rites and study, foci that are reminiscent of the single-minded purpose of Confucius himself.¹⁰ In his works, Xunzi set a lofty standard of clarity of narrative, structural balance, richness of diction, subtlety of argumentation, and deft handling of the classical corpus, most often in the form of the *Poems*. His insistence on the need for a teacher for training in moral self-cultivation and guidance in ritual performance set the trajectory for later Confucian master-

⁷ Noah Edward Fehl, *Rites and Propriety in Literature and Life: A Perspective for a Cultural History of Ancient China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1971), 152.

⁸ Hsu Fu-kuan (Xu Fuguan) 徐復觀, *Zhongguo jingxueshi de jichu* 中國經學史的基礎 (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 2004), 34.

⁹ Yu Wanli 虞萬里, *Yufangzhai xuelin* 榆枋齋學林, 2 vols. (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2012), 1:71–72.

¹⁰ Fehl, *Rites and Propriety in Literature and Life*, 153. Fehl stresses the association between ritual and scholarship even before Confucius, and explains that Xunzi fought against the trend of contemporary schools such as those he encountered at the Jixia academy, which sought to divorce the two in favor of practical and expedient politics.

disciple relations. But because of his advocacy of the doctrine that “man’s nature is evil”—the polar opposite of the Mencian stance—and perhaps also due to the role played by his students in providing the intellectual underpinnings of the detested Qin regime, his person has been denigrated by later Ruists, his teachings ignored, and his works neglected.

Ma Duanlin’s 馬端臨 (1245–1322) great work, *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考, published in 1317, assembles an array of typically negative appraisals of Xunzi from the preceding Tang and Song dynasties. Here I translate large excerpts from all of them, *ad seriatim*.

The most even-handed appraisal is by Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), who first noted the dichotomy between purity and defectiveness:

As for the work of Mr. Xun, when examining its terminology (*ci* 辭), it sometimes seems less than pure (*cui* 粹); but when summarizing its substance, it rarely differs from Confucius. Should he perhaps be placed somewhere between Mencius and Yang Xiong 楊雄 (53–18 BC)? ... Mencius is the purest of the pure. Xunzi and Yang Xiong were on the whole pure but defective in parts. 荀氏書，考其辭，時若不粹，要其歸，與孔子異者鮮矣，抑猶在軻、雄之間乎……孟子醇乎醇者也。荀與揚，大醇而小疵。¹¹

Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) was exponentially more astringent:

Formerly, they commonly blamed Li Si for serving Xunzi, and for burning and destroying his book, for greatly transforming the rule of the ancient first sages and kings, and for being unstinting in treating him as an enemy despite their master-disciple relationship. But nowadays, when we observe Xun the Minister’s work, we realize the reasons that Li Si served the Qin dynasty all derived from Xun the Minister; this is not worth wondering over. This Xun the Minister fellow delighted in construing odd theories with no yielding and dared propose lofty discourses without any scruples. His words startled petty persons and yet delighted them. Zisi and Mencius are termed by

¹¹ Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (1245–1322), *Wenxian tongkao*, 2 vols. (Taipei: Xinwenfeng Chuban Gongsi, 1986), 2:826–27 (*juan* 35). Lü Simian could have been attempting to clarify what Han Yu meant when he wrote: “Xunzi’s work came out rather late, and it is much adulterated with the terminology of the various masters and records” 荀子之書，其出較晚，而多雜諸子傳記之辭; Lü Simian 呂思勉, *Xian-Qin xueshu gailun* 先秦学术概论 (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 2005), 83.

the world worthy gentlemen. But Xun the Minister alone said that Zisi and Mencius were the ones who spread chaos in the world. With so many men in the world, and with the humane and righteous being so numerous, Xun the Minister alone said man’s nature is evil, that a Jie and a Zhou were due to nature, but a Yao and a Shun were due to artifice.

昔者常怪李斯事荀卿，既而焚滅其書，大變古先聖王之法，於其師之道，不啻若寇讎。及今觀荀卿之書，然後知李斯之所以事秦者，皆出於荀卿，而不足怪也。荀卿者，喜為異說而不讓，敢為高論而不顧者。其言，愚人之所驚，小人之所喜也。子思、孟軻，世之所謂賢人君子也，荀卿獨曰，亂天下者，子思、孟軻也。天下之人，如此其眾也，仁人義士，如此其多也，荀卿獨曰，人性惡，桀、紂，性也，堯、舜，偽也。¹²

He continues, matching this nadir of rebarbative rhetoric on Xunzi over another lengthy paragraph, which does not bear translating.

Master Cheng was briefer in his barbs:

Xun the Minister was lofty in his talent but numerous in his faults. Yang Xiong was lowly in his talent but scarce in his faults. When Master Han Yu said that he was largely pure, this was wrong. As for both of these masters, I refute them both. With the phrase that man’s nature is evil, Xun already lost the great foundation of the Way.

荀卿才高，其過多；揚雄才短，其過少。韓子稱其大醇，非也。若二子，大駁矣。且性惡一句，大本已失。¹³

A citation from Zhu Xi concludes and significantly elevates the tone of Ma Duanlin’s short survey on Xunzi:

Xunzi ultimately had good aspects, and seemed to exceed Master Yang Xiong. But at points he is hard to read. It seems that he was a solid and enlightened man, just a little crude

荀子盡有好處，勝勝似揚子，然亦難看。看來荀卿亦是剛明底人，只是粗。

Zhu Xi seems deliberately to be making a contrastive pun on Han Yu’s original use of the term *pure* (*cui* 粹) with the graphically similar word *crude* (*cu* 粗). If

¹² Lü Simian, *Xian-Qin xueshu gailun*, 827.

¹³ Lü Simian, *Xian-Qin xueshu gailun*, 827–28.

Ma Duanlin had quoted the incipit of the following paragraph from Zhu Xi, he would have drawn an even greater contrast between Xunzi and Yang Xiong:

There is no need to read Master Yang. There are no good points in what he says, nor do his comments have any substantial points. Although Xunzi did make mistakes, he nevertheless had substantial points in what he said, better than Master Yang, who talked in such a superficial, sterile manner.¹⁴

Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777) may be regarded as representative of late imperial Confucian apologists for the orthodoxy of the Mencian view. He takes it as given that Xunzi means what he says when he employs the term *evil* or *bad*. Witness Dai's famous essay on "Inquiry into Goodness" 原善 as translated by Chung-ying Cheng, with the expected changes in romanization:

It is only those persons like Xunzi and Gaozi who arbitrarily maintain that nature is but the natural endowments and capabilities of physical organs who fail to discern the presence of the principles of reason and righteousness. This is a reversal of right reasoning that causes him to conclude that man's nature is bad. ... The doctrine that human desires and feelings lead to biases and self-interests is implicit in Xunzi's assertion that man's nature is bad. But Xunzi sees those biases and selfishness merely as the results of having a loss of balance and integrity; he does not see man's nature as having [its intrinsic] balance and integrity.

主才質而遺義理，荀子告子是也。荀子以血氣心知之性，必教之義理，逆而變之，故為性惡……以有欲有覺為私者，荀子之所謂性惡在是也；是見於失其中正之為私，不見於得其中正。¹⁵

This is in stark contrast to modern students of philosophy, who take it as an article of faith that Xunzi must not have meant what he said, or that at the very least we need a deeper structure within which to construe his true meaning. Philip J. Ivanhoe divides these attempts at "rehabilitation" in two ways. First are those who argue that Xunzi's "pessimistic theory" complements Mengzi's more "optimistic view" on human nature; second are those who claim that both philosophers are

¹⁴ Lü Simian, *Xian-Qin xueshu gailun*, 828; Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Taipei: Hanjing wenhua shiye, 1980), 2:1306 (juan 137.2b).

¹⁵ Chung-ying Cheng, *Tai Chên's Inquiry into Goodness* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1971), 92, 94.

"talking at cross purposes."¹⁶ Such inquiries are valid and interesting in the context of pure philosophy, but in terms of illuminating the tradition, such nuanced argumentation was not present anywhere within it, as far as I can tell. Also irrelevant to the tradition is Dan Robins's textual study of chapter 23 which concludes that the argument for evil is only a small part of the rhetorical whole and that later Xunzi changed his mind, choosing to stress *artifice* (*wei* 偽) over *evil*.¹⁷ Again, the tradition is not retroactively affected by these insights.

As a counterbalance to Ma Duanlin's litany of negative witnesses from medieval times and the condemnation of history, let me cite the expansive views of one modern authority who explains Xunzi's early influence on the world of thought and learning, Xunzi's modern English translator John Knoblock:

¹⁶ Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self-Cultivation*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 30–31. A short survey of the more intriguing attempts includes Fung Yiu-ming's rendering of *evil* as "lack of positive value," based on his argument that Xunzi's rationale does not depend on human nature itself but the consequences of behavior, a form of consequentialism; Fung Yiu-ming, "Two Senses of 'Wei' 偽: A New Interpretation of Xunzi's Theory of Human Nature," *Dao* 11 (2011): 187–200. According to David E. Soles, Mencius holds a virtue-theoretic conception of morality; Xunzi instead subscribes to a rule-based conception of morality; David E. Soles, "The Nature and Grounds of Xunzi's Disagreement with Mencius," *Asian Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (1999): 123–33. Kim-Chong Chong sees the distinction rather in Xunzi's differentiation between *capacity* (*keyi* 可以) and *ability* (*neng* 能). Chong, "Xunzi's Systematic Critique of Mencius," *Philosophy East and West* 53, no. 2 (2003): 215–33. Yu Jiyuan explains that from Xunzi's perspective, "in our nature there are only different forms of appetitive desire. Other elements that do not naturally lead to evil, or elements that might even lead to good, do not seem to exist." Yu Jiyuan, "Human Nature and Virtue in Mencius and Xunzi: An Aristotelian Interpretation," *Dao* 5, no. 1 (2005): 11–30. As a final example, Chenyang Li argues that Mencius focused on a new moral term, that of *yi* 義, instead of "goodness," which Chenyang Li explains as a "potential capacity of humanity, and that until the sages established ritual propriety this capacity had not been actualized;" he essentially argues that to Xunzi, there was no original goodness; see Li, "Xunzi on the Origin of Goodness: A New Interpretation," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38 (2011): 46–63. An analysis that seems to me to be taking Xunzi's terminology seriously is Antonio S. Cua, "The Philosophy of Human Nature," in *Human Nature, Ritual, and History: Studies in Xunzi and Chinese Philosophy*. Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy, Vol. 43 (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 3–38.

