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# Introduction

This work addresses the development of four models of authorship in relation to the formation of early Chinese texts to facilitate the understanding of the nature of this textual corpus.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the familiar Greek example of Herodotus, early Chinese texts as manifested in newly excavated writings on wood and bamboo strips do not typically contain clear indications of authorship.<sup>2</sup> Currently available information demonstrates that explicit identification of the author in the text was not a matter of concern in early China: there was no explicit Herodotean “seal” of authorship heading texts, nor was there typically any traditional attribution. Only during the late Warring States period and the Western Han dynasty—roughly the second half of the first millennium BC and the subsequent century—did political stability and the professionalization of scholarly culture make possible new efforts to bring order to the corpus of received texts. For many texts this movement led to the retrospective attribution of a legendary or historical author.

The present monograph identifies and investigates four models of attributed authorship, and outlines the functions associated with each. The first authorship model is that of the cultural hero, demonstrated through the figure of the Yellow Emperor and the texts attributed to him. The next is that of the author as the head of a teaching lineage, as demonstrated by the revered Confucius and the *Analects*. The third is that of the author as a scholarly patron, such as Liu An, his scholar-

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1 Although the term authorship usually denotes the source, such as the author, of a piece of writing, music, or art, in this work it is limited to the discussion of the corpus of early Chinese literary writing. It in this sense excludes the investigation of music, art, or even early Chinese writings for administrative purposes. In a modern-day dictionary, the authorship of a piece of writing usually means the identity of its writer, and this concept used to be projected as a useful tool to discuss the date or authenticity of early writings. This study endeavors to prove that such projection mostly operates anachronistically and the author concept should be understood differently. Nevertheless, the term author or authorship in its modern-day definition still appears in the main text of this monograph not only for the purpose of making comparisons, but also for the necessity of arguing against it. A more detailed discussion of the concepts of author and authorship will be found throughout Chapter One.

2 *The Histories* by Herodotus may be the most famous example of this sort. It states: “Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvelous deeds—some displayed by Greeks, some by barbarians—may not be without their glory; and especially to show why the two peoples fought with each other.” Herodotus 2003: 1.

clients, and the *Huainanzi*. Finally, there is the model of the individual author, as demonstrated through Sima Qian and the *Shiji*. My discussion and categorization, then, of how order was brought to what had been, in pre-imperial times, a vast and chaotic repository of textual exchange, through the invention and application of models of attribution, will demonstrate how the concept of authorship became useful to both scholars and rulers. The selection of works considered in this investigation is meant to facilitate the establishment of a pre-history for authorship, textual production, and bibliographic work that would characterize China's long literary history. Additionally, this study aims to reveal the in-depth socio-political infrastructure, ritual-religious developments, and dynamics of the relationship between rulers and scholars, the cultural matrix accordingly embedding the development of the function of authorship.

For further clarification, I consider the convention of using authorship as a hermeneutical device for interpreting early Chinese writings. As seen in the *Documents* (*Shu* 書) and the "Greater Preface" (*Daxu* 大序) to the *Odes* (*Shi* 詩), the postulation of authorial intent began to play a significant role in the hermeneutics of Chinese literature quite early.<sup>3</sup> As part of the age-old interpretive tradition associated with authorial intent, interpreting early Chinese writings through an author's biographical information has remained a steady focus of scholarship even down to the present day. While this work explores authorial intent in its first chapter, its focus is on the attribution of authorship, its function, and how such attribution could influence the interpretation of the text.

