

**Tracing the Origin:
Formation of Zuo zhuan's Composition**

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Abstract

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This dissertation addresses the critical question of “how did the *Zuo zhuan* come to be composed in this unique way?” As one of the most well-known Pre-Qin texts, the *Zuo zhuan* has received a great amount of attention from scholars in various fields since the Han dynasty. While existing scholarship often emphasizes narrative features, my research shifts its focus toward understanding the specific conditions and rationales that led to *Zuo zhuan*'s final form. Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach, my study integrates elements of literary analysis, textual criticism, etymology, and Western narrative theory. I pay particular attention to a unique subset of commentaries, described as “commentaries without main text correspondences,” and offer a comprehensive analysis of how text, historical context, and scribal practices have converged to shape the *Zuo zhuan*. My research challenges conventional narrative approaches that overlook these intricate factors, thus aiming to redefine our understanding of this text and its role in early Chinese narrative traditions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vi
List of the Twelve Dukes of the State of Lu	ix
Chapter 0. Prologue	1
<hr/>	
I. Current Study on <i>Zuo zhuan</i> 's Writing Style	6
II. The Approach of This Thesis	13
Chapter 1. Scribes and <i>Shi</i> in the Pre-Qin Period	20
<hr/>	
1.1 An Etymological Review of <i>Shi</i>	21
1.1.1 The Origin of Scribe in the “Chu yu”	27
1.1.2 Between <i>Shi</i> and <i>Wu</i> and Other Related Offices	31
1.2 Scribal system during the Zhou Dynasty	39
1.2.1 Scribal Duties in the <i>Zhou li</i>	43
1.2.2 The Transition of Scribal system during the Spring and Autumn period	60
1.3 Historical Record vs. History	65
1.3.1 What is “History”?	67
1.3.2 Historical Records in Early China	73
1.3.3 Conclusion	96
1.4 The <i>Zuo zhuan</i> and <i>Shi</i>	100
Chapter 2. The <i>Chunqiu</i> and Confucius	110
<hr/>	
2.1 Confucius and the <i>Chunqiu</i>	111
2.1.1 Reception History of Confucius and the <i>Chunqiu</i> in the Pre-Qin Era	115
2.1.2 The Emergence of the Proclamation for Confucius' Authorship of the <i>Chunqiu</i> during the Han Era	125
2.1.3 The Influence of New Text School's Proclamation in the Late-Imperial and Modern Era	140

2.1.4 The Rejection of Confucius' Relationship to the <i>Chunqiu</i>	149
2.2 The Editorial Standards of the <i>Chunqiu</i>	166
2.2.1 Definition	166
2.2.2 Scholarly Treatments	169
2.2.3 Examples	175
Chapter 3. <i>Zuo zhuan</i> 's Nature and Style	180
<hr/>	
3.1 <i>Zuo zhuan</i> 's Nature	181
3.1.1 The <i>Zuo Zhuan</i> as a Historical Text	184
3.1.2 Controversy: A Ruist Construal of <i>Zhuan</i> vs. The Definition of <i>Zhuan</i> in the Pre-Qin Period	189
3.1.3 The <i>Zuo zhuan</i> as a Commentary to the <i>Chunqiu</i> Main Text	195
3.1.4 Structural Evidence within the <i>Zuo zhuan</i>	201
3.2 Elucidating the <i>Chunqiu</i> with Historical Accounts and the Forming of <i>Zuo zhuan</i> 's Structure	205
3.2.1 Elucidating the Main Text through Events: Passivity vs. Proactivity	206
3.2.2 The Forming of Quasi-Narrative Construct: Detail vs. Structure	214
Chapter 4. Commentaries without Main Text Counterparts (WJZZ)	227
<hr/>	
4.1 The Reception History of WJZZ	230
4.1.1 Commentaries with Main Text Counterparts vs. Commentaries without Main Text Counterparts	232
4.1.2 Pro-WJZZ Renditions: Du Yu and Kong Yingda	237
4.2 Classification and Analysis of WJZZ	240
4.3 WJZZ and Narrative Strategies	294
4.4 Conclusion	298
Chapter 5. Conclusion	301
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Bibliography	309

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List of Twelve Dukes of the State of Lu

魯國十二公

隱公 Duke Yin (r. 722–712 BC)

桓公 Duke Huan (r. 711–694 BC)

莊公 Duke Zhuang (r. 693–662 BC)

閔公 Duke Min (r. 661–660 BC)

僖公 Duke Xi (r. 659–627 BC)

文公 Duke Wen (r. 626–609 BC)

宣公 Duke Xuan (r. 608–591 BC)

成公 Duke Cheng (r. 590–573 BC)

襄公 Duke Xiang (r. 572–542 BC)

昭公 Duke Zhao (r. 541–510 BC)

定公 Duke Ding (r. 509–495 BC)

哀公 Duke Ai (r. 494–468 BC)

Chapter 0: Prologue

“Duke Hui’s first primary concubine was Mengzi. When Mengzi passed away, [Duke Hui] raised Shengzi to her place, who bore Duke Yin. Duke Wu of Song fathered Zhongzi. Zhongzi had patterns in the palm of her hand since birth, which resembled characters that said, ‘[she] will be the Lady of Lu.’ That is why Zhongzi came to us in marriage. Soon after she gave birth to Duke Huan, Duke Hui expired. Due to this, Duke Yin was established in power but served Duke Huan.”¹

In the field of the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 study, a notable aphorism describes the *Zuo zhuan* as “*Zuo hai*” 左海 (literally the *Zuo* ocean), implying that its depth is comparable to the sea. This

¹ “惠公元妃孟子，孟子卒，繼室以聲子，生隱公，宋武公生仲子，仲子生而有文在其手，曰為魯夫人，故仲子歸于我，生桓公而惠公薨，是以隱公立而奉之。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, Du Yu 杜預 comm., Kong Yingda 孔穎達 exeg., in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), *juan* 2, 37–42.

The translation is largely based on the collaborative work of Durrant, Li, and Schaberg, which presents a comprehensive and precise translation of the entire *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* in three volumes. This is also the most recent English translation of the *Zuo zhuan*. Most translations of the *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* within this dissertation are partially based on this work. See Stephen Durrant, Wai-ye Li, and David Schaberg trans., *Zuo Tradition/ Zuozhuan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).

This passage is cited from the very first entry in the *Zuo zhuan*, preceding even the first entry of the *Chunqiu*. Conventionally, commentary follows the main text in format. By placing it at the beginning of the text, Du Yu (222–285), the renowned Jin scholar who annotated the received version of the *Zuo zhuan*, underscored its significance as a “prologue” to the text. My reference to this passage here serves as a tribute to both Du Yu and the *Zuo zhuan*, as the essence of this chapter, titled “Prologue,” closely aligns with that of the cited passage in the *Zuo zhuan*. An in-depth analysis of this entry will be provided in Chapter Four.

metaphorical depth manifests in two dimensions: vertically and horizontally. Vertically, the profundity of *Zuo zhuan*'s meanings and interpretations provides a layered reading experience; each engagement with the text can unearth new insights, to the extent that few can claim complete mastery or understanding of its contents. This complexity leads to endless debates among scholars, often preventing consensus on its myriad issues. Horizontally, the *Zuo zhuan* serves as a repository of the Pre-Qin culture, encompassing a wide array of topics that enrich various fields of study, including literature, history, ritual conventions, archaeology, astronomy, and geography. The text's profundity is thus not only a reflection of its thematic richness but also of its intricate complexity, marking it as a cornerstone of classical Chinese studies.

To provide a simple example, the full title of the *Zuo zhuan* is the *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan* 春秋左氏傳, also known as the *Zuoshi Chunqiu* 左氏春秋 or simply the *Zuoshi zhuan* 左氏傳. Here, "Chunqiu" refers to the *Chunqiu* main text, one of the Ruist Classics.² "Zuoshi" denotes the surname of the compiler,³ though it is also thought to refer to the ancient title of "zuo shi" 左

² The *Chunqiu* is commonly translated as the *Chunqiu Annals*, or the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. I use the term "main text" instead of "annals" to designate the received version of the *Chunqiu* to avoid confusion with the Lu state annals, which is also titled *Chunqiu*. The Chinese term *jing* 經 literally translates to "warp text" and refers to the main text to which a commentary is attached. This rendition is related to the acknowledgment of Confucius' involvement in compiling the *Chunqiu*, a topic I will address in Chapter Two.

³ It is traditionally attributed to Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, who is believed to have been a scribe in the state of Lu and a contemporary of Confucius. However, doubts have been raised regarding the identity of the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*, as well as the identity of Zuo Qiuming. This issue represents a complex scholarly debate, which this thesis will not explore in depth. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will generally avoid specific attribution of the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*. For further discussions related to

史, a court scribe's position.⁴ The word 傳, which is pronounced as “zhuan,” signifies a commentary, indicating a text that serves to elucidate another primary text. Thus, the title *Zuo zhuan* means “the commentary to the *Chunqiu* main text by *Zuo*,” reflecting the traditional understanding of its purpose and composition. In English, the translation of the *Zuo zhuan* often uses its *pinyin* spelling, but some scholars have translated it as the *Zuo Tradition*, with 傳 read as “chuan” (as in *chuan tong* 傳統), meaning “Zuo's tradition.” This translation deviates from traditional Chinese text naming conventions, thereby complicating the interpretation of the title. So, why do some contemporary scholars deliberately adopt a new interpretation for the name “Zuo zhuan?” It likely stems from their acknowledgment of the text's intricate nature.

Since the Han dynasty, the nature of the *Zuo zhuan* has been a topic of intense debate. Some insist it is a commentary on the Classics, while others categorize it as a historical text, yet a consensus remains elusive within the academic community. Those who opt to translate the *Zuo zhuan* as the *Zuo Tradition* may either disagree with its conventional classification as a commentary or recognize the ongoing debate. The term “tradition” intentionally blurs its categorization, sidestepping complex issues without straying from the meanings conveyed by the word 傳. This reminds me of a conference I attended where an audience member proposed that the *Zuo zhuan* should be translated as the *Zuo Tradition* because they viewed it as a historical text. This diversity of opinions about its name alone highlights the complexity and scope of the

this issue, one may consult the work of Xu Zhongshu 徐中舒 (1898–1991), “Zuo zhuan de zuozhe ji qi chengshu nian” 左傳的作者及其成書年代, *Lishi jiaoxue* (1962): 28–40.

⁴ For instance, Yu Zhengxie 俞正燮 (1775–1840) argued that *Zuo* stands for a particular official title of scribe—*zuo shi* (literally “scribe on the left”). See Yu Zheng Xie, *Guisi leigao* 癸巳類稿, *juan* 7, in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, vol.1159, 420.

associated issues. My point is that how one views the appropriate construal of *Zuo zhuan*'s title is shaped by his academic stance, and this thesis will further elaborate on this issue later in the main chapters. For the purposes of this general introduction, this thesis adheres to the traditional interpretation of *zhuan* as referring to the commentary on the *Chunqiu* main text by Zuo.

The extant version of the *Zuo zhuan* was compiled by Du Yu 杜預 during the Jin dynasty, titled *Chunqiu jingzhuan jijie* 春秋經傳集解.⁵ According to historical sources, the earliest traceable reference to the *Zuo zhuan* is found in Ban Gu's 班固 (32–92) “Yiwen zhi” 藝文志, which lists an ancient version of the *Chunqiu* in twelve *pian* 篇 and the *Zuo zhuan* in thirty *juan* 卷.⁶ Ban Gu's catalog mainly draws from the now-lost “Qi lue” 七略 by Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BC–23 AD), which can be roughly dated to the reign of Emperor Cheng of Han 漢成帝 (r. 33–7 BC). From the listings in the “Yiwen Zhi,” it is evident that earlier versions of the *Zuo zhuan* existed separately from the *Chunqiu*. The integrated format we see today, which sequentially places the *Chunqiu* text before the *Zuo zhuan*, arranged according to the chronological order of the twelve dukes of the state of Lu, from Duke Yin 魯隱公 (the fourteenth ruler) to Duke Ai 魯哀公 (the twenty-sixth ruler), was systematically compiled by Du Yu. This integration is further evidenced

⁵ Yeh Cheng-hsin 葉政欣 has written a book on Du Yu and his studies of the *Zuo zhuan*. See, Yeh Cheng-hsin, *Du Yu ji qi Chunqiu Zuoshi xue* 杜預及其春秋左氏學 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1989).

⁶ Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), *juan* 30, 1712–13.

by numerous manuscripts found in the Dunhuang Mogao caves 敦煌莫高窟, which also follow this combined format and are attributed to Du Yu's compilation.⁷

However, Du Yu was not the first to undertake the task of integrating the main text and the *Zuo zhuan*. An entry from the thirty-third year of Duke Xi 魯僖公 from the *Zuo zhuan* records: "Duke Xi was buried, [the process was] slow."⁸ Where does the word "slow" come from? The annotation by Du Yu clarifies that "slow" refers to Duke Xi's burial in the intercalary seventh month, although he died in the eleventh month of that year, indicating a delay in funeral rites which mirrored a delay in making the spirit table.⁹ This is followed by further commentary entries detailing the pertinent ritual regulations to explain why such delays were contrary to proper rites. Accordingly, Du pointed out that this commentary entry should be placed after the main text entry. What is intriguing is his following comment, which reads: "[For the commentary] to be placed here today, it is due to the disordering of the sequence of the bamboo slips."¹⁰ Evidently, Du Yu's observation that the commentary preceded the main text in an earlier version he encountered suggests that prior scholars had attempted to merge the *Chunqiu* and the

⁷ See Xu Jianping 許建平, "Dunhuang ben Zuo zhuan xiejuan de xueshu jiazhi" 敦煌本《左傳》寫卷的學術價值, *Dunhuang yanjiu* 5 (2023): 58–65. For comprehensive studies and annotations on the Dunhuang manuscripts related to the *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*, see Zhang Yongquan 張湧泉, *Dunhuang jingbu wenxuan heji* 敦煌經部文獻合集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008); Li Suo 李索, *Dunhuang xiejuan Chunqiu jingzhuan jijie yiwen yanjiu* 敦煌寫卷《春秋經傳集解》異文研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2007).

⁸ "葬僖公，緩。" *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 17, 550.

⁹ The main text records that the making of the spirit table for Duke Xi did not occur until the second year of Duke Ding 魯定公. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 18, 562.

¹⁰ "今在此，簡編倒錯。" *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 17, 550.

Zuo zhuan. However, they inadvertently inverted the order of bamboo slips, resulting in a disordered sequence within the text. In his annotated version, Du Yu also adopted the approach of integrating the two texts and noted the previous error, specifically highlighting it for correction. This suggests that the practice of appending commentary directly following the main text had become a prevailing approach by that time. Later, during the Tang dynasty, Kong Yingda, under the imperial command of Emperor Taizong 唐太宗 (r. 626–649), compiled the *Wujing zhengyi* 五經正義, a thorough exegesis on five Ruist Classics including the *Chunqiu*. The specific title concerning his exegesis on the *Chunqiu* is called the *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, which uses Du Yu's work as its foundation.¹¹

I. Current Study on *Zuo zhuan*'s Writing Style

From a literary standpoint, the most notable aspect of the *Zuo zhuan* is its composition. The entire text exhibits a unique structural complexity, not found in other pre-Qin texts, which

¹¹ The commonly used edition of the *Zuo zhuan* today is the *Shisanjing zhushu* published by Peking University, which uses Kong Yingda's *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi* for its edition of the *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*. For diverse interpretations and exegeses of the *Zuo zhuan*, one can consult the *Saden kaisen* 左傳會箋, compiled by the Japanese Takezoe Shin'ichiro 竹添進一郎 (1842–1917). See Takezoe Shin'ichiro, *Saden kaisen* (1930, rpt. Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1961). Additionally, for English translations, one might consider the works by Durrant et al., as well as those by James Legge, *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, in *The Chinese Classics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1893). Burton Watson also translated a portion of the *Zuo zhuan*. See Burton Watson, *The Tso chuan: Selections from China's Oldest Narrative History* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1989). For a comprehensive Japanese translation, see Kamada Tadashi, *Shunju Sashiden* 春秋左氏傳 (Tokyo: Meitoku shuppansha, 1968). There is also a French translation by Séraphin Couvreur, *Tch'ouen Ts'iou et Tso Tchouan, La Chronique de le Principauté de Lou*, Ho Kien Fou, 1914.

closely parallels narrative forms developed in later periods. Consequently, the *Zuo zhuan* is often regarded as one of China's earliest representations of narrative writing. Its profound influence on subsequent historical works, such as the *Shi ji* 史記 and the *Han shu*, marks it as a cornerstone of Chinese narrative tradition. The brilliance of *Zuo zhuan*'s style lies in its early presentation of narrative elements, boasting a mature and systematic structure that incorporates many core components of modern narrative writing. This undeniably has sparked significant scholarly interest in its intricate and intriguing composition, leading to numerous studies that delve into its complexities.

The scholarly approaches to studying the *Zuo zhuan* predominantly focus on its narrative aspects. These studies scrutinize *Zuo zhuan*'s stylistic features and techniques by firmly establishing their ground in defining its composition as a narrative. This narrative-focused perspective may be further divided into two primary approaches: one originating from Western narrative theory, which provides detailed deconstructions of *Zuo zhuan*'s structure, and another rooted in Chinese narrative theory, often appreciating *Zuo zhuan*'s narrative traits through traditional Chinese literary analyses that emphasize the “alignment of phrases and arrangement of events” 屬詞比事. Some scholars who approach the text from a Western narrative theory perspective, focus on a detailed and thorough analysis of the stylistic and literary features of the speeches and dialogues that constructed the world of *Zuo zhuan*'s “narrative.” They furthermore identify sets of patterns in interpreting the basic structure of *Zuo zhuan*'s “narratives” which ought to, in turn, lead to the ultimate deciphering of *Zuo zhuan*'s core purpose, as seen in the works by David Schaberg, Ronald Egan, and C.Y. Wang. Other scholars, on the other hand, follow the approach of Wai-yee Li and Yuri Pines, which treat the content and the way events are

portrayed in *Zuo zhuan*'s "narratives" as a key to unlock the intellectual currents and the development of certain ideologies in early China.¹²

Scholars who approach from a Chinese theoretical perspective emphasize the integration of literary theories with Chinese traditions, seeking to ground these theories in historical sources. For example, Li Lung-hsien 李隆獻 cites Liu Zhiji's 劉知幾 (661–721) *Shi tong* 史通, considering it to be one of the earliest Chinese texts to discuss the term "xu shi" 敘事 (commonly translated as "narrative"). Li argues that Liu clearly defined the elements of narrative writing as "alignment of phrases and arrangement of events," and underscored the unique role of language in narrative, distinguishing historical narrative from history.¹³ Chang Su-ch'ing 張素卿 categorizes narratives into several types: narratives according to Western theories are predominantly fictional, whereas Chinese narratives can be described as historical narratives. In this framework, the *Zuo zhuan* is considered an explanatory narrative 解釋的敘事, positioned

¹² For English scholarship on *Zuo zhuan*'s composition or narrative features, see David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (MA: Harvard University Asia Center Publications Program, 2001); C.Y. Wang, "Early Chinese Narrative: The Tso-Chuan as Example," in *Chinese Narrative*, ed. Andrew Plaks (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 3–20; Andrew Plaks, "Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative," in *Chinese Narrative*, 309–52; Ronald Egan, "Narratives in Tso Chuan," *HJAS*.37 (1977): 323–52; Wai-yee Li, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (MA: Harvard University Asia Center Publications Program, 2007); Yuri Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed—The Bamboo Manuscript Xinian and Early Chinese Historiography* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2020).

¹³ Li Lung-hsien 李隆獻, *Xianqin lianghan lishi xushi yulun* 先秦兩漢歷史敘事隅論 (Taipei: Taida chuban zhongxin, 2017), 3–4.

between fiction and historical narrative.¹⁴ Chang Kao-p'ing contends that the *Zuo zhuan* does not fit neatly within these definitions and instead presents many variations, and should therefore be characterized as a variant narrative 變體敘事.¹⁵

Overall, both Western and Eastern scholars base their views on modern narrative theory. Their main point of contention lies in the compatibility of narrative with historical truth. Western traditions, rooted in literature, typically regard fiction as a fundamental core of narrative. In contrast, Eastern adaptations of these theories propose “historical narrative” as a variation, recognizing a greater degree of historical truth in narrative texts. Regardless of the perspective, the focus remains on the term “narrative” and its relationship to the *Zuo zhuan*. Utilizing established concepts to explore content related to the *Zuo zhuan* is a shared approach among these scholars. However, this intense focus on “narrative” introduces a potential problem.

In the traditional Chinese context, *xu shi* or “narrative” is simply a descriptive term developed by later scholars who analyzed ancient texts, not a prescriptive writing framework. In the *Zhou li* 周禮, *xu* 敘 is written as *xu* 序, as the two characters were interchangeable in early periods. *Xu shi* 序事 means “to arrange matters,” which primarily pertains to organizing ceremonial duties.¹⁶ The term “alignment of phrases and arrangement of events” was deduced

¹⁴ Chang Su-ching 張素卿, *Xushi yu jieshi—Zuo zhuan jingjie yanjiu* 敘事與解釋—《左傳》經解研究 (Taipei: Shulin chuban youxian gongsi, 1998), 29–30.

¹⁵ Chang Kao-p'ing 張高評, *Chunqiu shufa yu Zuo zhuan shibi* 春秋書法與左傳史筆 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 2011), 45.

¹⁶ The “Chun guan-Zong bo” 春官宗伯 section has a passage that reads: “The vice minister of rites is in charge of organizing matters and rituals pertaining to the ceremonies in the four seasons” 掌四

from observing the *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*, identified as a characteristic because that's how ancient texts were composed, not because the texts conformed to a narrative framework. "Narrative" is thus a retrospective understanding of ancient texts by later interpreters, not an inherent concept that guided the writing of those texts. Therefore, I concur with Yang Yi's 楊義 (1946–2023) assertion that "It is not that the narrative genre existed first, and then narrative writings began."¹⁷ From a Western perspective, "narrative" implies a specific theoretical framework, with defined elements, motives, and structured writing patterns. Whether this Western framework entirely suits early Chinese writing requires further scrutiny.

One may notice that I place the term "narrative" in quotation marks to avoid misconceptions associated with the established concept of narrative. There seems to be a cyclical argument: when certain features of a text correspond with those of the established Western concept of narrative, the text is characterized as a narrative. Because this text has been identified as a narrative, it is deemed acceptable and necessary to define and analyze the text using existing concepts and theories associated with this term. However, just because two entities have a similar appearance does not necessarily mean they share the same essence or that they underwent the same developmental process. Analyzing certain features under a particular framework or concept usually consists of two parts: the first involves a basic description of observed features, which may be accurate as it reflects a common understanding shared by humanity. The second

時祭祀之序事與其禮. *Zhou li zhushu* 周禮註疏, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 comm., Jia Gongyan 賈公彥 exeg., in *Shisanjing zhushu* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chuabanshe, 2000), *juan* 19, 578.

¹⁷ “非先有敘事文類，才有敘事文字的。” Yang Yi, *Zhongguo xushi xue* 中國敘事學 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1997), 13.

part involves attributing the cause and course of the development of these features attested in a certain culture or tradition to all circumstances, assuming these are universally shared.

I agree that many features of *Zuo zhuan*'s composition remind us of the characteristics of what is commonly understood as a literary technique or genre called narrative. However, using this term unqualified to refer to *Zuo zhuan*'s features assumes that the composition of the *Zuo zhuan*, or at least the parts considered to display narrative qualities, and the rationale, process, and structure are the same as those in established narratives. This is a significant assumption that should be rigorously tested by examining the actual process and conditions from which *Zuo zhuan*'s specific writing style emerged. Failure to recognize this key issue may result in attributing qualities to the *Zuo zhuan* that are not necessarily true or applicable.

For instance, if one follows the definition and basic model suggested by the established concept of narrative, they will be inclined to interpret all events portrayed in dialogues, speeches, and other narrative forms as anecdotes, often associated with significant alteration and fictionalization, if not entirely fabricated. Attitudes towards this interpretation may vary, depending on one's perspective. This approach is, to a certain degree, shaped by one's understanding of the established narrative concept and the tendency, consciously or unconsciously, to equate this concept with features observed in the *Zuo zhuan* based on their apparent similarities. However, if one were to distance oneself from the term "narrative," or even step back further from the specific "narrative" aspect of the text to view it from a broader perspective, a different understanding of the purpose and nature of the *Zuo zhuan* might emerge.

Another trend in narrative-focused scholarship, particularly among Western scholars, is to treat the *Zuo zhuan* as an independent text. One reason for such treatment is that the narrative features are only present in the *Zuo zhuan*, and completely invisible in the *Chunqiu*. Since the

focus is to deconstruct and analyze the narratives and the meaning the compiler hopes to convey through this particular writing style, texts or passages not associated or identified as narrative are not pertinent to the discussion. In addition, perhaps as a way to justify their exclusion of the *Chunqiu*, scholars who only focus on the *Zuo zhuan* in their studies also raise doubts about whether *Zuo zhuan* was indeed written as a commentary to the *Chunqiu*, and whether any relationship exists between the two texts. This important issue is not discussed in detail but is only mentioned in introductions to call it to the reader's attention and indicate their views on the subject. Consequently, conclusions focusing solely on the *Zuo zhuan* tend to emphasize the "self-consciousness" and "independence" of its compiler, reflecting his personal judgments and values predominantly.

In summary, there is a sense of one-dimensionality in the approaches and perspectives adopted by many studies of *Zuo zhuan*'s so-called "narrative" features. These studies primarily focus on the "narrative" aspect of the text, often treating the *Zuo zhuan* as an independent work. This independence is perceived either as having no or limited relationship with the *Chunqiu* main text, or, even when its connection with the *Chunqiu* is acknowledged, the discussion remains focused solely on the *Zuo zhuan*. Scholarship on *Zuo zhuan*'s narrative often relies on established structural and stylistic analyses from Western narrative concepts as guiding principles to account for the features observed in text. This approach is, as I understand it, result oriented. That is, the focus centers around the achieved form of the text, not its process.

The "narrative" quality displayed is accepted at face value, with discussions revolving around deconstructing this literary technique. The focal questions posed emphasize the "what": what can be said about *Zuo zhuan*'s narrative? What are its main components? What interpretations can be derived from this structure? While these questions are important and the

aforementioned approaches provide insightful and innovative methodologies for studying the *Zuo zhuan*, they predominantly address “what” questions and often neglect the crucial “how” questions, such as how this narrative structure was composed in the *Zuo zhuan* or even in early China. While enlightening within their scope, these arguments and observations, if extended to define and represent the fundamental nature and purpose of the entire text, risk making partial and potentially inaccurate statements about the *Zuo zhuan*. These issues span multiple fields such as textual, philological, and historical analysis and cannot be thoroughly explained from a single perspective.¹⁸

II. The Approach of This Thesis

This thesis aims to explore the rationale, conditions, and specific processes behind the unique composition exhibited by the *Zuo zhuan*. Regardless of how its style is categorized—whether as literary or historical narrative—every genre or concept evolves from pre-existing ones. Thus, understanding the emergence of the *Zuo zhuan*’s style requires an examination that extends beyond its literary manifestations. It involves analyzing the factors that influenced the adoption of its key literary elements without presuming it belongs to any fixed genre. The form

¹⁸ Zhou Xinglu 周興陸 contends that the analysis of *Zuo zhuan*’s narrative features in various versions of the history of Chinese Literature primarily focuses on literary narrative features rather than historical narrative writings. Issues such as whether the *Zuo zhuan* was compiled to elucidate the *Chunqiu* do not concern these studies. Zhou argues that a one-dimensional literary perspective, which examines the *Zuo zhuan* solely through the lens of the novel and narrative, invariably exhibits a deviation from the main course. See Zhou Xinglu, “Zuo zhuan yanjiu guannian de gujin yanbian” 左傳研究觀念的古今演變, *Beijing daxue xuebao* 61.2 (2024): 133.

of the composition is ultimately just a manifestation; at its core, the compiler's intent drives the selection of techniques and the achievement of the intended outcomes. While scholars have pinpointed the narrative techniques employed in the *Zuo zhuan*, the inquiry must delve into how and why these methods were synthesized into a unified whole. This question pertains to the complex nature of the *Zuo zhuan* and entails the examination of many different aspects.

Solving this main question will necessarily involve close examinations of several key issues related to the *Zuo zhuan*, including the following: its relation to the *Chunqiu* main text and Confucius' role in the making of the *Chunqiu* (edited or composed?); the existence and plausibility of the editorial standards (*yi li* 義例); the tradition and standards of scribes in early China and their relationship with the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*; the general historical background of the Spring and Autumn period as well as its intellectual history; the materials utilized in the *Zuo zhuan*; and the nature, purpose and function of the text (for example, whether one could classify it as a history or a canonical commentary).

