

Re-Dating the Sources

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The sources for history are basic to history, and an accurate idea of the chronology of the sources is basic to the task of understanding the sources themselves historically. We cannot effectively investigate the history of China's formative Warring States or classical period without knowing which of these texts are earlier and which are later. I here describe a systematic attempt to reach a better understanding of Warring States text chronology. But before saying how we have approached the chronology problem, I should first say why we think there *is* a problem – a problem that has not been solved in Michael Loewe's 1993 survey, **Early Chinese Texts** (ECT).¹

One reason is that the book's conclusions are not entirely consistent with each other. A second is that some are indeterminate, quoting conflicting opinions without deciding among them. A third is that some fail to address all the problems in the texts. There are also points at which problems which *are* addressed might be reconsidered. In other words, a fully coherent and convincing text chronology has not yet emerged.

The existence of conflicting opinions about the date of a text may indicate that the text itself includes diverse material. The proper solution in such cases may be, not to choose among the suggested dates, but to recognize different portions of the text as different layers, and assign *to each layer* its proper date. This approach is exemplified in Allyn Rickett's work on Gwǎndǔ.² Rickett recognizes the 86 Gwǎndǔ chapters (and in some cases, chapter sections) as being potentially different layers, and assigns them dates ranging from the 04th to the 02nd centuries (4th to 2nd centuries BC).

The idea that a Chinese text may not be an entirely self-consistent object has been around for a long time. Jāng Sywé-ch'ng (1738-1801) once dropped the hint that some of the philosophical texts may derive from a school rather than from a person.³ His contemporary Tswēi Shù (1740-1816) recognized a very late layer (LY 16-20) within the late Analects layer (LY 11-20), an idea which had been first suggested by the S'ng scholar Hú Yín (1098-1156) and was further developed by Itō Jinsai (1627-1705).

¹For a fuller statement of the position, see Brooks **Present** (1994).

²Rickett **Guanzi** 14-15.

³Summarized in Fung **History** 1/19-20. "It is therefore evident that these and other works contain sections that could not have been written by their supposed authors, but were probably composed by later followers of the same school. [Jāng] suggests that the primary purpose of a writer of ancient days was to expound the doctrines of his school, so that the question of who was the actual author of the writing was considered as relatively unimportant. And for this reason the writings of any school were the collective work of that school, rather than the work of any one individual."

Some scholars have recognized that the authorial or single-date model may not apply to certain texts, but they have not always allowed that perception to influence their *interpretations* of the texts. For example, Fung Yu-lan notes Jāng Sywē-chŭng's caution about school texts rather than individual compositions, but then proceeds to ignore that factor in discussing the classical philosophers.⁴ More recently, A C Graham in his survey work **Disputers of the Tao** observes that the Analects text in particular shows signs of layering, but then continues: "With inadequate criteria at our disposal for distinguishing the voice of the original teacher, it is *convenient to accept it* as the record of the earliest state of Confucianism, without asking how much of it was the actual words of the Master."⁵

Since Graham concedes that the criteria used by Tswēi Shù have been at least *partly* adequate to the problem, his shrugging off of the problem seems indeed to be little more than a counsel of convenience. He also silently ignores the clearly adequate criteria adduced by Chywān Dzŭ-wàng (1705-1755), Jàu Yī-chīng (1711-1764), and Dàu Jŭn (1724-1777) for disentangling text and commentary in the Shwěi Jīng Jù,⁶ or the method used by Yáu Ji-hŭng (1647-1715?) and Yén Rwò-jyŭ (1636-1704) in distinguishing the Gŭ-wŭn Shū from the rest of the Shū repertoire as later forgeries.⁷ In effect, Graham ignores a whole tradition of critical study of the classical texts, and the significant results obtained by previous work in that tradition. A fully adequate solution for any one text may still lie in the future, but surely a merely "convenient" approach to such questions does little justice to the importance of the problem itself, or to the progress already made by past generations.