As such, the thesis of this work is as follows: by investigating the above-mentioned four models of authorship in early Chinese literature, this work demonstrates how the notion of author functioned as the key to classifying, preserving, and interpreting a body of ancient knowledge. An examination of the various types of authorship exemplified in the creation, circulation, categorization, and function of early Chinese texts shows that, for early Chinese scholars, the attributed author was crucial to the body of knowledge incorporated in texts. The author not only served as a foundation upon which different elements of knowledge were brought together, conceptually and materially manifested in a text, but also furnished cues to the interpretation of composite texts and thus created a notional coherence in texts that might otherwise have been in danger of disintegrating into disconnected fragments in the reader's apprehension. On a deeper level, the inquiry into these four models of authorship also sheds light on the ritual, religious, and sociopolitical contexts influencing authorial attributions and how such attributions are associated with early Chinese intellectual

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3 *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 1.6; *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義 3.79.

history. As an historical phenomenon, especially during the Western Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 8), the connotations associated with authorship not only played a role in legitimizing the Han empire by connecting it to mythicized and politicized narratives, but also provided a lens through which we see how early Chinese intellectuals reconfigured their role and expressed themselves in the new and coercive model of imperial government.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis may be further illustrated via a comparison with what Mark E. Lewis and Alexander Beecroft have accomplished in their research on authorship in early Chinese writings. A thesis of Lewis's *Writing and Authority in Early China* is that

the ultimate importance of writing to the Chinese empire and imperial civilization did not derive from its administrative role. Rather the Chinese empire, including its artistic and religious versions, was based on an imaginary realm created within texts. These texts, couched in an artificial language above the local world of spoken dialects, created a model of society against which actual institutions were measured.<sup>5</sup>

To prove this thesis, Lewis examines a considerable number of early Chinese texts within a neatly structured scheme, clearly outlined by his carefully arranged chapter titles.<sup>6</sup> My purpose here is not to dispute Lewis's thesis; rather, I frequently find his statements on author and authorship in early Chinese writings useful for provoking questions and framing discussions.

Although not the main focus of Lewis's work, the authorship of early Chinese texts constitutes a meaningful part of his argument, as seen in his discussions on the function of the author as the master, such as Confucius, and the attribution of the "Lisao" 離騷 (Encountering the Sorrow) to Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 339–278 BC). In the chapter "Writing the Masters," taking the *Analects* as the example, Lewis points out that "the text, the master, and the disciples were inextricably bound together," because these textual collections of quotations obtained authority from the supposed wisdom of the masters, who in turn derived their authority

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<sup>4</sup> Here and elsewhere in this work, the word "intellectual" does not have its contemporary connotation originating in the *intelligentsiya* of Tsarist Russia, a social class of educated people that arose in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, or its counterparts the German *Bildungsbürgertum* or the French *bourgeoisie éclairée*, generally termed the enlightened middle classes. I use this word mostly in its plural form denoting a group or groups of educated men studying and thinking with a degree of complexity. See Williams 1983: 169–171.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis 1999: 4.

<sup>6</sup> Although using a different method, Yuri Pines reaches a similar conclusion in his recently published monograph. Cf. Pines 2009 and Lewis 1999.

from the presence of the disciples who produced the texts.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the master as the author became the source of authority. Such authority, as Lewis acknowledges throughout his monograph, asserts that it is the masters rather than the rulers who should “be the unique holders of the secrets of kingship” and as such the masters “claimed the ability to define the monarch and dictate his policies.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the authority claimed by the masters through the texts attributed to them constituted a challenge to political authority.

The function of an individual master as the author, however, was secondary to the importance of his writing following the emergence of the essay and dialogical forms of philosophical writing toward the late Warring States period.<sup>9</sup> The shift from collecting quotations to writing essays and dialogues between rulers and masters, Lewis argues, suggests that textual transmission superseded teaching as the primary motive for philosophical writing. During this time, when authority became connected to an all-encompassing knowledge, the name of any particular master to whom a tradition of texts was attributed now became a symbol marking the deficiency and limitations of his philosophy.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the appearance of a master as an author of texts from which his disciples are missing, Lewis argues, inevitably leads to the “disappearance” of that master as a fundamental textual authority. And it was at this moment that the authorship in Chinese philosophical writing emerged.<sup>11</sup>