The key issues mentioned above represent a multi-perspective approach that I will adopt in my study. Hypotheses and conclusions drawn from these issues are crucial for interpreting the nature and purpose of the text, without which one cannot hope to provide a compelling and comprehensive argument about a text of such profundity and complexity. Because the focus of this thesis is on the rationale and the conditions that prompted the formation of the *Zuo zhuan*'s composition and the process undertaken that contributed to the realization of the achieved form, the formal and stylistic analysis will not be the focus of this dissertation. In my view, the so-called "narrative" structure is not the core of the *Zuo zhuan* deliberately selected by its compiler to achieve a certain goal.

To put it another way, I do not believe that the quasi-narrative structure was a readily available tool, or a mature writing style conveniently chosen by *Zuo zhuan*'s compiler for the sole purpose of conveying moral judgments (in addition, there is also the question whether the conveyed values reflect Confucius' or the *Zuo zhuan* compiler's own thoughts). Rather, the style is a somewhat coincidental result formed from the various needs and purposes that led to the arrangement and portrayal of events in particular ways in the process of elucidating and interpreting the *Chunqiu*, which may include but are not limited to moral judgments. I will refrain from using the term "narrative" when discussing *Zuo zhuan*'s composition but use the term "quasi-narrative" throughout the discussion as a way to denote its similarity but also reflect my awareness of their different natures. Although I agree that most of the techniques or writing style seen in the *Zuo zhuan* fit the broad definition of narrative, I am reluctant to freely apply this term to the *Zuo zhuan* for I do not wish to attribute certain assumptions and concepts that may be untrue or inapplicable to the *Zuo zhuan*.

This thesis is divided into four main chapters followed by a concluding chapter. Each chapter addresses a critical issue related to deciphering the ultimate issue—the formation of *Zuo zhuan*'s composition. The first chapter focuses on the historical nature of the *Zuo zhuan*. It is widely accepted that the *Zuo zhuan* is an annalistic historical record. Yet, this classification has led to significant doubts and debates over the authenticity and accuracy of its historical records. Scholars generally categorize the text as historical but remain skeptical about the details and the narration of certain events. Historically, the *Zuo zhuan* has been categorized under the Classics since the Western Han dynasty. The emphasis on its historical aspect, treating this as the primary function of the *Zuo zhuan*, was not recognized until much later. This chapter examines the major arguments for defining the *Zuo zhuan* as a historical text. Key questions include: How was *shi* 史

defined in the Pre-Qin era? What are the characteristics and conventions of scribal records? Is the *Zuo zhuan* genuinely a historical record whose primary function is to record historical events? If not, what are the major factors that have contributed to its perceived function as a historical text, leading to misconceptions about its nature? This chapter investigates these questions from three perspectives: The first section surveys the definition and nature of *shi* using textual and philological evidence. The second section focuses on the delineation of the established scribal system in the Zhou dynasty. The third section compares “scribal records” and “history,” aiming to establish a clear boundary and definition of scribes in early China, and to discern whether the *Zuo zhuan* conforms to the structure and conventions of Pre-Qin historical records.

Chapter Two examines the nature of the *Chunqiu* and its relationship with Confucius, which is crucial for understanding *Zuo zhuan*’s role as a commentary on the Classics. For the *Zuo zhuan* to establish a relationship with the *Chunqiu*, Confucius’ involvement is a necessary prerequisite. This topic, like the nature of the *Zuo zhuan* itself, has been at the center of scholarly debates for centuries, with opinions divided among those who insist that Confucius edited the *Chunqiu*, those who argue he created it, and those who contend he had no relationship with it at all. The focal questions to be explored include: How should we interpret the reference to “Chunqiu” in the *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*? Does it refer to the Lu annals or to Confucius’ work? How should Confucius’ involvement with the *Chunqiu* be characterized? Do the *yi li*, or editorial standards, exist, and if so, how do we define their essence? The first section will devote meticulous attention to examining various comments on Confucius’ role in the making of the *Chunqiu* from the Pre-Qin period to contemporary times. The second section will focus on the existence and definition of the *yi li*, which are essential for our inquiry into the purpose of the

Zuo zhuan, as they serve as the main tool through which Confucius' moral judgments are reflected.

In Chapter Three, I will address the fundamental questions by building on the findings from the previous two chapters. As various claims and doubts have been thoroughly addressed earlier, this chapter will provide conclusive answers regarding the nature of the *Zuo zhuan*, the main factors contributing to its complex characteristics, and how these factors converged to culminate in its unique, quasi-narrative composition. Focal questions will include: What is the relationship between the *Zuo zhuan* and the *Chunqiu*? How do we explain the major differences between the *Zuo zhuan* and traditional Ruist commentaries like the *Gongyang* 公羊傳 and *Guliang* 穀梁傳? If the text is not to be viewed as history, how should we interpret *Zuo zhuan*'s accounts of historical events and their significance? What rationale motivated the use of historical events as commentary on the main text? What led to the formation of *Zuo zhuan*'s composition? How does it relate to the modern concept of "narrative"? Are they comparable? Did the compiler's identity as a scribe contribute to this process? The first section will focus on identifying the nature of the *Zuo zhuan*, while the second section will explore the factors that influenced the formation of its writing style. I will also discuss some of the main arguments presented by scholars from a modern narrative perspective, examining their applicability and limitations.

Chapter Four will provide concrete illustrations to support the arguments made in Chapter Three. While discussions in previous chapters center on more general and abstract issues, this chapter will focus on exploring specific techniques and features that were essential in forming the highly distinctive, quasi-narrative style of the *Zuo zhuan*. It has been noted that one of *Zuo zhuan*'s prominent features is the presence of many commentaries without corresponding

Chunqiu entries, known as *wujing zhi zhuan* 無經之傳. This feature has often been associated with *Zuo zhuan*'s independence from the *Chunqiu* main text. Contrary to this view, I argue that this is one of the most important techniques consistently employed by the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan* to subtly indicate the *Chunqiu* guidelines and Confucius' judgments. Interestingly, however, this method has been overlooked by many scholars. Schaberg briefly touched on this topic by identifying one type of *wujing zhi zhuan* and referring to it as an "anecdote series."¹⁹ He claims that some of the scattered passages form an anecdote series in which the development of an event may extend over time, and several related incidents may occur years apart due to their annalistic order. While this is an insightful observation, it accounts for only certain passages, leaving other commentaries without main text correspondences to be seen as individual or independent passages. If we treat these commentaries as a unit that can be further divided into subsets, each with a specific role and purpose, then we might gain a different understanding of how to read the *Zuo zhuan* and its inner logic. I will attempt to identify and classify the major subsets of all *wujing zhi zhuan* and analyze their functions and contributions to the overall structure of the text using concrete examples as evidence.

Together, through these four chapters, we will gradually build towards a deeper understanding of the purpose, nature, and overall structure of the *Zuo zhuan*. The ultimate goal I hope to achieve through this dissertation is to provide a cohesive and comprehensive discussion on the rationale and the process of the formation of *Zuo zhuan*'s unique composition, a question for which the answer lies not in the literary analysis of the formal features and rhetorical strategies perceived from its achieved form, but rather in the systematic examination of several

¹⁹ Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 15–16.

larger issues. By utilizing this approach, I hope I will not only be able to provide a different yet thorough understanding of the *Zuo zhuan*, but also suggest a different process for the formation of “narrative” that is particular for situations in early China, which may, in turn, contribute to the general discussion in the world of narrative.

Chapter One: Scribes and *Shi* in the Pre-Qin Period


Scribes, as a pivotal and distinctive group within Chinese history, have played a crucial role in shaping early literary forms and influencing the development of Chinese literary history. Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–597), in *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓, attributed the origin of Chinese literary genres to the Five Classics, explicitly noting: “Documents, memorials, admonitions, and inscriptions find their origins in the *Chunqiu*.”²⁰ The discussion of scribe’s functions typically evokes notions such as “writing,” “recording,” and “archiving.” Archaeological findings reveal a longstanding tradition of recording and conserving significant events, a practice evident as early as the Oracle Bone Inscriptions from the Shang dynasty. This tradition underscores a conscious effort towards the preservation of historical accounts. Yan Zhitui’s reference to the *Chunqiu* pertains to the official annals that encompass a broad spectrum of historical events, meticulously collected, preserved, and documented by scribes from various states during the Spring and Autumn period.

Nevertheless, the roles and responsibilities of scribes have not remained static but have evolved through a complex process. The meaning associated with the term “scribe” has varied significantly across antiquity, the Pre-Qin era, and beyond into the Qin and Han dynasties. Delving into the meanings and transitions of the scribe’s role across these periods is pivotal for understanding the nature of the *Zuo zhuan* and discerning its compiler’s identity. A thorough understanding of the origin, development, and specific duties after the formalization of the

²⁰ “書、奏、箴、銘生於《春秋》者也。” Wang Liqi 王利器, *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 顏氏家訓集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993; rpt. 2011), 237.

scribal system is crucial to effectively address the question of whether the *Zuo zhuan* is a historical text.

1.1 An Etymological Review of *Shi*

In the endeavor to trace the evolution and multifaceted roles of scribes in early China, scholars have delved into the nuanced transformations in the form and significance of characters, notably the character for “scribe,” 史 (*shi*).²¹ The earliest manifestations of this term can be traced back to the Oracle Bone Inscriptions (OBI), where the character 史 appears in diverse renditions, such as variations . This diversity has given rise to a range of scholarly interpretations of its significance. The *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 categorizes *shi* as an ideogram, deriving from the elements *you* 又 and *zhong* 中, denoting neutrality or centrality.²² An examination of the OBI reveals that 史 is consistently constructed from components 𠄎, or 𠄎, and 𠄎, regardless of script variation. Component 𠄎 is interpreted as the OBI rendition of 又, emblematic of a hand, embodying actions like “to grasp” or “to hold.” The orientation of 𠄎 within the OBI—occasionally leftward, at times rightward—serves to differentiate between the

²¹ While the term *shi* denotes a meaning equivalent to “scribe”, this is not the only meaning associated with the character. For further discussions on the complexity and the multi-layered structure of *shi*, please refer to section 1.3 of this chapter.

²² Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815), *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 116.

left and right hands, though this distinction does not convey a significant variation in semantic value.²³


The interpretations of 史's upper component, resembling the form of 中, vary among scholars. Lao Kan 勞榦 (1907–2003) perceived the pictograph in OBI as indicative of divinatory practices, specifically the drilling into turtle shells. He posited that the duties of ancient *shi* were akin to those of *wu* 巫 (shaman, spirit-medium, sorcerer) and *zhu* 祝 (invocator), roles deeply involved in rituals and divination. Lao further cites texts such as the *Guo yu* 國語, *Zuo zhuan*, and *Shi ji* to argue that ancient *wu* and *shi* belonged to the same office and occasionally performed the role of *zhu*.²⁴ Conversely, Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 (1911–1966) interpreted the upper component of 史 as analogous to a net-like tool associated with the character *bi* 畢, implying a role encompassing oversight of sacrifices, hunting, and military matters.²⁵ In his work “*Shangdai de shenhua yu wushu*” 商代的神話與巫術, Chen classified early *wu* into five categories: *zhu shi* 祝史 (ritual scribe), *yu bu* 預卜 (diviner), *zhan meng* 占夢 (dream interpreter), *wu yu* 舞雩 (rain dancer), and *yi* 醫 (physician/doctor). He posited a lack of clear

²³ Zhu Yanming 朱彥明 contends that the directional orientation of 又 merely represents the left and right hands. He argues that there is no significant distinction between the obverse and reverse sides. See Zhu Yanming, “You jiaguwen kan shi zi benyi ji qi zaoqi liubian” 由甲骨文看“史”字本義及其早期流變, *Yindu xuekan* 4 (2015): 1.

²⁴ Lao Kan 勞榦, “Gudai sixiang yu zongjiao de yige fangmian” 古代思想與宗教的一個方面, *Xue yuan* 10 (1947): 10–11.

²⁵ Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, “Shi zi xinshi buzheng” 史字新釋補證, *Kaogu xueshe shekan* 5 (1936): 13–16.

division of labor among *bus shi* 卜史 (divinatory scribes), *bu ci* 卜辭 (divination interpreter), and *zhu* during this period, highlighting a confluence of responsibilities that included interpreting weather patterns and dream divination for the king. These roles were collectively known as the *wu*, tasked with conducting various religious rituals. The distinct titles conferred upon these positions reflected their specific entrusted functions, with the king potentially assuming the role of the principal *wu*.²⁶

Shen Kang-po 沈剛伯 (1896–1977) offered a distinct viewpoint, conceptualizing the *shi* as a ceremonial official tasked predominantly with organizing the hierarchical placement of deities and spirits in rituals.²⁷ Aside from Chen Mengjia’s association of the term’s origin with hunting tools, another widely accepted interpretation posits that component 中 signifies bamboo slips, thereby suggesting that *shi* initially denoted individuals holding bamboo slips. This interpretation attracted substantial support within the scholarly community, including Wu Dacheng 吳大澂 (1835–1902), who advocated for the depiction of *shi* as a hand holding a bamboo slip. He challenged the interpretation of *shi* as symbolizing the concept of “centrality” by emphasizing the consistent presence of the character 中 in the form of  in the OBI, notably in the absence of variant 中. Wu further contended that 中 fundamentally represents a simplification of component 中 (depicting bound bamboo slips in OBI), evoking the imagery of a

²⁶ Chen, “Shangdai de shenhua yu wushu” 商代的神話與巫術, *Yanjing xuebao* 20 (1936): 534.

²⁷ Shen Kang-po 沈剛伯, “*Shuo shi*” 說史, in *Zhongguo shixue shi lunwen xuanji* 中國史學史論文選集, Tu Wei-yun and Huang Chin-Shing 黃進興 comp. (Taipei: Huashi chubanshe, 1976), 9–10.

person holding a booklet.²⁸ This interpretation finds resonance with Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927), who considered *shi* as a role entailing document or text management.²⁹

An alternative viewpoint interprets 巾 as indicative of a flag or banner. Hayashi Minao 林巳奈夫 (1925–2006), using 𣎵 for illustration, argued that the “丫” component essentially represents a simplified form of a flag.³⁰ Zhu Yanming expands on this interpretation, noting that in the OBI 巾 is sometimes depicted with a flag motif (𣎵), occasionally retains only the upper portion of the flag (𣎵), or omits the flag motif altogether, adopting the form 巾. Zhu posits that *shi* initially signified the act of bearing a flag, essentially identifying the flag carrier. This aligns with Hu Houxuan’s 胡厚宣 (1911–1995) hypothesis that *shi* functioned as a military official. In the context of the Pre-Qin era’s emphasis on ritual and warfare, the responsibilities associated with *shi* concerning warfare naturally expanded to include concepts such as “affair,” “envoy,” “record,” and “official.”³¹ Zhu Yanming’s analysis synthesizes various scholarly interpretations, positing that *shi* primarily served as a military official linked to banner-bearing, while also acknowledging its subsequent diversification into roles including ritual officiants, envoys, and

²⁸ Wu Dacheng 吳大澂, *Shuowen gu zhoubu* 說文古籀補 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 12.

²⁹ Wang Guowei 王國維, *Shi shi* 釋史, in *Guantang jilin* 觀堂集林, *juan* 6 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 263–274.

³⁰ Hayashi Minao 林巳奈夫, “Chūgoku saki shin jidai no hata” 中国先秦時代の旗, in *Shirin* 49 (1966): 87–89.

³¹ Zhu, “You jiaguwen kan shi zi benyi ji qi zaoqi liubian,” 6–7. For Hu’s arguments on *shi* functioning as a military position, see Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, “Yindai de shi wei wuguan shuo” 殷代的史為武官說, in *Zhongguo shixue shi lunwen xuanji*, 183–196.

record-keepers, as functional extensions of its original military duties.³² While the discussions above outline several prevailing theories regarding the etymological roots and initial functions of *shi*, this analysis cannot comprehensively cover all conjectures but aims to highlight some of the mainstream interpretations to foster further scholarly inquiry.

The scholarly discourse unveils a plethora of interpretations regarding the early meanings of the character 史, rendering a definitive conclusion elusive. The main challenge lies in ascertaining the specific implications of 史 representations in the OBI. Scholars like Lao Kan and Chen Mengjia offered valuable insights, yet their hypotheses, lacking sufficient evidence, remain speculative. This ambiguity is largely attributable to the scant availability of early textual evidence and the ongoing efforts to fully decipher the OBI. Additionally, contemporary interpretations of the antiquity are occasionally, and perhaps inadvertently, influenced by later historical and social contexts, leading to anachronistic readings of Pre-Qin phenomena. For example, the analyses by Wu Dacheng and Wang Guowei, which propose that the character 史 derives from 册, implying a role focusing on document management, may reflect the influences from the formalization of the scribal system during the Western Zhou dynasty, as well as the lexicographical contributions of Xu Shen's 許慎 (58–148) *Shuowen jiezi*.³³

Following the establishment of a structured scribal system in the Western Zhou dynasty, the roles of recording and archiving became increasingly highlighted, a trend solidified in the Han dynasty through historical texts such as the *Shi ji* and *Han shu*. However, conclusive evidence affirming that documentation and record-keeping were the primary and foundational

³² Zhu, “You jiaguwen kan shi zi benyi ji qi zaoqi liubian,” 4–7.

³³ Xu Shen construes *shi* as ones who record events. See Duan, *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 116.

duties of Pre-Qin scribes, or that the original semantic core of 史 was inherently linked to holding booklets (冊), remains elusive. Zhu Yanming, from a philological standpoint, has questioned this view, highlighting that the upper component of the character 史 was depicted using both the 𠄎 and 𠄏 forms. Even if the former bears resemblance to the OBI form of 冊, it does not substantiate a connection with the latter form.³⁴ Xu Zhaochang 許兆昌 further criticizes the approach of inferring the scribe's origins based on the character's form, arguing that it could represent 事 (affair), 吏 (official), 史 (scribe), and 使 (envoy). This implies that previous scholarly interpretations might have fallen into a logical circularity by presuming the character form explicitly denotes the word 史, associated with the sense of “scribe.”³⁵

In summary, while philological inquiry into the etymology of *shi* 史 is extensive, the approach of projecting later conceptual frameworks onto earlier epochs faces substantial limitations due to the scarcity materials, offering only a referential framework for understanding *shi* in early China. This dilemma extends beyond philological methods, indicating that definitively characterizing and elucidating the complex role of scribes in early China remains a formidable task. Nonetheless, an integrated analysis of the available historical sources, coupled with scholarly interpretations, enables us to sketch a tentative overview of the early scribe's functions.

³⁴ Zhu, “You jiaguwen kan shi zi benyi ji qi zaoqi liubian,” 4.

³⁵ Xu Zhaochang 許兆昌, *Xianqin shiguan de zhidu yu wenhua* 先秦史官的制度與文化 (Heilongjiang: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 2006), 1–6.

1.1.1 The Origin of Scribe in the “Chu yu” 楚語

The scholarly discourse predominantly centers on the debate over whether the role of *shi* was originally a branch of the *wu*, or if it constituted an entirely distinct office. This debate extends to questions of whether the *shi*'s responsibilities included conducting rituals, overseeing military operations, serving as heavenly officials,³⁶ or fire officials. Sima Qian, in his autobiographical preface to the *Shi ji*, traced his lineage back to the Yu 虞 and Xia 夏 dynasties, where his ancestors served as grand scribes, responsible for astronomical and astrological matters. This lineage continued until the position was abolished during the reign of King Xuan of Zhou 周宣王 (r. 828–782 BC), precipitating the transformation of the grand scribe role into the Sima clan.³⁷ Sima Qian's account explicitly characterizes the scribe's role as a heavenly officer, entrusted with the cosmic order since the time of Zhuanxu 顓頊. The source materials he refers to likely include private family records, preserved across generations given the Sima family's enduring association with the scribal duties, suggesting the preservation of detailed genealogical records within the family.³⁸ Additionally, part of his account may draw from the “Chu yu” section of the *Guo yu* or other analogous, now-lost records, which reads as follows:

³⁶ I use “heavenly office/official” to refer to the Chinese term *tian guan* 天官, which designates the office in charge of all heavenly matters. Since this office was often responsible for both astronomical and astrological matters in early China, I use the general reference of “heavenly office” to denote an all-encompassing scope.

³⁷ *Shi ji, juan* 130, 3285.

³⁸ Xu Zhaochang cites the example of Xuanzi 宣子 tracing his lineage to the Tang 唐 and Yu 虞 periods as depicted in the ninth year of Duke Xiang in the *Zuo zhuan*, to support the contention that, during the Pre-Qin era, the practice of documenting and transmitting family histories across generations within clans was widespread.

Zhuanxu, having received it, therefore he commanded Nan Zhengzhong to manage the heavens in order to communicate with the divine, and Huo Zhengli to govern the earth in order to communicate with the populace. This reinstated the ancient norms without encroachments, thus effectuating a definitive separation between earth and heaven. Following this, the Sanmiao clan inherited the ominous virtues of the Jiuli clan. Yao then restored the descendants of Chong and Li, not forgetting their ancestors' undertakings, and allowed them to oversee heaven and earth once again. This precedent was maintained through the Xia and Shang dynasties. Thus, Chong and Li's clans managed heaven and earth, distinguishing the ritual positions and establishing the hierarchical order of reverence between the populace and the deities. In the Zhou dynasty, the Earl of Cheng, Xiu Fu, was their descendant. During King Xuan's reign, he lost his official capacity, transitioning to the Sima clan.³⁹

This passage suggests that the lineage of the Sima clan can be traced to the legendary era of Zhuanxu, with heavenly duties divided between Nan Zhengzhong 南正天, who oversaw the

The phenomenon where official duties in early China were often tied to specific families seems to be a common scenario. An entry from the twenty-ninth year of Duke Xiang in the *Zuo zhuan* recounting a conversation between the Zheng minister, Boyou 伯有, and his subordinate Gongsun Hei 公孫黑 reveals that the Gongsun family has a long-standing reputation for assuming the role of messengers passed down through many generations. This account, along with the references to Xuanzi and Sima Qian's preface, indicate a prevalent occurrence of hereditary succession of official posts during early China, rendering the surmise that some of the official records were exclusively preserved within the related clans highly plausible. *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 39, 1275.

³⁹ “顓頊受之，乃命南正重司天以屬神，命火正黎司地以屬民，使復舊常，無相侵讀，是謂絕地通天。其后，三苗復九黎之德，堯復育重黎之後，不忘舊者，使復典之。以至於夏、商，故重黎氏敘天地，而別其分主者也。其在周，程伯休父其後也，當宣王時，失其守官，而為司馬氏。” Xu Yuangao 徐元誥 (1876–1955), *Guo yu jijie* 國語集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002; rpt. 2006), 515–6.

heavens, and Huo Zhengli 火正黎, who managed the earth. This established order was disrupted during the turmoil instigated by the Jiuli clan 九黎, leaving the heavenly office vacant until its re-establishment by Yao 堯. This enabled Chong 重 and Li 黎 to reassume their heavenly and earthly duties. By the Zhou dynasty, Xiu Fu, the Earl of Cheng 程伯休父, represented the culmination of such heavenly stewardship. With the ascent of King Xuan, the office responsible for dual governance of heaven and earth was completely lost, leading to the emergence of the Sima clan. While this account presents a cohesive delineation, the precise functions of ancient heavenly officials such as Nan Zhengzhong and Huo Zhengli, along with the full implications of being a “heavenly officer,” remain largely obscure. The only clue within this narrative is the notion of a “definitive separation between earth and heaven” 絕地通天. In fact, the dialogue between Guan Yifu 觀射父 and King Zhao of Chu 楚昭王 preceding this account extends further back, tracing the duties associated with heavenly governance back to an era predating Zhuangzi.

Initially, there was a clear distinction between mortals and deities. Individuals endowed with sage-like insight were deemed vessels for divine spirits, males known as *xi* 覡 and females as *wu* 巫. This reference may potentially represent the earliest documented instance of official roles in extant texts. Their duties predominantly revolved around the organization of deities’ precedence in rituals, the specification of ceremonial instruments, sacrificial animals, timings, and attire. This segment underpins Shen Kang-po’s proposition regarding the ritualistic role of *shi*. Other official titles include *zhu* 祝 and *zong* 宗, which also pertained to spiritual and ritualistic functions, explicitly overseeing ancestral temples, ancestral hierarchies, seasonal rites, and sacrificial offerings. This engendered a further division and categorization of duties into five

domains: heaven, earth, gods, humans, and various objects, managed by distinct personnels known as the “five officials” 五官. Fundamentally, all these roles were intimately connected with ritualistic and ceremonial observances.

These spiritual officials exclusively wielded control over the cosmos and divine communication channels, precluding direct interactions between the populace and the divine realm. Nonetheless, during Shaohao’s 少昊 reign, Jiuli’s disruption of this established harmony led to *wu* serving both the ruling power and private households, thus enabling personal communication with heavenly beings and obscuring the mortal-divine boundary. In response, Zhuanxu instructed Chong and Li to redefine the responsibilities concerning mortals and gods, thereby centralizing divine dialogue under the purview of royal officials. Consequently, the phrase “definitive separation between earth and heaven” signifies not a cessation of interactions between the two realms but rather the demarcation of duties relating to the populace from those concerning deities, prohibiting any overlap or direct communion between them. This short phrase symbolizes the consolidation of centralized authority, the inception of offices dedicated to mediating earthly and heavenly affairs, and the monopolization of the sacred privilege of divine dialogue. Chang Kwang-chih’s 張光直 (1931–2001) exploration into the “definitive separation between earth and heaven” elucidates:

The essence of this myth lies in the integration of shamanism and politics, indicating that the means of communicating with heaven became an exclusive phenomenon. This suggests that previously, through shamanic rituals, animals, and various ritual implements, people could

interact with deities. However, as society evolved, the means of communication with the heaven became monopolized by a select few.⁴⁰

This view is supported by Professor Fu Gang 傅剛, who posits that in the nascent stages of society, the populace relied on *wu* for divine favor, effectively placing the destiny of individuals within the remit of these spiritual intermediaries. Consequently, the preeminent *wu* was typically the ruler at the time, followed by shamanistic officials possessing specialized knowledge.⁴¹

1.1.2 Between *Shi* and *Wu* and Other Related Offices

The aforementioned account represents the ancients' endeavor to elucidate the cosmic order and the exclusive privilege of divine communication by tracing its roots to antiquity. However, the intricate details presented might not reliably inform our understanding of the actual circumstances of those times. The logical evolution of human society typically transitions from a state of disorder towards order. Initially, the realms of mortals and deities intermingled without an established cosmological sequence or a well-defined hierarchical structure, and devoid of a clear separation between divine and mortal governance. Guan Yifu's speech introduces speculative elements regarding ancient epochs, portraying a narrative where inherent order

⁴⁰ “這個神話的實質，是巫術與政治的結合，表明通天地的手段成為一種獨佔的現象。就是說，以往經過巫術、動物和各種法器的幫助，人們都可以與神詳見。但是社會發展到一定程度之後，通天地的手段便為少數人佔有。” Chang Kwang-chih 張光直, *Kaogu xue zhuanli liujiang* 考古學專題六講 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), 10–11.

⁴¹ Fu Gang 傅剛, *Hanwei liuchao wenxue yu wenxian lungao* 漢魏六朝文學與文獻論稿 (Beijing: Shangwu chubanshe, 2016), 6.

descends into chaos before reclaiming structure, diverging from conventional theories of societal progression. This perspective may reflect a reverence for antiquity, celebrating an idealized state of structure and order, a sentiment prevalent in the Pre-Imperial era.

Nevertheless, this historical rendition offers valuable insights into the ambiguous nature of early court official assignments, with the position of the *wu* emerging as a principal royal functionary. Guan Yifu's reference to positions such as *zong bo* 宗伯 (minister of rites) and *tai zhu* 太祝 (grand supplicator) likely signifies later developments stemming from societal expansion and the formalization of bureaucratic system, thereby increasing ritual practice demands and necessitating more intricate subdivisions. To further elaborate on this postulation, initially, *wu*'s responsibilities might have spanned a wide array of spiritual duties, chiefly mediating between the heavenly and terrestrial realms. The term *wu* serves as a general designation, with its numerous responsibilities likely distributed among various individuals. Over time, this collective role diversified into various specialized titles. Li Tsung-t'ung 李宗侗 (1895–1974) contends: “I surmise that the earliest officials emerged from *wu*, paralleling the origin of political authority from divine right.”⁴² This observation concurs with Chen Mengjia's view of the king as the preeminent *wu*, while also aligning with the surmise that *wu* likely represents the origin of all other offices that gradually developed throughout the course of Chinese history.