Given that there *is* a problem, and one worth solving, how do we approach it? On the assumption that text-critical difficulties have previously been resolved, we begin by discarding traditional assumptions about these works, and examine them *de novo*, analyzing them only on the basis of *what is in the texts themselves*, as though they had come to light through some recent archaeological discovery. Our strategy, in fact, for the text corpus as a whole, is somewhat similar to that used in archaeology:

1. Identify any different strata *within each text*,
2. Correlate strata *across different texts* to build up a larger picture, and
3. Look for any indications of *absolute date* in any of the strata.

It is the last step that permits the whole system to be placed in a real time context.

⁴"In treating the philosophy of the ancient period, therefore, the present work will simply try to indicate that, during this period, there existed certain schools of philosophy and systems of thought, but *it will not attempt to determine absolutely whether these systems are always actually representative of the individuals by whom they were founded*, or have been affected by later modifications" (Fung **History** 1/20; my emphasis). The "later modifications" in the Analects, I suggest (see Brooks **Analects**), reflect ideological evolution in the Confucian school of Lŭ. A true *history of philosophy*, as distinct from a mere inventory of philosophical schools, surely needs to consider such differences.

⁵Graham **Disputers** 10 (my emphasis).

⁶See the note by Hu Shih in Hummel **Eminent** 2/970-982).

⁷See Elman **Philology** 47-70, 237-250, 215-224, and 261-264 for a general sense of the intellectual climate in which these advances were made and debated.

Our initial clues for identifying strata are internal differences. To avoid the possible circularity of a content-based approach, we first focus on formal criteria, including:

1. Length of an average passage (in early texts, longer ones tend to be later)
2. Rhetorical devices (in early texts, elaborate ones tend to be later)
3. Formal or narrative discontinuity (intrusive material tends to be later)⁸

We also note linguistic peculiarities, and any external indications, such as posthumous names, or other references (whether open or indirect) to known historical events.

Only at the end, and as a plausibility check, do we systematically examine content. Do the layers, as previously hypothesized, imply a reasonable historical development? If so, we consider that the hypothesis is to that extent confirmed. If not, it is refuted.

The Example of the Analects

Defining Layers. Like many earlier commentators, we find significant differences which correlate with chapter divisions in the Analects (Lún Yǔ 論語; LY). We thus adopt the working assumption that the chapter is the module of accretion in this text. We then apply the method outlined above, with the following result.

Sequence of Layers. Of the Analects chapters, LY 4 has many archaic features, and may be the core of the work. Except for two passages, which have other late traits as well and may thus be interpolations, (a) the average LY 4 passage has 19 words, the shortest in the book (the overall average is 30 words); (b) it uses no narrative devices: each saying is an isolated quote introduced by the formula “The Master said (子曰);” (c) it contains no dialogues; the Master is the only speaker; (d) it mentions no proper names, and focuses only on the Master; and finally, (e) it contains linguistic archaisms such as the full verb yú 於 “to be in relation with” which is known in later texts only as a coverb, “in relation to.” Since the LY 4 sayings refer to Confucius in the third person, they were not written by Confucius. At earliest, then, the chapter must date from some time after his death in 0479 (479 BC).

In subsequent chapters, we note the following limitations on date:

LY 6 uses the posthumous name of Aī-gūng 哀公, and thus, unless it has been later amended, cannot be earlier than Aī-gūng’s death in 0469.

LY 8 reports the dying words of Dzǔngdǔ 曾子. It does so in two versions, of which the more elaborate (LY 8:4) is probably a later aggrandizing interpolation. The simpler and presumably earlier version (8:3) cannot be earlier than Dzǔngdǔ’s death, which is given by tradition as 0436.

LY 12-13 strikingly resemble the speeches of Mencius 孟子 in MC 1. D C Lau has shown⁹ that Mencius’s public career dates from 0320. It is widely assumed that Mencius at some point was associated with the Analects school. These two Analects chapters, as reflecting the background of Mencius’s public career, should then be at least slightly earlier in date than the beginning of that career.