Another discussion on authorship in Lewis’s work involves the relationship between the *Chu ci* 楚辭 (*Songs of Chu*) and Qu Yuan. According to Lewis, the Han dynasty compilation of the *Chu ci* anthology and its identification of Qu Yuan as the author of the “Lisao” began the tradition in which the prominence of Qu Yuan’s authorship dominates the interpretation of the *Chu ci*. Even now, many pieces in this anthology are read as Qu Yuan’s compositions and accordingly interpreted as a reflection of Qu Yuan’s political life: the loyal, virtuous minister who falls victim to the slander of his political enemies. Qu Yuan, according to Lewis, was acknowledged as “the first author to be identified for an individual, poetic voice, and as such became the archetype for later Chinese poets.”<sup>12</sup> Lewis sees this model not only as the precursor for writing as an expression of individual virtues in Chinese literature, but also as “a mode of sociability between like-

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7 Lewis 1999: 58.

8 Lewis 1999: 73.

9 Lewis 1999: 62–63.

10 Lewis 1999: 62, 332–36.

11 Lewis 1999: 63, 97.

12 Lewis 1999: 186.

minded individuals” and “a model for the later, author-based anthology.”<sup>13</sup> In short, the significance of Qu Yuan as an author is a result of his authorial invention by Han readers.

Whereas Lewis highlights the connection of authorship to authority and individual voice, Alexander Beecroft sees authorship as the means through which the transformation of literary systems can be traced.<sup>14</sup> Inspired by Sheldon Pollock’s analysis of Sanskrit literature, Beecroft crafts a model of literary transformation involving multiple phases through which literary texts are circulated, prestige is transmitted, and both the text and prestige are linked to their corresponding political and cultural power.<sup>15</sup> By examining how verbal art and textual performance were transformed in the first three phases, i.e., the epichoric (local), the panchoric (cultural), and the cosmopolitan (political), both in early Greece and in early China, Beecroft argues that a series of cultural and political assimilations occurred moving from the local level to the broader cultural and political spheres. These assimilations finally led to the appearance of the “scene of authorship,” a sort of textual performance that took the place of verbal art and enabled the formerly epichoric or panchoric texts to retain their authority and constitution even as they were shared in wider settings.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the epichoricity—which stressed a tradition of performance in the cases of both ancient Greece and China—of a given text was subdued, normalized, and potentially reassembled to serve the construction of the notion of a state, an empire, or the world. As a result, the birth of the author, in Beecroft’s words, “is at once the death of performance and the emergence of a cultural world empire, a marker of a given literature’s capacity to generate meaning far beyond and long after the creation of its central texts.”<sup>17</sup>

While these works inspire my study, my research emphasizes a different aspect of authorship. As Beecroft admits, the major concern of his research is the stories of the authors pertaining to textual interpretation; the construction of text is excluded from his discussion. My interests, however, include the situations under which early Chinese texts were produced and transmitted, as well as how the attributed author functioned in this process. The formation and transmission of texts constitute a significant piece of the study of the development of authorship. Certainly, theoretical trends since the 1960s have dealt a death-blow to the

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**13** Lewis 1999: 193.

**14** Beecroft 2010: 282.

**15** Beecroft 2010: 5.

**16** Beecroft 2010: 284–286.

**17** Beecroft 2010: 286.

author by defining him as a textual property and consequently putting him in an empty position.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, an interpretive framework focusing on authorial intent emerged fairly early and has exerted tremendous influence on Chinese literary interpretation.<sup>19</sup> The issue of authorship, although tied with the interpretation of text, deserves a close examination for its own sake.