¹⁷ Dan Robins, "The Development of Xunzi's Theory of Xing, Reconstructed on the Basis of a Textual Analysis of Xunzi 23, 'Xing e' 性惡 (Xing is Bad)," *Early China*, 26–27 (2001–2002): 99–158.

Though scarcely known in the West, Xunzi 荀子 occupies a place of importance in classical Chinese philosophy comparable to that of Aristotle. ... Like Aristotle, he molded successive ages. During the Han dynasty, his philosophy shaped learning and scholarship not only because of the pervasive influence of his thought but also because of his remarkable success as a teacher. Xunzi taught a whole generation of scholars whose traditions of learning dominated the intellectual world of the Han dynasty. Through the filiation of master and student, he determined the Han interpretation of ritual and its role in government, of the *Classic of Poetry*, of the role of music, of the nature of education, and of the lessons of history. More important still, the classical texts, understood within the framework of his philosophy, were the source of inspiration for countless thinkers, government officials, and scholars.

His influence first began to decline when Buddhism introduced alien patterns of thinking. ... Later in the Song dynasty, the reemergence of Mencius as a major thinker caused Xunzi's reputation to suffer an eclipse. Interest in him revived only during the florescence of scholarship during the Qing dynasty. With the advent of the modern period, and especially since the Communist Revolution, he has again been recognized as a thinker of great importance.¹⁸

11.2 The Life and Works of Xunzi

Xun Kuang 荀况, known as Xun the Minister 荀卿 (ca. 312–230 BC) is commonly called Master Xun 荀子.¹⁹ His surname alternates in early sources between *xun* 荀 (*zjwen) and *sun* 孫 (*swən), with the earlier form most likely

¹⁸ John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works. Volume I, Books 1–6* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), "Preface," vii. For modern annotated Chinese versions of *Xunzi*, see Beijing Daxue *Xunzi zhushizu* 北京大学荀子注释组, *Xunzi xinzhuzhu* 荀子新注 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979) and Wang Zhonglin 王忠林, *Xinyi Xunzi duben* 新译荀子读本 (Taipei: Sanmin Shuju, 2009). For a brief statement explaining the modern rehabilitation of Xunzi, see Paul R. Goldin, *Confucianism* (Durham, England: Acumen, 2011), 68.

¹⁹ His dates are not firmly established; suggested dates range from 340–245 BC for his birth and from 310–219 BC for his death.

correct.²⁰ A short biographical digest is found in *The Historian's Records*, chapter 74, in conjunction with that of Mencius.²¹ He was born in Zhao 趙 and educated in Qi 齊 at the Jixia Academy starting from age fifteen.²² After his studies, he visited Chu, and returned to Qi and Jixia in his mid-thirties, staying for many years. He gained the distinction of becoming the senior resident master. Thrice he served as "libationer" (*jijiu* 祭酒), or honorary officary at the sacrifices held at the academy. But after being slandered by men of Qi, he removed to the state of Chu, and because of the favor of the prime minister the Lord of Chunshen 春申君 (i.e., Huang Xie 黄歇, d. 238 BC), he was appointed Magistrate of Lanling 蘭陵令. After the death of the prime minister he lost his post but remained in Lanling as a private teacher for the rest of his life. His disciples included Han Fei 韓非

²⁰ Gu Yanwu noted long ago that Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) was wrong when he explained the variation between *sun* and *xun* as due to a Han period-taboo. Rather, it was only a matter of a slight variation in sound (*yuyin zhi zhuan* 語音之轉), meaning the same word was being represented by alternate orthography that was almost completely homophonous; see *Rizhilu* 2:2028 (*juan* 27.35a–b). Chen Yuan 陈垣 (1880–1971) agrees, describing the Xun/Sun alteration as a case of "same sound but different wording" (*yintong yuyi* 音同語易); "Shihui juli bajuan" 史諱舉例八卷, in *Liyun shuwu congke* 勵耘書屋叢刻, 3 vols. (Beijing: Beijing Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 1982), vol. 2, *juan* 5.48a–b. For a thorough modern analysis, consult Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫 (1884–1955), *Siku tiyao bianzheng* 四庫提要辨證, 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980), 2:519–24.

²¹ Important biographical studies include Kong Fan 孔繁, *Xunzi pingzhuan* 荀子評傳. *Zhongguo sixiangjia pingzhuan congshu* (Nanjing: Nanjing Daxue Chubanshe, 1997); Homer K. Dubs, *Hsüntze the Moulder of Ancient Confucianism* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1927); T. C. Kline III, in Xinzhong Yao, ed., *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, 2:718–21; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1:3–35. For events of his life, see Wang Zhong 汪中 (1745–1794), *Xun Qingzi nianpu* 荀卿子年譜, in *Xian-Qin zhuzi nianpu* 先秦諸子年譜, 5 vols. (Beijing: Beijing Tushuguan Chubanshe, 2004), 5: 611–24; J. J. L. Duyvendak, "The Chronology of Hsün-tzu," *T'oung Pao* 26 (1929): 73–95; Yang Yunru 楊筠如, *Xunzi yanjiu* 荀子研究 (Taiwan: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1966), 1–11.

²² His *Shiji* biography states that he headed to Jixia when he was fifty-one. Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (1101–1174), basing himself on Ying Shao 應劭 (140–206), *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 and a textual variant preserved in Wang Yinglin's 王應麟 (1223–1296) *Yuhai* 玉海, comes down on the side of fifteen over fifty. See the extended note at *Junzhai dushu zhi jiaozheng* 郡齋讀書志校證, 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2006), 1:422–23 (*juan* 10). See further the note at Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990), *Xian-Qin zhuzi xianian kaobian* 先秦諸子繫年攷辨 (1935; repr. Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian, 1991), 301–02.

(ca. 280–233 BC) and Li Si 李斯 (ca. 280–208 BC); this negative association with Legalism did nothing to augment his reputation among Confucians.²³

A few additional details included in Sima Qian's brief biographical epitome may be extracted. They include one-line characterizations of the other masters at Jixia, who were already mentioned above in conjunction with Mencius—namely, Zou Yan, Zou Shi, Chunyu Kun, and Tian Pian. Xunzi detested the political instability and moral decay of the time that portended impending doom and the preoccupation with witchcraft and the occult. Sima Qian concludes with an enigmatic summary of Xunzi's intellectual tendencies: "Thereupon he promoted the conduct and affairs, successes and failures, of the Confucians, Mohists, and Daoists. He ordered and arranged his writing in several tens of thousands of words, and then died, thereafter being buried in Lanling. 於是推儒、墨、道德之行事興壞，序列著數萬言而卒。因葬蘭陵。²⁴ Given Sima Qian's often murky handling of the different schools of thought, an intellectual legacy absorbed from his father Sima Tan 司馬談 (ca. 165–110 BC), it is not surprising that he lacked clarity in defining Xunzi's intellectual allegiances. But it is true that Xunzi was not only exposed to these other schools of thought while in residence at Jixia, but his thinking and writing profited from them in several ways, as T. C. Kline III explains:

Often when Xunzi most vehemently criticizes another school of thought, he simultaneously adopts and modifies some of his opponents' arguments, turning them to the defense of Confucianism. This practice can be seen most clearly in relation to the philosophies of Mozi and Zhuangzi. Xunzi soundly criticizes both thinkers for failing to understand properly the Way (*dao*), yet his own position owes a great debt to each.²⁵

Apparently Sima Qian is presenting Xunzi's thought as he encountered it, and it is the expectations of later times that demand clear scholastic demarcations among schools of thought.²⁶

²³ This information about Han Fei is not included in Sima Qian's treatment of Xunzi, but found in Han Fei's biography in chapter 63 of the *Shiji*.

²⁴ *Shiji* 74.2348.

²⁵ T. C. Kline III, in Xinzhong Yao, ed., *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, 2:719.

²⁶ On this important conceptual issue, see Kidder Smith, "Sima Tan and the Invention of Daoism, 'Legalism,' 'et cetera,'" *Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 1 (2003): 129–56. For a case-specific study of Xunzi and Daoism from within the classical tradition of Confucian apologetics, see Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849), "Xunzi yin

More biographical information is preserved in a late Western Han source. The father of textual criticism in China, Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BC), was in residence at the imperial archives known as the "Pavilion of Heavenly Emolument" (*Tianluge* 天祿閣) in Chang'an when Emperor Cheng 成帝 (r. 51–7 BC) conceived a grand project to organize the archives and make sense of the mish-mash of ancient manuscript remains; the project commenced in 26 BC. After completing each text, Liu Xiang prefaced the reconstituted text with a description of the editorial work he had performed and usually included an introduction to the author. The combined bibliographical prefaces formed his library catalog, called the *Separately Compiled Registers* 別錄.²⁷ When Liu Xiang got around to editing the welter of scattered bamboo strips of Xunzi's works, he likewise included much more biographical information on Xunzi in the preface to his newly reconstituted text, much of it based on Sima Qian, including the erroneous assertion that Xunzi started studying in Qi at age fifty. His preface is entitled "Register on the Book by Sun the Minister" 孫卿書錄.²⁸

Liu Xiang shares more interesting information about Xunzi, whom he consistently calls Sun Qing. He was "good at explaining the *Poems*, *Rites*, *Changes*, and *Spring and Autumn Annals*" 善為詩禮易春秋.²⁹ When he was first appointed magistrate of Lanling, somebody slandered him to the prime minister, the Lord of Chunshen, warning about Xunzi's power to rise up in imitation of King Wu since he was a "worthy person" (*xianren* 賢人). After Xunzi was dismissed from office, someone else reminded the prime minister that as a worthy person, Xunzi could act in imitation of the ancient worthy Yi Yin 伊尹 and strengthen whichever state employed him. The Lord of Chunshen sent an emissary to Xunzi to recruit him again, but Xunzi sent a missive critical of the

Daojing jie" 荀子引道經解, in *Yanjingshi xu sanji* 掣經室續三集 (CSJC ed.), *juan* 3.121–22. He explains the so-called "Daoisms" in Xunzi as misunderstandings of the entire context of his thought and not specific citations of passages from the *Daodejing*; and often these similarities are traceable to the Yellow Emperor.

²⁷ The extant registers from this catalog are preserved in Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843), ed. "Complete Prose of the Han" ("Quan Han wen" 全漢文), in *Quan Shangu Sandai Qin-Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1987), 1:331–35 (*juan* 37.1a–9a).