⁸Within each layer or text, one must begin by eliminating interpolations. For an extended example of this process, see now Brooks **Analects** Appendix 1.

⁹Lau **Mencius** Appendix 1.

LY 14 assumes the early death of Dǔ-lù 子路. The Dzwǒ Jwàn 左傳 (DJ) also mentions that tradition. The final composition date of the DJ text can be located by astronomical and other internal evidence to somewhere in the late 04th century.¹⁰

LY 16:2-3 contain veiled but numerically precise references to the Chí 齊 conquest of Sùng 宋 in 0286. LY 16:1 may be read as a veiled protest against this event.

LY 18 includes a hostile interchange with the Jwāngdǔ 莊子 (JZ). Parts of the Jwāngdǔ are noticed by the early 03c philosopher Sywǎndǔ, and many more are quoted in the Lǔ-shì Chūn/Chyōu 呂氏春秋 (LSCC, partly from 0241). The bulk of the Jwāngdǔ is thus first firmly attested in the early middle 03c.¹¹

LY 20, the final chapter, is a short Shū-type text followed by one or two Confucius sayings. These few sayings do not make a chapter on the standard Analects model, and LY 20 may reflect an interruption in the compilation process. One very forceful and thus plausible interruption would have been the conquest of Lǔ by Chǔ 楚 in 0249.

These are all the indications of date in the Analects. It is obvious that they form a chronological sequence. The likely implication is that Analects chapters from LY 4 through LY 20 were compiled and accumulated in chronological order between 0479 and 0249, a total time-depth of 230 years, as in the table below:

	LY 4 (after 0479)	
	LY 6 (after 0469)	
	LY 8 (after 0436)	
	LY 12-13 (before 0320)	> MC 1 (after 0320)
DJ (late 04c) >	LY 14	
	LY 16 (after 0286)	
	LY 18	~ JZ 4 (mid 03c)
	LY 20 (interrupted in 0249)	

• *Chronological Relationships of Selected Analects Chapters* •

By a similar argument, LY 1-3 can be fitted into this plan as a separate and parallel sequence.¹² These chapters seem to have been added to the LY 4 core in *reverse order*, LY 3 first and LY 1 last. Their prominent placement at the head of the text may have been in order to legitimate the major doctrinal shifts which they imply.

It will be noted that the above list of dates gives to the late layer noticed by Tswēi Shù a chronological interpretation which Tswēi himself did not suggest. That layer, the five chapters LY 16-20, which Tswēi defined by their anomalies of procedure as compared with the rest of the Analects, turns out to be approximately the 03rd century portion of the Analects: the text's long twilight in the shadow of the stronger statecraft theories put forward by Sywǎndǔ and the late Mencian school.

¹⁰For the 04c date of the DJ, see now Brooks **Heaven**.

¹¹A generally compatible opinion is reached by Roth in ECT 56-57.

¹²LY 3 after LY 11, LY 2 after LY 13, and LY 1 after LY 15. For a more detailed argument, see now Brooks **Analects** 206.

Test by Content. If we now test this tentative sequence by examining content, we find many examples of plausible development. In the Analects school itself, what Fung dismisses as “later modifications” in the Analects may be neither random nor trivial; they may, and in fact they do, imply an evolution in school doctrine. Thus, Confucius has modest status in LY 4, but has been aggrandized into a nearly superhuman figure by LY 19. Confucian teaching is a wisdom repertoire in LY 4, but by the end of the work the enterprise is a tuition-charging three-year institution with a fixed curriculum, housed in a mansion. As to basic doctrine and the use of other texts, we have:

