

A Taeko Brooks
Confucius Tradition in the Mencius
NECCT 3 (2014)

Introduction

Doubts have sometimes been raised as to whether the Lún Yǔ and the Mencius are Warring States texts or Hàn compilations. In this paper, I will examine this question by considering Confucius sayings which are quoted or evoked as authorities in the Mencius. I distinguish the received tradition, in which the Lún Yǔ is treated by the Mencians as a source of Confucius sayings, and the free tradition, where the Mencius, like the Dzwǒ Jwàn, invented Confucius sayings to give authority for situations not envisioned in the Lún Yǔ.

In this paper, I use an updated version of the Mencius theory published in our 1999 study *Nature and Historical Context of the Mencius*. We still see the Lún Yǔ and the Mencius as accretional texts, and see the posthumous Mencians as dividing into Northern and Southern schools. Among the changes are (1) the reclassification of MC 1B16 as a disciple addition, (2) a closer dating of all the Mencius passages, and (3) the recognition that, besides the use of the Lún Yǔ by the Mencius, the Lún Yǔ included in its own later chapters some sayings of Confucius originating in the Mencius school.

The history of the Mencian movement is before you in the handout. First there was Mencius, whose interviews with rulers (plus a private conversation in 2A2a) were the official record of the school. At his death in 0303, his disciples did two things. First, they added 1B16 as an epitaph, saying that Mencius's failure to attract a ruler was not his fault, but lay with Heaven. Second, they disagreed about how to continue Mencius' work, and wrote pseudo-Mencius interviews to embody their ideas. Some wanted to expand his economic program, and composed additions such as the 4th paragraph of 1A3. Others took a more personal approach, and wrote 1A7, which asks the King of Chí to take an interest not only in his pleasures, but in the welfare of his people.

This period lasted three years, and expanded MC 1 to twice its original length. In 0300, the King of Chí died, and all the schools of thought scrambled to make themselves known to his successor, Mǐn-wáng. The warring Mencians composed their differences, and reached a compromise position, MC 2A3-2B1. This, with MC 2A1 as a cover letter, was brought to the attention of the King. He was not interested. At this point, the philosophical Mencians detached themselves, left Tíng (where the political group continued to enjoy the patronage of that ruler), and went to Mencius' birthplace in Dzōu.

The southern school in Tíng proceeded to justify the behavior of Mencius in Chí in several passages, which comprise MC 2B2 and the rest of MC 2B.

The northern Mencians, who were teachers rather than courtiers, developed their theories at much greater length. They first composed a counter-statement to the compromise position of 2A3 and following; this, plus a few later insertions, is MC 4A2-14. They then turned to domestic virtue (starting with filial piety) as the basis of public virtue. In MC 5, they disputed what they saw as wrong traditions about filiality and rulership in antiquity. In Mencius 6, they took up the widely discussed question of human capacity, stating a position which drew fire from Sywǎndǒ. All this while, the southern school were textually quiet.

Toward mid-century, the threat from Sywǎndž (now the governor of Occupied Lǔ) brought the two schools closer together. MC 7 (the last northern chapter) and MC 3 (the last southern chapter) reflect the resulting interplay between the two.

We must thus deal with the writings of three groups of Mencians: the disciples before the split, and the separate northern and southern schools after it. In all three groups of writings, there are a total of 60 Confucius passages. Of these, 30 are related to material in the Lún Yǔ, and 30 are invented. In addition, 3 Mencius passages were modified by the Lún Yǔ people in composing a total of 5 late or interpolated Lún Yǔ passages.

In terms of word count, the northern school text (LY 4-7), at 27,171 words, is four times as large as that of the southern school (LY 2B2-14 and MC 3), but Confucius sayings of both types occur almost equally in their writings.

That is the large picture as we presently see it.

1. Lún Yǔ-Related Confucius Material in Mencius

I divide the material into three types: (1) quotes attributed to Confucius in the Mencius; (2) sayings not explicitly quoted but present in the Lún Yǔ, which I call evocations; and (3) sayings in the Lún Yǔ which are attributed in the Mencius to another person, whether Mencius himself or another such as Dzǎngdž. All are used to support Mencian ideas, or to justify his career.