²⁸ "Quan Han wen," 1:332–333 (*juan* 37.4b).

²⁹ "Quan Han wen," 1:332 (*juan* 37.4b). The word *wei* is used at *Mengzi* 6b.23 as a technical term meaning "to analyze and explain" (*jieshuo* 解說), as glossed by Sun Shi 孫奭 (962–1033) in his epexegetis (*shu* 疏); *Mengzi zhengyi*, *juan* 12, 482. It first appears in *Analekts* 17.10. For a collection of glosses, including Huang Kan and Zhu Xi's reading of *wei* as "to study" (*xue* 學), consult *Lunyu jishi*, 3:2269.

state in reply, along with an appropriate quote from the *Poems*. This offended the prime minister, who canceled his invitation to Xunzi. This early example of reverse psychology ultimately provoked Xunzi into returning to resume his post. Li Si is acknowledged as one disciple, something that Sima Qian already had mentioned. Han Fei is a new addition, along with Fuqiu Bo 浮丘伯, "both of whom received his instructions and became noted Ruists" 皆受業為名儒.³⁰ Xunzi responded to several invitations from feudal princes, debating military science in Qin and Zhao, but ultimately was not employed by either of them. Xunzi's personal piety was noted: "Xunzi observed as his way the rites and propriety, responding in his conduct to the regulations with the exactness of a carpenter's mark line; he was at ease in poverty and lowly station" 孫卿道守禮義, 行應繩墨, 安貧賤.

A lengthy section explains his doctrine of the evil nature of man. We are told he composed his chapter "Nature is Evil" expressly to refute Mencius's theory. He was heavily criticized for it by Su Qin 蘇秦 (380–284 BC), the original orchestrator of the "Vertical Alliance" against Qin, who of course appeared too early to make this claim plausible, and by Zhang Yi 張儀 (d. 309 BC), who worked actively against it, for spreading this pernicious doctrine among the feudal lords but was praised in the Han by the Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BC). (Since Zhang Yi died in 309 BC, this argues for an early date of birth for Xunzi.) After enumerating a long list of political thinkers and writers from Chu, Liu Xiang concludes that "none of their works followed the way of the former kings, none of them adhered to the arts of Mr. Kong. Only Mencius and Xunzi were able to venerate Confucius." 皆著書。然非先王之法也。皆不循孔氏之術。唯孟軻孫卿為能尊仲尼。In his final paragraph before the dedication, Liu Xiang describes the virtues of Xunzi's writings:

In perusing Xunzi's book, his portrayal of the kingly way is very easy to put into practice, but he was disgusted that no one in the world was able to apply it. His words were heartbreaking, and very easy to commiserate with. Alas! That such a man died in an obscure alley, while his meritorious teachings were not seen in the world, oh how tragic! This is something to shed tears over. His book may be compared with a record or commentary, and serve as a model.

觀孫卿之書。其陳王道甚易行。疾世莫能用。其言悽愴。甚可痛也。嗚呼。使斯人卒終於閭巷。而功業不得見於世。

³⁰ "Quan Han wen," 1:333 (juan 37.5a).

哀哉。可為貫涕。其書比於記傳。可以為法。

Liu Xiang found some 322 chapters of the works of Xunzi preserved in the archives. During the course of editing these chapters, he eliminated 290 duplications, then collated the remaining 32 to produce a definitive version. He entitled it *The New Book of Sun the Minister* (孫卿新書). The "Bibliographical Monograph" in the *Hanshu* records the work under title of *Master Sun the Minister* 孫卿子, in thirty-three sections ("fascicles," *pian* 篇),³¹ which number Wang Yinglin interprets as an error for thirty-two.³² The bibliographical monograph in the *Suishu* records the same title with twelve chapters ("scrolls," *juan* 卷).³³ It was not until AD 818 that the first commentary appeared, much later than commentaries on the *Analects* and *Mencius*. Yang Liang 楊倞 (fl. AD 805–820) not only produced a textual commentary, which definitively changed the name back from *Sunzi* to *Xunzi*: *The Annotated Xunzi* 荀子注, but he further rearranged the order of the final nine chapters. This version is the basis of the received version and forms the foundation of Wang Xianqian's 王先謙 (1842–1917) authoritative annotated version, *Collected Explanations of Xunzi* 荀子集解.

11.3 Xunzi's Place in the Confucian Scholastic Lineage

Han Yu's early dismissal in his "On Reading Xunzi" 讀荀子 is cited by Wang Xianqian to launch the preface to his own *Collected Explanations*: "Formerly during the Tang dynasty, Mr. Han Yu regarded the work of Xunzi as pure (*chun* 醇) in the main points but flawed in details. By the Song, attackers were more numerous. In finding a reason for this, it is due to his teachings on 'nature is evil'" 昔唐韓愈以荀子書為大醇小疵。逮宋, 攻者益眾。推其由,

³¹ *Hanshu* 30.1725.

³² Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223–1296), "Han Yiwenzhi kaozheng" 漢藝文志考證, in *Ershiwu shi bubian* 二十五史補編, 6 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1989), 2:1408.

³³ *Suishu* 34.997. For introductions to the textual history of *Xunzi* and relevant studies, see Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), 178–88; T. C. Kline III, in *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, 2:721–24; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 105–28; John Knoblock, "The Chronology of Xunzi's Works," *Early China* 8 (1982–83): 28–52; Yang Yunru, *Xunzi yanjiu*, 12–35, and most recently, Masayuki Sato, *The Confucian Quest for Order: The Origin and Formation of the Political Thought of Xunzi* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 26–39.

以言性惡故。³⁴ But Wang argues that Xunzi did not really teach this doctrine, because man contains both good and evil, and nature can conform with goodness, given the rule of sages and the transforming effect of the rites. He laments the neglect of Xunzi's work due to the chaos of his age. He ultimately concludes that "Xunzi's discourses on learning and ruling are both based on the rites. When extending his thought and studying his arguments in detail, and in striving to clarify his fundamental significance, he cannot be excluded from the thousand-year course of cultivating the Way and establishing doctrine. 荀子論學論治。皆以禮為宗。反復推詳務明其指趣。為乾古脩道立教所莫能外。"³⁵ In fact, because of this understanding, Yang Liang states that he deserves his place in the Confucian scholastic lineage: "Mencius expounded what came before, and Xunzi invigorated what came after" 孟子闡其前，荀子振其後。³⁶ No claim of sagely character here for Xunzi, but he did make his contributions to the scholastic tradition of Confucius. Wang explicitly links him up with the entire tradition at one point, converting it into a scholastic lineage that transmitted the classics: "Furthermore, his work also was used to put into practice the Six Classics, and increased the glory of Mr. Kong, not merely the words of the various masters. It seems that the Duke of Zhou had created them, Confucius had transmitted them as an ancestor, and Xun and Meng added to and completed it. 又其書亦所以羽翼六經。增光孔氏。非徒諸子之言也。蓋周公製作之。仲尼祖述之。荀孟贊成之。"³⁷

Wang Zhong 汪中 (1745–1794) is the most vociferous defender of Xunzi as inheritor of the Confucian lineage. In his extensive essay, "Comprehensive Discourse on Master Sun the Minister" 荀卿子通論, Wang starts off by setting forth Xunzi's role in transmitting the learning of Confucius: "The learning of Xun the Minister derived from Confucius, and was particularly meritorious in explaining the various classics" 荀卿之學出於孔氏而尤有功於諸經。³⁸ He then cites a scholastic lineage of the *Poems* imparted by one Xu Zheng

³⁴ Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (ZZJC ed.), "Xu", 1. The title as originally preserved in Ma Tongbo 馬通伯 (1854–1929), ed., *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注 (Taipei: Huazheng Shuju, 1975), 1.20–21 is "On Reading Xun," 讀荀 lacking the *zi* for "master." The editor notes that some manuscripts include this word, so it is not clear whether Han Yu intended any derogatory denotation by its absence. This essay is usually cited as translated.

³⁵ Wang Xianqian, *Xunzi jijie*, "Xu", 1.

³⁶ Yang Liang, *Xunzi*, "Xu", 2.

³⁷ Yang Liang, *Xunzi*, "Xu", 2.

³⁸ *Xun Qingzi tonglun* 荀卿子通論 (HQJJ ed.), 5: 6539.

徐整 preserved in Lu Deming's 陸德明 (556–627) *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文; it commences with Zixia and concludes with the Greater and Lesser Mao. Another tradition preserved by Lu Deming includes Xunzi within its lineage, which of course, Wang Zhong hastens to include: "Zixia transmitted it to Zeng Shen; Shen transmitted it to the man of Wei Li Ke; Ke transmitted it to the man of Lu Meng Zhongzi; Meng Zhongzi transmitted it to Gen Mouzi; Gen Mouzi transmitted it to the man of Zhao Master Sun the Minister, Master Sun the Minister transmitted it to the man of Lu Mao the Greater. Speaking from this point of view, the Mao tradition on the *Poems* was transmitted by Master Xun the Minister." 子夏傳曾申，申傳魏人李克，克傳魯人孟仲子，孟仲子傳根牟子，根牟子傳趙人孫卿子，孫卿子傳魯人大毛公。³⁹ Adducing evidence from such sources as the "Monograph on Bibliography," the "Bielu," and the *Yantielun*, Wang confidently attests that the Lu school on the *Poems* had been transmitted by Xunzi when he imparted his teachings to Shen Pei 申培 (219–135 BC), the founder of the Lu school. As Wang Zhong finds more than forty citations of Xunzi's explanations on the *Poems* preserved in Han Ying's *Hanshi waizhuan*, Wang claims that transmission of the Han school of *Poems* exegesis is also the merit of Xunzi.⁴⁰

Next, Wang traces the transmission of Zuo's *Commentary* and *Guliang's Commentary* through Xunzi. Wang terms multiple chapters currently preserved in the *Records of Ritualists of Dai the Greater* and other sources the "branches and residual progeny" (*zhi yu yuyi* 支與餘裔) of Xunzi's teachings on the rites. In a preliminary conclusion, Wang states, "It seems that in the interval between the death of the seventy-two disciples and the rise of the various Ruist schools in the Han and during the alternation of the Warring States and violent Qin when the Six Classics were thrown into chaos, who their continuous transmission relied on was Master Xun Qing." 蓋自七十子之徒既歿，漢諸儒未興中更戰國暴秦之亂六藝之傳賴以不絕者，卿子請者也。⁴¹ To conclude his essay, Wang Zhong reveals the explicit link between Confucius and Xunzi; it is the pair of disciples

³⁹ For the original quote, see Wu Chengshi 吳承仕 (1884–1939), *Jingdian shiwen xulu shuzheng* 經典釋文序錄疏證 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2008), 79.