A consensus seems to exist among scholars that early shamanic and scribal roles were indistinct, suggesting that the scribe's function evolved from shamanic practices. In fact, the

⁴² “我以为最初的官吏皆出自巫，等于最初的政权是出自神权一样。” Li Tsung-t'ung 李宗侗, “Shiguan zhidu—fulun dui chuantong zhi zunzhong” 史官制度——附論對傳統之尊重, in *Zhongguo shixue shi lunwen xuanji*, 66.

initial segment of Guan Yifu's discourse does not explicitly address the *shi* concept, and the later mention of the term *wu shi* 巫史 appears more as a generic reference than an indication of a definitive divergence from *wu*. Based on available texts and scholarly debates regarding the genesis of scribe, even after the delineation of offices such as *shi*, *zong*, and *zhu*, their responsibilities frequently overlapped, lacking the clear distinctions observed in Western Zhou and beyond. Regarding the origin of scribe and its relationship to the *wu*, Shen Kang-po states:

In ancient Egypt and Babylon, written records were preserved within temples. The subsequent organization and compilation of these records produced the sole surviving ancient histories of these nations; their authors, Manetho and Berossus, were indeed priests. From this, we can ascertain that in antiquity, not all shamans were necessarily scribes, but all ancient scribes were definitely shamans, a phenomenon consistent across both Eastern and Western contexts.⁴³

The priestly aspect of scribes is also articulated in Lao Kan's argument: "Thus, the essence of scribe embodies the roles of both priest and diviner."⁴⁴ He cited the *Shi ji* to support his assertion, summarizing: "The term 'heavenly official,' as referenced in the 'Tianguan shu' (Heaven Official Text) within the *Shi ji*, implies that the astrological responsibilities held by the grand scribe are akin to the duties performed by priests and diviners."⁴⁵ The "Tianguan shu" 天官書, as

⁴³ “古埃及，巴比倫的文字記載皆藏於神廟之中，後來加以整理，編輯，成為兩國僅有之古史；其著作人滿列左（Manetho）與白諾沙（Berossus）固均為祭司。由此可確知，上古之巫固不必皆史，而上古之史則必定為巫，固不分中西，皆相同也。” Shen, “Shuo shi,” 15.

⁴⁴ “所以史官就是祭司而兼卜官。” Lao, “Shi zi de jiegou yiji shi de yuanshi zhiwu,” 39.

⁴⁵ “天官即史记天官书之‘天官’...所以太史所掌的也就是占星术（Astrology），这正和祭司、卜官，属于同类的职务。” Lao, “Shi zi de jiegou yiji shi de yuanshi zhiwu,” 39.

referenced by Lao, meticulously enumerates individuals tasked with “transmitting astronomical patterns” through the ages, extending from ancient heavenly officials such as Chong and Li, through Wuxian 巫咸 of the Shang dynasty, to Scribe Yi 史佚 of Zhou, and onwards to Shi Shen 石申 of the Wei-Jin period.⁴⁶ This enumeration illuminates a genealogical thread of ancient offices, tracing the lineage from heavenly officials of antiquity to Shang shamans and Zhou scribes.

Tai Chün-jen 戴軍仁 (1901–1990), in his treatise “Shi shi” 釋史, drawing from the “Hong yun” 鴻運 section of the *Li ji* 禮記 and the Biography of Wang Mang 王莽傳 from the *Han shu*, argued that ancient scribes were tasked with religious ceremonies, akin to those of *zong* 宗, *zhu* 祝, *wu* 巫 and *bu* 卜, a tradition persisting into the Han dynasty.⁴⁷ British historian Herbert Butterfield (1900–1979), approaching from a different academic background and research perspective, also concluded that early event records, in both the East and West, likely emanated from calendrical recordings, divinatory outcomes, and religious devotions.⁴⁸ This viewpoint underscores a universal aspect of early human civilizations, indicating that despite distinct cultural identities, similar practices across various civilizations during analogous periods were driven by universal needs and methodologies.

While diverse perspectives abound regarding the ancillary roles of scribes (such as diviners, fire officers, military officers, among others), there exists a unanimous consensus on

⁴⁶ *Shi ji*, *juan* 27, 1343.

⁴⁷ Tai Chün-jen 戴軍仁, “Shi sh” 釋史, in *Zhongguo shixue shi lunwen xuanji*, 23.

⁴⁸ Herbert Butterfield, *History and Man’s Attitude to the Past* (London: SOAS, University of London, 1961), 7–8.

their primary role, mirroring that of Western priests, chiefly concerned with overseeing divine affairs. This priestly attribute predominantly pertains to the *wu*. Inquiries into the genealogy of scribes often trace back to an era when *wu* and *shi* were indistinct, elucidating the early functions of scribes through the generalized duties of *wu*, essentially considering *shi* as an extension of shamanic functions. However, consensus among scholars regarding the specific responsibilities of scribes in this undifferentiated era remains elusive. Among the few certainties is that from their earliest instances, scribes assumed roles encompassing those of ritual and heavenly officials, among others. Xu Zhaochang posits that a defining trait of early scribes was their engagement in astronomical observations and calendar development.⁴⁹ Analysis of the *Zhou li* reveals that, beyond document archival, record excerpting, and documenting the ruler's words and deeds, Zhou dynasty scribes also engaged in ritual duties. These included divining auspicious days, ordering the sequence and prominence of offerings, alongside other tasks associated with ritual officials. They were also responsible for identifying the seasons, formulating calendars, and conducting astrological divinations as part of their heavenly official duties.

Yet, a comprehensive assessment indicates that the overarching function of scribes at this juncture was focused on overseeing the state's legal codes and managing official documents concerning the four realms, essentially clerical tasks. Their involvement in ritualistic matters was largely in collaboration with specified ritual officials (like the *zhishi* 執事).⁵⁰ Moreover, the “Chunguan-Zongbo” 春官·宗伯 section of the *Zhou li* outlines a range of roles specific to

⁴⁹ Xu, *Xianqin shiguan de zhidu yu wenhua*, 11–16.

⁵⁰ *Zhou li zhushu*, juan 26, 818.

divination, rituals, and shamanism, thus indicating that the duties undertaken by scribes within the scopes of ritual and heavenly affairs were delegated to specialized officials, highlighting these were not their principal responsibilities.⁵¹ Although scribes did not exclusively serve as ritual or heavenly officials, their participation in these domains signifies that such roles constituted a significant portion of a scribe's duties in antiquity, with remnants of these functions persisting into later periods. This interpretation corroborates earlier scholarly assertions. Qing scholar Wang Zhong 汪中 (1745–1794) cited several passages of scribal involvement in heavenly, spiritual, and divinatory affairs during the Spring and Autumn period in the *Zuo zhuan*, suggesting a continuity in managing affairs related to heaven, spirits, and divination.⁵²

Sima Qian claimed that the Sima clan “has traditionally had charge of the Zhou annals.”⁵³ As noted in previous reference to the “Chu yu” section of *Guo yu*, the origin of the scribe is traced back to Chong and Li, whose descendant lost his position during King Xuan's reign, subsequently transforming into the Sima clan. Notably, the expression “lost his position” presumably refers to the governance of heaven and earth undertaken by Chong and Li. Wei Zhao 韋昭 (201–273) in his annotation to the *Guo yu* states: “‘Cheng’ designates a state, ‘bo’ denotes a rank of nobility; Xiufu is one's name. Losing the office means losing the position related to heaven and earth and becoming the Minister of War for the vassals.”⁵⁴ Shen Kang-po elaborated

⁵¹ *Zhou li zhushu*, *juan* 17, 518–525.

⁵² Wang Zhong 汪中, *Shu xue · Zuo zhuan Chunqiu shiyi* 述學·左傳春秋釋疑, in *Sibu congkan*, 3b.

⁵³ “司馬氏，世典周史。” *Shi ji*, *juan* 130, 3285.

⁵⁴ “程，國，伯，爵。休父，名也。失官，謂失天地之官，而以諸侯為大司馬。” *Guo yu jijie*, 516.

on this transition, suggesting that by the Spring and Autumn period, the scribe's role had transformed distinctly into a role involving the documentation of speech and events.⁵⁵ This cumulative evidence suggests a dynamic evolution in the scribe's function and focus over time. Inversely, the preservation of the ancient scribal duties into the Spring and Autumn period highlights the significance of these tasks, which continued to form a part of scribal functions in later generations.

The function of record-keeping exhibited by scribes during the Zhou period is considered by scholars such as Shen Kang-po and Lao Kan to be a development of later stages. Shen Kang-po's analysis of the expansion of scribes' duties suggests a linear progression, positing that scribes initially functioned as ritual officials arranging the ranks of deities, while concurrently holding astronomical and astrological responsibilities. This role evolved into managing court ceremonies and writing decrees, eventually culminating in their engagement with documenting events and speeches.⁵⁶ Lao Kan concurred that the emergence of scribes' record-keeping roles was contingent upon the emergence of writing systems, indicating an absence of such functions in earlier times.⁵⁷ However, the assertion that the evolution of scribes' roles followed a strictly linear trajectory warrants reconsideration. Contrarily, this dissertation posits that the genesis of scribes' record-keeping duties might be traced back to ancient precedents, with essential functions attributed to scribes in later periods possibly established since antiquity, albeit in varying degrees (represented in figure 1).

⁵⁵ Shen, "Shuo shi," 15.

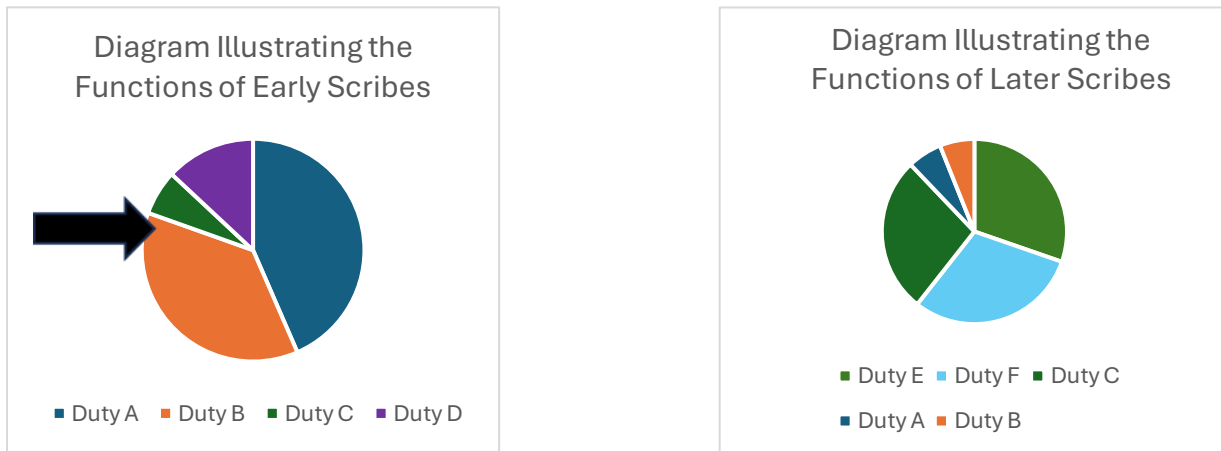
⁵⁶ Shen, "Shuo shi," 12–15.

⁵⁷ Lao, "Shi zi de jiegou ji shiguan de yuanshi zhiwu," 40.

It has been noticed that the ancients utilized a distinctive practice of knotting cords for record-keeping, with the size of knots conveying different meanings and interpretations.⁵⁸ Considering that divine communication during rituals was a predominant activity of the era, the need for interpretation may have inherently linked to the outcomes of such communications, vesting the authority of interpretation with the *wu*, who mediated interactions with the deities. This, of course, differs from later practices of record-keeping, but it could be indicative of the potential origin for the scribes' documentation role. This perspective suggests that the practice of documentation could have emerged prior to the advent of writing. Consequently, viewing the transformation of scribal duties through a pie logic that recognizes simultaneous existence with shifting emphases may provide a more nuanced understanding of their historical development. This approach also elucidates why, despite a significant shift towards managing official documents and archives during the Spring and Autumn period, scribes retained aspects of their original duties.

⁵⁸ Regarding the knotting practice, the *Zhou yi* 周易 writes: "In remote antiquity, [people] knotted cords to manage things." 上古結繩而治. Kong Yingda cited Zheng Kangcheng's 鄭康成 comment, stating: "As for knotting cords, Zheng Kangcheng's annotation says that one ties larger knots for important matters, and smaller knots for minor matters. The meaning is perhaps just so." 結繩者, 鄭康成注云, 事大大結其繩, 事小小結其繩, 義或然也。 *Zhou yi zhengyi* 周易正義, Wang Bi 王弼 comm., Kong Yingda exeg., in *Shisanjing zhushu* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), *juan* 8, 356.

Figure 1: Illustration of the “pie-logic” regarding the transformation of scribal functions⁵⁹



1.2 Scribal system during the Zhou Dynasty

Drawing upon existing texts, the establishment of the scribal system can be traced back to the era of the Yellow Emperor. The “*Zuo pian*” 作篇 section of *Shi ben* 世本 recounts:

The Yellow Emperor appointed Xi He to prognosticate the sun, Chang Yi to prognosticate the moon, Yu Qu to prognosticate the constellations and weather, Ling Lun to invent the bamboo pitch-pipes, Da Nao to establish the sixty-year cycle, Li Shou to devise methods of counting, Rong Cheng to craft calendars based on these six arts, Hou Yi to invent prognostication for

⁵⁹ This serves as an illustration of what I refer to as “pie logic,” in contrast to the linear progression proposed by Shen Kang-po. The categories and proportions of each segment are not based on actual data and do not imply statistical significance.

annual harvests, and Ju Song and Cang Jie to invent writing. These figures were all scribal officials during Yellow Emperor's reign.⁶⁰

According to Song Zhong's 宋衷 (?–219) commentary on the *Shi ben*, the Yellow Emperor's era signified the inaugural establishment of the scribe position, with Cang Jie and Ju Song 沮誦 assuming this role. By the Xia and Shang dynasties, the office of the scribe had bifurcated into left and right positions: scribes on the left were tasked with documenting verbal matters, whereas scribes on the right recorded actions.⁶¹ This narrative, rooted in ancient mythology, posits Ju Song and Cang Jie, the inventors of writing and scribes under the Yellow Emperor, as pioneers in the practice of recording, marking it as a principal responsibility of scribes from the outset.

As delineated in preceding discussions, early scribes evolved from an initially multifaceted role, encapsulating duties such as conducting rituals, divinations, and military expeditions, into a position with clearly demarcated functions and responsibilities within the royal court. This evolution primarily transpired following Western Zhou's establishment of a formalized system. Consequently, from a stringent standpoint, the *wu shi* of the antiquity does not directly equate to the scribe official as later conceptualized but rather serves as its antecedent. The concept of the scribe as an official capacity first emerged in the OBI of the Shang dynasty,

⁶⁰ “黃帝使羲和占日，常儀占月，臯區占星氣，伶倫造律呂，大撓作甲子，隸首作算數，容成綜此六術作調歷，后益作占歲，沮誦倉頡作書，並黃帝時史官。” *Shi ben bazhong* 世本八種，*Song Zhong* 宋衷 comm., Qin Jiamo 秦嘉謨 et al comp. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 356.

The *Shi ben* refers to a text recording genealogical accounts of families, clans, and dynasties in the Pre-Qin period, attributed to Pre-Qin scribes. This text is no longer extant.

⁶¹ “黃帝之世，始立史官。倉頡沮誦，居其職矣。至於夏商，乃分置左右；言則左史書之，動則右史書之。” *Shi ben bazhong*, 357.

but it was not until the *Zhou li* we see an elaborate depiction on a comprehensive scribal system. It is unlikely, though, that this detailed regulatory framework of the Zhou dynasty emerged spontaneously; some scholars argue that this elaborate scribal system suggests a gradual development from similar systems existing in preceding eras, which through reform and refinement, reached maturity in the Western Zhou period.⁶²

Due to scant historical sources, this analysis predominantly relies on the *Zhou li*, supplemented with additional documentary evidence, to outline the scribe's role post the establishment of a formal bureaucratic system in pre-Qin period. The exploration into Zhou dynasty's scribal system constitutes a pivotal segment in the discourse on Pre-Qin scribe tradition, not only as an indispensable component in the continuum of the scribe's historical evolution but also because it closely mirrors the scribal system during the Spring and Autumn period. The scribal practices and duties across various states during this period largely adhered to the scribal system instituted by the Western Zhou, underscoring the enduring influence of Zhou's bureaucratic and ritual frameworks on subsequent scribal traditions.

Extensive scholarly efforts have focused on examining the Zhou dynasty's establishment of the scribe office, primarily utilizing the *Zhou li* as a foundational reference. However, some

⁶² For instance, Zhu Yanmin contends that a preliminary form of scribal system had already been established in the Shang court, with a specific designation named *taishi liao* 太史寮 (grand scribe secretariat). Luo Zhenyu argued that evidence indicating grand scribes' participation in ritual ceremonies found in the OBI aligns with the scribal duties outlined in the *Zhou li*, thereby confirming Zhou's inheritance of Shang dynasty's bureaucratic system. Xu Zhaochang also posits that the maturity of Zhou's scribal system suggests a long process of development tracing back to a remote origin. See Zhu, "You jiaguwen kan shi zi benyi ji qi zaoqi liubian," 6; Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉, *Yinxu shuqi kaoshi* 殷墟書契考釋, vol. 3 (Shanghai: Dongfang xuehui, 1927), 63b; Xu, *Xianqin shiguan de zhidu yu wenhua*, 1.

scholars question the dating of the *Zhou li*, suggesting its later compilation might not accurately reflect conditions for early scribes. The prevailing consensus among contemporary scholars places the composition of the extant *Zhou li* within the Warring States period. According to He Jin 何晉, the text amalgamates institutional practices from both the Western Zhou and the Spring and Autumn periods with the political framework of the Warring States period, enriched with the compiler's own political ideology.⁶³ While the *Zhou li* itself may not have originated during the Zhou dynasty, the Warring States period's proximity to the Zhou era implies a continuation of Zhou traditions and rituals. Consequently, the portrayal of Pre-Qin scribal practices within this text represents the earliest, most detailed, and systematically organized account available, providing invaluable insights into the roles and responsibilities of scribes of the time.⁶⁴

The *Zhou li* presents the scribe offices in two distinct sections: detailed discussions on the organization of these offices are found within the “Chun guan-Zong bo” section, while mentions of scribal duties also surface in descriptions pertaining to other official positions. This indicates that in addition to maintaining a separate office, scribes were integrated across various offices to fulfill specific roles within those entities. This analysis will first elucidate the diverse

⁶³ He Jin 何晉, “Cong *Zhou li* shiguan shezhi kan xianqin shixue de chansheng yu fazhan” 從《周禮》史官設置看先秦史學的產生與發展, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* (2020): 2.

⁶⁴ Martin Kern, through his analysis of the *Zhou li*, bronze inscriptions, and various other early texts, contends that most of the scribal offices and duties are attested in other sources, rendering the *Zhou li* a credible and authoritative source on the Zhou scribal system. The only fictional element presented by this text is its ideal blueprint for a synchronic government structure. See Kern, “Offices of Writing and Reading in the Rituals of Zhou,” in *Statecraft and Classical Learning: The Rituals of Zhou in East Asian History*, ed. Benjamin A. Elman and Martin Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 65–93.

responsibilities of scribes as outlined in the “Chun guan-Zong bo” section before delving into the roles of scribes situated in other capacities.

1.2.1 Scribal Duties in the *Zhou li*

The “Chun guan-Zong bo” section categorizes scribes into seven types: *da shi/tai shi* 大史/太史 (grand scribe), *xiao shi* 小史 (junior scribe), *baozhang shi* 保章氏 (royal astrologer), *pingxiang shi* 馮相氏 (astronomical observer), *nei shi* 內史 (royal secretary), *wai shi* 外史 (external secretary), and *yu shi* 御史 (royal scribe). Within this structure, the junior scribe functions under the grand scribe, paralleling the relationship between the junior and grand applicators, and the junior and grand ministers of rites, indicating a hierarchical or deputy role to the grand scribe.⁶⁵ Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) identified the grand scribe as the head of all scribes. However, according to the “Xu guan” 敘官 section of the “Chun guan-Zong bo,” royal secretary outranks the grand scribe,⁶⁶ positioning the latter in a subordinate role within the hierarchy. Addressing this controversy, Jia Gongyan 賈公彥 (dates unknown, active during the

⁶⁵ Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 writes: “As for junior scribe, it serves as the deputy to the grand scribe.” 小史，太史之副二。 *Zhou li zhengyi* 周禮正義, Sun Yirang exeg., in *Sun Yirang quanji* 孫詒讓全集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 1546.

I use Charles Hucker’s dictionary for the English translation of the official titles. See Charles Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2008).

⁶⁶ Royal scribe was ranked as a *zhong dafu* 中大夫 (ordinary grand master), whereas the grand scribe ranked only as a *xia dafu* 下大夫 (junior grand master).

7th century) argued that the grand scribe's expertise in heavenly matters elevates his status above the royal secretary.⁶⁷

Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 (1848–1908) offered a revisionist view, dividing the scribes into two independent divisions: one under the grand scribe, including the junior scribe and the royal astrologer and astronomical observer, and another led by the royal secretary, encompassing the royal scribe and external secretary. This division underscores Sun's contention that the grand scribe and royal secretary are juxtaposed to each other in court, embodying the practice where “the scribe on the left records speech, the scribe on the right records actions.” This practice, he asserted, was established well before the Spring and Autumn period, challenging Kong Yingda's claim of its formation during said era. In scenarios where one position was vacated, the remaining would assume its duties, underscoring their interchangeable roles. Consequently, Sun posited that the royal secretary might also be designated as the grand scribe, suggesting that references in the *Zuo zhuan* to grand scribes undertaking tasks of the royal secretary actually refer to royal secretaries functioning under the title of “grand scribe.”⁶⁸

This initial examination of scribal systems during the Spring and Autumn period, awaiting detailed discussion, provides a preliminary insight into the evolving structure of scribal offices. Let us, however, delve deeper into the issue of the so-called “scribes on the left and right” for a moment. Kong Yingda states:

The *Zhou li* has no mention of the left and right [scribes]. For the reference to [scribes on] the left and right, it directly reflects the will of contemporaneous ruler, placing them to the left

⁶⁷ *Zhou li zhushu*, juan 17, 526.

⁶⁸ *Zhou li zhengyi*, juan 32, 1546–47.

and right, thereby giving rise to their titles based on the affairs they managed. Consequently, the commentary contains the phrase ‘Yi Xiang, scribe on the left.’ The one in charge of recording matters on the left is called the ‘scribe on the left.’ Thus, ‘left’ and ‘right’ are not official titles but rather positional designations.⁶⁹

The designation of left and right scribes is not mentioned in the *Zhou li*; this concept gained prominence during the Han dynasty. The “Yu zao” 玉藻 section of the *Li ji* states as follows: “Actions are recorded by the scribe on the left, and words by scribe on the right.”⁷⁰ The “Sheng de” 盛德 section of the *Da Dai Li ji* 大戴禮記 notes: “The grand scribe and the royal secretary function as the left and right hands, respectively.”⁷¹ Commentary by Lu Bian 盧辯 (?–557) indicates, “The grand scribe is equated with the scribe on the left, and the royal secretary with the scribe on the right.”⁷² Moreover, the “Jiu gao” 酒誥 section of the *Shang shu* 尚書 mentions two figures, Grand Scribe You 太史友 and Royal Secretary You 內史友, with Zheng Xuan identifying the grand scribe and royal secretary as responsible for documenting words and

⁶⁹ “《周禮》無左右之名，得稱左右者，直是時君之意，處之左右，史掌之事因為立名，故《傳》有“左史倚相”。掌記左事，謂之左史，左右非官名也。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan 1*, 9.

⁷⁰ “動則左史書之，言則右史書之。” *Li ji zhengyi* 禮記正義, Zheng Xuan comm., Kong Yingda exeg., in *Shisanjing zhuhsu* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), *juan 29*, 1022.

⁷¹ “太史、內史，左右手也。” Wang Pinzhen 王聘珍 (dates unknown, active during the Qing period), *Da Dai Li ji jiegou* 大戴禮記解詁 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 148.

⁷² “太史為左史，內史為右史。” Dai De 戴德 (dates unknown, active during the Western Han period), “Sheng de,” *Da Dai Li ji* 大戴禮記, Lu Bian 盧辯 comm., in *Sibu congkan*, 7a.

actions.⁷³ These references suggest that the detailed responsibilities of the left and right scribes were first outlined in Han compilations of the *Li ji*, subsequently becoming prevalent during the Han period and broadly accepted thereafter. Discourse concerning left and right scribes prior to the Han period was scarce.

In the *Zuo zhuan*, “scribe on the left” is mentioned three times, with no mention of “scribe on the right.” For instance, an account from the fourteenth year of Duke Xiang 魯襄公, records the following phrase: “The scribe on the left spoke to Wei Zhuangzi, saying...”⁷⁴ Kong Yingda’s exegesis regarding the identity of this “scribe on the left,” as incorporated in the *Shisanjing zhushu* version, indicates a Jin official 晉大夫. However, the Song 宋, Yue 岳, and Ashikaga 足利 versions all indicate a Jin Grand Scribe 晉太史.⁷⁵ A similar situation is observed in the *Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年, where the text documents one account pertaining to “scribe on the left” without a single reference to the “scribe on the right.”⁷⁶ Regarding this intriguing phenomenon, Kong Yingda posited that *Chunqiu*’s omission of references to the royal secretary and the “scribe on the right” may indicate an incomplete scribal system in the vassal states

⁷³ *Shang shu zhengyi* 尚書正義, Kong Anguo 孔安國 comm., Kong Yingda exge., in *Shisanjing zhushu* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), *juan* 14, 450.

⁷⁴ “左史謂魏莊子曰。” *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 32, 1056.

⁷⁵ Note #1, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 32, 1056.

The other two references to the “scribe on the left” are recorded in the twelfth year of Duke Zhao and seventeenth year of Duke Ai respectively. See *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 45, 1504; *juan* 60, 1954–55.

⁷⁶ Hao Yixing 郝懿行 (1757–1825), *Hao Yixing ji* 郝懿行集 vol. 5 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2010), 3892. Similar phrase also appears in the “Shi ji jie” 史記解 section of the *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書. *Yi Zhou shu*, Kong Chao 孔晁 comm., in *Siku quanshu*, *juan* 8, 4a.

during the Spring and Autumn period. This system was characterized by the absence of the royal secretary role, whose responsibilities were largely assumed by the grand scribe.⁷⁷ While further examination is warranted to fully understand such a hypothesis, the presence and absence of “scribes on the left and right” as documented in the *Zuo zhuan* seem to support Kong’s claim. Additionally, *Zhushu jinian*’s account, which, like the *Zuo zhuan*, mentions only the “scribe on the left,” further enhances the plausibility of Kong’s assertion.

An examination of the evidence presented suggests the potential for a unified understanding of the “scribes on the left and right” by merging the insights of Sun Yirang and Kong Yingda. The absence of specific mentions of left and right scribe roles in the *Zhou li* implies that these were not formal titles. Sun Yirang, synthesizing views from the Han dynasty, argued that the terms “scribe on the left” and “scribe on the right” were essentially alternative titles for the grand scribe and royal secretary, reflecting their physical positions in court. This interpretation supports Kong Yingda’s assertion. However, Sun’s hypothesis that the royal secretary could also be referred to as the grand scribe appears speculative and is without solid evidence, thereby rendering Kong Yingda’s viewpoint—that the vassal states did not have a distinct royal secretary role—more plausible.⁷⁸

The “Zong bo” section provides detailed descriptions of the duties associated with the seven types of scribes. The following section will list these scribe positions along with summaries of their responsibilities:

⁷⁷ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 8.

⁷⁸ For a more detailed analysis on Sun’s and Kong’s arguments regarding the scribal system in the vassal states during the Spring and Autumn period, please refer to section 1.2.2 of this chapter.

1. Da shi 大史:

- i. **Archival management, record-keeping:** The grand scribe manages the six codes that govern the state, the legal framework for the administration of officialdom, and the regulations for the governance of the capital and provinces. In addition, this office preserves all state, municipal, and populace contracts and agreements. According to Zheng Xuan's commentary, the codes, rules, and regulations—namely the six codes, eight rules, and eight regulations—fall under the jurisdiction of the *zhong zai* 冢宰 (minister of state), established to govern the hundred officials. Jia Gongyan interpreted that the legal framework is, in fact, instituted by the minister of state, and the grand scribe is tasked with managing the corresponding documents in order to facilitate the minister of state in governance.⁷⁹ In other words, during the Zhou dynasty, the legal framework and official positions were managed by the minister of state. The reference to the grand scribe overseeing the six codes signifies not control over regulations but rather custody of specific documents. Regarding the storage of agreements, the original versions are maintained at the offices of the six officials 六官, with the grand scribe holding duplicates of these documents. This applies not only to agreements but also to alliance terms and certificates, the originals of which are kept by officials tasked with alliances and agreements, with copies stored by the grand scribe.⁸⁰ This arrangement demonstrates that the grand scribe functioned as a centralized archive, ensuring comprehensive document preservation across the state.

