

Oral Tradition in Analects 9

A Taeko Brooks 白妙子

University of Massachusetts at Amherst

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Abstract. The only place in the Analects where alternate versions of Confucius sayings are quoted is LY 9:7, following 9:6. The two sayings read this way:

- LY 9:6. The Grand Steward asked Dǔ-gùng, Your master is a Sage, is he not? Why then does he have these many skills? Dǔ-gùng said, Surely Heaven will grant him to be a Sage; he also has these many skills. The Master heard of it, and said, Does the Grand Steward perhaps know me? When I was young, I was poor, so I became skilled in many mean matters. Does a gentleman have so many of them? He does not.
- LY 9:7. Láu 牢 says that the Master said, I was not given a chance 不試, therefore I have all these accomplishments.

There are differences: Láu’s version does not mention Confucius’s poverty; it suggests rather that a lack of opportunity was the problem.¹ It may perhaps be a softer version. I here explore the implications for the way Confucius’s sayings were preserved.

Context. Confucius in LY 9:8 modestly denies that he possesses wisdom, but will take up a topic raised by a commoner; it is paired² with the corrective 9:11, where Yén Hwéi praises his vast knowledge. The imagined death scene of 9:12 emphasizes Confucius’ lack of lifetime accomplishment. The early hardship of 9:6 is supported by this later hardship. In LY 9:2, originally the first saying in the chapter,³ Confucius rejects his inherited role as a warrior by ridiculing the warrior’s basic skills: archery and chariot driving. The tale of his difficulties in Ch’yn and Tsà implies indifferent military skills. Confucius thus made his mark otherwise than in his inherited role.

Name. Láu 牢 (“animal pen”) is unknown. That name is not mentioned in the Dzwǒ Jwàn (04c), the Mencius (late 04c to mid 03c), or the KZJY 38 disciple list (core, mid 04c).⁴ There is no reason to link Láu with the Chín Jāng 琴張, who is rebuked by “Confucius” in DJ 10/20:4, or to the Dǔ-láu of JZ 25:7, glossed by some as Chín Jāng, about whom in any case the story gives no information.⁵ The Analects commentator J’ng Sywǎn (127-200) calls him Dǔ-láu 子牢, and gives no surname. Láu seems to be a member of the Confucius circle whose details had been forgotten.

¹Confucius’s father died while Confucius was very young; he received no military training from his father, and was raised by his mother. Stories of early hardship are thus plausible.

²Two intervening interpolations must here be ignored; see Brooks **Analects** 218.

³See Brooks **Word**.

⁴The present KZJY 38 has Chín Láu 琴牢 corresponding to Chín Rǎn 秦冉 in SJ 67. The latter may be the better reading; see Brooks **Analects** 275.

⁵For JZ 25:7, see the selection of commentaries cited by Wáng Shú-mín.

Author. The probable author of LY 7 is Dz̄vngdž (d 0436), four of whose sayings are preserved in the core of LY 8; the probable preserver of these sayings, and the probable author of LY 9, which is closely modeled on LY 7,⁶ is Dz̄vngdž's elder son Dz̄vng Ywǎn. Dz̄vngdž, a very late disciple, knew Confucius;⁷ his son surely did not; the son will necessarily have relied on other sources than his own memory.

Láu is the informant for the 9:7 variant. Is Láu credible? Confucius's retrospective remark was probably made late in his life. He died in 0479. The youngest disciple who could have heard it would then have been 20. We date LY 9 to c0405 from its latest sayings,⁸ but other parts must be earlier. Respect for Dz̄vngdž rules out a beginning date of 0435 or 0434, but 0430 would be late for a new school head to issue teaching material. In that year, our conjectural disciple would have been 70. Yes, it is possible.

So far Láu. Who was the informant for 9:6? For LY 9 in general, as above noted, the main source was Dz̄vngdž's LY 7, parts of which Dz̄vng Ywǎn has recast and rewritten. Thus the LY 7:35 Confucius death scene, concluding Dz̄vngdž's portrait of Confucius, is rewritten as LY 9:12. The only disciples mentioned by Dz̄vngdž were Yén Hwéi and Dž-lù, and these figures LY 9 develops, Yén Hwéi positively in 9:11 and 9:21-22, Dž-lù negatively in 9:12 and 9:27. Thus begins the emblematic contrast of reflective Yén Hwéi and rash Dž-lù, a topos further developed in the later *Analects*.⁹

This expansion process will account for much of LY 9. But 9:6 is clearly not an invented saying (since an old disciple recalls a similar saying in 9:7); 9:6 must have been remembered, and by someone of greater authority in Dz̄vng Ywǎn's eyes than the obscure Láu. The likely person is Dz̄vngdž himself. In Dz̄vngdž's LY 7, the theme of poverty appears in 7:12 ("if wealth could be had for the seeking") and 7:16 ("eating coarse food"). The theme of poverty *in youth* is absent from LY 7, but it seems that Dz̄vngdž knew a saying about it, and passed it to his son. Dz̄vng Ywǎn naturally took this inherited saying as primary, while also respecting the variant testimony of a surviving member of the Confucius circle, which he scrupulously included in his text.

What LY 9:6-7 do *not* show is that there existed a general reservoir or oral soup of Confucius sayings, on which later *Analects* writers (or anyone else) might draw at will. The LY 9 sayings seem to have been expanded from earlier written tradition, or invented outright in response to current needs and interests, while also respecting the literal memories of living individuals who still went back to the time of Confucius.

Works Cited

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⁶Brooks *Analects* 51, 57, and 218-219.

⁷Brooks *Analects* 214, 280.

⁸Brooks *Analects* 218.

⁹Waley *Analects* 20 calls them "perfect examples . . . of introvert and extrovert." Exactly.