⁴⁰ Modern scholarship identifies fifty-four quotes from Xunzi in the *Hanshi waizhuan* and includes passages in common with eighteen of Xunzi's thirty-two chapters, both clear indications of the heavy debt owed by Han Ying to Xunzi; see Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 44, based on the work of Robert Hightower.

⁴¹ "Comprehensive Discourse on Master Sun the Minister," 5:6540. The link between Confucius and Xunzi, according to Wang Zhong, is the master-disciple tandem of Zixia and Zhonggong 仲弓.

Zixia and Zhonggong 仲弓—namely, Zigong 子弓. In fact, in “Contra Twelve Philosophers,” Xunzi himself placed Confucius and his disciple Zigong on par with the ancient sages Shun and Yu:

With what task should the humane man of today occupy himself? On the one hand he should model himself after the regulations of Shun and Yu; and on the other hand, he should model himself after the moral principles manifested by Confucius and Zigong, therefore making it his task to silence the theories of the twelve philosophers. When this has been done, then harm to the world is eliminated, the undertakings of the humane man are completed, and the footprints of the sage kings are made visible.

今夫仁人也，將何務哉？上則法舜禹之制，下則法仲尼子弓之義，以務息十二子之說。如是則天下之害除，仁人之事畢，聖王之跡著矣。⁴²

From Wang Zhong's perspective, Xunzi's bona fides as inheritor of the mantle of Confucius and transmitter of the classical tradition are unassailable.⁴³

11.4 Xunzi and the Classics

For Xunzi, the canon consists of the *Poems*, the *Documents*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the *Rites*, and the *Music*. In chapter 8, “The Teachings of the Ru” 儒效, he defines the function of each Classic as revealing different aspects of the Way of the sage. To Xunzi, the canon is a code of conduct and a set of standards exemplified by sages who can serve as models for others who toil along the path towards sagehood:

The sage is the pitch pipe of the Way. The Way of the world has its pitch pipe in the sage. The Way of the Hundred Kings is at one with the sage. Hence the Way expressed in the *Odes*,

⁴² Xunzi jijie 61; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 225.

⁴³ Wang is not proposing anything startling from the point of view of historical transmission, for the same linkages between Xunzi and the texts of the Lu and Mao schools of the *Poems*, and the Zuo zhuan and Guliang schools of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, are presented in tabular form by Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1730–1797), *Chuanjing biao* 傳經表, CSJC ed. (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1965), 7, 71, 89. The only linkages not supported by Bi Yuan are with the chapters in the *Da Dai Liji* that have counterparts within the text of the *Xunzi*, the *Liji*, and the Han school of *Poems* exegesis. On the primacy of Xunzi over these parallel chapters, see Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 124–27.

Documents, *Rituals*, and *Music* returns to this oneness. The *Odes* express the sage's intentions; the *Documents* his official business; the *Rituals* his conduct; the *Music* his harmoniousness; [and the *Annals* his esoteric meaning].⁴⁴ Accordingly, the “Airs” are not reckless because they choose to employ his Way to moderate themselves. The “Lesser Odes” are less elegant because they merely select it and elaborate it. The “Greater Odes” are more elegant because they select it and glorify it. The “Ancestral Hymns” are the most perfect because they select it and universalize it. The Way of the world is brought to completion in oneness.

聖人也者，道之管也：天下之道管是矣，百王之道一是矣。故詩書禮樂之道歸是矣。詩言是其志也，書言是其事也，禮言是其行也，樂言是其和也，春秋言是其微也，故風之所以為不逐者，取是以節之也，小雅之所以為小雅者，取是而文之也，大雅之所以為大雅者，取是而光之也，頌之所以為至者，取是而通之也。天下之道畢是矣。鄉是者臧，倍是者亡；鄉是如不臧，倍是如不亡者，自古及今，未嘗有也。⁴⁵

Xunzi's endorsement of the sage and how the classics embody the gamut of his intentions, including business, conduct, harmoniousness, and esoteric meanings certainly parallels Xunzi's more prominent emphasis on the role of the teacher to explain the canon and apply its teachings. We may certainly regard this as an indirect evocation of Confucius and the importance of taking his sagely precedent as the ultimate model, though not with the same direct fervor as argued by Mencius.

In a “Eulogy,” separated by Knoblock as an appendix to the final chapter, “The Questions of Yao” 堯問, Xunzi's followers in fact linked him with Confucius in their separate roles as models and patterns:

Those who offer persuasions say: Xun Qing was not the equal of Confucius. This is not so. Xun Qing was oppressed by a chaotic age and lived under the intimidating threat of stern punishments. On the one hand there were no worthy rulers, and on the other hand he faced the aggression of Qin. Ritual and

⁴⁴ Knoblock places this sentence in parentheses because he regards it as an interpolation; neither Yang Liang nor Wang Xianqian concur.

⁴⁵ Xunzi jijie 4.8.84–85; John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works. Volume II, Books 7–16* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 76–77.

moral principles were not observed. ... Students of today can obtain the transmitted doctrines and remaining teachings of Xun Qing in sufficient detail to serve as a model and pattern, the paradigm and gnomon, that establish the standard for the whole world. His presence had an effect like that of a spirit, and wherever he passed by he produced transformation. If one closely inspects his good works, one would see that even Confucius did not surpass him. Because the age does not examine things in detail or judge matters carefully, so it says that he was not a sage.

為說者曰：孫卿不及孔子。是不然。孫卿迫於亂世，遭於嚴刑，上無賢主，下遇暴秦，禮義不行。... 今之學者，得孫卿之遺言餘教，足以為天下法式表儀。所存者神，所過者化，觀其善行，孔子弗過。世不詳察，云非聖人。⁴⁶

Despite the boldness of this encomium by his followers, Xunzi does not partake of the same enthusiasm; he does not often openly invoke Confucius in his work as his individual inspiration and model. At most in "Contra Twelve Philosophers," as cited above, he urges the humane man to "model himself after the moral principles manifested by Confucius and Zigong." Despite this rare instance, out of some eighty-two times that the name of Confucius is mentioned, in only twenty-six instances is Confucius mentioned as a topic. The remaining fifty-six times Confucius is quoted; and in many instances out of these twenty-six examples, Confucius is mentioned merely in the context of setting up the quotation. Even in chapter 7, which is called "On Confucius" 仲尼, the "theme of the book," explains Knoblock, "is not Confucius but the genuine doctrine and practices of those at the 'gate' of Confucius in contrast to those Ru who have strayed far from the original doctrines of the 'Great Gentleman.'"⁴⁷ This means that Confucius is seldom explained but often evoked as a figure of authority and legitimacy. But the focus of Xunzi is obviously on the automaticity of the process, not the inspiration behind initiating it or the particular sagely model to follow.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Xunzi jijie* 20.32.363–65; John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works. Volume III, Books 13–32* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 269.

⁴⁷ Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 2:51.

⁴⁸ This is seen most clearly in "Discourse on Ritual": "Those who model themselves after ritual and find satisfaction in ritual principles are said to be scholars who have method and standards. Those who keep to the mean provided by ritual and are able to ponder and meditate on it are said to be able to think. ... Those who keep to the

The connection between the sage and his function to conduct others along the path toward sagehood is made explicit in chapter 1, "An Exhortation to Learning" (*Quanxue* 勸學). This passage is another encapsulation of the function of the classics, this time directed to the endeavors of those treading the sagely path:

Learning—where should it begin and where should it end! I say: Its proper method is to start with the recitation of the classics and conclude with the reading of the *Rituals*.⁴⁹ Its real purpose is first to create a scholar and in the end to create a sage. If you genuinely accumulate and earnestly practice for a long time, then you will become an initiate. Learning continues until death and only then does it stop. ... Truly, the *Documents* contain the record of government affairs. The *Odes* set the correct standards to which pronunciations should adhere. The *Rituals* contain the model for the primary social distinctions and the categories used by analogical extension for the guiding rules and ordering norms of behavior. Accordingly, when learning has been perfected in the rituals, it has come to its terminus. Surely this may be called the culmination of the Way and its Power. The reverence and refinement of the *Rituals*, the concord and harmony of the *Music*, the breadth of the *Odes* and *Documents*, the subtlety of the *Annals*—all the creations of Heaven and Earth are completed in them.

學惡乎始？惡乎終？曰：其數則始乎誦經，終乎讀禮；其義則始乎為士，終乎為聖人。真積力久則入。學至乎沒而後止也。……故書者、政事之紀也；詩者、中聲之所止也；禮者、法之大分，群類之綱紀也。故學至乎禮而止矣。夫是之謂道德之極。禮之敬文也，樂之中和也，詩書之博也，春秋之微也，在天地之間者畢矣。⁵⁰

In this formulation, because of the breadth of the *Poems* and the *Documents*, they form the foundation of the curriculum. With this broad foundation mastered, the

mean provided by ritual and are able not to alter it are said to be steadfast. One who, being able to think and to stay steadfast, adds to them a fondness for ritual—this is to be a sage." John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works. Volume III, Books 13–32* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 3:61.

⁴⁹ The "classics" here refer, according to a gloss by Yang Liang, to the *Poems* and to the *Documents*.

⁵⁰ *Xunzi jijie* 1.1.7; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1:139.

ritual texts may be approached not only as textual documents to chant and read but also as repositories of instructions on ritual behavior. The goal is to transform an erudite scholar into a cultivated sage, which transformation requires the combination of extensive learning and refined deportment.