⁷⁹ *Zhou li zhushu*, juan 26, 813–4.

⁸⁰ *Zhou li zhengyi*, juan 51, 2503–04.

- ii. **Adjudication and punishment:** Due to the grand scribe’s custody of the legal codes, as well as various contracts and alliance terms, this office is also tasked with interpreting rules. After assessing the case in accordance with ritual propriety, they adjudicate and impose penalties accordingly. Additionally, they enforce punishments on those who disregard the prescribed order of ritual rankings during ritual ceremonies.
- iii. **Participate in sacrificial and funerary ceremonies:** The grand scribe’s duties in ritual affairs are twofold: first, as a supportive role, often carried out in collaboration with other specialized ritual officials or assisting other officers in conducting ritual matters. This includes, for instance, collaboratively selecting auspicious dates for major sacrifices with the grand diviner,⁸¹ and coordinate actions with a group of diviners on the days of *jie* and *su* 戒及宿之日 by reading the ritual texts.⁸² Secondly,

⁸¹ Zheng Xuan states: “As for the meaning of ‘with,’ it means that [the grand scribe] ought to be tasked with prognosticating ink patterns.” 與之者，當視墨。 Jia Gongyan cited the “Zhan ren” 占人 subsection in the “Chun guan·Zong bo” section of the *Zhou li* to indicate that the prognostication methods are divided into several categories, among which the scribe is in charge of divination through ink patterns. *Zhou li zhushu*, juan 26, 818.

⁸² The days of *jie* and *su* refer to a set of preparations to be conducted before major ritual ceremonies. The term *jie* corresponds to the concept of *san zhai* 散齋, lasting approximately seven days. During this time, the ruler must distance himself from all personnel and abstain from various entertainments and physical activities. This period is followed by three days of *su*, akin to *zhi zhai* 致齋, where the ruler dedicates himself to contemplating his ancestors by recalling memories of their behaviors, interests, and intentions. This process is believed to prepare the ruler to communicate with spirits and deities with the utmost devotion. See *Zhou li zhushu*, juan 26, 818; *Li ji zhengyi*, juan 47, 1529–30.

Jia Gongyan asserted that the involvement of the grand scribe serves to avert inaccuracies in the coordination, setup, and offerings during ceremonies, necessitating grand scribe’s reading from ritual texts to ensure compliance with established ceremonial procedures. *Zhou li zhushu*, juan 26, 818.

the grand scribe independently oversees certain functions, such as organizing officials' ranks during rituals, an activity that is traced back to the *wu*'s original duties of ordering the spiritual hierarchy, as mentioned in the *Guo yu*. Additional responsibilities entail overseeing major funerals, enforcing regulations to encourage prevention, pronouncing eulogies on the day of admonishment 讖之日, and bestowing posthumous titles during minor funerals.

- iv. **Observe astronomical phenomena and establish the calendar:** The grand scribe's responsibilities extend into heavenly administration, albeit with a slightly lesser focus compared to his role in ritual oversight and document management. His primary function encompasses monitoring astronomical and astrological signs to set the annual calendar. Responsibilities include defining the year, setting the four seasons to regulate public affairs, announcing this information across governmental and provincial bodies, notifying all vassal states of the lunar month's commencement, and summoning the sovereign to remain within his palace throughout an intercalary month.
- v. **Participate in rituals related to state matters and archery affairs:** In instances of grand assemblies where vassals convene to have audience with the sovereign, the grand scribe is tasked with preliminary reviews and documentation of pertinent ritualistic activities, guided by the ritual texts. On occasions where the vassals present their offerings of metals, monetary units, jade, and silks to the sovereign, the grand scribe counsels the sovereign to prevent any procedural errors. Beyond these significant state events, the grand scribe's responsibilities extend to overseeing various rites associated with archery. This encompasses duties like cleansing the

vessel for counting-tallies, extracting and counting the tallies contained within, and managing the ceremonial aspects linked to archery competitions.

- vi. **Travel:** The grand scribe undertakes travel for official purposes in two specific situations. Firstly, during major military expeditions, the grand scribe, with the calendar in hand, rides alongside the music master 太師 in a chariot to collaboratively observe astronomical signs and determine omens.⁸³ This instance not only underscores the grand scribe's role in military campaigns but also confirms his involvement in divination as part of his duties related to heavenly matters.⁸⁴ Secondly, if a major capital relocation occurs, the grand scribe is responsible for transporting the state's legal codes to the new capital.

2. Xiao shi 小史

- i. **Preserve historical records and delineate genealogies:** The first duty assigned to the junior scribe, as delineated in the *Zhou li*, is to manage the state records, establish

⁸³ Jia Gongyan interpreted the music master as the overseer of the blind musician office. Since both the grand scribe and music master acquire knowledge regarding the astronomical phenomena, thus they are placed in the same chariot. *Zhou li zhushu*, juan 26, 819.

⁸⁴ The “Lu yu” 魯語 section of the *Guo yu* records that the grand scribe inspected in awe the astronomical patterns with *shi zai* / *si zai* 師載/ 司載 (the master of astronomy). According to Wei Zhao, *shi zai* is the official title for the director of astronomy, notably the *Pingxiang shi* and *Baozhang shi*. All together, these three offices examined and evaluated the auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of the unusual signs of the moon. Conversely, Xu Yuangao concurred with Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821–1907) in construing the character *zai* as a variant for *zai* 災. He contends that 司載 should be understood as 司災, which is the name for a star. Although duties pertaining to the observation of astronomical phenomena within the scribes are largely entrusted to the *Pingxiang shi* and *Baozhang shi*, it is evident that the grand scribe also conducted relevant tasks. Xu, *Guo yu jijie*, 196.

- genealogical sequences, and clarify hierarchical order of ancestral tablets. Zheng Xuan interpreted the term “records” as referring to what the *Chunqiu* designated as *Zhou zhi* 周志 and what the *Guo yu* refers to as *Zheng zhi* 鄭志, which are essentially the historical accounts of the various vassal states. The task of establishing genealogical sequences involves managing materials akin to the *Shi ben* and *Di xi* 帝系 where the junior scribe is specifically responsible for authenticating genealogies and determining familial proximity.
- ii. **Facilitate matters for the grand scribe:** The junior scribe primarily acts as deputy to the grand scribe, assisting in all state activities that involve the grand scribe. These activities encompass major funerals, major banquets, major assemblies, major military expeditions, and any event necessitating the application of ritual norms. During major ritual ceremonies, the grand scribe, alongside a group of diviners, reads from the ritual texts, while the junior scribe is responsible for arranging the ancestral tablets and ordering the sacrificial vessels. At the funerals of high-ranking officials, while the grand scribe bestows posthumous titles, the junior scribe recites eulogies on the side.

3. *Pingxiang shi* 馮相氏

- i. **Observe heavenly signs:** While both the *Pingxiang shi* and the *Baozhang shi* are tasked with observing astronomical phenomena, the *Pingxiang shi* specifically focuses on tracking the year, month, day, hour, and positions of the twenty-eight lunar mansions. Their primary duty entails analyzing observed heavenly signs to organize and inspect the calendar’s structure, including the arrangement of years, months, and seasons.

- ii. **Measure Equinoxes and Solstices:** This duty consists of measuring the lunar shadows at the spring and autumn equinoxes and the solar shadows at the winter and summer solstices, thereby determining the transition between the four seasons.

4. *Baozhang shi* 保章氏

- i. **Observing astronomical signs for prognostication:** The role of the *Baozhang shi* in observing astronomical phenomena primarily serves to divine auspicious and inauspicious outcomes based on astronomical changes. The divination subjects mainly include five categories: the overall heavenly signs such as the stars, sun, and moon; individual stars within constellations; the Jupiter cycle; cloud colors; and wind patterns. In addition to determining fortune or misfortune, the divinations also encompass signs of floods or droughts, abundance or famine, and the equilibrium of cosmic forces between heaven and earth.
- ii. **Admonish the sovereign:** The *Baozhang shi* bears the responsibility to transparently communicate divination results to the sovereign, advising on corrective measures for governance missteps. They must notify the king about anticipated disasters and arrange the sequence of subsequent actions.

5. *Nei shi* 內史

- i. **Assist the sovereign in utilizing his power:** The royal secretary manages the ways of utilizing the king's eight prerogatives in order to instruct the sovereign in regulating officials.⁸⁵ According to Zheng Xuan's annotation, the task of managing the

⁸⁵ The eight prerogatives include: enfeoff 爵, issue emolument 祿, discharge 廢, appoint 置, kill 殺, grant life 生, bestow 予, and confiscate 奪. *Zhou li zhushu*, juan 26, 833.

- prerogatives and instructing the sovereign traditionally falls under minister of state's responsibilities, with the royal secretary playing a supporting role in these duties. Sun Yirang concurred, noting that the minister of state primarily advises the king on supervising officials using the eight instructional methods, and the royal secretary, acting as minister of state's assistant, aids in reinforcing these instructions.
- ii. **Preserve state records and codes:** Similar to the grand scribe, the royal secretary also preserves copies of the state's rules and decrees.⁸⁶ According to Sun Yirang, the junior minister of state, accountant (*si kuai* 司會), grand scribe, and royal secretary jointly oversee this function. Moreover, the royal secretary must scrutinize the political affairs of different regions based on the archived copies and receive accounting documents from these areas.
 - iii. **Relay messages between the sovereign and officials:** The royal secretary is in charge of presenting affairs; he accepts submissions from officials to the king in sequential order and subsequently relay these to the king. Moreover, when vassals need to present documents to the king, the royal secretary reads these documents aloud to the sovereign.
 - iv. **Record affairs:** The *Zhou li* specified that the royal secretary is responsible for recording two types of affairs: decrees issued to the vassals and high officials, and emoluments and rewards commanded by the sovereign. The second type of affair is

⁸⁶ According to Sun Yirang, the state's decrees here refer to all decrees issued within the capital. Decrees issued outside the capital are managed by the external secretary. Zheng Xuan's annotation also states that the external secretary is in charge of the decrees issued outside the capital. *Zhou li zhengyi*, *juan* 52, 1562; *Zhou li zhushu*, *juan* 26, 835.

typically inscribed on square tablets for public declaration. The royal secretary copies and archives a duplicate of all royal commands.

6. *Wai shi* 外史

- i. **Manage archives:** The external secretary maintains archives of royal decrees issued outside the capital and the historical records of the vassal states. Additionally, this role encompasses the management of texts pertaining to the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, known as the *San fen* 三墳 and the *Wu dian* 五典.
- ii. **Record affairs:** The external secretary primarily undertakes the task of documenting external affairs by recording the sovereign's edicts directed towards the four quarters to be transmitted by envoys. Moreover, this role entails the dissemination of the central court's writings and texts to the vassal states, thereby ensuring the uniformity of the writing and reading system across the realm.

7. *Yu shi* 御史

- i. **Preserve state codes and records:** The royal scribe, akin to the grand scribe and the royal secretary, supervises archives containing decrees that govern the state, its capitals, provinces, and the populace, thus assisting the minister of state in administering state affairs.
- ii. **Record affairs:** In addition to preserving decrees for the administration of the populace, the royal scribe is responsible for documenting the details of these decrees and distributing them to officials responsible for their implementation. When the sovereign promulgates edicts, the royal scribe is tasked with composing the texts. Furthermore, this office performs the task of tallying the numbers of officials within the bureaucracy.

Through the examination of the *Zhou li*, it becomes evident that the most prevalent function of the Zhou scribes is overseeing documents. This oversight function extended across all types of scribes, implicating nearly every one of them in the maintenance of state annals, legal statutes, and governmental decrees. Far from merely collecting documents, this role demanded that custodians intimately know these materials and adeptly apply them in specific situations. The duties encompassed by the grand scribe, royal secretary, and royal scribe—ranging from assisting with ceremonies and adjudicating penalties to supporting the minister of state in official oversight—essentially derive from their foundational engagement with document management. Record-keeping stands as another pivotal duty, with the royal secretary and external secretary assuming primary responsibility, closely followed by the royal scribe. The critical involvement of the junior scribe in recording historical events and genealogies of vassal states underscores record-keeping as a key function. While the junior scribe and external secretary each oversee the historical records of vassal states, Sun Yirang contended that a clear distinction exists between the records of the state and the those of the four quarters, with the former implying parameters within the capital and the latter encompassing those of the states beyond the capital's vicinity.⁸⁷

Uniquely among the seven scribe categories, the grand scribe's explicit role in record-keeping is limited to preparing and documenting ceremonial events, specifically pertaining to the days of *jie* and *su*, and the grand assemblies. However, the grand scribe's purview, spanning significant state activities such as calendar management and divination, indicates a broader command for comprehensive oversight. As Zheng Xuan and Jia Gongyan posited, the grand

⁸⁷ *Zhou li zhengyi*, juan 57, 2525.

scribe's role as the head of the entire scribe office indeed leans toward holistic coordination.⁸⁸ Although each scribe category has distinct responsibilities, many tasks are collaboratively executed by two to three types of scribes, illustrating a significant overlap. Tasks like managing state legal codes and assisting the minister of state in governance are jointly undertaken by the grand scribe, royal secretary, and royal scribe. Sun Yirang's reference of the concept of "official collaboration" 官聯 and Xu Zhaochang's compilation of a detailed list of tasks with overlapping scribal responsibilities highlight the collaborative nature of scribal functions within the Zhou dynasty.⁸⁹

Regarding the ritual and heavenly duties that likely reflect remnants of ancient *wu shi* functions, as presented in the previous section, they are predominantly observed in the grand scribe's duties. The junior scribe, acting as deputy to the grand scribe, also engages in some of these ceremonial tasks. However, his involvement is strictly auxiliary, aimed at assisting the

⁸⁸ The designation of "leader" among scribes (史官之“長”)—whether it applies to the leader of all scribes or solely to the head of a specific subgroup—remains a subject of scholarly debate. Sun Yirang's two-faction theory, which suggests that the grand scribe and the royal secretary each oversee a distinct group without subordination to one another, merits consideration. After all, the rank of the royal secretary surpasses that of the grand scribe, and the scope of responsibilities under royal secretary's purview is comparably substantial, an undeniable fact that warrants attention. Furthermore, He Jin's proposition of a three-party theory, which posits the royal scribe as a standalone party, enriches this discussion. He bases his argument on the collective oversight of the "Six Codes, Eight Regulations, and Eight Rules" by the grand scribe, royal secretary, and royal scribe (He, "Cong Zhou li shiguan shezhi kan xianqin shixue de chansheng yu fazhan," 5–8). The diversity of perspectives on this matter, each grounded in its own evidence, precludes a definitive conclusion. Nevertheless, both the traditional single-faction theory and the subsequent multi-faction theory affirm grand scribe's pivotal role as the "leader," tasked with coordinating the overarching framework.

⁸⁹ Xu, *Xianqin shiguan de zhidu yu wenhua*, 99–101.

grand scribe rather than independently managing separate ceremonial duties. The *Baozhang shi* and *Pingxiang shi*, representing two unique branches of scribes, essentially served as specialized heavenly officers, overseeing the majority of tasks related to astronomical phenomena. Although the responsibilities of the *Baozhang shi* and *Pingxiang shi* bear a striking resemblance, a crucial distinction emerges: one office is responsible for calendrical management, defining the seasons, solstices, and equinoxes, while the other specializes in divination through astronomical phenomena. The remaining three scribe offices concentrated on archiving and documenting textual materials, alongside their involvement in state affairs reflective of their roles, such as issuing imperial edicts and government decrees. Thus, in the context of the *Zhou li*, while the Zhou scribes preserved certain ancient functions, the focal point of their activities had unmistakably shifted towards the preservation and documentation of diverse textual materials.

The analysis thus far pertains to the delineation of a distinct and complete scribal office affiliated with the “Chun guan· Zong bo” section. Beyond this, the text reveals that many other government offices within the *Zhou li* independently employed scribes to serve their specific needs.⁹⁰ Distinguished from the seven principal scribes listed among the “Chun guan,” these scribes operated as office personnel within the broader category of “*fu, shi, xu, and tu*” 府、史、胥、徒.⁹¹ According to the organizational structure presented in the “Xu guan” subsection within

⁹⁰ In fact, not only other offices, the seven principal scribes are each equipped with several of sub-official scribes.

⁹¹ Hucker translates them as fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth class administrative officials within the eight categories in which “officials were classified in a hierarchy separate from the formal rank system called the Nine Honors.” See, for instance, item “xu” 胥 in Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 249.

the “Chun guan” section, these scribes represent the most commonly employed positions across various government offices. Zheng Xuan contended that both the *fu* and *shi* were independently selected and appointed by the heads of their respective offices, which led Jia Gongyan to remark that they did not serve as royal servants.⁹² Sun Yirang elaborated on the nature of these sub-officials, stating: “*Fu* and *shi* and *xu* and *tu* all lacked noble ranks. They were commoners employed in an official capacity.”⁹³ Consequently, scribes situated among the subordinate official ranks did not hold royal appointments but were commoners selected by office heads, occupying positions devoid of rank or emolument. He Jin introduces the term “scribal personnel” 史職人員 to differentiate them from formal scribes.⁹⁴

Regarding the duties of these scribes within the cadre of subordinate officials, the “Zai fu” 宰夫 section of the *Zhou li* delineates their responsibilities, stating as follows: “The sixth is referred to as ‘scribe,’ charged with the management of official documents to aid administration.”⁹⁵ According to Zheng Xuan, scribes were responsible for document handling, equivalent to drafting administrative papers of the period. In summary, in the bureaucratic structure of various government offices, scribes played a pivotal role in drafting documents to support governance, embodying a clerical function. Sun Yirang, drawing on the definition of the character *shi* in the *Shuowen jie zi*, asserted that the essence of a scribe’s role was record-keeping, a function that forms the basis of this office. Consequently, any official tasked with document management was

⁹² *Zhou li zhushu*, juan 1, 9.

⁹³ “府史與胥徒皆無爵，同為庶人在官者。” *Zhou li zhengyi*, juan 1, 26.

⁹⁴ He, “Cong Zhou li shiguan shezhi kan xianqin shixue de chansheng yu fazhan,” 3.

⁹⁵ “六曰史，掌官書以贊治。” *Zhou li zhushu*, juan 3, 78.

designated as a “scribe,” emphasizing “document management” as the core duty of the role.⁹⁶

While scribes and scribal personnels constituted distinct systems with considerable variation in the types of documents they manage, both groups were designated as “scribe” and shared the fundamental duty of document oversight.

1.2.2 The Transition of Scribal System During the Spring and Autumn Period

The *Zhou li* delineates a bureaucratic system centered around the Zhou royal court, distinguishing between seven distinct categories of scribes and supporting them with staff that, in some instances, exceeded one hundred individuals. This extensive and well-defined organizational structure, unique to the Zhou kings, likely saw nuanced variations in the vassal states, rather than exact replication. Moreover, during the Spring and Autumn period, the rites and music system suffered significant disruption, leading to incomplete adherence to ritual practices among the vassal states. A notable transition within the scribal system during this time was the expansion of the grand scribe’s responsibilities. For example, the *Zuo zhuan* recounts the murder of a grand scribe by Cui Zhu 崔杼, resulting from his straightforward account of Cui Zhu’s regicide in the twenty-fifth year of Duke Xiang. This event marked a significant expansion of the grand scribe’s duties to include the recording of events. The grand scribe’s death was followed by the murder of one of his younger brothers, who sought to continue his legacy. Upon hearing the elimination of the grand scribes, the scribe of the south 南史 hurried to the court with bamboo slips to document these events.⁹⁷ Additionally, the first year of Duke Zhao 魯昭公 in the

⁹⁶ *Zhou li zhengyi*, juan 1, 25.

⁹⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 36, 1167.

Zuo zhuan recounts Gongsun Hei's uninvited attendance at a private alliance led by Han Hu 罕虎 and Gongsun Qiao 公孫僑, at which he ordered the grand scribe to record his name on the covenant, thus highlighting the grand scribe's role in documenting treaties.⁹⁸

Moreover, the *Zuo zhuan* illustrates instances where the grand scribe assumed duties typically reserved for the royal secretary, such as announcing the appointment of officials. For example, the commentary from the thirtieth year of Duke Xiang records as follows: "As soon as Bo You passed away, [the ruler] made the grand scribe to appoint Bo Shi as minister."⁹⁹ Based on the *Zhou li*, Kong Yingda posited that the historical records pertaining to the Zhou sovereign were predominantly overseen by the royal secretary, with the external secretary playing the supporting role. This model was expected to be mirrored by the vassal states. Nevertheless, the Spring and Autumn period witnessed a significant departure from these practices, leading to a reduction in the role of royal secretary and a corresponding increase in responsibilities for the grand scribe. Kong Yingda contended that the position of royal secretary might have been absent during this era, thereby centralizing the function of recording state annals under the grand scribe, assisted by the junior scribe. Furthermore, Kong Yingda cited instances from the *Chunqiu* where only the title of grand scribe is mentioned in various vassal states, suggesting the absence of the royal secretary role.

Contrary to Kong's assertions, Sun Yirang offered a different perspective, arguing that the roles of the grand scribe and the royal secretary were inherently interchangeable. This suggests that the absence of explicit references to the royal secretary in the *Chunqiu* does not indicate a

⁹⁸ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 41, 1330.

⁹⁹ “伯有即死，使大史命伯石為卿。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 40, 1290.

lack of this position in the vassal states but rather that the designation “grand scribe” encompasses both roles. However, this claim may not be justified, as Sun’s evidence from the Western Zhou period predominantly demonstrates instances of the grand scribe assuming responsibilities typically allocated to the royal secretary, without demonstrating the reciprocal arrangement.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Sun’s claim regarding the nomenclature flexibility between the royal secretary and the grand scribe lacks solid evidence.

The various indications within the *Chunqiu* suggest that the vassal states established positions for the grand scribe, the external secretary, and the royal scribe, but not for the royal secretary; the only scenario where the term “royal secretary” is referenced in the text point to the role within the Zhou central court itself. Most duties typically managed by the royal secretary in these states appear to have been absorbed by the grand scribe, tasks that, according to the *Zhou li*, were not traditionally within the purview of the grand scribe. Kong Yingda’s observations, therefore, merit consideration for their insight into this organizational anomaly. Nonetheless, Kong’s further deduction that the absence of a royal secretary necessarily implies the redundancy of an external secretary (predicated on a lack of distinction between internal and external roles) appears insubstantial. The conclusion that the vassal states would consequently eliminate the external secretary position lacks compelling justification, for the structuring of the scribal system in these states, derived from the Western Zhou’s ritual framework, indicates a complex

¹⁰⁰ Another example illustrating that the grand scribe had occasionally substituted responsibilities for the royal secretary is seen in the *Shang shu*. The text records the situation during King Kang of Zhou’s 周康王 ascension ceremony, reading as follows: “The grand scribe holding the [conferment] document, ascended by the guest’s steps, and presented to the king the conferment edict.” 太史秉書，由賓階躋，御王冊命。 *Shang shu zhengyi*, *juan* 18, 601. For details regarding Sun’s argument, see *Zhou li zhengyi*, *juan* 32, 1546.

administrative structure where the absence of one role does not inherently disrupt the functionality of others.

Who then oversaw the compilation of state annals during the Western Zhou to the Spring and Autumn periods? The answer to this question involves a complex inquiry, particularly due to the scarcity of detailed and persuasive evidence in extant texts. Kong Yingda also acknowledged that although various scribes delineated in the *Zhou li* were tasked with documentation, the specific authorship of official annals such as the *Chunqiu* remains ambiguous. According to Kong, “the historical records of the Son of Heaven relied on both the royal and external secretaries,” implying that the Zhou court’s official annals predominantly fell under the purview of these two roles. The royal secretary managed the court’s formal records, complemented by the external secretary, who incorporated regional accounts into the records. It is worth noting, however, that besides the royal and external secretaries, the junior scribe also actively participated in the management of state annals. As for the natural disasters and unusual phenomena commonly observed within Pre-Qin historical records, they were predominantly recorded by the *Pingxiang shi* and *Baozhang shi*. The degree to which these parties influenced the historical compilations remains indeterminate.

If the vassal states were indeed devoid of a royal secretary position during the Spring and Autumn period, as Kong suggested, then it is highly plausible that the grand scribe oversaw the compilation of historical records. The grand scribe, serving as the head among scribes while assuming the duties of the royal secretary, was intrinsically tasked with understanding the Way of the heaven, managing ritual regulations, and archiving various official documents. Further insights from the *Zuo zhuan* recount the expertise of a scribe on the left from the state of Chu, Yi Xiang 左史倚相, in the twelfth year of Duke Zhao, who was adept at interpreting the *San fen*

and *Wu dian* and was subsequently applauded by King Ling of Chu as a skilled scribe.¹⁰¹ This account clearly illustrates that, despite the external secretary's custodianship of texts concerning ancient sovereigns, the grand scribe also had access to these significant documents. Considering the broad scope of engagement and the comprehensive access to documentary materials attributed to the grand scribe, it stands to reason that this position likely oversaw the compilation of historical records.

Through the analyses provided in sections 1.1 and 1.2, we have delineated a conceptual outline of the scribe's role throughout the Pre-Qin period. Although the scarcity of source materials leaves many specifics undetermined, several key assertions stand firm. Firstly, the evolution of the scribe's role from the *wu* origin mirrors the broader evolution of officialdom; secondly, upon examining the responsibilities carried by scribes in subsequent eras, it becomes evident that they initially embodied specific functions as officers of ritual sacrifices and heavenly observations, roles that remained pronounced into the Zhou dynasty. Thirdly, following an undistinguished era of the roles of *wu* and *shi*, the *shi* was gradually separated from the *wu*, transforming into an independent and systematic bureaucratic entity. Pinpointing the exact moment of this development proves challenging, but it is clear that by the Western Zhou period, scribes had already operated under a tightly knit structure. Fourthly, the functions of scribes underwent significant transformations after the Western Zhou, shifting from predominantly overseeing rituals and heavenly events to focusing on the core task of documentation and archiving.

¹⁰¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi, juan 45*, 1504.

This exposition aims to succinctly encapsulates the scribal system in Pre-Qin China, setting a clear foundation for understanding the primary responsibilities of historiographers. The subsequent discussion will further explore the milieu and characteristics of Pre-Qin historical texts, addressing prevalent conceptual ambiguities associated with these texts. This exploration is crucial for a deeper inquiry into the pivotal question to be addressed in this chapter: the intricate relationship between the *Zuo zhuan* and historical texts.

1.3 Historical Record vs. History

When assessing whether an object can be construed as a particular entity, the essential question lies in how to understand its definition. Such definitions are primarily of two types: the definitions it held in its own time, and the meanings attributed to it in later periods. The challenge arises when an object, enduring since ancient times and commonly encountered in contemporary life, experiences nuanced shifts in meaning. This often leads to a disregard of the difference between these two types of definition. In regard to the second type of definition, our approach adopts the perspective of later generations to trace, postulate, and unearth the origins and development of a tradition or school of thought. This process entails identifying the specific conditions under which initial signs of the concept appeared and even allows us to view and utilize the object in alignment with our needs. This represents the relationship between the user and the object, where the user assumes the dominant role. Conversely, when examining the nature of such an object, we inquire into the very purpose of its creation. This inquiry is intrinsically tied to temporality, aligning with the first type of definition: comprehending and interpreting the object based on its initial significance, as opposed to concepts and meanings

developed in later generations. The emphasis here lies in the object itself, rather than our subjective connotations.