An example of a quote is LY 11:17 in MC 4A14. In the Lún Yǔ, Confucius disapproves of Rǎn Yǒu collecting taxes for the wealthy Jǐ Family. MC 4A14 quotes him in this way: “Confucius said, Chyóu is no disciple of mine. You little ones may beat the drums and denounce him.” Mencius then comments, “From this it may be seen that Confucius rejected those who enriched rulers not given to the practice of benevolent government. How much more would he have rejected those who do their best to wage war on their behalf.” This saying uses Confucius to support Mencius’s own theory of benevolent government.

An example of an evocation is the earlier mentioned 1B16, in which Mencius attributes his failed meeting with Lǔ Píng-gūng as due to Heaven, not to any one man. This evokes the Confucius of LY 14:36, who says that one’s success or failure is mìng 命 or fated by Heaven.

An example of a reattributed saying is MC 2B13. Mencius’ “air of dissatisfaction as he left Chí” prompted his disciple to say, “I heard from you the other day that the gentleman reproaches neither Heaven nor man.” This is a doublet of Confucius’ remark in LY 14:35, “I do not resent Heaven; I do not fault men,” but here treated as a saying of Mencius.

2. Non-Lún Yǔ Confucius Material in the Mencius

There are 30 examples in the Mencius of attribution to Confucius of sayings or actions which are not in our present Lún Yǔ. These complement the Lún Yǔ material by extending it to situations not explicitly addressed in that text.

Before the school split, MC 2A7 quoted LY 4:1 on rǎn 仁 behavior, and developed that idea further in non-Lún Yǔ sayings of Confucius in MC 2A1, 2A3, and 2A4. These concern the Mencian ideal of benevolent government, and show how they took Confucius with them as they further developed their ideas. In MC 6 on human nature, the invented Confucius sayings in MC 6A6 and 6A8 supported the Mencian view of the interiority of morality.

3. Was There a Lún Yǔ?

That the Mencian school extended its Lún Yǔ authority at need, by inventing new Confucius sayings, is intelligible behavior. It is exactly how the Lún Yǔ gradually extended itself to deal with new situations. The problem comes rather with the sayings seemingly derived from our Lún Yǔ: Are they really derived from an existing text?

Two Mencius passages clearly indicate that the Confucius tradition was known to both Mencius and his disciples, and sometimes figures in disciple questions asking how Mencius' words or actions can be reconciled with the Lún Yǔ tradition of Confucius.

MC 5B7 discusses the propriety of not seeing a ruler. Mencius gives an example of why an officer did not respond to such a summons. The disciple Wàn Jāng then asks, quoting LY 10:14, "Then did Confucius do wrong when he immediately responded to the ruler's summons?" Here, the Lún Yǔ is not simply a source, but a problem, for whoever was speaking for Mencius at that period. The likely inference is that the Mencian school, not only its leader, knew the Lún Yǔ tradition, and was concerned to reconcile it with the sayings being attributed to Mencius.

Likewise, MC 7B37 quotes LY 5:22 on Confucius in Chǔn, and asks, What does this mean? This too suggests that in the Mencian school, the Lún Yǔ as well as the Mencian writings were known, and were compared, and needed to be reconciled. We have here not just a quote supporting a Mencian idea, but a tradition seemingly at variance with a Mencian idea. At this point, the Mencius is not inventing, it is engaging a problematic outside text.

Additionally, the fact that the three stages in the evolution of the Mencian movement (the early disciples and the separate schools after the split) used different parts of the Lún Yǔ also lends support to the idea of an existing text.

Before the split, the undivided school seems to have been aware only of Lún Yǔ passages written up to the year 0299 – 5 passages from the 05th century, 1 from the mid 04th century, and 2 from the later 04th century. The heavy reliance on what may be called the classic or 05th century phase of the text (LY 4-9; see the divider line on the handout) is obvious. The governmental southern school made little use of that material, but relied on the 04th and 03rd century Lún Yǔ, the period where questions of statecraft began to be dealt with in the text.

The philosophical northern school addressed these topics as well, but unlike the southern school, continued to maintain contact with the earliest Lún Yǔ: its 05th century layers.

The implication is that the Confucius material of which the Mencius made use not only existed, as it might in an undifferentiated oral tradition, but had a fixed order, which strongly implies a written text.

4. Mutual Awareness of Lún Yǔ and Mencius

The historical Mencius had been associated with the Lún Yǔ school at the time LY 12 and 13 were composed. (See *The Original Analects* p106). Mencius himself was then probably the author of such sayings as 13:29 on training the people before taking them to war, a saying which reappears (as a saying of his own) in MC 6B8.