The very next passage concerns the commencement of learning through the medium of hearing: "The learning of the gentleman enters through the ear, is stored in the mind, spreads through the four limbs, and visible in his activity and repose" 君子之學也，入乎耳，著乎心，布乎四體，形乎動靜。Xunzi here is doubtlessly playing on the associations with hearing visible in the graphic components of the character for *sage*, *sheng* 聖. According to Xu Shen, it is classified under the signific *ear* (er 耳), with *cheng* 呈 serving as the phonetic element. It means "penetrating," (*tongye* 通也), that is, as parsed by Duan Yucai: "The reason that 'sage' is classified under the 'ear' signific, is because it says that the ears accord" 聖從耳者，謂其耳順。⁵¹ In rare cases, the graph features only the component for *mouth* (*kou* 口) along with the signific *ear*, as evident in this bronze form, 𠂔, and in this seal form, 𠂔 (both modern 耳口). This abbreviated form also appears in the Guodian bamboo manuscript "The Way of Tang and Yu" (*Tang Yu zhi dao* 唐虞之道), strip six,⁵² and in the Mawangdui silk manuscript B of the *Laozi* in chapter 12, for instance. Phonetically, *sage* (*sheng*, *śjǎŋ) is cognate with *sound* (*sheng*, *śjǎŋ 聲), perhaps its derivation, and is also related to *hearing* (*ting* 聽).⁵³ Because of this, William Boltz prefers to interpret the literal meaning of this word as "one who is adept at 'hearing,'" or the "audient person,"⁵⁴ instead of Axel Schuessler's reading of "'be renowned, one who is renowned' (for his wisdom)."⁵⁵ Zhu Junsheng 朱駿聲 (1788–1858) provides early support for

⁵¹ Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815), *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Taipei: Hanjing Wenhua Shiye Youxian Gongsi, 1983), 12a.17a

⁵² *Guodian Chujian wenzibian*, 103.

⁵³ Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*, 461.

⁵⁴ William G. Boltz, "The Religious and Philosophical Significance of the 'Hsiang erh' Lao Tzu [相爾老子] in the Light of the Ma-Wang-Tui Silk Manuscripts," *Bulletin of the School of African and Oriental Studies*, 45, no. 1 (1982): 95–117; 101–102; see pp. 101–102n17, for the phonetic affinities between the words "sound," "listen," and "sage." Boltz later suggested two other amplifications of the meanings: "a person who is wise through having heard" or "being aurally keen and therefore illumined." Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1994), 116n21.

⁵⁵ Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*, 461.

Boltz's reading: "When the ears accord, this is called to be a sage" 耳順之謂聖。⁵⁶ Obviously, the emphasis is on hearing, not on being heard. Modern specialist Tang Kejing 湯可敬 summarizes the aspect of hearing associated with sages as follows: "It is appropriate that in the beginning sages had sensitive hearing organs; hence the extended meanings were glossed the same. The definitions of 'sage' and 'worthy' are also extended meanings. The three words 'hearing,' 'sound,' and 'sage' have the same origin; at first they were at base the same word. (聖之初誼為叢聽覺官能之敏銳；故引申訓通；賢聖之義，又其引申也。聽、聲、聖三字同源，其始當本一字。)"⁵⁷ For Xunzi, then, the sage is emblematic of the hearing necessary to apprehend the Way; the sagely sounds he makes through his teaching associates him with the same process of oral transmission as exemplified by Confucius. This is one more link in his understated chain of direct evocations, indirect associations, and allusions that all lead back to the sage *par excellence*, Confucius.

11.5 Use of the Poems

Xunzi's most often quoted classic, as was common for the age, is the *Poems*. In the previous chapter on Mencius, my analysis of his use of the *Documents* preceded that of the *Poems*. But Xunzi only directly quotes from the *Documents* fourteen times, hardly the basis for an examination of his approach to this text.⁵⁸ He did discourse on ancient history to aid his argumentation in the manner of the exemplar historiography employed by Mencius. Antonio S. Cua terms it "the use of historical appeal."⁵⁹ Despite Xunzi's paucity of quotes from the *Documents*, his student Shen Pei was the teacher of Kong Anguo 孔安國 (ca. 156–74 BC) for the *Poems*; perhaps something of Xunzi's teachings on the *Documents* filtered down to Kong Anguo along with more official teachings of Kong's formal *Documents* master, Fu Sheng. At any rate, through his disciples, Xunzi's views may have possibly impacted the Old Text reading of this important

⁵⁶ Zhu Junsheng 朱駿聲, *Shuowen tongxun dingsheng* 說文通訓定聲 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1998), 880 (*juan* 17.47a).

⁵⁷ Tang Kejing 湯可敬, *Shuowen jiezi jinshi* 說文解字今釋, 2 vols. (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2001), 2:1679.

⁵⁸ They are enumerated at Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, *Shangshu tonglun* 尚書通論, 2nd ed. (1963; repr., Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1986), 30–31.

⁵⁹ Antonio S. Cua, "Ethical Uses of the Past in Early Confucianism: The Case of Xunzi," in *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*, ed. T. C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 39–68.

text in opposition to that of Fu Sheng.⁶⁰

Based chiefly on Xunzi's merit as interpreter and transmitter of the *Poems*, Steven Van Zoeren proclaims him the classical transmitter *primus inter pares*: "Probably no single figure exerted as great an influence over the institutionalization of the study of classics in Confucianism as Xunzi."⁶¹ This is confirmed when we recall his merit in the lines of transmission of the Mao, Lu, and Han schools of *Poems*, and the Zuo and Guliang schools of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Yet Xunzi does not delve into textual details of the *Poems*, nor does he betray a hint of any differences in the school readings of the verses he cites that would develop with the rise of the four formal schools during the Han dynasty. He apparently transmitted his own reading of the *Poems*, and then his disciples or second-generation students developed their own views, with or without the sanction of their master, Xunzi, to diverge from his standard readings. From this angle, his merit in transmitting three different scholastic lineages of the *Poems* may be overstating the case.

As for how he utilized the poetic corpus in his persuasive writings, his various approaches are skillfully distilled by Mark Edward Lewis. Lewis contrasts the use of the *Poems* by Mencius and *Zuo's Traditions* with Xunzi's new calculus in ethical argumentation:

In the *Mencius* and the *Zuo zhuan* the Zhou odes had served primarily to urge, to justify, or to pass judgment. ... While the *Xunzi* inherited this program, it also moved into the arena of dispute and adapted rules of definition and argument pioneered by the Mohists. In this context, the odes ceased to be an alternative to argument and instead were adapted to serve as an element within argument. The author(s) of the text employed three methods of rereading the odes in order to turn archaic verse into contemporary argument: (1) granting a figurative sense to objects cited in the ode, (2) universalizing individuals or incidents described in the poems, and (3) discovering Warring States equivalents to phenomena mentioned in the Zhou verse. A fourth type of reading, used largely in poems of praise and blame, consisted of observing the original sense of the ode.

All four types of citing verse use a common formula. Like the *Mencius* and *Zuo zhuan*, the *Xunzi* sought to fix the sense of the odes by incorporating them into another mode of writing, in this

⁶⁰ On this point, see Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1:43.

⁶¹ Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality*, 74.

case philosophical prose. The text presents an argument, cites an ode, and then concludes with either the phrase "this is what it says" [*ci zhi wei* 此之為], or with an explanation of how the poem says the same things as the argument. The former is much more common, figuring in about three-quarters of the quotations.

As in the *Zuo zhuan*, reference to figuration is rare, representing about 10 percent of the cases. ... The vast majority of the poetic citations in the *Xunzi* refer not to objects but to human actions or to sentiments. These are transformed into philosophy either through reading a universal import into their particular referent, or through finding a Warring States equivalent for them.⁶²

Paul R. Goldin adds several nuances to the above schema, especially in terms of Xunzi's argumentation being more profound and indirect than superficial and apparent. As an example he cites chapter 3, "Bugou" 不苟, in his own translation:

In his actions, the noble man does not esteem difficult acts if they are indecorous; in his speech, he does not esteem investigations if they are indecorous; in matters of reputation, he does not esteem traditions if they are indecorous. He esteems only what is appropriate. ... When it is said in the *Odes*, "The goods are in quantities, and yet they are timely" [Mao 170, "Yuli" 魚麗], this is what it refers to.

君子行不貴苟難，說不貴苟察，名不貴苟傳，唯其當之為貴……詩曰：物其有矣，惟其時矣。此之謂也。⁶³

Goldin comments on Xunzi's subtlety as follows: "A review of Mao 170 will reveal that the 'goods'—fish and wine, perhaps gathered for a sacrifice—do not, in the context of the poem, pertain even remotely to indecorous casuistry. ... Xunzi's motivation in quoting this line has to do with the word 'timely' (*shi* 時): his point is that timely and suitable actions can bring about great quantities of goods without violating any moral principles." Goldin's conclusion, the subtle nuance that we must account for in Xunzi, is that "one cannot take Xunzi literally when he says that Mao 170 'refers to' (*wei* 謂) this teaching. Rather, he means to say that he can illustrate his arguments through a deep reading of the poem."⁶⁴

⁶² Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 169.

⁶³ *Xunzi jijie* 2.3.23; Paul R. Goldin, "The Reception of the *Odes* in the Warring States Era," in *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 32.

⁶⁴ *Xunzi jijie* 2.3.23; Goldin, "Reception of the *Odes*," 32.

Structurally, it is instructive to view the distribution of quotes from the *Poems*. Leaving aside chapter 26, which contains five pieces of rhyme-prose (*fu* 賦) and still uses the term *shi* once, in thirty-one remaining chapters of philosophical, political, and doctrinal argumentation, *shi* appears ninety-eight times. The *Poems* are directly quoted eighty-two times; sixteen times they are merely mentioned as the name of the canonical corpus. This number of quotes is significantly higher than the thirty quotes found in *Mencius*, even given the increased length of the *Xunzi*, as noted by Van Zoeren.⁶⁵ Each chapter features at least one citation; the norm is three quotes per chapter. Chapter 8, "An Exhortation to Learning," contains eight quotes. Chapter 27, "The Great Compendium" 大略, contains eleven, but one extended passage preserves five quotes from the *Poems* that are put in the mouth of Confucius, not utilized by Xunzi as part of his argumentation. That the entire passage is lifted from an old text is clear from the fact that Confucius's quotes are introduced with the irregular formula, "The *Poems* state..." (*Shiyun* 詩云), reminiscent of the Zisi chapters in the *Records of Ritualists*. Eliminating these five quotations from the calculus leaves "An Exhortation to Learning" with the largest number of nods to the *Poems*. But out of eight uses of the term *shi*, five of them merely mention the text; only three are quotations that aid the argumentation. Taking into account such a limitation, two chapters tie in the number of meaningful *Shijing* citations: chapter 8, "The Teachings of the *Ru*," contains nine references to the *Poems*, with six being direct citations; chapter 10, "Enriching the State" 富國, includes six quotations from the *Poems*, with not a single stray reference to this classic. Five other chapters include four quotations each, but the norm is three quotes per chapter. This all boils down to two chapters that focus on the central Confucian concerns of learning and teaching, sharing with an important political discourse the distinction of citing the most quotes from or referring the most times to the *Poems*.⁶⁶

It might not be overanalyzing to suggest that this increased attention to the *Poems* reflects the brooding presence of Confucius, as is patently obvious in chapter 27, "The Great Compendium," with its succession of five direct citations of Confucius quoting the *Poems*. The elevated density of references to the *Poems* in the two central pedagogical chapters, "An Exhortation to Learning" and "The

⁶⁵ Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality*, 265n34.

