

## Dual Authorship in Shǐ Jì 63

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**Abstract.** The Shǐ Jì (SJ) is the source for much of what we think we know about early China. But which parts were written by Sǐmǎ Tán 司馬談 and which by his ideologically distinct son Chyēn 遷? I here consider the Hán Fēi portion of SJ 63, where both authors seem to be present. I conclude that Tán and Chyēn can indeed be distinguished, and that it will aid our understanding of the text to make that distinction.

**SJ 63** contains two pairs of accounts: first Lǎudž 老子 and Jwāngdž 莊子, then Shǔn Bù-hài 申不害 and Hán Fēi 韓非. Two authors seem present in the Hán Fēi section. For each statement in the following summary, I attempt to identify a source. Most sources turn out to be the Hán Fēidž 韓非子 (HFZ) text; they are guesses such as we ourselves could have made. If there is no probable source, or if a statement conflicts with others which *do* have probable sources, that statement is given in **bold**.

1. Hán Fēi was a son of the ruler of Hán.

*This need be no more than a reasonable guess from the name Hán.*

2. He liked to study syíng-míng 形名, fǎ 法, and shù 數, but his basic affinity was to Hwáng/Lǎu 黃 / 老.

*Probably inferred from the HFZ, which uses the three political theory terms, and which also includes two separate Lǎudž commentaries, HFZ 20-21.*

3. Fēi stuttered, and couldn't express himself verbally, but was good at writing.

*For the stutter, see HFZ 3. For the best writing in the HFZ, see #9 below.*

4. **With Lǐ Sǐ he studied under Syǔn Chīng. Sǐ felt he was not Fēi's equal.**

*This returns to the topic of #2, and thus is out of sequence. It also conflicts with #2: Syǔndž did not teach those doctrines. It is unsupported: Lǐ Sǐ is mentioned as a disciple in the Syǔndž writings (see SZ 15), but Hán Fēi is not, nor does the Lǐ Sǐ account in SJ 87 mention Fēi as a fellow student. The statement is highly dubious.*

5. Fēi saw that the state of Hán was declining, and often remonstrated in writing with the King of Hán, but the King was unable to accept his advice.

*The supposed remonstrances are contained in the HFZ; see below.*

6. Hán Fēi faulted the government for its inattention to laws and institutions, to enriching the state and strengthening the army, and to rewarding merit.

*These policy emphases agree with #2. The probable source is the HFZ; see #7-8.*

7. He considered that the Confucians, in emphasizing civil culture, disordered the laws . . . “When times are easy, they show favor to people of reputation; when times are urgent, they call for soldiers. What they advocate is not what they can use; what they actually use is not what they advocate.”

*This quote from HFZ 49 opposes Syǔndž, who believed in civil culture. It conflicts with the idea (in the dubious #4) that Hán Fēi had been a student of Syǔndž.*

8. He grieved that honesty and candor were not countenanced by the dissolute ministers, and . . . wrote Lonely Frustration 孤憤, Five Maggots 五蠱, Inner and Outer Sayings 內外儲說, Forest of Persuasions 說林, and Difficulty of Persuasion 說難, amounting in all to more than ten myriad characters.

*These chapters are HFZ 11, 49, 30-35, 22-23, and 12. Their total count is 40,692, so “more than 100,000” must refer to the entire HFZ (111,914 characters).*

9. Fēi knew the difficulty of persuading a ruler; in his Difficulty of Persuasion he described it in detail. In the end, he died in Chín, and was not himself able to evade that difficulty. [The Difficulty of Persuasion is quoted at this point].

*The “Difficulty” is HFZ 12. The implication is that Fēi’s attempt at persuasion failed, and he was executed. HFZ 2 implies a pro-Hán mission for Fēi in Chín.*

**10. Someone took his writings to Chín. When the King of Chín saw the Lonely Frustration and the Five Maggots, he said “Ah, if I could only manage to meet this person, I could die without regret.”**

*No known source. The wish to meet an earlier person after seeing their writings is a topos which also appears in the account of Sǎmǎ Syàng-rú (SJ 117).*

**11. Lǐ Sǎ said, “These are writings by Hán Fēi.”**

*Sǎ will later conspire to have Fēi executed. All he need do here, to keep the King from meeting Fēi in the first place, is to hold his peace. Inconsistent with next.*

12. Chín made a surprise attack on Hán. The King of Hán had not employed Fēi, but in this emergency he made him an envoy to Chín. The King of Chín was pleased with him, but did not trust him enough to employ him.

*Can be inferred from HFZ 2. This is inconsistent with the unsupported #10-11.*

13/13a. Lǐ Sǎ and Yáú Jyǎ regarded him as a threat, and slandered him saying, “Hán Fēi is a descendant of the Hán ruling house . . . he will in the end support Hán and not Chín . . . But if the King does not employ him, and after keeping him for a time sends him back, it is merely bequeathing a problem to the future. It would be better to punish him . . . The King of Chín assented to this, and sent officials to arrest Fēi.