Our examination of the term *shi* aptly encapsulates this dilemma. In contemporary scholarship, particularly regarding Pre-Qin texts, there is a tendency to equate *shi* (scribe or clerk) and *shi shu* 史書 (scribal records, annals, or history) directly with the modern concept of “history,” implying a static, singular interpretation of *shi*. In reality, the term *shi* encompasses a broad range of meanings, including but not limited to *shi guan*, *shi shu*, *li shi* 歷史 (history), *shi xue* 史學 (historiography), *shi liao* 史料 (historical materials), among others. As time has passed and social structures have evolved, the interpretations of terms like *shi guan* and *shi shu* have undergone significant changes. Nowadays, the understanding of *shi* is predominantly viewed through the lens of “history.” For instance, the late professor Tu Wei-yun 杜維運 (1928–2012), in his comparative analysis of Eastern and Western historical traditions, presented extensive evidence to emphasize that the history writing is not a tradition exclusive to Western civilization. He contended that there is no hierarchical distinction of superiority or inferiority between these historical practices. In Tu’s view, the historical tradition in China, deeply rooted and systemically developed, not only reflects but often more assertively applies core elements of Western historical theories.¹⁰² Certainly, China is renowned for its long-standing practice of meticulously recording and preserving historical records. However, such a statement also prompts some critical questions: Does this tradition correspond with the Western conceptualization of “history?” Moreover, did the notions of “history” and “historiography,” as prevalently

¹⁰² Tu, *Zhongxi gudai shixue bijiao* 中西古代史學比較 (Taipei: Dongda tushuguan Ltd., 1988).

understood today, exist during the Pre-Qin period? Addressing these inquiries necessitates a thorough exploration in several aspects, starting with the fundamental definition of “history.”

1.3.1 What is “History”?

The word “history” stems from Ancient Greek *ἱστορία* (*historia*), first appearing in Herodotus’s treatise on the Greco-Persian Wars, meaning “to inquire” or “to examine.” This notion inherently embodies the pursuit of “truth,” as knowledge derived from scrutiny and systematic investigation represents a process of filtering out impurities. Tu Wei-yun noted that the inquiry into truth is one the predominant features of Greek historiography, which also serves as the building block for Greek history writing. This pursuit of truth led to the emergence of critical historiography. Both Herodotus and Thucydides chose to avoid excessive moral judgments in their writings in order to pursue a truthful account of the past.¹⁰³ In transitioning to the modern era, the concept of “history” unfolded in two distinct dimensions. Broadly speaking, it refers to all events that transpired in the past. This can be further interpreted as “the whole series of past events connected with a particular person, country, institution, or thing,” or “the aggregate of past events; the course of human affairs.” The second dimension emphasizes the interpretive aspect, specifically “senses relating to the narration, representation, or study of events or phenomena.”¹⁰⁴ The first type of definition emphasizes the event itself, but rather than referring to any events that occurred in the past, it has a very clear precondition: a whole series of events that can be connected by a common theme. The latter definition delves into the

¹⁰³ Tu, *Zhongxi gudai shixue bijiao*, 49.

¹⁰⁴ Oxford English Dictionary. Online source link: <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9602520444>.

interpretive processes—how events are understood, represented, and studied. Here, the focus shifts to the methodologies, perspectives, and frameworks employed in historical analysis.

With regard to the question of how “history” should be presented, it has proven to be quite challenging for historians to arrive at a consensus. Herbert Butterfield (1900–1979), defined the true writing of history as “an interest in the past.”¹⁰⁵ He further writes: “The stimulus behind historical records is at first not an interest in the past—not an interest that we should call historical.”¹⁰⁶ According to Butterfield, “history” is defined within an explicit and limited scope: its genuine emergence only occurs when written by those who harbor a sole interest in the past. Henceforth, Butterfield critically pointed out that many of the early annals were not crafted out of the urge to “recover the past,” but were driven by more personal ambitions. These include monarchs’ wishes for their victories and virtues to be eternally commemorated, or for other, more pragmatic business purposes. This trend was evident in the recording practices of both early Western and Oriental societies, where record-keeping owed much to the officers who were in charge of the calendar, a duty that is defined by noting important dates. However, the records produced in this manner can hardly be seen as “history,” for it was not written by individuals dedicated to recover the past.¹⁰⁷

Tu Wei-yun’s definition of “history” was significantly influenced by Butterfield’s argument, emphasizing the emergence of history and historiography within a civilization as

¹⁰⁵ The original quote reads as follows: “The exciting discoveries and speculations of recent years give importance to everything new that we can learn about the beginnings of historical writing, or the first signs of an emerging interest in the past, in any part of the world.” See Butterfield, “The History of the East,” in *History*, vol.47 (1962): 160.

¹⁰⁶ Butterfield, “The History of the East,” 161.

¹⁰⁷ Butterfield, *History and Man’s Attitude to the Past*, 7.

primarily stemming from an “interest in the past.” Du identified four core elements of history writing: historical accuracy, the pursuit of truth, a certain amount of skepticism, and the willingness to challenge.¹⁰⁸ For him, “history” transcends mere records of the past, distinguishing itself from “fragmented and deteriorated court reports” 斷爛朝報. He contended that the most fitting description of “history” is as an “academic discipline dedicated to the study of the past,” achieved through the historian’s meticulous examination.¹⁰⁹

Another famous historian, Edward Carr (1892–1982), viewed “history” in exactly the opposite manner. He argued that “history” is not a straightforward recounting of the historical truth, but rather reflects the historian’s subjective interpretation of the past. Carr articulated this view by stating: “My answer therefore to the question ‘What is history’ is that it is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past.”¹¹⁰ Unlike the view of treating the past as facts waiting to be “recovered”,¹¹¹ Carr’s theory emphasizes the subjectivity and variability of history writing. The writing of history is the process of selection and interpretation, within which the historian is significantly influenced by his own time, cultural and social context and perspective. Carr further contended

¹⁰⁸ Tu, *Zhongxi gudai shixue bijiao*, 19–29; 31–51.

¹⁰⁹ Tu, *Shixue fangfa lun* 史學方法論 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2006), 17–20.

¹¹⁰ Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1990), 30.

¹¹¹ Certainly, Butterfield acknowledges that history should not be an oversimplified narrative that interprets the past mainly for the sake of the present. He argues that historians ought to interpret historical events within their own context, avoiding contemporary values and moral judgments. Despite his extensive critique of the subjective influences of historians’ personal perspectives and values, Butterfield seems to acknowledge that, despite the subjective interpretations by historians, there exists an underlying, objective truth in the historical narrative. For detailed discussion, see Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (NY: W.W.Norton & Company, 1965).

that summarizing and applying the lessons learned from past events to guide future actions is a historian's primary task.¹¹²

Ernst Breisach (1923–2016), in his book title *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, systematically reviewed and analyzed the most prevalent historical traditions in different eras throughout Western civilization.¹¹³ For example, the essence of the historical tradition in the two most representative ancient civilizations, Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, was inclined towards a rational exploration and inquiry. However, Ancient Rome, while inheriting the Greek tradition, further emphasized moral lessons and the attention to Rome's great achievements. The Medieval period is an era dominated by Christianity, during which the historical understanding shifted towards a Christian viewpoint. Historical writings during this period often take the form of annals, focusing primarily on recording significant religious events and Church affairs. The Renaissance, with its revival of interest in classical culture, shifted historical emphasis towards secular matters and human achievements, introducing a critical approach to the study of historical sources.

Although Breisach did not explicitly provide his definition of the concept of "history" in his treatise, it is evident through the narration of the historical trends in different periods that Breisach's view toward "history" bears some resemblance to Carr's arguments. That the concept of "history" and the manner in which it is interpreted and understood dramatically shifts with the progression of time and social structure lies at the heart of both of these historians' conception. Generally speaking, the significance, methodologies, and core philosophies underlying historical

¹¹² Carr, *What is History*, 69.

¹¹³ Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

narratives significantly vary across different periods. From this vantage point, the writing of history is profoundly shaped by the cultural, societal, and intellectual milieus of its respective era.

While historians may each hold a distinct concept of “history,” rendering consensus difficult, it is still possible to identify some of the core principles underpinning the conceptualization of “history” in Western scholarship. First of all, the primary motivation for writing “history” stems from an interest in the past, with the intention of offering insights through the examination of historical activities. Furthermore, this endeavor seeks not only to understand past events but also to provide guidance for contemporary and future decisions. Secondly, the pursuit of facts constitutes the cornerstone of such a scholarly inquiry. People who write history strive for objectivity and accuracy in their narratives, leading to the development of a methodology that utilizes logical and scientific approaches for reconstructing the historical past. Despite the various ways they have evolved over time, these methods are intrinsically grounded in the principles of “rationality,” “systematicity,” and “scientific rigor.”

However, of course, achieving absolute objectivity remains an elusive goal; the “facts” possessed by an individual may not fully encapsulate an event’s entirety, particularly as these “facts” are mediated through the individual’s linguistic narration. Language is often regarded as the explicit expression of thought; consequently, the selection of words is a subjective and conscious process. Thus, the same object can be depicted in two markedly distinct manners, depending on whether it is described by you or by me. Upon recognizing this critical issue, Carr and Breisach bring our attention to the second layer of “history,” focusing on its subjectivity and fluidity. Although, “history” ostensibly concerns itself with the reconstruction of the past, what it really reflects are the intellectual and ethical predispositions of its writer. Furthermore, the

genesis of these predispositions is intricately related to the cultural context, prevailing ideologies, and societal structures characteristic of the author's contemporaneous era.

Henceforth, the perspective that history endeavors to reconstruct the past, aiming for an objective truth, finds itself at odds with the viewpoint that history is inherently subjective and interpretive. Despite the ostensible contradiction between these two perspectives, the discord is merely superficial; fundamentally, both approaches are driven by a common goal: the pursuit of "facts." The concept put forth by the "subjective" perspective does not abandon its quest for an objective depiction of the past (it does not imply that historians have the liberty to fabricate or twist the past to suit their purpose simply because there does not exist an absolute truthful/objective narration). It acknowledges, more pragmatically, that such "objectivity" is not unequivocal, necessitating a nuanced and critical scrutiny of "historical writings" rather than an unquestioned acceptance. The lasting influence of the historians' own period, alongside their subjective interpretations, constitutes an inevitable force majeure. Nonetheless, this does not prevent historians from striving for the utmost objectivity in recollecting the facts (or at least, their perceived "objectivity") in their initial endeavor. In summary, the contrast between the "objective" and the "subjective" interpretations of "fact" essentially reflects the interplay between relativism and absolutism. However, regardless of the perspective adopted, the fundamental concept that "history" is written by individuals (historians) with an interest in the past, dedicated to its recovery, remains unchanged.

The third and last point highlights that history in the West is primarily written by individuals, an elementary yet frequently overlooked aspect. This oversight may stem from its foundational nature, which renders it rarely cited as a distinctive feature, despite its prevalence in Western historiographical discourse. In delineating the historical traditions of different eras and

cultural stages, Breisach's examples underscore this individual authorship, presenting figures such as Livy and Tacitus from Ancient Rome, Augustine and Bede from the Medieval period, Voltaire and Gibbon from the Enlightenment, and Ranke from the Nineteenth century, among others. Furthermore, in his argument for history's interpretative nature, Carr constantly emphasized how past events are reflected through the human brain. He articulated the historians' task as a continuous endeavor to mold their facts into personal interpretative frameworks, then refining these interpretations within their constructed factual models.¹¹⁴ These observations suggest that the majority of Western history, from antiquity to modern times, has predominantly been composed by individuals with distinct and independent identities. Often philosophers and thinkers, these individuals led R.G. Collingwood (1889–1943) to astutely conclude, "All history is the history of thought."¹¹⁵ Their compositions do not conform to a rigid, unified framework or standardized criteria, including specific terminology or writing models. Historians typically have considerable freedom in selecting their subjects, perspectives, and methods of narration. The resulting works are imbued with the clear imprints of their respective eras and the authors' distinct styles, sharply contrasting with the historical tradition of the Pre-Qin period in China.

1.3.2 Historical Records in Early China

The second aspect involves the writing criteria of historical, or scribal, records in early China. However, before delving into the specifics of early Chinese scribal practices, it is imperative that we first define the scope of textual materials pertinent to our analysis. Typically,

¹¹⁴ Carr, *What is History*, 29.

¹¹⁵ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 82.

the Chinese term *shi guan* 史官 is translated as “scribe,” a term that likely offers the closest representation in English, meaning a person who transcribes manuscripts. It is important to note that for the translation of *shi guan* in early period (Pre-Qin), scholars seldom use “historian.” Stephen Durrant, in his article on the early Chinese scribe, contends that the concept of “history” as understood today did not exist in early China. One of his arguments is the distinction between “scribe” and “historian.” According to Durrant, the conflation of *shi* and *shi guan* with “history” and “historian” by later generations stems from the term *shi* acquiring different meanings across periods. These meanings accumulating over time, formed thick layers that eventually obscured the term’s original meaning. He further argues that *shi* initially denoted the name for an office, but eventually came to encompass all works produced by this office, not limited to historical records but also including other documents overseen by them.¹¹⁶

The “Jing ji zhi” 經籍志 of the *Sui shu* 隋書 has a passage commenting on the duties of Pre-Qin scribes, reading as follows: “As for the scribes of the past, they inevitably broadened the scope of their recordings, not solely focusing on the actions of the ruler. The *Zhou guan* records that the scribe of external affairs managed the records of the four realms, thus [the scribe of

¹¹⁶ Stephen Durrant, “From Scribe to History” in *Key Words in Chinese Culture*, ed. Wai-ye Li and Yuri Pines (NY: Columbia University Press, 2020), 85–119.

David Schaberg has also written an article that elaborates on the function of *shi* in early China. For details, please refer to Schaberg, “Functionary Speech: On the Work of *Shi* 使 and *Shi* 史,” in *Facing the Monarch: Modes of Advice in the Early Chinese Court*, ed. Garret P. S. Olberding (Harvard University Asia Center Publications Program, 2013), 19–41.

external affairs] also maintained the historical records of various marquises.”¹¹⁷ This argument primarily derives from the scribal system portrayed in the *Zhou li*, where scribes of the Zhou court are categorized into many sub-types, each with distinct responsibilities. A significant portion of these duties are related, to some extent, to documentation and record-keeping. Nevertheless, the phrase “that which the scribes produce” encompasses a wide range of sources, including the contracts copied and preserved by the grand scribe, and the state orders and regulations managed by the royal secretary. The focus of this section is to delineate the silhouette of historical records of the Pre-Qin period, and to explore the concept of “history” as understood by later generations. Our aim is to examine the differences between these two subjects and the rationale behind the treatment of certain Pre-Qin texts as history or historiography by subsequent scholars, along with the complications arising from such classification. Consequently, the discussion will primarily center on historical records from the Pre-Qin period within “that which the scribes produce.”

Since the First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇 (r. 247–210 BC) ordered the burning of texts, only a limited number of Pre-Qin texts circulate today. This scarcity poses significant challenges for scholars attempting to fully comprehend the nature of Pre-Qin historical records. Our insights are primarily derived from the extant texts and additional information from other materials. Based on the surviving texts, we can surmise that the content of historical records from the Pre-Qin period exhibits a considerable degree of stability and uniformity. Among these, one of the most

¹¹⁷ “古之史官，必廣備其所記，非獨人君之舉。《周官》，外史掌四方之志，則諸侯史記，兼而有之。” *Sui shu* 隋書, Wei Zheng 魏徵 comp., (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973) *juan* 33, 981.

exemplary formats is the official annals known as the *Chunqiu*.¹¹⁸ Additionally, there are the genealogical compilations, like the *shi ben*, and various other fragmented records. The “Yiwen zhi” section of *Han shu* writes as follows: “The scribe on the left records words, and the scribe on the right records events. The *Chunqiu* exemplifies events, and the *Shang shu* exemplifies words.”¹¹⁹ However, genealogical records are not considered historical records, they are merely the chronicles of the lineages of ancient rulers, serving as a type of historical archival source.¹²⁰ Regarding the records described by Ban Gu as “recording words,” these were mostly documented on bamboo slips and wooden tablets, which were then compiled into bound texts, as represented by the chapter titles seen in the *Shang shu*,¹²¹ as well as the *Shang shu* itself. However, the nature of these texts that record words is deemed to diverge from those that record

¹¹⁸ The *Chunqiu* here refers to the generic title for all official annals during the Spring and Autumn period, such as the Lu annals or the Qi annals, not the extant version of *Chunqiu* that was allegedly edited by Confucius.

¹¹⁹ “左史記言，右史記事，事為《春秋》，言為《尚書》。” *Han shu*, *juan* 30, 1715.

The *Li ji* records that it was the scribe on the left who recorded events, and the scribe on the right who recorded words. Ban Gu’s words are exactly the opposite of what is stated in the *Li ji*. According to Kong Yingda, the left side is designated as positive, or *yang* 陽, and the right side as negative, or *yin* 陰, suggesting that *Li ji*’s version might be the correct order. While Ban Gu may have had his own basis, the sources of his information remain uncertain. See *Li ji zhengyi*, *juan* 29, 1022; *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 9.

¹²⁰ Based on the extant texts, it was Sima Qian during the Han period who first incorporated genealogical records into the compilation of historical records.

¹²¹ The received version of *Shang shu* is divided into four sections, each corresponding to a political regime from the Xia to Zhou. This indicates that the practice of collecting historical sources and compiling them into bound booklets in correspondence with their epochs had already existed in the Pre-Qin era.

events.¹²² Since the intent of this section is to discern the differences between Pre-Qin historical records and the Western concept of “history,” as well as its relationship with texts such as the *Zuo zhuan*, the focus will primarily center on the specific type of bound historical texts that record events, or the official annals.¹²³

What is the rationale underpinning the claim that historical records from the Pre-Qin period exhibit a considerable degree of stability and uniformity? This can be primarily associated with China’s long-standing scribal tradition and the specific nature of the recipients to whom the scribes offered their services. As demonstrated in previous sections, from the inception of the

¹²² Kong Yingda contended that the elucidations and teachings of the sages are reflected in their speeches, and the purpose of recording words is to convey one’s intent, thereby instructing those below and serving those above with proper rites. See *Shang shu zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 1.

¹²³ A core aspect of “history” involves the meaningful study or tracing of the past. This meaningfulness can manifest through various dimensions, notably through periods or sequential orders. A mere aggregation of disordered, standalone entries does not constitute “history”; rather, it represents a simplistic act of recording. It is the process of gathering, selecting, and sequentially arranging these entries based on specific temporal junctures that they form an integrated entity, establishing interconnections and thereby acquiring meaning. Similarly, considering early Chinese historical records as merely individual bamboo slips and wooden tablets would render the discussion on the distinction between the concepts of “historical records” and “history” unnecessary. It was the Pre-Qin scribes’ systematic compilation, selection, and chronological arrangement of these preliminary archival documents onto bound bamboo slips, turning them into a relatively cohesive unit, that led to the conceptualization of “historical texts.” Of course, bound historical texts may include more than just state annals, but other texts such as the *Shang shu*. bound historical texts may include more than just state annals; they can also encompass texts such as the *Shang shu*. Nonetheless, the issue warranting this discussion lies in the treatment of texts such as the *Zuo zhuan* as Pre-Qin histories. Consequently, the emphasis is placed on the specific type of bound historical records that document events, which is one of the defining characteristics of the *Zuo zhuan*, rather than on other bound texts that display a significantly different nature and writing format.

writing system, the practice of recording has always been controlled by the ruling authority, particularly managed by court officials in service to the ruler. Xu Zhaochang posits that origin of this recording practice might have stemmed from the responsibilities for orally transmitting clan origins, ancestral legends, and reciting lineages, tasks performed by the *wu*. Moreover, the *wu* also needed to record the outcome of their communication with the divine. The practice of recording might also have originated from the long-term astronomical observations conducted by the heavenly office responsible for calendar-making.¹²⁴ Xu's posits are substantiated by the "Baozhang" 保章 subsection in the "Chun guan" section of the *Zhou li*, which reads as follows: "[The *Baozhang*] manages the stars in the heaven in order to chronicle the movements and changes of the stars, the constellations, the sun, and the moon."¹²⁵ Similarly, the "Yue ling" 月令 section of the *Li ji* states: "[The king] thus orders the grand scribe to uphold the regulations and observe the laws, and manage the movements of the sun, the moon, the stars and the constellations in the heaven."¹²⁶ These references suggest that early recording practices were intrinsically tied to the communications between humanity and the heavenly realm, as well as between humanity and spirits. This domain of heavenly interaction has historically been the exclusive control of the ruling class, serving as both a privilege and a symbol of their authority. Consequently, the practice of recording arising from this domain remained within the management of the officials appointed by the ruler.

¹²⁴ Xu, *Xian qin shi guan de zhidu yu wenhua*, 25–26.

¹²⁵ “掌天星，以志星辰日月之變動。” *Zhou li zhushu*, *juan* 26, 827.

¹²⁶ “乃命大史奉典守法，司天日月星辰之行。” *Li ji zhengyi*, *juan* 14, 538.

Over time, as societal structures evolved and administrative systems matured, the complexity of state affairs necessitated an expansion in the scribe's domain, extending well beyond the initial confines of astral monitoring and ritual activities. Nevertheless, the practice of recording continued to be conducted under the ruler's orders, dedicated to the service of state governance. Thus, the recording of historical events during the Pre-Qin period lacks the distinct individualistic characteristic prevalent in Western "history" writing; instead, it was overseen by a specialized group. This group did not possess what is conventionally recognized as "individual identity" or "authorial identity"; it comprised individuals who undertook the task of recording under the collective identity of scribes. Their motivation for record-keeping bore no relation to personal interests or passions but was dictated by adherence to ritual norms and sovereign commands, thus fulfilling the duties required of their role. Such record-keeping was systematic, conforming to a strict set of criteria established by the rites. This included criteria for material selection, writing style, content, and diction, each governed by precise regulations.

Nonetheless, it is not to be inferred that the scribe's records were entirely devoid of variation. Du Yu writes: "Among scribes, there are the ornate and the unadorned, and in their phrasing, there are those that are detailed and those that are succinct."¹²⁷ This is to highlight the extensive span of the *Chunqiu*, across which the recording of events has inevitably passed across successive generations of scribes, each with a distinct style. The ornate scribal style is elaborate, whereas the unadorned style is straightforward and succinct. Regardless of the stylistic approach, both the content and the overarching writing framework were invariably governed by established ritual regulations.

¹²⁷ “史有文質，辭有詳略。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 13.

Du Yu contended in his preface that the recording practices in the past possessed a certain feature: “As for the important matters, they were written on bound bamboo slips, the insignificant matters were only recorded on individual bamboo slips and wooden tablets.”¹²⁸ The “Pin li” 聘禮 section of the *Yi li* 儀禮 states: “If there were incidents, then [one] should immediately send a diplomat for inquiry. [The diplomat] would relay his ruler’s commands by presenting the document on bound silk. For documents exceeding a hundred words, they would be written on bound bamboo slips, while documents with less than a hundred words would be written on tablets.”¹²⁹ Zheng Xuan construed *ming* 名 as *zi* 字, meaning word or character.¹³⁰ Regarding the identity of *jian* 簡 (bamboo slips) and *ce* 冊/策 (bound bamboo slips), as well as the relationship between these two objects, previous scholars have offered varying

¹²⁸ “大事書之於策，小事簡牘而已。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 9.

¹²⁹ “若有故，則卒聘，束帛加書將命。百名以上書於策，不及百名書于方。” *Yi li zhushu* 儀禮註疏, Zheng Xuan comm., Jia Gongyan exeg., in *Shisanjing zhushu* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), *juan* 24, 521.

¹³⁰ Although there were clear instructions regarding the size and medium for recording in the past, considering the considerable lapse of time, later scholars have varying interpretations of what constitutes “important and insignificant matters.” For instance, Kong Yingda argued that this phrase does not refer to the number of words, but rather indicate the level of importance of those matters. All important state affairs, such as the actions taken by the ruler, the report to the ancestry hall, and reports received by other states’ diplomat were considered major affairs to be recorded on bound slips. All other matters, including recordings of passages or speeches, were considered minor affairs that were only written on *jian*. The Qing scholar, Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 (1623–1716), on the other hand, argued that the “importance of matters” indeed referred to the actual number of words associate with them. Matters with many words were written on the *ce* and matters that were described with less words were written on individual strips. See, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 9; Mao Qiling, *Chunqiu zhuan* 春秋傳 in *Qing jing jie* 清經解, *juan* 120, 3a.

interpretations. One interpretation equates *jian* with *bi* 畢, while others argue that it is synonymous with *zha* 札 or *die* 牒. Kong Yingda, however, contended that all the aforementioned terms are “alternative titles for the same object” 同物而異名也.¹³¹ As for *ce*, it was initially loose bamboo slips, which, when bound together, formed bound slips, or *ce*.¹³² In contemporary terms, the distinction between *jian* and *ce* is analogous to the difference between loose sheets and bound books. Scholars of the past also held diverging opinions regarding the length of *ce*. Cai Yong 蔡邕 posited that the standard measurement for *ce* should be two feet (approx. 19 Western inches). However, Kong Yingda, citing Zheng Xuan, challenged Cai Yong’s argument by highlighting the different standards employed by the Han sovereign and the Six Classics. According to Kong, Cai’s position only applies to the measurement employed by the Han emperors and does not extend to the Classics.

¹³¹ Both *zha* and *die* refer to some kind of writing tablets, typically wooden or bamboo. As for *bi*, the *Shuowen* explains it as a hunting net. There is no mentioning of writing tablets, or any other meaning related to the practice of recording. See Duan, *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 158; *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 9.

¹³² The *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi* cites Cai Yong 蔡邕’s (132–192) words from the *Du duan* 獨斷, stating: “As for *ce*, it is bamboo slips. Regarding its measurement, the longer ones are two feet long, the shorter ones are half of that length. As for its arrangement, it is ordered in the sequence of one long slip followed by one short slip, with two strings attached to it.” 策，簡也。其制，長二尺，短者半之。其次一長一短，兩編下附。Kong Yingda states: “Holding a single strip is referred to as a ‘bamboo slip’, and when these slips are bound together, they are called a ‘booklet’. Therefore, in writing, *ce* (策) is sometimes written as *ce* (冊), symbolizing the form of bound slips.” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 9.

In addition to formative regulations, the Pre-Qin scribes adhered to specific protocols concerning recording methods. According to Kong Yingda, all matters pertaining to the state, regardless of their significance, were initially recorded on *jian*. If an event overwhelms in its detail, then it would be recorded on a larger surface, such as the *du* 牘 or *fang* 方 (both are forms of wooden tablets used for writing). These records were subject to review and selection based on ritual regulations before being transcribed onto bound bamboo slips.¹³³ The decision of what to include in bound bamboo slips was strictly governed by the rites of Zhou. For instance, the *Zuo zhuan* recounts Han Xuanzi 韓宣子's journey to the state of Lu, where he observed Lu's historical records and exclaimed that the rites of Zhou had been exhaustively preserved in the state of Lu.¹³⁴ This reference shows that Lu's preservation of the rites and regulations was the most comprehensive among the vassal states. Moreover, the fifty General Standards in the *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* detail the standards on phraseology in composing historical records, thus indicating that scribes of the time adhered to specific restrictions in recording events.

Du Yu's annotation on the commentary from the eleventh year of Duke Yin states that, in documenting affairs of other states, the scribes invariably recorded them on bound bamboo slips, adhering to the content of diplomatic reports. If the source did not originate directly from an official report ordered by the ruler, then it could only be documented on individual bamboo slips and wooden tablets as archival references and not included in the official annals. This practice stems from traditional standards of the rites of Zhou.¹³⁵ The "Yiwen zhi" section of the *Han shu* writes as follows: "A ruler's activities must be recorded. It serves as a means to ensure that [the

¹³³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 9.

¹³⁴ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 10–11.

¹³⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 4, 148.

ruler] exercises caution in his words and deeds, and to illuminate the laws and standards.”¹³⁶ Furthermore, the commentary from the first year of Duke Yin records an undocumented attack launched by the state of Ji 紀 on the state of Yi 夷. It specifically notes that this event is not recorded in the official annals (the *Chunqiu*) because the state of Lu did not receive an official report from Yi.¹³⁷ Moreover, in diplomatic interactions between states, if the appointed envoy is a high official, the scribes are expected to include his name in the record. Nonetheless, the *Zuo zhuan* mentions two instances, in the first and third years of Duke Yin, where the envoys’ names are omitted from the records.¹³⁸ This omission suggests that both diplomatic missions were carried out by lower-ranking officials, whose positions did not meet the standard for name inclusion in the official annals.

All these references serve as evidence that the work of Pre-Qin scribes was rigorously confined by specific ritual regulations. Consequently, the state annals, despite being the product of multiple or successive generations of scribes, exhibit a consistency in content and methodology, showing minimal variation, as exemplified by the *Chunqiu*. The formation of historical records during this epoch was a collective action oriented towards political objectives. Such records predominantly functioned as “chronicles,” prioritizing the recording of events over analytical inquiry or contemplation of the past. This delineates one of the quintessential distinctions between the historical records in early China and the practice of history writing in the Western tradition.

¹³⁶ “君舉必書，所以慎言行，昭法式。” *Han shu*, *juan* 30, 1715.

¹³⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 2, 70.

¹³⁸ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 2, 52; *juan* 3, 81.