In comparison with Lewis's interest in the author's expression of authority and individual voice via literature, my work focuses on the historical and material manifestation of the notion of authorship. Recent discoveries have no doubt enriched our understanding of the development of early Chinese writings in terms of their form, content, and function.<sup>20</sup> These discoveries link this study to the historical context in which the author was situated. Here I follow Donald F. McKenzie's argument that the form of a text defines its reading and that a change in form affects its meaning.<sup>21</sup> Our understanding of expressions of authority and individual voice in transmitted literature, therefore, must also be connected to the conditions responsible for the forming and re-forming of early texts as well as the conditions behind the development of a concept of authorship inseparable from the arrangement of texts in their many forms.

In short, this subject is characterized by a focus on the formation and function of early Chinese authorship and the noticeable influence of a text's material form on its literary interpretation. In other words, this project explores the early history of Chinese text making and interpretation by understanding the emergence and development of the concept of authorship. The major period covered in this study is often referred to as "early China," a vague term used for convenience to refer to the Eastern Zhou (770–221 BC), the Qin (221–206 BC), and the Western Han periods. This period witnessed how early Chinese texts evolved from brief single *pian* to more voluminous units, how pedagogical use of texts expanded from royal and aristocratic families to the classes of lower elite, how texts were collected by local nobles and the imperial library, and how texts could serve a range of functions, from talismanic to ideological. The creation, dissemination, and application of writings not only made Chinese history more recognizable and readable, but also made such reading more interesting and meaningful.

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**18** Barthes 2002; Owen 2006: 7; Beecroft 2010: 16–20.

**19** Zhang Longxi 張隆溪 1992: 133–146. I will return to this point later in this introduction.

**20** Among the numerous recent discoveries, the Guodian 郭店 and Mawangdui 馬王堆 texts serve as two excellent examples in this regard. For the texts excavated from these two places, see Jingmen Shi Bowuguan 荊門市博物館 1998; Hunan Sheng Bowuguan 湖南省博物館 and Fudan Daxue Chutu Wenxian yu Guwenzi Yanjiu Zhongxin 復旦大學出土文獻與古文字研究中心, 2014.

**21** McKenzie 1999.

In addition to the issues surrounding the formation and transmission of early texts, early Chinese authorship is complicated by the fact that it has various manifestations in different social and historical contexts. Inevitably its full richness cannot be thoroughly studied and presented in a single project. The four types of authorship this work focuses on are carefully chosen not only for their being representative in reflecting the complexity of early authorial attribution, but also for a sense of the history of early Chinese authorship as reconstructed through the examination of these four models. Each model is illustrated by examining an author and a text attributed to him. Each study will offer answers to long-standing questions regarding the authorship and the formation of a specific text. Additionally, it is my hope that each study may provide a guide for understanding similar cases, and that all four studies will prove helpful in explaining how the concept of the author formed, and how texts may be understood through the author's relation to early Chinese text formation and transmission.

Chapter One sets up a framework for the discussion of the four case studies. While making a condensed introduction to the concept of the author and its development over time in the context of Western literary trends, this chapter establishes early Chinese authors in connection with newly discovered early texts written on wood or bamboo strips. It also examines how authorial intent functioned in the *bianwei* 辨偽 (identifying the fakes) tradition as a key part of its methodology.

Chapter Two discusses the Yellow Emperor as an example of the type of authorship that views the author as a cultural hero. It begins with a description and analysis of the types of works attributed to the Yellow Emperor in the “Yiwen zhi” 藝文志 chapter of the *Hanshu* 漢書. It then answers the following three questions in relation to various intellectual, religious, and political discourses: (1) Why was the Yellow Emperor excluded from the Confucian Classics? (2) Why do the majority of the Yellow Emperor's writings concern methods, calculations, recipes, and techniques? (3) Why has the Yellow Emperor received significantly more textual attributions than any other cultural hero?

I suggest that the answers to all three questions are associated with the argument that the figure of the Yellow Emperor was forged out of Eastern Zhou ritual and religious thought that bears the mark of the ancestral veneration of great antiquity while also reflecting the concerns of the changing social realities of the time. At the end of this chapter, I also discuss the debate on the authorship of the newly excavated text from Mawangdui Tomb 3, the “Huangdi sijing” 黃帝四經 (Four Classics by the Yellow Emperor) from the perspective of early Chinese text formation and transmission.