⁶⁶ Kwing-kin Cheng 鄭炯堅, "Xunzi 荀子 (313?-238 BC) 文學研究" (A study of the literary works of Xunzi [313?-238 BC]) (Chinese University of Hong Kong, master's dissertation, 1999), 87-107, analyzes how Xunzi discusses or cites the *Poems*. A convenient table that summarizes the quote or characterization, where it is found in *Xunzi*, and the provenance of each piece in the *Poems* is presented on pages 108-112.

Teachings of the *Ru*," focuses student attention on this foundational text in the original Confucian curriculum over and above the rhetorical role played by cited poems. This would be especially pronounced in "An Exhortation to Learning," with five references to this central classical corpus and three quoted poems. After all, as "The Teachings of the *Ru*" puts it in the traditional formulation, "the *Odes* express the sage's intentions."⁶⁷ Therefore, whenever a poem is quoted or the corpus is mentioned, it naturally animates multiple associations of Confucius, including his embodiment of sagely virtues and his archetypal role for all classical masters.

11.6 The Rites and Classical Masters

Xunzi marks a decisive change in the traditional emphasis in the Confucian educational program. Departing from emphasizing textual mastery through memorization and citation for rhetorical effectiveness, and generic moral cultivation inspired by the classical precedents and historical exemplars, Xunzi places great weight on the performance of the rites and adherence to moral principles, as he explains in "The Teachings of the *Ru*":

The vulgar *Ru* ... follow the model of the Ancient Kings only in a general way, though enough to bring disorder to the age. Having erroneous methods and eclectic learning, they do not realize that they should model themselves on the Later Kings in order to unify the rules and regulations and are unaware that they should exalt ritual and moral principles and give less importance to the *Odes* and *Documents*.

俗人者……略法先王而足亂世術，繆學雜舉，不知法後王而一制度，不知隆禮義而殺詩書。⁶⁸

In conjunction with my earlier analysis of Confucius's teachings on ritual, I argue that the term *liyi* 禮義 should be rendered "rites and their performances." Here John Knoblock translates it as "ritual and moral principles." This change in meaning may reflect the same process of generalization that "benevolence and propriety" (*renyi* 仁義) underwent in the interval after Confucius, until Mencius used the term for generic morality.

The rites figure prominently in Xunzi's readings of the *Poems*. One passage is even suggestive of a linkage of some sort with a text from the southern school of Chu poetics like *Confucius Discourses on the Poems*, a so-called

⁶⁷ Xunzi *jijie* 4.8.84; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 2:76.

⁶⁸ Xunzi *jijie* 4.8.8; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 2:79.

“Commentary”:

Of the eroticism of the “Airs of the States,” the *Commentary* says: “They give satisfaction to the desires men have but do not err in their stopping points. Their sincerity can be compared to metal and stone whose sounds are permitted within the ancestral temple.”

國風之好色也，傳曰：盈其欲而不愆其止。其誠可比於金石，其聲可內於宗廟。小雅不以於汙上，自引而居下，疾今之政以思往者，其言有文焉，其聲有哀焉。⁶⁹

Chen Tongsheng explicitly links up this passage with the sentiment expressed in strip 10 of *Confucius Discourses on the Poems*, which comments on Mao 1 as follows, as already cited earlier in chapter 5: “The eroticism in the ‘Guanju’ is a metaphor for ritual” 關雎以色喻於禮.⁷⁰ Given that Xunzi spent his retirement at Lanling in Chu and often treats the *Poems* from the twin vantage points of ritual and emotions with the emphasis on poetic “intention,” it is entirely to be expected that he was involved in the intellectual activities of the area; whether he was leading or reacting to it is problematic.⁷¹

In Xunzi’s conception of the Confucian educational program, the rites take second place to the teachings of a worthy master:

In learning, no method is of more advantage than to be near a man of learning. The *Rituals* and *Music* present models but do not offer explanations; the *Odes* and *Documents* present matters of antiquity but are not always apposite; the *Annals* are laconic, and their import is not quickly grasped. It is just on these occasions that the man of learning repeats the explanations of the gentleman.

學莫便乎近其人。禮樂法而不說，詩書故而不切，春秋約而不速。方其人之習君子之說。

Of the direct routes to learning, nothing is quicker than devotion to a man of learning. The next best route is exaltation of ritual principles. If you can neither be devoted to a man of learning nor exalt ritual principles, how will you do more than learn

⁶⁹ *Xunzi jijie* 19.27.336; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 3:230.

⁷⁰ Ma Chengyuan, ed., *Shanghai Bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chuzhushu*, 1:139.

⁷¹ Chen Tongsheng, *Kongzi shilun yanjiu*, 213–18 presents a strong case for Xunzi’s connection to the southern school of poetics in Chu as represented by the *Confucius Discourses on the Poems*. He also examines Xunzi’s approach to the *Poems* that is reminiscent of Confucius’s stress on intention.

unordered facts or merely mechanically follow the *Odes* and *Documents*. ... If you would take the Ancient Kings as your source and the principle of humanity and justice as your foundation, then ritual principles will rectify the warp and woof. ... Not being led by the examples of ritual principles while using the *Odes* and *Documents* as the basis of action is like “using a finger to plumb the depth of the Yellow River.”

學之經莫速乎好其人，隆禮次之。上不能好其人，下不能隆禮，安特將學雜識志，順詩書而已耳。則末世窮年，不免為陋儒而已。將原先王，本仁義，則禮正其經緯蹊徑也。若挈裘領，誦五指而頓之，順者不可勝數也。不道禮憲，以詩書為之，譬之猶以指測河也。⁷²

Xunzi’s exaltation of the role of the teacher is due to the teacher’s mastery of the rites and classical learning. In this, the obedience he commands from his disciples is absolute. Even the deference shown to Confucius by his followers did not reach this degree, according to David Elstein arguing against the view of Mark Edward Lewis.⁷³ But his valorizing of the teacher over even ritual principles indicates the profound humanization of the teacher in the learning process. No longer a living embodiment of ancient wisdom and saintly morality connected to the storied lineage of sages, the teacher now is the detached conduit to classical knowledge and ritual behavior divorced from his personal ethical attainments. In other words, he no longer embodies sageliness in his person but merely conveys it in his teaching. This model of the Confucian classical master was eminently approachable and served as the norm for centuries afterward, as book learning was sometimes seen as independent of individual moral attainments. In this, he reverts to the old tradition of classical learning for educational purposes without, however, the expectation of personal sageliness on the part of a classical master.

Xunzi’s comprehensive approach to the rites and their foundational role

⁷² *Xunzi jijie* 1.1.8–10; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1:140–41. For a confirmation of the authenticity of this chapter, see Zhang Xitang 張西堂 (1901–1960), “Xunzi ‘Quanxuepian’ yuanci” 荀子勸學篇冤詞, *Gushibian*, 7 vols. (rprt., Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1982), 6:147–62. A semantic and rhetorical study of this chapter is Tse Shing-ngat 謝承屹, “A Study of Xunzi’s (312–230 BC) ‘Essay on the Enhancement of Learning’” (荀子 [312–230 BC] 勸學篇研究), University of Hong Kong, MA Dissertation, 2009; a refined philosophical analysis is Wang Bo 王博, “Xian-Qin jian” 先秦卷, in *Zhongguo Ruxueshi*, ed. Tang Yijie and Li Zhonghua, 522–28.

⁷³ For both views, see David Elstein, “The Authority of the Master in the *Analects*,” *Philosophy East and West* 59, no. 2 (2009): 142–73.

in Chinese religion, society, and politics, even ethical thinking, comprises a major component of his lasting legacy. It was through his ritual-oriented educational program that he inherited legitimate succession from Confucius and Mencius, something that could not be claimed for any other thinker of the age.⁷⁴

Xunzi derives the importance of the rites and moral principles from the very fact that man's nature is evil. They are part of the necessary contrivances that the sages instituted to overcome this flawed nature and lead man to restrict his desires and order his conduct, as he explains in the opening paragraph of chapter 23, "Man's nature is Evil":

Human nature is evil; any good in human is acquired by conscious exertion. Now, the nature of man is such that he is born with a love of profit. Following this nature will cause its aggressiveness and greed tendencies to grow and courtesy and deference to disappear. Humans are born with feelings of envy and hatred. Indulging these feelings causes violence and crime to develop and loyalty and trustworthiness to perish. Man is born possessing the desires of ears and eyes (which are fond of sounds and colors). ... Thus, it is necessary that man's nature undergo the transforming influence of a teacher and the model and that he be guided by ritual and moral principles. ... Now, since human nature is evil, it must await the instructions of a teacher and the model before it can be put aright, and it must obtain ritual principles and a sense of moral right before it can become orderly.