The relatively stable responsibilities of scribes can largely be attributed to the ruling power's long-term monopoly over literacy and writing materials. At least for the Pre-Qin period, we have not yet seen compelling evidence for the existence of personally compiled historical records or the so-called unclassified history.¹³⁹ This absence likely results from the fact that the practice of recording at the time was specifically managed by court scribes, oriented towards state matters. Moreover, the compilation of historical records demanded access to extensive records from various sources, which were predominantly under the control of the grand scribe, leaving individuals with very limited access.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, under the premise that official

¹³⁹ Both Liu Fenglu 劉逢祿 (1776–1829) and Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) have discussed the concept of unclassified histories in the Pre-Qin period. However, their focus was not on proving the existence of such a type of history but on demonstrating that the *Zuo zhuan* is not a commentary on the *Chunqiu*. In their views, since the *Zuo zhuan* is unrelated to the *Chunqiu*, and given that most of *Zuo zhuan*'s content prominently features event recording, classifying it as a unclassified history would be the most “convenient” approach. The challenge, however, is that no one has yet provided detailed information on the condition and format of this supposed category known as “unclassified history” in the Pre-Qin era. This is particularly noteworthy considering that early scribes were all court officials, subject to strict regulations, rather than free to create works based on individual identity. For detailed discussion on Liu and Gu's arguments, please refer to Chapter Three of this dissertation.

¹⁴⁰ Li Tsung-t'ung in his *Zhongguo shixue shi* 中國史學史 states: “The official documents and laws of the central court in the ancient era were all managed by court officials. For those that belong to the vassal states, they were managed by state officials. Down to the lower rank officials, official documents related to their families were also privately preserved within their clans. If one is not an official, then he not only could not manage those documents, but also was not permitted to study them, for he lacked the channel to study. For any study there must be an instructor, the instructors [during that epoch] were all aristocrats and officials, who refused to teach outsiders.” 古代王國典冊皆掌於王官；列國者掌于列國之官吏；下至大夫，其家族的典冊，亦為其族所私有。非官吏非獨不能掌理，且不能學習，且亦無從學習。學必有師，師皆是貴族官吏，亦不肯授於外人。Li, *Zhongguo shixue shi* (Taipei: Zhongguo wenhua daxue chubanshu,), 5.

historical records in the Pre-Qin period were primarily in the form of bound bamboo slips, it can be determined that the primary historical records compiled by scribes in the early period were indeed the state annals known as the *Chunqiu*. The *Han shu* may provide additional evidence to this effect.

The “Yiwen zhi” section presents an elaborate list of texts ranging from the Pre-Qin to Han periods, within which items belonging to the “Chunqiu” category are as many as twenty three. The categorization strategy of the “Yiwen zhi” is primarily based on the various types of Ruist Classics. The first seven categories correspond to the *Yi jing* 易經, *Shang shu* 尚書, *Shi jing* 詩經, *Zhou li* 周禮, *Yue ji* 樂記, *Chunqiu*, *Lunyu* 論語, and *Xiao jing* 孝經 respectively, with related works listed under these main texts. As for the related texts, they are also arranged in a specific order. Typically, these texts are sequenced based on their direct involvement with the

However, of course, Li’s argument primarily focuses on the situation during the Western Zhou to early Spring and Autumn periods. By Confucius’ era, learning was no longer exclusive to the upper class, leading to Confucius teaching the *Shi jing* and *Shu jing* to his disciples. Nonetheless, a clear distinction exists between the *Shi jing*, *Shu jing*, and historical records. In general, the *Shi jing* and *Shu jing* texts were used for educating the masses, whereas historical records pertain to important and private court matters; hence, their accessibility to the public warrants further investigation. Moreover, the conversation between Shenshu Shi 申叔時 and King Zhuang of Chu on the ways of grand tutor, as recounted in the *Guo yu*, which mentions the teaching of *Chunqiu*, should be understood specifically within the context of instructing the crown prince; the general public indeed did not have access to those records. *Guo yu*, *juan* 17, 528.

For another instance, the second year of Duke Zhao recounts Han Xuanzi’s journey to the state of Lu where he observed the *Yi jing* and *Chunqiu*. Duan Yucai comments: “[Han Xuanzi] only observed the *Yi jing* and the Lu *Chunqiu* when traveled to the state of Lu, thus it can be known that these two texts were not commonly studied by people.” 适魯乃見《易》與魯《春秋》，此二者非人所常習明矣。 Duan, *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 786.

corresponding the main text and their own respective era, first the main text, then its commentaries, followed by other independent works of similar subject in later periods. All other non-Classics texts written by the various masters form their own categories based on the philosophical traditions associated with them.¹⁴¹ Viewed from this perspective, this is essentially a list of early texts prepared from a Ruist angle, enumerating through the lens of philosophical discourse. Accordingly, what the *Chunqiu* refers to, in this particular list, is the Ruist Classics edited by Confucius,¹⁴² rather than the generic title for the state annals in the Spring and Autumn period.

What seems interesting is that, in addition to the various commentaries to the *Chunqiu*, Ban Gu also incorporated the *Guo yu*, *Shi ben*, *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, and *Shi ji* into this category. These texts are generally listed under the *shi* 史 (history) category in later works, such as the “Jingji zhi” section of the *Sui shu*, alongside other standard histories like the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, *Sanguo zhi* 三國志, and *Jin shu* 晉書. Regarding the Ruist Classics, the *Sui shu* has an independent division dedicated to them, which only includes the Classics and their commentaries. It is obvious that the categorization system is much more refined in the *Sui shu* compared to the *Han shu*. Particularly the distinction between the *jing* 經 and the *shi* 史

¹⁴¹ *Han shu*, *juan 30*, 1712–84.

¹⁴² The first line of the “Chunqiu” category contains the following phrase: “The ancient text of the *Chunqiu*” 春秋古經, thereby confirming its reference to the text edited by Confucius. The two terms following this phrase, namely the “twelve sections” 十二篇 and the “eleven scrolls” 十一卷, refer to the varying length of different commentaries to the main text. The *Zuo zhuan* is structured by the twelve dukes of Lu, thus it has twelve sections. The *Gongyang zhuan* and the *Guliang zhuan* are also structured by the twelve dukes of Lu, but because of Duke Xi’s exceptionally short reign period, these two commentaries only consist of eleven scrolls each.

categories marks a clear divergence from the undistinguished state during the Han era. The claim “all Six Classics are histories in nature” 六經皆史 put forth by the Qing scholar Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) also pointed to the ambiguous understanding of the Han people towards the distinction between *jing* and *shi*. Regarding this issue, Lu Yaodong 逯耀東 (1933–2006) contended that the actual emergence of *shi* as an independent category did not take place until the Wei and Jin periods. During the Han era, the *shi* genre was viewed as subordinate to the *jing* and was always attached below the *jing* section as an appendix.¹⁴³ Zhang and Lu’s arguments astutely point to the transition of ancients’ classification of texts, which also enlightens us with an alternative perspective.

As Lu Yaodong argued, *shi* as an individual category likely did not exist during the Han period. Nonetheless, the range of texts classified under the “Chunqiu” category significantly surpasses that of other Classics, encompassing nearly all historical compilations of that time. This suggests that *shi* as a distinct subject may indeed not have existed in the Pre-Qin period; rather, there was merely the text known as *Chunqiu*. According to available sources, the first individual known to have conducted a systematic examination of texts and compiled his findings into a complete volume is Han scholar Liu Xin, whose work laid the foundation for Ban Gu’s “Yiwen zhi.” There is no evidence of text classification in a similar manner during the Pre-Qin period. The so-called “categories” prior to the Han likely had different implications, merely denoting the titles of the existing texts. For instance, the “Li” 禮 category refers to texts concerning the ritual standards established in the Zhou court, and the “Chunqiu” category refers

¹⁴³ Lu Yaodong 逯耀東, *Wei Jin shixue de sixiang yu shehui jichu* 魏晉史學的思想與社會基礎 (Taipei: Dongda tushuguan ltd., 2000), 30.

to all official annals of the Zhou court and vassal states. These subjects were entirely under state jurisdiction, thereby necessitating uniform titles to illuminate the standards.¹⁴⁴ In other words, during the Pre-Qin period (particularly between the Western Zhou and Spring and Autumn periods), the term *Chunqiu* referred to state annals recorded on bound bamboo slips. Conversely, the official state annals of that era specifically designated as texts titled *Chunqiu*.¹⁴⁵

By the Han era, however, both the scope and the meaning inherent to the terms “shi” and “state annals” had undergone considerable change and expansion. This evolution resulted in the classification of all texts considered “historical” by the Han scholar under the “Chunqiu” category. Ban Gu precisely explained this “historical” sense meant “the *Chunqiu* exemplifies deeds, and the *Shang shu* exemplifies words.” It is possible to posit that all texts listed under the “Chunqiu” category are what Ban considered as texts that record actions. However, this classification appears rather contradictory. For instance, the *Guo yu* primarily records words, suggesting that it would be classified under the “Shang shu” category if we adhere to Ban’s logic. As for the *Zhanguo ce*, it constitutes a genre of strategic discourses, differing in both form and nature from the chronicle oriented *Chunqiu*. Were it not for the intention to elevate the status of Ruist Classics, the seven Classics categories in the “Yiwen zhi” would arguably be situated

¹⁴⁴ Kong Yingda states: “According to the laws during the Zhou era, every state had its own historical records, and they were all referred by the same title as *Chunqiu*.” 據周世法則，每國有史記，當同名“春秋”。 *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 3.

¹⁴⁵ In this context, “Pre-Qin” serves merely as a broad term. Following the Spring and Autumn period, the deterioration of ritual and music traditions marked a shift; private works by figures such as Yu Zi 虞子, Yan Zi 晏子, and Lu Jia, among others, were also titled “Chunqiu.” This transition indicates that the term “Chunqiu” had transcended its original exclusive association with official annals compiled by court scribes. Consequently, these divergent “Chunqiu” texts should not be conflated or treated as homogenous literary entities.

under the category of “Ruism.” akin to “Daoism” and “Mohism,” serving as components of the diverse philosophical schools. Hence, observing the evolution of textual categorization from the “Yiwen Zhi” to the “Jingji zhi” reveals that the Han dynasty occupied a pivotal transitional phase. It had already manifested an awareness of the *shi* category and recognized the necessity for the classification of texts. However, the distinction between the canonical and historical texts remained notably ambiguous.

Since the establishment of the scribal system in the Zhou court, all official annals for the vassal states were uniformly designated as *Chunqiu*. Du Yu’s preface in his *Chunqiu jing zhuan jijie* reads as follows: “Thus, for that which is recorded by the scribes, it inevitably begins by indicating the year, and since a year has four seasons, the names of what is recorded are derived by alternately highlighting these seasons.”¹⁴⁶ In other words, the title *Chunqiu* is an abbreviated form of the seasonal sequence *Chun xia qiu dong* 春夏秋冬 (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter), stemming from a specific recording practice adhered by the scribes. Du Yu further argued that the recording format during the Spring and Autumn period followed a specific chronological pattern, where events are linked to days, days to months, months to seasons, and seasons to years, embodying what is commonly understood as the annalistic style. In addition to the formal title *Chunqiu*, there were few occasions when some vassal states used alternative designations for their annals, such as the *Sheng* 乘 of Jin and the *Taowu* 柶杙 of Chu. Kong Yingda attributed this variation to Jin and Chu’s deviation from the standards, citing two passages from the *Guoyu* to support his argument. He noted that both Shenshu Shi 申叔時 and

¹⁴⁶ “故史之所記，必表年以首事，年有四時，故錯舉以為所記之名也。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 6.

Sima Hou 司馬侯, ministers of the states of Chu and Jin respectively, referred to their state annals as *Chunqiu*, not *Taowu* or *Sheng*. This indicates that the *Chunqiu* was the official title, while *Taowu* and *Sheng* were alternative titles independently adopted by Chu and Jin. Conversely, the state of Lu, adhering strictly to Zhou standards, retained the traditional title for its official annals.¹⁴⁷

Such is the origin of the title “Chunqiu”; as for its scope, Kong Yingda states: “In general, the *Chunqiu* records the actions of the ruler and other individuals, it is a text managed by the scribes on the left.”¹⁴⁸ The original form of the Lu annals *Chunqiu*, is no longer extant. Analysis of the contents of the extant version of the *Chunqiu* reveals that its recording methodology predominantly centered on chronicling events, devoid of any narratives on speeches. Kong Yingda’s assertion regarding the “role of the scribes on the left” was derived from the *Li ji*. Yet, the distinction between the scribes on the left and right serves as merely a general statement; the *Zhou li* does not acknowledge the specific roles of the left and right scribes, rendering the attribution of the compilation of the *Chunqiu* to the scribes on the left a subject of debate. In practice, the *Chunqiu* not only details the ruler’s actions but also encapsulates various significant state-related events, such as unusual natural disasters. While the

¹⁴⁷ Jia Kui 賈逵 (174–228) held a differing view on this issue. He posited that *Chunqiu* was the title for the Zhou annals, and since Lu preserved the Zhou rites in the most comprehensive manner, it also inherited Zhou’s title in naming its own records. However, Kong Yingda refuted this argument. Kong contended rhetorically, asking if following this logic implied that Chu and Jin, aware of their own impropriety and inability to adhere to the standards, specifically used other titles to display their malfeasance. See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 10.

¹⁴⁸ “夫《春秋》者，記人君之動作之務，是左史所職之書。” “Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi xu” 春秋左傳正義序 in *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, 3.

Chunqiu purports to encompass the essence of “myriad creatures,” there exists a clear boundary to its writing style, setting it apart from other notes recorded on individual bamboo slips and wooden tablets.

First and foremost, the *Chunqiu* consistently documented the names of the four seasons, irrespective of the presence or absence of significant events within a given season. Kong Yingda annotates: “If no significant events occur within a given month, then [the main text] does not gratuitously record the month; if no significant events occur within a given season, [the main text] nevertheless records the season.”¹⁴⁹ The *Chunqiu*, deriving its name from the four seasons, thereby ensures all four are recorded annually to signify a year’s completion. An exemplar from the seventh year of Duke Xi, stating simply “Autumn, the seventh month,” serves this purpose, marking the season’s commencement without corresponding events.¹⁵⁰

Secondly, as mentioned previously, in documenting affairs from other states, scribes rigorously adhered to received envoy reports. Matters not communicated through official channels were merely noted on bamboo slips. Should the actual timing of an event differ from the report, scribes followed the reported date. For instance, while the main text from the sixth year of Duke Yin mentions Song overtaking Changge 長葛 in winter, the *Zuo zhuan* places it in autumn. Du Yu confirmed the autumn occurrence, attributing the discrepancy to Lu scribes’ adherence to the report, which mentions the event taking place in winter.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ “一月無事不空舉月，一時無事必空舉時。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 7.

¹⁵⁰ “秋，七月” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 13, 419.

¹⁵¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 4, 116.

Thirdly, *Chunqiu*'s diction is subject to specific constraints.¹⁵² Regarding personal names, a report from an allied state on a deceased vassal lord includes the personal name, whereas non-allies only indicate the lord's title. Lu scribes' references to a ruler's title or name strictly follow the report, a tradition rooted in the rites of Zhou. A notable instance is an account from the seventh year of Duke Yin recording the demise of the marquis of Teng 滕. The main text refrains from mentioning his name, and the commentary explains this omission by stating that Teng and Lu were not allied.¹⁵³ Furthermore, the *Chunqiu* typically specifies the names of higher-ranking officials, while those of lower-ranking officials are seldom recorded.

In terms of diction, particularly with reference to war terminology, the *Chunqiu* employs specific terms to depict various scenarios: the term *ru* 入 denotes occupying another state's territory; *fa* 伐 refers to military engagements signified by the presentation of a drum or bell on the battlefield; *ke* 克 describes achieving victory over the enemy and capturing their prominent

¹⁵² This constitutes one of the rationales for arguing that the *Chunqiu* has the editorial standards, originating from Confucius editing the text to convey his moral judgments and reflections. Du Yu posited that the fifty General Standards 五十凡例 represent the ritual regulations set forth by the Duke of Zhou, governing the General Standards for compiling state annals. Based on this foundation, dictions that do not conform to the fifty standards may be viewed as the Transformed Standards 變例 resulted from Confucius' edition.

¹⁵³ Du Yu provided further explanation to the rationale behind this practice in his annotation. He argued that when two states swore alliances, they were required to report their names to the god as part of the ritual. Consequently, when an ally passed away, it was also required to report his name to the god in order to ensure consistency and completion from beginning to end. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 4, 120–22.

talents;¹⁵⁴ if the enemy secures victory without displaying its army, it is termed as “defeating one’s army” 敗某師; if both forces displayed their armies, it is called *zhan* 戰;¹⁵⁵ a significant defeat is called *bai ji* 敗績 and complete annihilation of a force is noted as “taking one’s army” 取某師. Each term corresponds to a specific situation and is applied according to scribal conventions, underscoring the discipline in their usage.

Furthermore, in chronicling deaths within the *Chunqiu*, the text distinguishes among various ranks: sovereigns are denoted by *beng* 崩, marquises and their primary concubines by *hong* 薨, and officials by *zu* 卒. If a marchioness of one’s state died without formal notification to other vassals, the term *zu* rather than *hong* is used.¹⁵⁶ Since all reports regarding the demise of vassals use the term *hong*, each state would alter the diction by utilizing the term *zu* when addressing the demise of the ruler of other states, in order to distinguish from one’s own ruler. This practice partly reflects the Duke of Zhou’s standards and the modified rituals adopted by the scribes of vassal states.

¹⁵⁴ The *Zuo zhuan* interprets the meaning of *ke* as “Obtaining the talented one is called *ke*” 得隽曰克. Kong Yingda interpreted the phrase “obtaining the talented one” to mean the acquiring prominent talents from the enemy force, which can be extended to convey a major victory. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 9, 278–79.

¹⁵⁵ If only term *zhan* is used in an entry without the usage of *bai* 敗 (defeat), then it can be assumed that both forces retracted their armies without a decisive result. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 9, 277–78.

¹⁵⁶ For more details, one can refer to the example set forth by accounts of the demises of Zhongzi 仲子 and Shengzi 聲子 in the second and third year of Duke Yin respectively. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 2, 76; *juan* 3, 82.

Lastly, scribes' fundamental approach to compiling historical records involves both precise documentation and strategic omissions. Instances include the scribe of the south recording Cui Zhu's regicide, Dong Hu's 董狐 account of Zhao Dun's 趙盾's regicide, and the account of the Zhou sovereign dispatching an envoy, Jiafu 家父, to request for chariots from the state of Lu in the fifteenth year of Duke Huan. These instances explicitly reveal misconduct, with Confucius notably praising Dong Hu as an exemplary scribe for his commitment to truthful reporting.¹⁵⁷ Ban Gu contended that the exemplary scribal writings should embody factual recording: "its expression should be straightforward, its events should be verified, it does not unduly praise, it does not conceal faults."¹⁵⁸ Liu Zhiji similarly asserted that accurate recording should "invariably document both virtue and vice."¹⁵⁹ These views collectively underline a consensus on the standards of factual recording in the post-Qin period, positioning it as the ideal for scribal practices.

However, the *Chunqiu* also contains numerous cases of omission and taboo, applying euphemisms to sensitive matters. For instance, the eleventh year of Duke Yin, where the duke was in fact assassinated, is merely described as his "demise."¹⁶⁰ In the first year of Duke Huan, the trade between Zheng and Lu involving the field of Xu 許 is euphemistically recorded as a

¹⁵⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 4, 139–140; the account of the Zhou sovereign requesting chariots can be found in *juan* 7, 234.

¹⁵⁸ "其文直，其事核，不虛美，不隱惡。" *Han shu*, *juan* 62, 2738.

¹⁵⁹ "善惡必書。" *Xin tang shu* 新唐書, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 comp. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), *juan* 132, 4522.

¹⁶⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 4, 139.

loan (with jade disc), when it was in reality an exchange with the field of Fang 枋.¹⁶¹

Additionally, the seventh year of Duke Xi's recounts duke's attendance at a meeting in the state of Qi, when, in reality, the duke was detained by Qi.¹⁶² These examples underscore the scribes' frequent recourse to euphemisms, suggesting that strict factual recording was not the exclusive standard.

The commentary from the first year of Duke Xi expounds on the omission of Duke Xi's ascension in the main text, which reads as follows: "tabooing the malfeasance of the state aligns with ritual propriety."¹⁶³ Kong Yingda construed "malfeasance of the state" as the disorders of the state, arguing that such omission is consistent with ritual norms.¹⁶⁴ Du Yu elaborated on the taboo convention in his annotation, stating as follows: "To conceal faults and promote virtues is an act of loyalty towards the sovereign and kinship, thus the practice of taboo was common, subjectively applied upon contemporaneous officials' will, hence lacking a uniform standard of depth or shallowness."¹⁶⁵ This perspective, diverging from Ban and Liu, argues that scribes regularly practiced euphemism, which was also in accordance with ritual propriety. Shenshu Shi's response to King Zhuang of Chu in the *Guo yu* further reinforces this argument, stating:

¹⁶¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 5, 152.

¹⁶² *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 14, 446.

¹⁶³ "諱國惡，禮也。" ¹⁶³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 12, 367.

¹⁶⁴ For more details on taboo practices in the *Chunqiu*, please refer to section 4.2 of Chapter Four of this dissertation.

¹⁶⁵ "掩惡揚善，義存君親，故通有諱例，皆當時臣子率意而隱，故無深淺常准。" *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 12, 367.

“Teaching the *Chunqiu* to [the prince] to let him know how to elevate virtue and suppress vice, in order to admonish his mind.”¹⁶⁶

Synthesizing these insights reveals that scribes during the Spring and Autumn period, while fundamentally committed to accurate recording, selectively omitted details under certain conditions deemed as state malfeasance by Du and Kong. Notably, not all instances of state disorder were tabooed; typically, only those directly involving the scribes’ own state were omitted, while wrongdoings by other states were forthrightly recorded. Regarding the existence of a uniform standard, although individual scribes might exhibit nuanced variances in judgment, the principal guideline of omitting references to state chaos presumably remained constant.¹⁶⁷

1.3.3 Conclusion

The discussion presented above is derived solely from an analysis of the *Chunqiu*, highlighting certain practices of scribes in compiling official annals. Additional details may be explored in dedicated scholarship. Nonetheless, these four criteria epitomize the core prerequisites for historical compositions during the Spring and Autumn period; only texts that satisfy these criteria truly resonate with the essence of historical records of that epoch. This

¹⁶⁶ “教之《春秋》，而為之聳善而抑惡焉，以戒勸其心。” *Guo yu*, *juan* 17, 528.

¹⁶⁷ The *Gongyang zhuan* posits a uniform convention for the taboo practice: for external matters, major misdeeds are recorded while minor ones are tabooed; conversely, for internal affairs, minor misdeeds are documented while major ones are tabooed. However, Kong Yingda contended that no rigid protocol exists within the *Chunqiu*, indicating occurrences where minor misdeeds are tabooed, yet significant misdeeds are detailed, even in the context of internal affairs. See *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 春秋公羊傳註疏, He Xiu 何休 comm., Xu Yan 徐彥 exeg., in *Shisanjing zhushu* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), *juan* 3, 74; *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 12, 367.

illustrates that the practice of recording events by Pre-Qin scribes and the concept of “history” as understood in later periods are fundamentally different notions, rooted in their distinct modes of composition. “History,” in its essence, is composed by individuals within a context of relative autonomy, driven by personal aspiration and interest. Its primary aim is the “reconstruction” of the past, an endeavor to pursue factual accuracy free from the constraints of external factors, such as political, moral, or religious influences, representing a pursuit of objectivity. Although this portrays an idealized framework, it does not detract from this ideal serving as the foundational aspiration or pursuit of historical writing. “History,” being a product of individual authorship, inherently reflects personal analyses and philosophical underpinnings, forming its essential component. Additionally, it necessitates a structured, sequential account that weaves together a comprehensive narrative, thereby effectively outlining the causal relationships between events and the author’s analytical insights.

In contrast, the historical records during the Pre-Qin period were not the product of individual authors; rather, they were systematically regulated by institutional frameworks, dedicated to serving the interests of the ruling power. The content and structure of these writings do not convey the personal reflections or judgments of their compilers, to such an extent that the identities of these individuals remain obscured. The notion of authorship is absent in the writing of historical records of the Pre-Qin era. Meanwhile, although these records methodically arrange events in an annalistic manner, they exist as independent entries, documenting the ruler’s significant acts without weaving these accounts into a cohesive narrative. Consequently, these discrete records do not constitute a general history. This is attributable to the monopolization of historical recording by the sovereign power, specifically managed by court officials. As such, the aspirational ideal typically associated with “history” is not applicable, given that the motivation

behind Pre-Qin historical writing was not personal inquiry but adherence to ritualistic and state objectives. Despite acknowledgments of “accurate recording,” the prevailing conditions were governed by ritual conventions and bureaucratic demands. Hence, due to these considerations, texts such as the *Chunqiu* (edited by Confucius) or the *Zuo zhuan* do not qualify as *shi* in the Pre-Qin context. The treatment of these works as historical texts reflects a lack of differentiation between personal compilation and the essence of *shi* by subsequent generations.

The extant *Chunqiu* does not conform to the concept of *shi* during the Pre-Qin period. Might it then be recognized, from a subsequent historical perspective, as China’s earliest work that conforms to the later definitions of “history”? Certainly, Confucius’ editorial efforts on the *Chunqiu*, which involved selecting 242 years of records from the Lu annals and structuring these accounts around twelve dukes to form a cohesive entity, arguably mark the origin of China’s earliest general history.¹⁶⁸ This transformation rendered the work a personal endeavor, imbued with Confucius’ judgments, thereby distinguishing it from the state annals produced under the royal bureaucracy. Tu Wei-yün had identified the *Chunqiu* as an instance of pre-Tang individually compiled history.¹⁶⁹ However, as discussed previously, this perspective is generated from an undistinguished comprehension of the complex multi-layered structure of *shi*.

The *Chunqiu* may predominantly exhibit traits akin to historical composition, but its foremost intention is to articulate Confucius’ philosophical viewpoints and advocate for the ritual

¹⁶⁸ By general history, I do not mean to characterize the extant *Chunqiu* as a “history,” but merely refers to its structure, which is largely based on the Lu annals, as embodying features akin to a general history. Regarding the formation of the earliest general history as a result from Confucius’ edition of the *Chunqiu*, please refer to Fu, “Lun zuo zhuan de xingzhi” 論左傳的性質, *Beijing daxue xuebao*, 60 (2023): 51–4.

¹⁶⁹ Tu, *Zhongguo shixue shi* 中國史學史 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshushe, 2010), 74.

propriety he esteemed. His motivations for editing the Lu annals were not solely driven by a historical curiosity or an ambition to reconstruct the past. Throughout this process, he did not refrain from editing the dictions on the original annals to express his commendations or criticisms, a practice at odds with the truth-seeking ethos admired by historians.¹⁷⁰ Upon meticulous analysis, it becomes apparent that the *Chunqiu* is more aptly classified as a philosophical treatise of the Pre-Qin era, thereby aligning it with the Masters category. Nonetheless, some may argue that history is inherently a branch of philosophical inquiry, positing that deeming the *Chunqiu* a work of Masters' treatise does not necessarily negate its validity as a historiographical text. In delineating the distinctions between these two concepts, Shen Kang-po, in his work *Shixue yu shibian* 史學與世變, articulates:

Despite the early inception of the scribe's role in China, and the existence of unique historical viewpoints among thinkers such as the Ruists, Mohists, and Legalists, these individuals were primarily philosophers, not dedicated historians. The significant development of Chinese historiography should indeed be ascribed to Sima Qian.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ The emphasis on the moral judgments as displayed in the *Chunqiu* and the *Zuo zhuan* is another place that diverge from the characteristics of historian and history. Carr contended that there exists a clear distinction between a historian and a moralist. Historian's interest in passing moral judgments on individuals' character only in the capacity that their deeds affected historical events. While acknowledging the inevitability for historian to pass moral judgments one way or another in the writing of history, Carr articulated that these judgments do not serve the predominant purpose. He concludes: "The serious historian is the one who recognizes the historically conditioned character of all values, not the one who claim for his own values an objectivity beyond history." Carr, *What is History*, 75–84.

¹⁷¹ “儘管中國史官之設很早，而且一般思想家如儒家、墨家、法家等對於歷史都有他們獨有的看法，但他們畢竟是哲學家而不是專門史學家。中國史學之高度發展實在是應該歸功於司馬子長的。” Shen, *Shixue yu shibian* 史學與世變 (Taipei: Xianrenzhang chubanshe, 1970), 5.

History represents a distinct intellectual tradition; it may be considered a subset within the broader intellectual history, yet not all philosophical works constitute historical texts.