LY 4-9. Central value *rǎn* 仁, wisdom teaching, no reference to ancient texts

LY 10-15 (and 1-3). Central value *lǐ* 禮, systematic, interpretation of *Shī* 詩

LY 16-20 (Tswēi Shù layer). Memorization of *Shī*

Even this modest three-way division of Analects material tells us a great deal. It refutes the traditional idea, still often encountered,¹³ that Confucius himself edited the *Shī* into the form we know. It puts the *lǐ*-based Confucianism noticed by Fingarette¹⁴ in the second, not the first, period of the school’s evolution, leaving the *rǎn*-based Confucianism noticed by other scholars to occupy the 05th century period. It reveals, over the whole of that evolution, a process of increasing textualization. That process in turn may easily be seen as the Analects version of the general spread of literacy, and the increasing reliance on ancient texts in elite argument, in the contemporary world. Other signs of evolution in the outside culture, as witnessed by the Analects, are the increased availability of silk, a shift in metal crafts from ritual vessels to weapons, and the rise of the mass infantry army with its new specialist, the general. The plausible character of these developments (they can hardly have run in the opposite direction) tends to confirm the hypothesis.

External Relations

Independent evidence is available from parallels between the Analects and other texts. Reading the Analects in the proposed chronological sequence, we first find hints of other texts (the Mician “if so, then” logic which first appears in MZ 8) in LY 11 (c0360). There are phrases in common between LY 12-13 (c0326-c0322) and certain chapters of the *Gwǎndž*, agreeing with Rickett’s dating of those chapters to the 04th century.¹⁵ As noted above, in LY 12-13 there are many similarities with the public philosophy of Mencius as expounded in MC 1, a series of interviews dating from 0320 onward. There are echoes of the *Dàu/Dó* *Jīng* in the mid and late Analects, supporting the later of the two datings that have been proposed for that text.¹⁶

¹³See now, for example, Nylan **Five** 72f.

¹⁴Fingarette **Confucius**. On the famous crux LY 9:1, which apparently rejects *rǎn* as an idea which was at any point advocated by Confucius, see now Brooks **Word Philology**.

¹⁵The strongest identities are with GZ 1-3 and GZ 7. See Rickett **Guanzi** v1, ad loc.

¹⁶Boltz in ECT 269-271; compare Chan **Way** 61-71. Mental concentration as a technique is present already in LY 5, but similarities with DDJ *wording* do not appear until LY 11, followed by adversative references to DDJ precepts in LY 16:8 (DDJ 53), 16:11 (DDJ 54-56), 17:17 (DDJ 73), and the interpolated *14:34 (DDJ 49 and 63). If the DDJ were from the time of Confucius, the lack of DDJ echoes in the earliest Analects would seem to be inexplicable.

Further, the mention of military tactics *as an unwelcome novelty* in the late 04c Analects tends to confirm the Griffith 04c dating of the Sūndž against the 06c date defended by Gawlikowski,¹⁷ and the interaction of Analects 11-18 with MZ 46-49 generally favors the accretional Mwòdž theory of Watanabe over the integral theory of Graham.¹⁸ These intertextual relations reach a peak at about 0320, and continue strong thereafter. They imply a general elite discourse. Such a dialogue among the “Hundred Schools” has been asserted, but has not previously been visible *in the texts*. Our Analects chronology, in effect, makes visible many of the strands in that dialogue.

Conclusion

In general, we suggest that an approach which admits the possibility of growth during the text formation process can bring greater consistency and coherence to our understanding of *all* of the Warring States texts, making them more fully available as evidence for what really happened in the period, and not, as at present, merely for the legends that later accumulated around them, or for the commentarial reinterpretations that have adapted them to the different tastes and needs of more recent centuries.

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¹⁷Griffith **Sun** 11, versus Gawlikowski in ECT 447-449; see now also Brooks **Sūn Wǔ**.

¹⁸Graham **Later** 3-5 (Watanabe’s view is summarized at n7) and Graham’s summary in ECT 337-338. For one aspect of the text relationship, see now Brooks **Analects** 259-262.