人之性惡，其善者偽也。今人之性，生而有好利焉，順是，故爭奪生而辭讓亡焉；生而有疾惡焉，順是，故殘賊生而忠信亡焉；生而有耳目之欲，有好聲色焉。... 故必將有師法之化，禮義之道。... 今人之性惡，必將待師法然後正，得禮義然後治。⁷⁵

John Knoblock distills Xunzi's logical grounds for the evil nature of man and the way to overcome this nature down to four arguments, which I further condense: (1) a love of profit is inborn in man; (2) "dislikes and hatreds" are inborn in man; (3) the desires generated by the senses are inborn in man; and (4) ritual and moral principles are not inborn in man; they were created by the sages, and they must

be learned and require effort to master.⁷⁶

Paul R. Goldin poses an unavoidable question: "What does Xunzi mean by these 'rituals,' in concrete terms?" His answer bears quoting:

We know from several passages that Xunzi has specific rituals in mind. ... But with the exception of these rare instances, Xunzi's writings usually presuppose a basic familiarity on the part of the reader with the rituals that he has in mind. Perhaps we may infer that they are similar to the rituals preserved in such compendia as the *Liji* (*Record of Rites*) and *Yili* (*Ceremonies and Rites*), which cover such topics as salutation, sacrifice, courtship, and mourning. Usually, Xunzi takes the rituals as a complete set of moral prescriptions, and he is absolutely convinced of their efficacy.⁷⁷

In a comparative study of the concept of ritual in the thought of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi, Chen Feilong broadly distinguishes their general doctrinal foundations as "humaneness" (*ren* 仁), "rightness" (*yi* 義), and the "rites" (*li*), respectively. Quantitatively, he points out that the word *rites* appears seventy-five times in the *Analects*, sixty-seven times in *Mencius*, and three hundred forty-two times in *Xunzi*.⁷⁸ Therefore, it is not that Confucius and Mencius did not mention rituals, but these religious and familial ceremonies, plus the manifold prescriptions for wider social interaction, were all subordinate to cardinal virtues. Qualitatively, harmony is prized in the *Analects* as social cement, while the rites were used by Xunzi to regulate desires and distribute goods, thus differentiating social strata. Xunzi explains that desires and distribution are the sources of the rites in "Discourse on Ritual Principles" 禮論:

How did ritual principles arise? I say that men are born with desires which, if not satisfied, cannot but lead men to seek to satisfy them. If in seeking to satisfy their desires men observe no measure and apportion things without limits, then it would be impossible for them not to contend over the means to satisfy their desires. Such contention leads to disorder. Disorder leads to poverty. The Ancient Kings abhorred such disorder; so they established the regulations contained within ritual and moral principles in order to apportion things, to nurture the desires of men, and to supply the means for their satisfaction.

⁷⁶ Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 3:141.

⁷⁷ Paul R. Goldin, "Xunzi's Piety," in *Confucian Spirituality*, ed. Tu Weiming and Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 291.

⁷⁸ Chen Feilong, *Kong Meng Xun lixue zhi yanjiu*, 149.

⁷⁴ This is the insight of Chen Feilong 陳飛龍, *Kong Meng Xun lixue zhi yanjiu* 孔孟荀禮學之研究 (Taipei: Wen Shi zhe Chubanshe, 1982), 148.

⁷⁵ *Xunzi jijie* 17.23.289; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 3:150–51.

禮起於何也？曰：人生而有欲，欲而不得，則不能無求。求而無度量分界，則不能不爭；爭則亂，亂則窮。先王惡其亂也，故制禮義以分之，以養人之欲，給人之求。⁷⁹

Chen summarizes Mencius's approach to the rites with the quote from *Mencius* 5B7, in Legge's version: "Now, righteousness is the way, and propriety is the door, but it is only the superior man who can follow this way, and go out and in by this door" 夫義，路也；禮，門也。惟君子能由是路，出入是門也。For Mencius, the rites are the entrance to the moral path towards sageliness; for Xunzi, the rites are the performative path toward social order.

Masayuki Sato includes a survey of the meaning of the rites to Mencius in his magisterial study of the political thought of Xunzi. Mencius generally views them less as rituals than social norms. He even defines ritual as one of the four moral values, along with humaneness, propriety, and wisdom. *Li* is the source of "the mind of yielding" and equivalent to the "mind of modesty and reverence." Viewing ritual as a moral abstraction, explains Sato, allows Mencius to internalize it, along with other virtues. Sato argues that the basis of his political system was "benevolence and righteousness" (my "humaneness and propriety"); not so for Xunzi—it was ritual.⁸⁰ This is expressed most effectively by Xunzi in chapter 15, "Debate on the Principles of Warfare" 議兵:

Where the lord is himself worthy, his country will be well ordered. Where the lord is personally incapable, his country will be anarchic. When he exalts ritual principles and values morality, his country will be well ordered; when he disdains ritual principles and despises morality, his country will be anarchic. What is orderly is strong; what is chaotic, is weak.

君賢者其國治，君不能者其國亂；隆禮貴義者其國治，簡禮賤義者其國亂。治者強，亂者弱。⁸¹

Returning to statistical figures, it is surprising that out of some 343 citations of the term *ritual* (*li*) in *Xunzi* (according to computer tabulation—one more than Chen Feilong found), only six instances refer to a text, and three times *Rites* are associated with the *Poems*, *Documents*, and *Music*.⁸² Only one example quotes from a text: "The treatise *Rituals of Goodwill Missions* says: 'If ceremonial

⁷⁹ *Xunzi jijie* 13.19.231; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 3:55.

⁸⁰ Masayuki Sato, *The Confucian Quest for Order*, 200–8.

⁸¹ *Xunzi jijie* 15.10.179; John Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 2:221.

⁸² Masayuki Sato, *The Confucian Quest for Order*, Appendices 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 tabulate every instance of the term *li* in full linguistic context.

offerings are too rich, it damages moral authority. If displays of wealth are extravagant, ritual principles are destroyed.' Surely in saying 'ritual principles' one means more than offerings of jade and silk!" 聘禮志曰：幣厚則傷德，財侈則殄禮。禮云禮云，玉帛云乎哉！⁸³ This quote is a paraphrase from *Ceremonials and Rites*, chapter 7, "Pinli" 聘禮, 24.6b.⁸⁴ The only other indication of reading a ritual text is from chapter 1, "An Exhortation to Learning," cited earlier. The pertinent line is "Learning—where should it begin and where should it end! I say: Its proper method is to start with the recitation of the classics and conclude with the reading of the *Ritual*." 學惡乎始？惡乎終？曰：其數則始乎誦經，終乎讀禮。⁸⁵ Four other instances occur where Xunzi seems to be paraphrasing a ritual text such as the *Ceremonies and Rites*. Given these few examples and the passages mentioned earlier, where Xunzi describes the rites as a classic, Xunzi teaches ritual by explaining ritual principles instead of explicating ritual texts. In this he is a teacher of ritual, not a textual commentator. His role as teacher is thus considerably strengthened, as *obiter dicta* flow as oral pronouncements, not recalled as canonical citations from memory. This ultimately shifts the locus of authority from the classics to his store of learning as classical master. In short, Xunzi imparts general principles of ritualized morality rather than the specific details of ritualized ceremonies.

A mid-Qing specialist on the rites, Ling Tingkan 凌廷堪 (1757–1809), author of the important compendium on ritual classics *Lijing shili* 禮經釋例, commends Xunzi's ritual-centered teachings. Ling explains Xunzi's understanding of ritual principles and practices with fervent admiration in his "Paean for Xun the Minister, with Preface" 荀卿頌並序.⁸⁶ He first introduces general principles concerning the rites, their derivation from the Duke of Zhou to Confucius, and their importance in ethics. A noteworthy formulation is "Now if one abandons ritual and discusses the Way, this is to speak in vain without any basis; if one only abandons ritual and reverts to human nature, this is to be blind and at a loss as to what to follow" 夫舍禮而言道則空無所附。舍禮而復性則茫然無所從。Next Ling cites Mencius's broad use of the *Poems* and *Documents*, and his neglect of the "ritual classics" (*lijing* 禮經), Mencius merely confessing that he used to hear about them in a general way; and sometimes Mencius's

⁸³ *Xunzi jijie* 19.27.322; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 3:209.

⁸⁴ See Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 3:362n14.

⁸⁵ *Xunzi jijie* 1.1.7; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1:139.

⁸⁶ Ling Tingkan 凌廷堪, *Jiaolitang wenji* 校禮堂文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1998), 10.67–68.

teachings were at variance with the *Rituals*. Ling concludes that Mencius was only able to grasp the "salient points" (*daduan* 大端) of the rites.

Ling's evaluation of Xunzi on the rites continues as follows:

As for the work of Mr. Xun the Minister, what he transmits are all the lost literature on ritual, what he promotes are all the essential meanings of ritual. Hence Mister Dai used them to make his record; Mr. Zheng used them to explicate the classics. His extant chapters are all available, and cannot be calumniated. Now as for when Mr. Meng spoke of humaneness, he invariably extended it via morality; when Mr. Xun spoke of humaneness, he invariably extrapolated its foundation in ritual. ... It is close to the aim of the sage in regulating nature and preventing lasciviousness, and the source of dignity and ceremonies settling mandated destiny. Nevertheless, the regulations and adornments, ritual implements and protocols, are tortuous and vexatious; it is difficult for those who accord with them, and easy for those who avoid them. Those who are fond of them are few, while those who deliberate over them are numerous. Thereupon Mr. Xun gradually devalued the way of human nature and at first grounded himself in vapidness, regarding humanness as an unfathomable entity, distant and dark. ... Still, we know that the learning of Mr. Xun does not contravene that of sages. Men of later ages venerate Mencius and denigrate Xunzi; but don't they thereby place themselves outside of the rites and models? My "Paeon" states ...

Ling Tingkan proceeds with his paeon, thirty-six lines of quadrisyllabic verses. I start *in medias res* and include a number of relevant lines:

卓哉荀卿	Eminent indeed was Xun the Minister,
取法後王	Taking later kings as his model.
取法後王	He composed his work in Lanling,
儒術以昌	And Confucian learning thereby flourished.
本禮言性	Based on ritual he preached about humanness,
厥性乃復	Human nature was thereupon restored.
...	
韓氏有言	Mr. Han had a saying,
大醇小疵	"Pure in the main points but flawed in details."
不學群起	Those who ignored his learning rose up en masse,
萬聲詬之	Denouncing him, a myriad voices.
孟曰性善	Mencius said nature is good,

荀曰性惡	Xunzi said nature is evil.
折衷至聖	Compromising these positions is the utmost in sageliness,
其理非鑿	This reasoning is not far-fetched.
善固上智	Good inherently is wisdom about heavenly things,
惡亦下愚	And evil itself is ignorance about the mundane.
各成一是	Each forms a unified truth—
均屬大儒	Equally according with great Confucians.
...	
史遷合傳	The history of Sima Qian combined them in one biography,
垂之千年	Extending them over a thousand years.
敬告後人	I respectfully announce to men of later times:
毋岐視焉	Do not differentiate ⁸⁷ in how you regard them. ⁸⁸

11.7 Conclusions

To close, let me again quote similar but earlier sentiments from Han Yu, this time his essay "Explanation for Advancing Learning" 進學解:

Formerly, Meng Ke was fond of disputation, and the way of Confucius was thereby clarified. He always wandered around the entire world; and died in old age during his travels. Xun the Minister held fast to the orthodox, and rose up due to his great disquisitions.⁸⁹ While fleeing he was slandered in Chu; and was dismissed and died at Lanling. These two Ruists spouted terminology to explain the classics; what they cited was sufficient to serve as models. They were unique in their types and stood out from their peers. Their superiority enabled them to enter the city of the sages.