Recognizing these subtle differences, Shen Kang-po, while acknowledged the *Chunqiu* (edited by Confucius) as marking the inception of Chinese historiography did not regard it as the first genuine historiographical work. Instead, he recognized Sima Qian as the first specialized historian.¹⁷² This recognition may further elucidate the disparities between the concepts of “Classics,” “*shi*” and “history.”

1.4 The *Zuo zhuan* and *shi* 史

As elucidated in the conclusion of the preceding section, the compilation of historical records of the Pre-Qin period adhere to a distinct set of conventions and formats, markedly diverging from contemporary understandings of “history” influenced by Western theoretical frameworks. The *Zuo zhuan*, in several instances, deviates from the established ritual conventions that govern the compilation of historical records, including disparities in writing materials and formats. Concerning the overarching structure of historical documentation in the Pre-Qin era, He Jin identifies six principal characteristics. Among these, his insights into the writing format are especially noteworthy, offering a critical examination of the methodologies employed in ancient Chinese historical records. He writes as follows:

[As for the historical records during the Pre-Qin period,] Its diction is extremely concise, constituting entries akin to headlines... This ledger-style, simplistic mode of recording was wittily referred to by Wang Anshi as a “fragmented and corrupt court report” ... The twenty

¹⁷² Shen, *Shixue yu shibian*, 4.

fifth year of Duke Xiang from the *Zuo zhuan* recounts Cui Zhu's regicide of Duke Zhuang of Qi, the grand scribe of Qi forthrightly records: "Cui Zhu murdered his ruler." It appears that the scribal practice of that era embraced such brevity, omitting the causes leading to the events.¹⁷³

He's remark aligns with the analysis in the previous section of this chapter regarding the writing form and conventions of Pre-Qin historical records. In the Pre-Qin era, the contemporary notion of "history" as understood today was absent. Historical records primarily consisted of brief recordings of significant events, characterized by their conciseness and presented in succinct phrasing without forming a cohesive narrative. The chronological sequence of events did not necessitate an explicit cause-and-effect linkage, often resulting in the documentation of events as fragmented phrases lacking clear initiation and conclusion. Conversely, the stylistic approach of the *Zuo zhuan* encapsulates both the recording of words and events, demonstrating a meticulous attention to detail in its depiction. It delineates not only the specifics of events, settings, and contexts but occasionally also portrays character dispositions. This depth of comprehensiveness and narrative coherence diverges markedly from the historical recording practices prevalent during the Spring and Autumn period.

Regarding the selection of source materials, the *Zuo zhuan* incorporates numerous accounts of minor affairs documented on individual bamboo slips and wooden tablets, which are excluded from the official texts. Kong Yingda notes:

¹⁷³ “文字極簡，基本是標題式的條文...這種流水賬式的簡單條文式的記錄，被王安石戲稱為‘斷爛朝報’...《左傳》襄公二十五年記載，齊國的崔杼殺死齊莊公，齊國大史徑書：‘崔杼弑其君。’或許當時史官所書就是上述如此簡單，並不記其始。” He, “*Cong Zhou li shiguan shezhi kan xianqin shixue de chansheng yu fazhan*,” 10.

Those not included in the official records, yet known to Qiuming, are minor affairs and hearsay recorded on bamboo slips and wooden tablets. This indicates that Confucius, in revising the main text, primarily utilized official documents in all cases. In contrast, Qiuming, in compiling the commentary, extensively gathered information from a diverse collection of bamboo and wooden slip records under all circumstances.¹⁷⁴

Moreover, the historical records of various vassal states seem to be intrinsically focused on themselves, documenting events that occurred within their own territories. Even on occasion when records of other states are mentioned, it is because those states had made formal communications; the focus, however, always remained centered on the affairs of one's own state. The *Zuo zhuan*, however, employs an expansive array of sources. Despite the *Chunqiu* relying on the Lu annals as its foundation, the *Zuo zhuan* in its elucidation of the main text, utilizes a considerable volume of historical records and notes from other vassal states. This phenomenon was well noted as early as the Tang dynasty by the famous scholar Dan Zhu 啖助 (724–770), who states as follows:

I observe that the accounts in Zuo's commentary concerning the states of Zhou, Jin, Qi, Song, Chu, and Zheng are the most detailed. For Jin, it lists the generals and officers every time an army is dispatched; for Song, it details the rise and fall by thoroughly mentioning the six

¹⁷⁴ “策書不載，丘明得之，明是小事傳聞，記於簡牘也。以此知仲尼修經，皆約策書成文。丘明作傳，皆博采簡牘眾記。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1,

ministers. Therefore, it is understood that the writings of historical records vary from state to state, and Mister Zuo acquired the records of these several states to teach his disciples.¹⁷⁵

The recognition of the multiple origins of *Zuo zhuan*'s sources seems to have become an established fact among scholars. Yuri Pines, in his examination of *Zuo zhuan*'s source materials, posits that, aside from the archival documents preserved by the state of Lu, historical records from various vassal states play a crucial role in shaping the compilation of the *Zuo zhuan*.¹⁷⁶ Du Yu, in his preface, noted that Zuo Qiuming and Confucius examined the official annals across various states. Irrespective of whether Zuo Qiuming was the actual compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*, it is evident that its historical content was not exclusively derived from the Lu scribal records. This approach to sourcing material is unprecedented in the historical recording practices of the Pre-Qin era. Based on the available sources, official annals during that epoch seemed to be typically localized, detailing the events of a single state. Therefore, such texts rarely encompass detailed accounts of external affairs, relying mainly on information provided through diplomatic correspondences rather than external historical records. Consequently, the source material for these annals was relatively homogeneous, primarily drawn from the archives managed by the respective state.

With respect to the writing format, it has been noted that a fundamental characteristic of recording practice during the Spring and Autumn period involved documenting the four seasons to signify the completion of a year, a principle that underlies the designation and foundational

¹⁷⁵ “予觀左氏傳自周晉齊宋楚鄭等國之事最詳，晉則每一出師具列將佐，宋則每因興廢備舉六卿，故知史策之文每國各異，左氏得此數國之史以授門人。” Lu Chun 陸淳 (?–805), *Chunqiu jizhuan zuanli* 春秋集傳纂例, in *Siku quanshu*, *juan* 1, 4b.

¹⁷⁶ Yuri Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed*, 31.

structure of the *Chunqiu*. Nevertheless, an analytical review of the *Zuo zhuan* indicates a deviation from this convention, with several instances where seasonal markers are absent. The narrative strategy predominantly hinges on the necessity to supplement events; when no additional supplementation is required within a given season, the narrative proceeds directly to the subsequent season. For example, in the ninth year of Duke Huan, the main text mentions “summer, the fourth month” 夏四月 to denote a season devoid of notable events yet documented to fulfill the annual cycle, whereas the commentary omits the summer season entirely, transitioning from spring to autumnal events.¹⁷⁷ It is noteworthy that, in addition to summer, this year’s main text also lacks entries in autumn, suggesting an absence of events worthy of recording in the annals from the Lu scribes’ perspective. Conversely, the *Zuo zhuan* recounts the campaign led by Guo Zhong’s 虢仲 against Quwo 曲沃 in that autumn, underscoring a departure in its purpose from the recording practice observed in the *Chunqiu*.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, in the thirteenth year of Duke Huan, while the main text records significant flooding during summer, with autumn and winter devoid of entries, the commentary only records spring, thereby omitting the subsequent seasons due to an absence of reportable events.¹⁷⁹ This pattern, among others not exhaustively cited here, illustrates the selective approach to seasonal documentation. Occasionally, the *Chunqiu* may specifically chronicle events within a season, yet the *Zuo zhuan*, for lack of supplemental content, might omit such temporal reference, resulting in the situation characterized as “main text entries without commentary counterparts.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 7, 216–7.

¹⁷⁸ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 7, 216–7.

¹⁷⁹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 7, 228–31.

¹⁸⁰ A notable example may be found in the fifteenth year of Duke Zhuang, where the main text records Duke Zhuang’s primary consort traveling to the state of Qi in summer, but the commentary does

In terms of the specifics of its narrative content, the *Zuo zhuan* is not constrained by many of the protocols observed by Pre-Qin scribes, such as practices of taboo and deliberate omissions. This allows for a writing style that is markedly more unencumbered compared to the official annals compiled by scribes, following the writing imperatives of the individual rather than adhering to a set of standards imposed on a collective. This unrestrained approach of the *Zuo zhuan* has enabled subsequent generations of scholars to gain insights into the diverse writing conventions employed in Pre-Qin historical recording. Moreover, the *Zuo zhuan* diverges from the *Chunqiu* in its adherence to “factual recording.” Whereas the *Chunqiu* follows a strict chronology based on the timing of reports received, the *Zuo zhuan* structures its account according to the actual chronological sequence of events.

To summarize, the writing style of the *Zuo zhuan* sharply contrasts with the scribal standards and the Pre-Qin historical records observable to us. This raises the question: why, particularly post the twentieth century, has the *Zuo zhuan* been categorized by many as a historical text? Indeed, the *Zuo zhuan* inherently exhibits prominent historical features, chiefly through its detailed and substantial account of events. Its most distinctive attribute, interpreting the main text through events, markedly deviates from the conventional Ruist approach of elucidating the main text, contributing to criticisms of it not being a commentary to the *Chunqiu*. The mastery of historical events demonstrated in the *Zuo zhuan* suggests the likelihood for the compiler to be identified as a court scribe, for only a court scribe would have access to and

not provide any note on this entry. Instead, it transitions directly from spring to autumn accounts. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 9, 289.

comprehensive knowledge of the archival records maintained within different sectors of court administration.

Upon examining the scope incorporated by the *Zuo zhuan*, one discerns an intricate knowledge of historical events across states demonstrated by its compiler, uniquely grasping the causal relationships and specifics of these events. For instance, the main text from the second year of Duke Huan recounts the murder of the duke of Song and Kong Fu 孔父 committed by Song Du 宋督 respectively.¹⁸¹ While both the *Gongyang zhuan* and the *Zuo zhuan* agree on the actual sequence of the murders is the exact opposite of the main text, their rationales diverge. The *Gongyang zhuan* conducts a meticulous philological analysis on the conjunction word *ji* 及 (and), suggesting the employment of this word implies a sense of complicity, aiming to underscore Kong Fu's virtue. The *Gongyang zhuan* posits that this passage primarily serves to praise Kong Fu, whose death was necessitated by Song Du's intention to commit regicide, resulting in his premature demise.¹⁸² In contrast, the *Zuo zhuan* adopts an approach grounded in specific historical context, supplementing events to elucidate the main text. It first notes a seemingly unrelated minor incident occurring in the previous year, which details Song Du's infatuation with Kong Fu's wife. Then, the *Zuo zhuan* recounts Song Du's killing of Kong Fu in the second year of Duke Huan, whose action infuriated the duke, culminating in Song Du's regicide of Duke Shang of Song 宋殤公. However, the *Zuo zhuan* further elaborates on the sequence of these murders as depicted in the main text, arguing that this order implies a deliberate choice to underscore Song Du's premeditated disloyalty, rather than merely driven by

¹⁸¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 5, 154.

¹⁸² *Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 4, 81–3.

his fear. The purpose is to accentuate Song's culpability. Consequently, if we follow *Zuo zhuan's* annotation, our inception of this entry leads to a completely different angle; Kong Fu died not out of loyalty to the duke of Song but due to Song Du's personal motives.¹⁸³

This example illustrates that the method of explication employed by the *Zuo zhuan* not only relies on an array of specific incidents but also deeply committed to elucidating the origins and developments of these events. Contrary to the conventional Ruist method of explication, which might suffice with a straightforward account of Song Du's act of killing Kong Fu to marry his wife in the second year, the *Zuo zhuan* chooses to unravel the cause of the incident in the prior year, serving as a foundation for the narrative progression. Such an approach, unseen in other Ruist commentaries, necessitates the compiler's command over an extensive corpus of materials and a sensitive insight into the chronological order of events and their interconnectedness, evidently embodying a scribal consciousness. In addition to entries that directly engage with the main text entries, the *Zuo zhuan* incorporates events that do not directly correlate with the main text, chosen solely for their intrinsic importance. This particular attention to the events themselves further highlights its distinctive historical features. With regard to the classification of the *Zuo zhuan* as a historical text by subsequent generations, Professor Fu Gang offers distinctive insights in his recent article, which reads as follows:

The *Zuo zhuan*, which structures around the twelve dukes as outlined in the *Chunqiu*, meticulously chronicles individual events on an annual basis. Each account is comprehensively articulated, with a discernible inception and conclusion, and the exposition of events is elaborately clarified, mirroring the historical narrative style prevalent in later

¹⁸³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 5, 156.

eras. Furthermore, within the historical span of 242 years covered by the Spring and Autumn period, no other historical texts have survived beyond the *Zuo zhuan*. Subsequent generations derive their understanding of the historical events during the Spring and Autumn period predominantly from the *Zuo zhuan*. Consequently, the capacity of the *Zuo zhuan* to provide historical insights effectively warrants its classification as a historical text.¹⁸⁴

The *Zuo zhuan* is recognized as a Pre-Qin historical text by posterity primarily due to its exhaustive accounts of historical events, transforming the work into a rich repository of Pre-Qin historical sources. Additionally, as articulated by Professor Fu, the distinct narrative feature of the *Zuo zhuan* plays a pivotal role in its classification. It bases its narrative on the portrayal of events, with a meticulous emphasis on detailing and reconstructing the context and progression of events. Consequently, the *Zuo zhuan* exhibits elements characteristic of later historical writing, such as coherent narration. Moreover, the text's inclusion of moral judgments of historical figures and occurrences aligns with the conceptual framework of historiography in subsequent eras, leading contemporary readers to naturally regard it as a historical text.

Certainly, the *Zuo zhuan* displays significant historiographical value, and its unique stylistic approach is largely attributed to the compiler's consciousness as a court scribe. For modern scholars, employing the text as a source of historical data seems both appropriate and rational. Nonetheless, defining it strictly as a Pre-Qin historical text may misinterpret the relationship between its inherent qualities and its historical function. Fundamentally, the

¹⁸⁴ “《左傳》依據《春秋》十二公，逐年依《經》文詳敘發生的具體事件，事件又都有頭有尾，來龍去脈交代得非常清楚，與後世史書敘事非常相合。又，春秋二百四十二年歷史，除了《左傳》以外，沒有別的史書存世，後人所有關於春秋歷史事件的知識，基本來自《左傳》，所以能夠據此書得到歷史事件的知識，自然便歸之於史書了。” Fu Gang, “Lun Zuo zhuan de xingzhi,” 53.

perception of the *Zuo zhuan* as a historical text arises from its incorporation of the essential elements identified in later historiography, which, however, do not correspond to the scribal practices of the Pre-Qin era. To accurately analyze *Zuo zhuan*'s nature, it is imperative to examine this text within the context of the literary and writing standards of its time, rather than imposing later concepts onto the historical reality. Historical records during the Spring and Autumn period were crafted by court scribes, governed by precise ritual conventions, resulting in disjointed, clause-based compilations collectively referred to as "Chunqiu." Given these considerations, the *Zuo zhuan* does not conform to this specific genre of text, rendering its identification as a Pre-Qin historical record both inaccurate and inappropriate.

Chapter Two: The *Chunqiu* and Confucius

Another important issue pertaining to the formation of *Zuo zhuan*'s quasi-narrative structure is the relationship between the *Chunqiu* and Confucius. This is an issue that pertains to the purpose of the compilation of the *Zuo zhuan*. Generally, the writing style serves merely as the means, while the purpose of composing a text plays a crucial role in determining how this means is employed. In the case of the *Zuo zhuan*, a text intended to serve as a commentary to the *Chunqiu* would certainly display varying formats and literary techniques from a text intended as an independent work. Consequently, the examination of *Zuo zhuan*'s relationship to the *Chunqiu* constitutes an essential integral to the ultimate deciphering of the formation of its quasi-narrative qualities. In Chapter One, we have discussed the relationship between the *Zuo zhuan* and *shi* 史 by systematically examining the profound influence of historical writing qualities on *Zuo zhuan*'s composition, while also contending that this text was not intended as a Pre-Qin historical record, either as an official annal or a so-called "miscellaneous" history. This chapter will be devoted to the sole exploration of the *Chunqiu* and the editorial standards, without which we cannot hope to unveil *Zuo zhuan*'s true character.

The *Chunqiu* is perhaps one of the most frequently debated subjects among scholars studying the Classics. Questions arise as to whether Confucius was involved with the *Chunqiu* and, if so, whether he authored or merely edited the text. These inquiries, while perhaps seen as cliché, remain central to scholarly discourse in the field of Pre-Qin Classics, with no consensus yet achieved. The debate often splits between proponents of the Old Text tradition 古文學家, who highlight Confucius' editorial role, and those of the New Text tradition 今文學家, who

assert that Confucius authored the entire *Chunqiu*. Over time, a new perspective has even emerged that denies any involvement of Confucius with the main text.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the term “Chunqiu” originally denoted the official annals of both the Zhou court and the various vassal states during the Spring and Autumn period, later known as the *Chunqiu* main text after Confucius’ edition. However, debates persist among scholars who insist that only one form of *Chunqiu* exists: either as a Ruist creation by Confucius or other Ruists, or as the original Lu annals, later modified by Ruists. This section will systematically address the diverse opinions on *Chunqiu*’s nature from ancient times to the present. This analysis is not only crucial for understanding its complex nature but also sets the stage for further discussions on the existence of the editorial standards.

2.1 Confucius and the *Chunqiu*

The earliest extant source directly commenting on Confucius’ role in compiling the *Chunqiu* may be traced to the *Mencius* 孟子. The “Tengwen gong xia” 滕文公下 section records as follows:

The world has diminished, and the Way has faded away. The perverse sayings and the violent deeds have risen again. There were instances of officials who murdered their sovereigns, and of sons who murdered their fathers. Confucius was afraid, and “composed” the *Chunqiu*. As for the *Chunqiu*, it is a text containing matters pertinent to

the Son of Heaven. Thus, Confucius said, “Alas! It is the *Chunqiu* which will make men know me, and it is the *Chunqiu* which will make men condemn me.”¹⁸⁵

This passage is notable not only because it provides the earliest traceable account of Confucius’ involvement with the *Chunqiu*, but it also specifically uses the word *zuo* 作 (to create, to make) to describe the nature of his engagement. Many subsequent studies have deemed this source as definitive evidence that Confucius authored the *Chunqiu*, interpreting the text as his composition. However, because the nature of this text contains matters of the Son of Heaven, Confucius remarked that it would be the reason for both his renown and condemnation.¹⁸⁶ If one pays close attention to the translation presented above, they may notice that I have placed the word “compose” in quotation marks. This indicates that the term *zuo*, seemingly straightforward, may entail a more complex usage than initially apparent.

In another section of the *Mencius* titled “Li lou xia” 離婁下, a passage states as follows:

“Mencius said: ‘The traces of the sovereignty extinguished, and the Odes ceased to be made.

¹⁸⁵ “世衰道微，邪說暴行有作，臣弑其君者有之，子弑其父者有之。孔子懼，作《春秋》。《春秋》，天子之事也。是故孔子曰：‘知我者其惟春秋乎！罪我者其惟春秋乎！’” *Mengzi zhushu* 孟子註疏, Zhao Qi 趙岐 comm., Sun Shi 孫奭 exeg., in *Shisanjing zhushu* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), *juan* 6, 210. For all translations on the *Mencius* in this chapter, they are partially based on James Legge’s translations. For Legge’s complete translation and notes, see James Legge, *The Chinese Classics: The Works of Mencius* (HK: Hong Kong University Press, 1960).

¹⁸⁶ Many argue that the *Chunqiu* contains evaluations and moral judgments through which Confucius praises or condemns one’s deeds. However, typically, only the Son of Heaven is granted the authority and right to evaluate one’s conduct and mete out punishments. Thus, Confucius uses the word “venture” 竊 to describe his involvement with the *Chunqiu* and comments that it is for this involvement that he will be known and condemned by others.

When the Odes ceased to be made, then the *Chunqiu* was produced. The *Sheng* of Jin, the *Taowu* of Chu, and the *Chunqiu* of Lu were texts of the same nature. The subject of the *Chunqiu* was the affairs of Huan of Qi and Wen of Jin, and its style was the historical. Confucius said: ‘As for its purport, I have ventured to make.’”¹⁸⁷ Evidently, the *Chunqiu* referred to in this passage designates the official state annals during the Pre-Qin period. Mencius was not only aware of the annals *Chunqiu* but was also able to delineate its nature. The term *Chunqiu* appears twice in the “Li lou” passage; the first occurrence refers to the collective title of all official annals, and the second occurrence refers to the specific subsets of this collective title. Despite the ostensible variation in their references, the three state annals are all historical records documenting important matters akin to the accounts of Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin, both of whom were hegemonies during the Spring and Autumn periods. These kinds of records are all known as the *Chunqiu*.

The “Li lou” passage provides substantial evidence of early historical records explicitly titled as the *Chunqiu*, predating Confucius. It also shows that Mencius had a comprehensive understanding of these annals. This challenges the view that Confucius could have composed the *Chunqiu*, as these texts already existed as formal, royal documents. The dual occurrence of the term *Chunqiu* in this passage—one referring to all official annals and the other to specific Lu annals—illustrates the varied use of the title. If we juxtapose this passage with the one from the “Tengwen gong xia,” a very different interpretation of the “Tengwen gong xia” reference emerges. Initially, one might be tempted to interpret the *zuo* as “to compose” or “to create,” as these are the most common meanings associated with *zuo*. The interpretation of this particular

¹⁸⁷ “孟子曰：‘王者之跡熄而詩亡，詩亡然后春秋作。晉之乘，楚之梲杌，魯之春秋，一也。其事則齊桓、晉文，其文則史。孔子曰：‘其義則丘竊取之矣。’” *Mengzi zhushu*, *juan* 8, 267.

word plays a pivotal role in how this passage is understood as Mencius' explicit statement that Confucius had "composed" the *Chunqiu*. However, if one sets aside the controversial *zuo*, without presupposing its meaning, this passage could equally be understood as implying that Confucius edited the *Chunqiu*. An alternative rendition could be as follows:

... Confucius was afraid and **edited** the *Chunqiu*. As for the *Chunqiu*, it is a text containing matters related to the Son of Heaven. Thus, Confucius said, "Alas! It is the *Chunqiu* which will make men know me, and it is the *Chunqiu* which will make men condemn me.

In this case, the first *Chunqiu* is interpreted as the Lu annals, and the second *Chunqiu* may refer to both the Lu annals as well as the generic title of all state annals, for they are texts of the same nature. In any case, the *Chunqiu* records important state and royal matters that are under the jurisdiction of the Son of Heaven. The compilation of these records was strictly managed by court scribes under royal decrees and followed strict ritual conventions. Therefore, Confucius' claim that he edited the Lu annals comports with his assertion that he would be both known to men and condemned by men for his deeds.

Consequently, taking into full consideration all relevant evidence presented in the *Mencius*, the "Tengwen gong xia" passage presents two interpretations, both of which are justifiable and plausible readings, rendering this source as ambiguous in its meaning at best. In fact, the unambiguous demonstration of Mencius's awareness of the annals *Chunqiu* in the "Li lou xia" section seems to provide a firm basis for a rendition leaning towards the second alternative (the edition alternative). On this note, the late professor Cao Daoheng 曹道衡 presented similar concern in his *Jing shi shuo lue* 經史說略, reading as follows:

When the ancients refer to *zuo*, it does not necessarily mean that one created or composed the work. Organizing and editing texts written by previous generations could also sometimes be called *zuo*. Based on the *Mencius*, it seems that Mencius did not necessarily reject the existence of the original Lu annals before Confucius. For instance, the “Li lou xia” section juxtaposes the *Chunqiu* of Lu with the *Sheng* of Jin and the *Taowu* of Chu and contends that “their contents pertain to Huan of Qi and Wen of Jin, and their writings are historical.” This statement matches what we see from the extant *Chunqiu*, indicating that Confucius only made modifications to the original content.¹⁸⁸

Professor Cao further cited a famous passage attributed to Confucius himself commenting on the nature of his involvement with the Classics, stating that “I only recount and do not compose.”¹⁸⁹

2.1.1 Reception History of Confucius and the *Chunqiu* in the Pre-Qin Era and the Undistinguished Distinction between *Zuo* 作 and *Xiu* 修

As a matter of fact, in addition to Confucius’ own comment, there are numerous sources from the Pre-Qin to Han periods that suggest the view of Confucius’ involvement with the *Chunqiu* was predominantly editorial. Moreover, the undistinguished use of the words *zuo* and

¹⁸⁸ “古人謂‘作’，其實並不一定意味著自己撰著，整理、修訂前人的書，有時也可以叫‘作’。從《孟子》一書看來，孟子並不見得否認孔子以前有魯史舊文的存在。如《離婁下》，就把‘魯之《春秋》’和‘晉之《乘》’、‘楚之《梲杌》’並提，並斷言‘其事則齊桓、晉文，其文則史’。這和今本《春秋》的內容並無不同，可見孔子之事對原文作過某些加工。” Cao Daoheng, *Jing shi shuo lue* (Beijing: Beijing yanshan chubanshe, 2002), 148.

¹⁸⁹ “述而不作。” *Lunyu zhushu*, *juan 7*, 93.

xiu 修 (to edit, to fix) was common during this epoch. For instance, the “Tian yun” 天運 section of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 records a dialogue between Confucius and Laozi 老子, in which Confucius claims to have extensively studied the Six Classics, including the *Chunqiu*.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, the well-known “Qiwu lun” 齊物論 section of the same text records as follows: “The *Chunqiu* aligns the realm, it is a text containing the intents of former kings. The sage only passes on his judgments [regarding the *Chunqiu*] and does not argue.”¹⁹¹ Like the *Mencius*, the *Zhuangzi* passages also acknowledge the existence of the annals *Chunqiu* prior to Confucius’ time. Its recording of Confucius’ words to Laozi closely aligns with his speech in the “Shu er” 述而 section of the *Lun yu*, articulating his editorial role in the transmission of the *Chunqiu*. Thus, in the “Qiwu lun” passage, Zhuangzi’s depiction of Confucius’ relationship with the *Chunqiu* also underscores his role as an editor of an existing sacred text.

Another crucial source is the *Gongyang zhuan*, which is one the most influential Ruist commentaries on the *Chunqiu*. The *Gongyang* school has been noted for its strong advocacy of the claim that Confucius made the *Chunqiu*, with prominent figures such as Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BC) and He Xiu 何休 (129–182), who are affiliated with this tradition. However, the *Gongyang zhuan* itself explicitly discusses Confucius’ editorial role. Its annotation for an entry from the seventh year of Duke Zhuang 魯莊公 illustrates this point:

¹⁹⁰ “孔子謂老聃曰：‘丘治《詩》、《書》、《禮》、《樂》、《易》、《春秋》六經，自以為久矣。’” Lü Huiqing 呂惠卿, *Zhuangzi quanjie* 莊子全解 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2011), *juan* 5, 210.

¹⁹¹ “春秋經世，先王之志，聖人論而不辯。” Lü, *Zhuangzi quanjie*, *juan* 1, 37.

In the fourth month of summer, on the night of *xinmao*, the fixed stars were not visible, and the stars fell like rain during midnight. What are the fixed stars? They are the stars that are fixed in their alignments. If the fixed stars are not visible, then how is it known that it was during midnight? It is because the stars returned to their positions [in later half of the night]. What does it mean by “like rain?” “Like rain” means it is not actually rain. If it’s not rain, then why is it described as “like rain?” The unedited *Chunqiu* says: “The rain of stars does not reach a foot above the ground before it returns.” The gentleman amended it to say: “The stars fell like rain.” Why was this recorded? To document the unusual.¹⁹²

This annotation by the *Gongyang* not only explicitly uses the term *xiu* (to edit, to amend) in describing Confucius’ relationship to the *Chunqiu* but also cites the original text from the Lu annals. In another entry from the first year of Duke Min 魯閔公, the *Gongyang zhuan* references a comment made by Zi Ruzi 子女子, stating that Confucius “makes the *Chunqiu* based on the *Chunqiu*.”¹⁹³ Xu Yan 徐彥 (dates unknown, active during the Tang) clarified that the first reference to the *Chunqiu* designates the historical annals *Chunqiu*, and this line implies that Confucius edited the historical annals into the existing version of the *Chunqiu*.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² “夏，四月，辛卯夜，恆星不見，夜中星貫如雨。恆星者何？列星也。列星不見，則何以知夜之中？星反也。如雨者何？如雨者非雨也。非雨則曷為謂之如雨？不脩《春秋》曰：“雨星不及地尺而復。”君子脩之曰：“星貫如雨。”何以書？記異也。” *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 6, 153–4.

¹⁹³ “以《春秋》為春秋。” *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 9, 224.