*Jàn-gwó Tsv̄ (JGT) 113 tells how Hán Fēi’s attempt to slander Yáú Jyǎ backfired, and he was himself executed. #13a makes Yáú a wrongful accuser. #13 conflicts with the role of Lǐ Sǎ in the dubious #11, but is compatible with the rest of SJ 63.*

14. Lǐ Sǎ had someone take poison to Fēi so he could commit suicide. Fēi sought to make a defense, but could not gain an audience. The King later regretted his action and sent someone to grant a pardon, but Fēi was dead.

*Betrayal by a fellow student is another SJ topos (compare Sūn Bìn in SJ 65).*

15. Shǎndǎ and Hándǎ both wrote books which have been handed down to later ages; most scholars have them. I only lament that Hándǎ could write the Difficulty of Persuasion, but was himself in the end unable to avoid those perils.

*This concludes the chapter by summing up the notices of Shǎn Bù-hài and Hán Fēi.*

**Two Authors.** Of the two components in this account: (1) One is based on or inferred from the HFZ. (2) The other is based on no known text and contradicts three known texts (the Syǎndǎ and SJ 87, which do not know Hán Fēi as Lǐ Sǎ’s fellow student, and JGT 113, which makes Fēi a slanderer rather than a victim). It also contradicts the main narrative. Line #4 heightens the infamy of Lǐ Sǎ’s betrayal of Fēi in #10-11 and 13a. The betrayal itself is the chief burden of this second component.

Apart from its lack of source support, the second component meets the classic test of an interpolation: (1) it conflicts with the context, and (2) when it is removed, what is left is consistent and consecutive. I conclude that it is a later layer, and that the narrative *without* it is the earlier layer. Of possible authors for the earlier layer, Tán the father must precede Chyēn the son. Then Tán wrote it, and Chyēn later added to it.

**Corroboration.** The final Tàishǐ-gūng 太史公 (TSG) summary says that all four SJ 63 figures had their virtues, “but Lǎudǐ was the profound one 深遠.” This echoes Tán’s essay on the Essentials of the Six Schools 六家之要旨, preserved in SJ 130. That essay praises Dàuism as embracing all things (能究萬物之情) and thus able to rule them (能為萬物主); it sees noninterference (無為) as the right way to govern. Segments of SJ 130 which unmistakably depict Chyēn, on the other hand, notably his long statement to Hú Swèi 壺遂, are entirely Confucian, and remain within the limits of the Six Classics; there is no gesture of inclusiveness toward Dàuism. We have here a strong ideological contrast, of which the Dàuist or known Tán side agrees with the final comment in SJ 63. The case for Tán as the main author of SJ 63 would seem to be correspondingly strengthened.

### Appendix 1: The Original Hán Fēi Notice

Hán Fēi was a son of the ruler of Hán. He liked to study syíng-míng 形名, fǎ 法, and shù 數, but his basic affinity was to Hwáng/Lǎu 黃/老. Fēi stuttered, and couldn’t express himself verbally, but was good at writing. Fēi saw that the state of Hán was declining, and often remonstrated in writing with the King of Hán, but the King was unable to accept his advice. Hán Fēi faulted the government for its inattention to laws and institutions, to enriching the state and strengthening the army, and to rewarding merit. He considered that the Confucians, in emphasizing civil culture, disordered the laws . . . “When times are easy, they show favor to people of reputation; when times are urgent, they call for soldiers. What they advocate is not what they can use; what they actually use is not what they advocate.” He grieved that honesty and candor were not countenanced by the dissolute ministers, and . . . wrote Lonely Frustration 孤憤, Five Maggots 五蠹, Inner and Outer Sayings 內外儲說, Forest of Persuasions 說林, and Difficulty of Persuasion 說難, amounting in all to more than ten myriad characters. Fēi knew the difficulty of persuading a ruler; in his Difficulty of Persuasion he described it in detail. In the end, he died in Chín, and was not himself able to evade that difficulty [the Difficulty of Persuasion is quoted at this point].

Chín made a surprise attack on Hán. The King of Hán had not employed Fēi, but in this emergency he made him an envoy to Chín. The King of Chín was pleased with him, but did not trust him enough to employ him. Lǐ Sǐ regarded him as a threat, and slandered him saying, “Hán Fēi is a descendant of the Hán ruling house . . . he will in the end support Hán and not Chín . . . But if the King does not employ him, and after keeping him for a time sends him back, it is merely bequeathing a problem to the future. It would be better to punish him . . . The King of Chín assented to this, and sent officials to arrest Fēi. Lǐ Sǐ had someone take poison to Fēi so he could commit suicide. Fēi sought to make a defense, but could not gain an audience. The King later regretted his action and sent someone to grant a pardon, but Fēi was dead.

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## Appendix 2: The Interpolated Hán Fēi Notice

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**Postscript***E Bruce Brooks (2005)*

This result has implications. If Sǔmǎ Tán wrote SJ 63, and if Sǔmǎ Chyēn's main contribution was that of a sensationalist interpolator, it follows that we must attribute to Tán not only the grand design of the *Shǐ Jì*, but much of its contents. This some had earlier suspected, but Gù Jyé-gāng was the first to proclaim: "To the ranks of our country's great historians and great literary figures, we must add one more – Sǔmǎ Tán 凡言吾國之大史家者與大文學家者，必更增一人焉曰司馬談."

*Works Cited*

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