昔者孟軻好辯，孔道以明。輒環天下，卒老于行。荀卿守正，大論是弘。逃讒于楚，廢死蘭陵。是二儒者，吐辭為經，舉足為法。絕類離倫，優入聖域。⁹⁰

It turns out that, before the fog of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy socked in the intellectual landscape for centuries, Han Yu granted Xunzi the status of a Confucian sage; and Ling Tingkan, after the haze had completely lifted, considered him as halfway there. Perhaps modern scholars will come to perceive

⁸⁷ Reading 岐 as an archaism for 歧.

⁸⁸ Ling Tingkan, *Jiaoli tang wenji*, 10.67–68.

⁸⁹ Reading 以興 for 是弘, per the modern editor.

⁹⁰ Ma Tongbo, ed., *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, 1.27.

this sagely quality in him, given the increasing attention Xunzi's work enjoys today.

Ultimately, Xunzi enshrined the authority of the classical master at the apex of learning, and grounded the curriculum in the ritual theory. Not until the career of Zhu Xi during the Song dynasty would a Confucian master enjoy the same degree of eminence for both canonical erudition and mastery of ritual. Xunzi's transmission of much of the textual legacy of the Classics helped conduct Confucian learning through to the Han dynasty; and it was during this extended era of imperial unity, political stability, and economic vigor that the discipline of classical scholarship gradually took form. Because he bathed all his teachings in the ambient light of ritual orthodoxy, his legacy was as much socio-religious as it was scholarly, twin legacies that truly molded the tradition as inherited by the Han dynasty.

Epilogue

During the course of Gu Yanwu's 顧炎武 (1613–1682) long career as an itinerant scholar, he toured Shandong province in the spring of 1658 when he was 45 years old.¹ Along with climbing Mount Tai and visiting the tombs of the Duke of Zhou and Mencius, he paid homage at Confucius's former dwelling in Qufu, Shandong. All these activities resulted in poems.

Successive renovations under imperial sponsorship over the centuries had turned Confucius's dwelling into a spacious temple complex with capacious grounds. Gu's poem records the impressions of his tour of the site and the feelings generated by his thoughts of the sage. His poem nicely embodies the traditional veneration accorded Confucius, elegantly encapsulates the historical heritage bequeathed to later ages, and serves as an apt and effective conclusion to this book:

謁夫子廟 “Visiting The Master's Temple”²

1 道統三王 His contributions to the Unity of the Way was as great as
大, the three kings,³

功超二帝 His merit exceeded the Two Emperors in excellence.⁴
優。

斯文垂象 He bequeathed “this culture” through his commentaries on
繫, the *Changes*—⁵

吾志在春 “My intentions are preserved in the *Spring and Autumn*
秋。 *Annals*.”⁶

¹ Xu Jia 徐嘉 (1834–1913) ed., *Gu Tinglin xiansheng shipu* 顧亭林先生詩譜 (Guangxu period [1875–1908 ed.]), in *Gu Tinglin xiansheng nianpu sanzong* 顧亭林先生年譜三種 (Beijing: Beijing Tushuguan Chubanshe, 1997), 8a.

² Wang Quchang 王蘊常 (1900–1989) and Wu Pixu 吳丕績, eds., *Gu Tinglin shiji huizhu* 顧亭林詩集匯注, 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2006), 1:560–65.

³ The “three kings” mentioned are the dynastic founders Yu, Tang, and Wen.

⁴ Yao and Shun are the two emperors.

⁵ An allusion to *Analects* 9.5, in which Confucius claims that “this culture” of King Wen is preserved in himself.

⁶ A quote from He Xiu's 何休 (129–182) preface to the *Gongyang zhuan*, 1a: “Anciently, Confucius stated that ‘My intention is preserved in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.’”

- 5 車服先公 His chariot and ritual clothing accord with the requirements of the Duke of Zhou, 制, 威儀弟子 His dignity and deportment were cultivated by his disciples.⁷ 修。 宅聞絲竹 In his residence was heard the sounds of strings and woodwinds, 聲, 壁有簡編 In his wall remained bamboo manuscripts.⁸ 留。
- 9 俎豆傳千 His ritual vessels were handed down over thousands of ages, 葉, 章逢被九 His cap and gown covered the Nine Provinces.⁹ 州。 獨全兵火 Only the temple remains from the time of ravaging troops, 代, 不籍廟堂 But they did not plot to use the temple hall.¹⁰

⁷ Lines 5 and 6 are indebted to Sima Qian's account of his visit to Confucius's temple in Qufu, as preserved in the "appraisal" to chapter 47 in his biography of Confucius: "When I went to Lu, I observed the chariot, clothing, and ritual paraphernalia in the hall of Zhongni's temple. His various pupils from time to time practiced in order to ritually honor his school" 適魯，觀仲尼廟堂車服禮器，諸生以時習禮其家 (p. 1947).

⁸ *Hanshu* 53.2414 records the context of this incident, treated over lines 7 and 8: "Initially King Gong 恭王 of Lu (d. 128 BC) was fond of building chambers onto his palace; he was demolishing Confucius' former residence in order to expand his palace. But he heard the sounds of bells and chimes, lutes and zithers. Subsequently he did not dare demolish it. In a wall he found old classics and commentaries in the old script."

⁹ "Cap and gown" 章逢, is short for *zhangfu* 章甫, "black cloth cap," and *fengye* 逢掖, "long-sleeved garments." It alludes to a passage in the "Confucian Conduct" 儒行 chapter of the *Records of Ritualists* (*Liji zhengyi*, 59.1a, trans. Legge, *Li Chi*, 2:402): "Duke Ai of Lu asked Confucius, saying, 'Is not the dress, Master, which you wear that of the scholar?' Confucius replied, 'When I was little, I lived in Lu, and wore the garment with large sleeves; when I was grown up, I lived in Song, and was then capped with the *zhangfu* cap. I have heard that the studies of the scholar are extensive, but his dress is that of the state from which he sprang. I do not know any dress of the scholar.'" Legge notes that this cap was characteristic of Shang clothing, worn by Confucius's ancestors when they settled in the state of Song.

¹⁰ Traditional commentator Huang Jie 黃節 (1874–1935) mentions that Gu visited the temple shortly after pillaging Qing troops had passed through the area, though the

- 謀。
- 13 老檜當庭 The old junipers bloomed in the courtyard,¹¹ 發, 清洙繞墓 The pure Zhu river wound around the tomb. 流。 一來瞻闕 Coming to tour Que Quarter,¹² 里, 如得與重 Was like being able to travel with him again. 遊。

What is especially relevant to this book is Gu's frequent affirmation of the ritual comportment, ritual implements, and ritual clothing that helped form Confucius's legacy to posterity. In Gu's view, Confucius is not merely the greatest molder and intellectual transmitter of a body of ethical teachings of incalculable influence on his own world view, the mythic "unity of the way"; nor is he solely the scholar-editor of the classics that informed this ethical tradition. For Gu, Confucius is the living exemplar of ritual behavior, the "dignity and deportment" that was transmitted through praxis and precept to his disciples. It was this combination of all three that made Confucius the sage that he was.

Yet Gu had another hero, the historian Sima Qian, whose own encomium of Confucius was appended to his biography of the sage in the *Records of the Historian*. I cite it here as the thematic backdrop in prose to Gu's poetic praise, ultimately bringing the conclusion of this work back around to Confucius the classicist:

The Grand Historian said, "The *Poems* include the lines 'The high hill is looked up to; / The great road is easy to be travelled

troops did not offer sacrifices in the temple to plot to legitimize their actions. *Gu Tinglin shiji huizhu*, 1:564.

¹¹ According to a local gazetteer, the *Quli zhi* 闕里志, Confucius himself planted three juniper trees. They were called regenerating junipers, for they died off during the Jin dynasty, only to regenerate during the Sui. They died again about 60 years later during the early Tang dynasty, only to spring to life again during the Song in the mid-eleventh century. During the Jin dynasty, the trees were burned by invading troops. In the Yuan, tiny shoots emerged in the ruins of a side building that were transplanted to the original sites of the three trees. *Gu Tinglin shiji huizhu*, 1:564–65.

¹² "Que Quarter" was the name of the area of the town in which Confucius's residence was located. The *Family Sayings of Confucius* identifies this location as the site where Confucius taught his students. *Kongzi jiaoyu*, 9.89.

on.”¹³ Although he was unable to achieve this,¹⁴ his heart was inclined towards it. When I read the books of Mr. Kong, I wished to see what sort of man he was. Travelling to Lu, I observed the chariot, clothing, and ritual vessels in the hall of the temple of Zhongni. His various pupils were on occasion practicing to ritually honor his lineage. I tarried there in reverence, among other emotions, and could not leave. The ruling kings in the world who have reached the status of worthies can be numbered by the hosts. During their times they were honored; but after death they were no longer remembered. Confucius was a commoner, yet his fame has been transmitted over ten and more generations. Scholars regard him as their intellectual ancestor. From the Son of Heaven down to kings and marquises, when those in China discourse on the Six Classics, they take the master's views as correct;¹⁵ he may be termed the utmost in sageliness.

太史公曰：詩有之：高山仰止，景行行止。雖不能至，然心鄉往之。余讀孔氏書，想見其為人。適魯，觀仲尼廟堂車服禮器，諸生以時習禮其家，余祇迴留之不能去云。天下君王至于賢人眾矣，當時則榮，沒則已焉。孔子布衣，傳十餘世，學者宗之。自天子王侯，中國言六藝者折中於夫子，可謂至聖矣！

¹³ *Shijing zhengyi*, 14b.15b; Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 4:393. Legge further comments that the lesson to be drawn from this poem is the “earnest pursuit of virtue” (p. 395).

¹⁴ Sima Qian is only supporting Confucius in his own assertion that he has not attained to the stature of a man of humaneness.

¹⁵ Wang Yi 王逸 (89–158), the Eastern Han commentator on the *Chuci*, takes *zhezong* 折中 in the sense of “to correct” when it appears in the “Lisao”; quoted in the *Suoyin* 索隱 commentary of Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (679–732). *Shiji* 47.1947.

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