In the reverse direction, it is notable that the Lún Yǔ did not present Confucius as a wandering scholar until LY 14:36, which we date to circa 0310. In the Dzwǒ Jwàn, that idea of Confucius first appears in DJ 12/11:6b (from c0312). Both passages were written after Mencius' career had provided an example of a politically important Confucian figure. An intimate relation between the two texts is suggested by the added passage MC 2A2b, where Mencius refuses to identify himself with Yén Hwéi, a known practitioner of meditation. This probably reflects a change in the Lún Yǔ school, which at LY 15:31 (c0299) rejects “thinking” (sǐ 思, that is, meditation) in favor of study (sywé 學) of the traditional kind.

5. Mencius Passages Borrowed Into Lún Yǔ

In the following discussion of the directionality MC > LY, I depend on evidence internal to the passage or chapter in which they occur, to show that the Lún Yǔ is developmentally later than its Mencius counterpart. I will discuss them in the order of the Lún Yǔ passages:

MC 6B6 (c0271) > LY 18:3, 18:4 (c0262)

MC 3A4 (c0261) > LY *8:18, *8:19 (c0260)

MC 2B9 (c0292) > LY 19:21 (c0250)

LY 18:3 and 4. This depends on the rank Confucius is said to have held in the story.

In LY 11:8 (c0360), Confucius refuses to give up his chariot for a lavish burial for Yén Hwéi, since as Shǐ Shǐ “Leader of the Officers” he cannot go on foot.

In DJ 11/1:4 (late 04c), Confucius as Minister of Crime in Lǔ is said to have united the tomb of Jāu-gūng by means of a ditch with the tombs of the other Lǔ rulers.

In MC 6B6 (0271), Confucius is again Minister of Crime in Lǔ, and leaves on a pretext when his advice is not followed. In LY 18:3, Chí Jǐng-gūng debates whether to receive Confucius as equal to the head of the Jì family, or between that and the head of the less powerful Mǐng family. This ranks him with the most powerful families in Lǔ. In LY 18:4, Confucius serves Jì Hwándǔ as minister, but leaves Lǔ because Hwándǔ has neglected his duties. His position in 18:3 and 18:4 is higher than the office of Minister of Crime in MC 6B6, and is thus developmentally later.

LY *8:18 and *8:19 present a similar situation. Confucius praised the good rule of Yáu and Shùn in MC 3A4. LY 8:19 goes beyond the praise of Yáu “as great as Heaven” to add “cultural splendor” 文章, a term also found in LY *5:13. But in that passage it is said that he did not discuss “the Way of Heaven” (天之道). Since LY 8:19 does mention 文章 and 天 it appears to be a later development than MC 3A4 or LY *5:13.

LY 19:21. On the Duke of Jōu's error in giving rulership to his brother Gwǎn-shú, MC 2B9 remarks that “when the gentleman of antiquity made a mistake, it was there to be seen by all the people, like the eclipse of the sun and moon, and when he made amends the people looked up to him.” This is reattributed to Dǔ-gùng in LY 19:21.

Dǔ-gùng defends Confucius against critics in LY 19:23 and 24. He uses cosmological metaphors: “Jūng-ní is the sun and moon, which cannot be stepped over (19:23) . . . he cannot be attained to as Heaven cannot be climbed by the steps of a stair” (19:24). This praise goes beyond anything said of the Duke of Jōu in MC 2B9, where it is admitted that he made a mistake. LY 19:21 borrows language from MC 2B9 but praises Confucius more highly than the Duke of Jōu. Confucius has here become a cosmic figure, and we may say that, developmentally, LY 19:21 comes after MC 2B9.

Aggrandization of Confucius also occurs in the Mencius. For example, he has 70 disciples in 2A3, and is thus an important teacher. In the later 4B21, he is the author of the Chūn/Chyōu, which makes him a culture creator and a judge of past history. By the end of the text, in 7B38, he is implicitly on a par with the ancient worthies who **define epochs** in history: Yáu and Shùn, Tāng of Shāng, and Wǎn-wáng of Jōu. Confucius in this passage has passed from being a judge of history to being a watershed within history itself. This is comparable to the cosmic elevation of Confucius in LY 19. In this way, both the Lún Yǔ and the Mencian schools reach the ultimate praise of Confucius, and at about the same time.

This example of parallel evolution and mutual interchange between Lún Yǔ and Mencius may serve as my conclusion. That the two are so closely interconnected in real time suggests that both texts were in fact real, and that each served the other as both a source and an inspiration.