Chapter Three focuses on Confucius (551–479 BC), the “quotable” author portrayed in the *Lunyu* 論語, or *The Analects*, to explore the type of author regarded



as the head of a teaching lineage. It begins by addressing the ongoing debate in mainland China on Li Ling's reading of the *Lunyu*, in which he identifies Confucius "as exile and marginal, as amateur, and as the author of a language that tries to speak truth to power,"<sup>22</sup> a *de facto* reading against the influential convention that views Confucius as a sage, and, thus, the *Lunyu* as the collection of the sage's wise words. To explain why Confucius has been understood as a sage, this chapter links the sanctification of Confucius to the Early Western Han. In an attempt to reconstruct the history of the *Lunyu*'s formation and transmission, this chapter argues that the written materials later incorporated into the *Lunyu* originally served different purposes and were interpreted as such in differing contexts. The compilation of the *Lunyu* in the early Western Han was concomitant with the trend of elevating and mythicizing Confucius as the creator of the Han governmental ideology, as he filled the need for a tangible, quotable authority.

Chapter Four examines the type of author identified as a patron, with the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 and its owner-author Liu An 劉安 (179–122 BC) provided as an example. Liu An has long been considered the author of the *Huainanzi*. He is said to have established the overall design of the compilation, written parts of the text, and composed and presented the postface, the "Yaolüe" 要略 (Summary of the Essentials) chapter of the *Huainanzi*, to the Han imperial court, although his precise role in fashioning the text is uncertain. By examining the remaining sources documenting Liu An and the *Huainanzi*—including the *Hanshu* accounts, Gao You's 高誘 (fl. 205–210 AD) annotations and commentaries, and related archaeological finds on early Chinese writings—and the development and function of early Chinese postface writing, this chapter argues that the "Yaolüe" was composed after Liu An's death as a means to impart a cohesive unity to those writings left from Liu An's Huainan court. It further explores the significant role of patronage as represented by the compilation of the *Huainanzi*, the nature of this type of authorship, as well as the relationship between the patron-author and the actual writers or compilers.

Chapter Five explores the concept of the author as an individual writer via Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145/135–86 BC). This chapter begins with an examination of the *Shiji* interpretation which places it in a framework stressing the authorial voice as a vent for individual frustration. This interpretive strategy rests upon the assumption that the *Shiji* postface, known as the "Grand Historian's Self-Narration" (*Taishigong zixu* 太史公自序), and the "Letter in Response to Ren An" (*Bao Ren An shu* 報任安書), another "autobiographical" piece of literature, were indeed written by Sima Qian. Nevertheless, a careful reading of both accounts reveals

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22 Said 1994: xvi.

the possibility that neither was written by Sima Qian himself, and that the voice of frustration should be understood as the collective voice of the Han intellectuals. It also shows that epistolary writing developed as a form for Han writers to convey their dissent without risk of public exposure by hiding themselves behind a pseudonym. This function was closely associated with the centralized power of the newly established imperial system that diminished an individual's voice in civil service when compared with the Eastern Zhou's multi-centered political structure and its looser social control.

In conclusion, this work considers the physical form of manuscripts and the formation of authorship as key approaches to advance new understanding of early Chinese texts. Each chapter addresses specific issues that have been widely studied for centuries, each chapter challenges previous scholarship by adding new evidence to the argument and offering new interpretations of old information, each chapter aims to find new solutions to old questions from different and more meaningful perspectives. Put together, hopefully these chapters form a group of examples strong and inspiring enough to present a more effective way of viewing and understanding early Chinese texts, and “raise one corner” (*ju yiyu* 舉一隅)<sup>23</sup> to facilitate more comprehensive and systematic studies of this sort in the future.

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23 *Lunyu zhushu* 論語註疏 7.87.