¹⁹⁴ “言古謂史記為《春秋》... 夫子脩史記為春秋。” *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 9, 224.

Furthermore, an entry from the twelfth year of Duke Zhao 魯昭公 records Gao Yan 高偃 from the state of Qi leading an army to receive the earl of Northern Yan 北燕 at Yang 陽. The *Gongyang zhuan* reflects on the phrasing of this entry, stating as follows: “The *Chunqiu* is a credible historical record. As for the arrangement [of ranks in meetings], one follows [the orders of] Huan of Qi and Wen of Jin; in their absence, the host arranges the order; the phrasing, however, is where Confucius is condemned.”¹⁹⁵ This explanation expounds on the use of the word *na* 納 and the title of “earl of Northern Yan at Yang” 北燕伯於陽. The *Gongyang zhuan* suggests this line should read “receiving Prince Yangsheng of Northern Yan” 納北燕公子陽生, arguing that the term the *bo* 伯 is a graphic error for *gong* 公, *yu* 於 for *zi* 子, and that the character *sheng* 生 was mistakenly omitted during the transmission.¹⁹⁶ This interpretation is problematic as there is no evidence for the suggested interchangeability between these characters, and it is highly unusual for a line this short to contain three major textual errors, thus casting doubt on *Gongyang zhuan*’s interpretation as overly rigid.

In contrast, the *Zuo zhuan* provides a succinct and convincing explanation, maintaining the original phrasing of the line. It clarifies that the earl’s personal name is Kuan 款 and that *yang* is a graphic variant for *tang* 唐,¹⁹⁷ a county in the state of Zhongshan 中山. Du Yu notes

¹⁹⁵ “《春秋》之信史也，其序則齊桓、晉文，其會，則主會者為之也，其辭，則丘有罪焉耳。” *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 22, 568–9.

¹⁹⁶ *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 22, 567–8.

¹⁹⁷ Both *yang* and *tang* belong to the *yang* 陽 rhyme group in Wang Li’s 王力 reconstruction. The *Shuowen jiezi* notes that an ancient graphic variant of *tang* is written as *tang* 陽. See Duan, *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 58; Wang Li, *Hanyu yuyin shi* 漢語語音史 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1985), 54.

that the main text specifies that the earl of Northern Yan was received at Yang/Tang because he had not yet reached Yan's territory.¹⁹⁸ A similar convention is recorded in the second year of Duke Ai, which states: "Zhao Yang of Jin led an army to receive the crown prince of Wei, Kuai Kui at Qi."¹⁹⁹

While *Gongyang zhuan*'s annotation may be seen as unsatisfactory and inaccurate, its comment on Confucius' editorial role in the making of the *Chunqiu* is unequivocally articulated, whether through the direct use of the word *xiu* or other alternative phrasings. Moreover, the "Fang ji" 坊記 section of the *Li ji* includes two separate "Confucius says" passages, both referencing the "Lu *Chunqiu*,"²⁰⁰ indicating both Confucius' and the *Li ji* compiler's recognitions of the annals *Chunqiu*. Similarly, Ban Gu, though a prominent New Text scholar in the Eastern Han, clearly states: "As the Way of the Zhou diminished, Confucius thus transmitted the *Chunqiu*."²⁰¹ Ban's use of the word *shu* 述 aligns with Confucius' remarks recorded in the "Shu er" section, underscoring his acknowledgment of Confucius' editorial involvement with the text.

Ban Gu's discussion in the "Yiwen zhi" section of the *Han shu* further elaborates on the nature of the *Chunqiu*. He distinguished between two major types of historical records managed by court scribes, which documented the sovereign's words and deeds. The records of deeds are

¹⁹⁸ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 45, 1487.

¹⁹⁹ "晉趙鞅帥師納衛世子蒯聩於戚。" *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 57, 1860.

²⁰⁰ The two passages are as follows: 子云: "升自客階, 受吊於賓位, 教民追孝也。" 未沒喪不稱君, 示民不爭也。故魯《春秋》記晉喪曰: "殺其君之子奚齊及其君卓。" 以此坊民, 子猶有弑其父者; and 子云: "取妻不取同姓, 以厚別也。" 故買妾不知其姓, 則卜之。以此坊民, 魯《春秋》猶去夫人之姓曰吳, 其死曰孟子卒。 *Li ji zhengyi*, juan 51, 1651; 1657.

²⁰¹ "周道敝, 孔子述春秋。" *Han shu*, juan 27, 1316.

known as the *Chunqiu*, and those recording speeches are referred to as the *Shang shu*. By the time of Confucius, the Zhou court had diminished, along with the rituals and texts that recorded ritual standards and the sage's words. Among various state annals, the Lu annals were considered to have preserved the Zhou rituals most comprehensively. Hence, Confucius, with the help of Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, observed Lu's records and edited the annals to correct the corrupted rites and music. His judgments and criticisms were not explicitly stated in the text but were transmitted orally to his disciples.²⁰² This passage raises several complex issues and personal viewpoints, each warranting separate discussions.²⁰³ Nevertheless, it is clear that Ban Gu characterized the creation of the extant *Chunqiu* primarily as an editorial effort based on the original state annals of Lu. Regarding the use of the word *zuo*, which has often been interpreted by both past and present scholars as concrete evidence that Confucius composed the *Chunqiu*, there are numerous instances indicating that this term had a more ambiguous meaning and usage in early periods. For example, the "Gui de" 貴德 section of the *Shuo yuan* 說苑 by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BC) includes the passage: "[Confucius] thus retreated to *zuo* (make) the *Chunqiu*."²⁰⁴ Meanwhile, in the "Zhi gong" 至公 section, Liu uses a different word: "[Confucius] thus retreated and *xiu* (edited) the *Chunqiu*."²⁰⁵

²⁰² *Han shu*, *juan* 30, 1715.

²⁰³ On the issue of "scribes on the left and right," as well as the significance of this *Chunqiu* category in the "Yiwen zhi," please refer to Chapter One of this dissertation for detailed analysis.

²⁰⁴ "退作春秋。" Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯, *Shuo yuan jiaozheng* 說苑校證, in *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng* 新編諸子集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987; rpt.2000), *juan* 5, 95.

²⁰⁵ "退而修春秋。" Xiang, *Shuo yuan*, *juan* 14, 350.

Another notable example is found in the *Shi ji*. In the “Sandai shi biao” 三代世表 section, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145 BC–?) writes as follows: “Confucius organized the *Chunqiu* based on historical records, recording the years and rectifying the times of the sun and the moon. Indeed, it is detailed.”²⁰⁶ This phrasing is echoed in the “Shier zhuhou nianbian” 十二諸侯年表 section, which reads: “Therefore, [Confucius] traveled west to observe the [records] of the Zhou royal house. He put into order historical records and old tales, and organized the *Chunqiu* by building on the Lu annals.”²⁰⁷ In the “Kongzi shijia” 孔子世家 section, Sima Qian elaborated on Confucius’ relationship with the *Chunqiu*, stating: “As for making the *Chunqiu*, Confucius used brush when it was proper to write and cutter when it was proper to delete; even someone like Zixia could not add a single word.”²⁰⁸ However, immediately preceding this entry, the word *zuo* appears, reading as follows: “[Confucius] thus made the *Chunqiu* by basing on the historical records, tracing up to Duke Yin and down to the fourteenth year of Duke Ai, encompassing twelve dukes. [The *Chunqiu*] took the state of Lu as its foundation, considering Zhou to be closest and Yin to be more removed, covering [the rules of] the Three Dynasties.”²⁰⁹ This phrase

²⁰⁶ “孔子因史文次春秋，紀元年，正時日月，蓋其詳哉。” *Shi ji, juan 13*, 487.

²⁰⁷ “故西觀周室，論史記舊聞，興於魯而次春秋。” *Shi ji, juan 14*, 509.

²⁰⁸ “至於為春秋，筆則筆，削則削，子夏之徒不能贊一辭。” *Shi ji, juan 47*, 1944. This translation is based on Tsuen-hsuei Tsien’s (1910–2005) work. See Tsuen-hsuei Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 195.

²⁰⁹ “乃因史記作春秋，上至隱公，下訖哀公十四年，十二公。據魯，親周，故殷，運之三代。” *Shi ji, juan 47*, 1943. There are multiple interpretations of this line; Sima Qian’s reference to the Three Dynasties may be traced back to Dong Zhongshu’s theory of the Three Dispensations. The precise meaning is difficult to determine, so I chose to render this phrase in a way that closely aligns with what is expressed in Dong’s treatise. For discussion on Dong Zhongshu and his treatise, please refer to section

is slightly altered in the “Rulin liezhuan” 儒林列傳 section, reading as follows: “Thus [Confucius] made the *Chunqiu* based on the historical records to serve as the guidelines for the king.”²¹⁰

In each of the first three cases, Sima Qian contended that Confucius specifically took the Lu annals as his basis to arrange and correct the *Chunqiu*. Notably, instead of using the common term *xiu*, the text transitions to using *ci* 次 (to arrange, to organize) and *bi xue* 筆削 (to correct and improve), presenting a more vivid image of the editorial actions taken by Confucius. Considering the firm and consistent standpoint established by these three references, the use of *zuo* in the fourth incidence suggests significant ambiguity. It seems more plausible to interpret it as a general verb encompassing a range of actions related to one’s involvement with physical objects, rather than a precise meaning of “to create” or “to compose.” Sima Zhen 司馬貞’s (679–732) *Shi ji suoyin* 史記索引 interprets this passage as indicating Confucius edited the *Chunqiu* with a primary focus on the state of Lu.²¹¹ Furthermore, the subsequent *bi xue* passage clearly indicates Confucius’ editing and correction of the text, alongside the recognition of the existence of the annals *Chunqiu* serving as the base for the *Chunqiu* main text. Hence, Sima Qian’s use of

2.1.2, for details regarding this phrase in the *Shi ji*, see Wang Shumin 王叔岷, *Shi ji jiaozheng* 史記斟證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 1786; and Han Zhaoqi 韓兆琦, *Shi ji jianzheng* 史記箋證 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2004), 3267.

²¹⁰ “故因史記作春秋，以當王法。” *Shi ji, juan* 121, 3115.

²¹¹ “言夫子修春秋，以魯為主，故云據魯。” note #1 in *Shi ji, juan* 47, 194 There are multiple interpretations of this line; Sima Qian’s reference to the Three Dynasties may be traced back to Dong Zhongshu’s theory of the Three Dispensations. The precise meaning is difficult to determine, so I chose to render this phrase in a way that closely aligns with what is expressed in Dong’s treatise.

zuo here likely denotes a general sense of “rectify” or “edit.” Additionally, the use of *wei* 為 (to make) in the *bi xue* passage supports the notion that early uses of terms like *zuo*, *wei*, *xiu*, and *xue* often lacked significant distinctions, typically understood in their broadest sense.

To further support my argument, Wang Chong 王充 (27–97) in the “Yi zeng” 藝增 section of the *Lun heng* 論衡 cited *Gongyang zhuan*’s passage regarding Confucius’ editing of the *Chunqiu* and provided a detailed explanation. Wang Chong explicitly contended that *Gongyang zhuan*’s mention of an “unedited *Chunqiu*” refers to the Lu state annals that had not yet been transformed into the extant version of the *Chunqiu*. The original record is described as “raining stars that did not reach a foot above the ground and returned.”²¹² Wang Chong elaborated on this passage, praising Confucius’ alteration of the phrase from “not reaching a foot above the ground” to “stars fell like rain.” Given the difficulty in determining the actual distance between the fallen stars and the earth, using specific measurements is deemed inaccurate and inappropriate. Wang argued that, had Confucius not edited the *Chunqiu*, the extant version would still contain the original wording.²¹³ Intriguingly, Wang Chong used the word *zuo* in the second instance, although it clearly means “edit” rather than “compose.”

Through meticulous examination of various sources from the Pre-Qin to Han periods, it is evident that the predominant view of Confucius’ involvement with the *Chunqiu* during this time, especially in the Pre-Qin era, centers around an explicit acknowledgement of the Lu annals

²¹² “不修《春秋》者，未修《春秋》時《魯史記》，曰：‘雨星，不及地尺如復。’” Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lun heng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990; rpt.1995), *juan* 8, 391–2.

²¹³ “孔子作《春秋》，故正言‘如雨’。如孔子不作，‘不及地尺’之文，遂傳至今。” Huang, *Lun heng jiaoshi*, *juan* 8, 392.

Chunqiu and Confucius' role in editing this text to form the extant version. Moreover, in many discussions, there is a tendency to interchangeably use terms typically associated with “to compose” or “to create” and those indicating “to edit” or “to correct.” Frequently, both *zuo* and *xiu*, among other terms with similar meanings, are used when the context clearly supports an editorial interpretation. This consistent pattern across various sources provides compelling evidence that the meaning of *zuo* was ambiguous and encompassed a broader range of actions than commonly understood in later periods.²¹⁴ Consequently, the mere presence of the word *zuo* is insufficient to conclude that it exclusively denotes Confucius' authorship of the *Chunqiu*; a thorough analysis of the overall context is necessary before drawing such a conclusion.

²¹⁴ Liu Shippei 劉師培 studied this issue and contended that *zuo* may be glossed in two distinct ways, one as *shi* 始, another as *wei* 為. The first denotation means to initiate or to begin, which is more closely associated with the sense of to create or craft (*chuang zuo* 創作); the second notion has more ambiguous meaning that may be applied to a wide array of situations. According to Liu, the use of *zuo* is often ambiguous in its significance, requiring close examination case by case. He cited several instances from early texts where *zuo* is used in various scenarios, none of which actually denote the meaning of “to create.” Consequently, Liu argued that the *zuo* in the phrase “Confucius *zuo* *Chunqiu*” should not be construed in its literal meaning. In reality, several sources from the Pre-Qin period evidently confirms Confucius' editorial role in the transmission of the *Chunqiu*. Liu Shippei, *Liu Shippei shixue lunzhu xuanji* 劉師培史學論著選集, Wu Guoyi 鄒國義 and Wu Xiuyi 吳修藝 edit (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), 522.

2.1.2 The Emergence of the Proclamation for Confucius' Authorship of the *Chunqiu* during the Han Era

The actual assertion that Confucius authored the *Chunqiu* did not appear until the Western Han period. Dong Zhongshu, in the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露, dedicated a section to discussing the reformation of the established system and the concept of the *san tong* 三統 (Three Bonds or Dispensations).²¹⁵ In this discussion, Dong asserted that the *Chunqiu* was composed by Confucius in response to a heavenly mandate, this work resembles Confucius' effort in performing duties of the “new king” 作新王之事.²¹⁶ Specifically, Dong writes:

²¹⁵ For meticulous and comprehensive studies on Dong's treatise, one may consult Michael Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a 'Confucian' Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). For Chinese study, please see Chang Tuan-sui 張端穗, “Dong Zhongshu sixiang Zhong santong shuo de neihan, yuanqi ji yiyi” 董仲舒思想中三統說的內涵、緣起及意義, *Donghai zhongwen xuebao* (2004): 55–103.

The essence of the idea of *san tong* is precisely delineated in Loewe's work, who writes: “...true rulership devolves from heaven, being imparted and operated with requisite changes of practice and symbol that follow the sequences of time. The process is seen in a cycle whereby three bonds of dispensations follow one another, each with its own personalities, characteristics and symbolical colour.” Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a 'Confucian' Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu*, 292.

The English translations pertaining to Dong Zhongshu's discourse on the *san tong* in this chapter are primarily based on Loewe's work. For his complete translation of Dong's “Sandai gaizhi zhiwen” 三代改制質文, see Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a 'Confucian' Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu*, 317–34. Alternatively, I have also consulted Sarah Queen and John Major's translation of the *Chunqiu fanlu*. See Sarah A. Queen and John S. Major, *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2016), 241–6.

²¹⁶ The term “new king” is specific to Dong's theory of the “Three Bonds.” In the “Dui ce” 對策 section, Dong used a slightly different yet similar term, “uncrowned king” 素王, to refer to Confucius. This term is commonly used by New Text scholars during the Han period to elevate Confucius' status.

The *Chunqiu* represents [Confucius'] effort to perform the duties of the new king. It removed the institutions of Zhou and thought it fitting to adopt the Black Dispensation, with Yin and Zhou being treated as the descendants of former kings. It downgraded Xia and styled Yu as Emperor Yu, marking out his descendants by means of small territories. Thus, the statement 'degrade Xia and preserve Zhou' was due to [Confucius'] effort to act as the new king with [the making of] the *Chunqiu*.²¹⁷

In this context, *zuo* clearly denotes "to compose," as Dong not only credited Confucius as the original composer of the *Chunqiu* but also portrayed this composition as establishing a new dispensation.

The term "Black Dispensation" 黑統 in the aforementioned passage refers to one of the three bonds in the cyclical system of the *san tong* promoted by Dong Zhongshu. The other two bonds are known as the White 白統 and Red Dispensations 紅統. Each bond corresponds to a

Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645), in his commentary to the *Han shu*, stated that this term first appears in the *Guliang zhuan*. However, Zhao Boxiong contends that it is not observed from the received version of the *Guliang zhuan*. Regardless, it seems that Dong Zhongshu is responsible for advocating the elevation of Confucius to a king. Jack Dull contends in this dissertation that "Up to Tung Chung-shu's time, Confucius was looked upon as a teacher, writer and philosopher. Tung averred that Confucius had actually 'received a charge from Heaven to succeed the Chou house in its sovereign position ...' Confucius thus became an 'uncrowned king.' See *Han shu*, note #11, *juan* 67, 2926; Zhao Boxiong 趙伯雄, *Chunqiu xue shi* 《春秋》學史 (Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2014), note #5, 162; Jack Dull, "A Historical Introduction to Apocryphal (Ch'an-wei) Texts of the Han Dynasty," Ph.D. Diss. (University of Washington, 1996), 28.

²¹⁷ “《春秋》作新王之事，變周之制，當正黑統。而殷、周為王者之後。紂夏，改號禹謂之帝，錄其後以小國。故曰：紂夏存周，以《春秋》當新王。” Su Yu 蘇輿 (1874–1914), *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露義證, in *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng* (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1992, rpt.1996), *juan* 7, 200.

specific set of ritual standards that ought to be followed based on the rotation of the bonds. Furthermore, Dong also classifies the “Three Kings” 三王, “Five Emperors” 五帝, and “Nine Sovereigns” 九皇. The “Three Kings” include the current ruler and two former rulers, constituting the current cycle of the “Three Bonds.” The replaced former “king” then joined the group of the “Five Emperors,” and the nine rulers preceding the “Five Emperors” are known as the “Nine Sovereigns.” Gu Jiegang contended that these titles function similar to kinship designations such as “grandfather”, “father”, and “son”, serving as generic references rather than fixed designations for specific figures.²¹⁸

According to Dong, the previous cycle consisted of the Xia 夏, Shang 商, and Zhou dynasties. However, with Confucius’ composition of the *Chunqiu*, which was mandated by Heaven and pertained to sovereign affairs, the state of Lu replaces the Zhou dynasty as the current dispensation of the “Three Bonds.” This reassignment leads to the Zhou and Shang dynasties becoming the two former rulers preceding Lu, culminating in the “downgrade” of Xia to the category of the “Five Emperors.”²¹⁹ Consequently, Dong Zhongshu posited that the creation of the *Chunqiu* represents the establishment of a new kingship, with Confucius endowed

²¹⁸ For more details on the “Three Bonds” theory, please refer to Gu Jiegang, *Gushi bian* 古史辨, vol.5 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 442.

²¹⁹ According to Zhao Boxiong, the “Three Kings” is considered as the most prestigious rank among the three classifications. With the emergence new kings, former rulers gradually descend down the line into other categories. Loewe maintains a similar view: he contends that with each change in the cycle, the most remote ruler, or ancestor, is removed from the current sequence, and placed in higher but also more transcendent category. See Zhao, *Chunqiu xue shi*, 99; Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a ‘Confucian’ Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu*, 292–3.

by the heavenly mandate as the new king through this composition, thereby positioning the state of Lu as the new kingdom supplanting Zhou's authority.²²⁰

²²⁰ Dong's statement reads as follows: "Thus, [the making of] the *Chunqiu* represents [Confucius's] effort to conduct the deeds of a new king in response to the mandate. For that point of time, he set up the Black Dispensation as being correct; he treated Lu as the one that reigned; he held black in honor, and degraded Xia, considering Zhou to be closest and Song to be more removed." 故春秋應天作新王之事，時正黑統，王魯，尚黑，黜夏，親周，故宋。 Su, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, juan 7, 187–8.

It is worth noting that scholars have not reached a consensus on the reading of *qin* 親. In his annotation to the *Gongyang zhuan*, He Xiu referred to the phrase “新周故宋,” presenting a variation of Dong Zhongshu's idea. The exact interpretation of He Xiu's use of *xin* is quite problematic. This phrase is repeated throughout the *Gongyang zhuan*, with multiple occurrences noted in He Xiu's commentary and Xu Yan's exegesis in the first year of Duke Yin, the twenty-seventh year of Duke Zhuang, the twenty-third year of Duke Xi, the sixteenth year of Duke Xuan, the sixth and the twenty-ninth years of Duke Xiang, respectively. Both He Xiu and Xu Yan, who expounded on He Xiu's commentary, clearly attributed a very specific meaning to the term “新周.” However, later scholars have struggled to interpret its meaning. The term *xin* forms an antonym set with *gu* 故 (adj. past, more removed); it is when these two terms are placed in the complete sentence of “《春秋》黜杞，新周而故宋，以《春秋》當新王” that the meaning becomes obscured. If *xin* is to be construed as “new” or “recent,” then how could the *Chunqiu*, or Lu, or Confucius regard Zhou as a new or recent entity after Confucius claimed new kingship? Consequently, some have proposed that He's use of *xin* might be a graphic error for *qin*, as the two words were sometimes used interchangeably. For instance, the “Wang zheng” 亡徵 section of the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 has the phrase “親臣進而故人退,” where Wang Xianshen 王先慎 (dates unknown, active during the late-Qing period) noted that *qin* should be read as *xin* 新, which can be translated as “new officials made advancement and former personnels retreated.” See Wang Xianshen, *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998, rpt. 2003), 113.

Su Yu referenced several instances, including an entry from the *Gongyang zhuan* and a passage from the *Yuewei dongsheng yi* 樂緯動聲儀, that mention *xin Zhou*. Building on Su's observations, Zhong Zhaopeng 鐘肇鵬 further provides two lists of different versions of the *Chunqiu fanlu*—one following the *xin Zhou* reading and the other the *qin Zhou* reading. However, both Su and Zhong lean toward the *qin*

Dong's proclamation may be closely related to his political agenda and his promotion of Ruism. As a Ruist scholar belonging to the *Gongyang* tradition, Dong strongly advocated for the *Chunqiu* and Ruism to be recognized as the dominant teaching in the Western Han imperial court. Through elevating Confucius to the status of a new king and identifying the *Chunqiu* as a sacred composition of this sage king for the establishment of a new legitimate regime, Dong Zhongshu offered to the Han court an exemplary way of accomplishing great merits comparable to the sage king. Zhao Boxiong summarizes Dong's discourse as follows:

Such reform, in reality, serves to further argue for the legitimacy of the "new king" ...

From this perspective, the "reform" in Dong Zhongshu's studies of the *Chunqiu* is less a theoretical issue than a political necessity of the time. Since the establishment of the Han dynasty, numerous aspects including institutional frameworks, ceremonial practices, and calendrical systems were largely inherited from the preceding Qin dynasty. Emperors Wen and Jing, who advocated *wu wei*, made no significant corrections. By the time of Emperor Wu of Han, the period of recuperation and restoration had passed, and the state's strength was unprecedentedly robust. Various reforms like the Feng and Shan sacrifices, correction of the calendar, and changes in dress codes had been long contemplated,

reading, contending that it makes the most sense within the context. A strong foundation for this argument is that the *Shi ji* also follows the *qin* reading. Given the complexity of this issue, I will not delve into the extensive debate but rather bring to the reader's attention the underlying problem. The translation I adopt in this chapter does not reflect my academic stance but merely adheres to the renditions by Loewe and Queen, who both follow the *qin* reading. For detailed discussions on this issue, please consult Su Yu, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, *juan* 7, 189–191; Zhong Zhaopeng, *Chunqiu fanlu jiaoshi* 春秋繁露校釋 (Hebei: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2005), 433. For He Xiu and Xu Yan's comments and the *Shi ji* reference, see *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, *juan* 1, 5; *juan* 8, 206; *juan* 12, 288–9; *juan* 16, 421; *juan* 19, 487; *juan* 21, 533; *Shi ji*, *juan* 47, 1943.

merely awaiting a ruler keen on glory and fond of ostentation to implement them... In this context, Dong Zhongshu incorporated the notion of reform into his theory of the *Chunqiu* merely to better adapt his *Chunqiu* study to the needs of the ruler.²²¹

Similarly, Michael Loewe argues that, by identifying the Lu state as the Black Dispensation, the text offers the Han ruling house a measure of legitimacy; Han is now regarded as the successor of a renowned regime, the state of Lu, rather than the successor of Qin, which is excluded from the cycle.²²² Dong Zhongshu's proclamation marks a watershed moment in the reception history of Confucius' involvement with the *Chunqiu*. His argument not only marks the origin of the explicit support for Confucius' composing of the *Chunqiu*, but also imposes profound influence on later scholars, particularly those that are affiliated with the New Text school.

Dong's reformation theory was highly influential during the Han era, particularly with the rise of the New Text tradition and weft texts in the Eastern Han period. He Xiu, another renowned Eastern Han scholar who exegeted the *Gongyang zhuan*, fully embraced Dong Zhongshu's argument, stating: "As for the concept of Three Regulations and Nine Purports, it refers to Lu's treating of the Zhou as its more recent predecessor and Song to be more removed,

²²¹ “這樣的改制，實際上是為‘新王’的合法性做進一步的論證... 這樣看來，董仲舒《春秋》學中的‘改制’，與其說是一個理論問題，還不如說是當時的一種政治需要。漢興以來，在制度、禮儀、曆法等許多方面都基本上承襲了秦代之舊，文、景諸帝，崇尚無為，都沒有做什麼大的更正。漢武帝的時候，早已渡過了休養生息的恢復時期，國力已經空前強盛，封禪、改正朔、易服色等種種改制的舉措都已經醞釀了許久，就等著有一位貪好功名、喜歡誇飾的君主來實行了...在這種情況下，董仲舒把改制之說糅進了《春秋》理論，不過是為了使他的《春秋》學更能適應人主的需要而已。” Zhao, *Chunqiu xue shi*, 101.

²²² Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a 'Confucian' Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu*, 292.

and Confucius' realization of the new kingship with [the making of] the *Chunqiu*.”²²³ In addition, He Xiu further reinforced this argument through incorporating it in his annotation to the *Gongyang zhuan*. For instance, in the twenty-seventh year of Duke Zhuang, a main text entry records as follows: “The earl of Qi came to pay his visit.”²²⁴ The *Gongyang zhuan* does not provide commentary on this particular entry. Nonetheless, He Xiu took issue with the reference to the ruler of the state of Qi 杞, stating that the state of Qi is descended from the Xia dynasty, thereby rendering its ruler a duke. He argued that the main text refers to Qi's ruler as an earl because Confucius had claimed legitimacy as the new king. Consequently, the *Chunqiu*

²²³ “三科九旨者，新周故宋，以《春秋》當新王。” Zhao Boxiong contends that this line is primarily based on Dong Zhong's “reformation” discourse, and he points out that *xin* and *qin* share strong similarity in their graphic forms, thereby attributing the use of *xin* to graphic errors during transmission. However, as explained in footnote #36, there are various interpretations of the correct reading of *qin*. Moreover, despite Dong Zhongshu's intended meaning, it appears that He Xiu harbored a distinct idea about elaborating Lu's relationship with Zhou and Song within the cycle of the Three Bonds. Consequently, the rationale for using *xin* in He Xiu's argument may be more complex than a mere graphic error. See *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, *juan* 1, 5; Zhao, *Chunqiu xue shi*, 98.

He Xiu's theory of the “Three Regulations and Nine Purports” consists of three main sections, in which the “Three Regulations” and the “Nine Purports” essentially refer to same subjects, for each regulation contains three purports. The line “新周故宋，以《春秋》當新王” serves as the first division, with the “新周”，“故宋，” and “以《春秋》當新王” representing the three purports conveyed in this regulation. The significance of this first regulation is to establish Confucius' legitimacy as the “new king”，with the state of Lu functioning as the new kingdom. For a comprehensive summary of He Xiu's theory, please refer to Zhao, *Chunqiu xue shi*, 165–7.

²²⁴ “杞伯來朝。” *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, *juan* 9, 206.

downgrades the status of Qi, indicating its consideration of Zhou to be closest and Song to be more removed.²²⁵

The ideas of Confucius composing the *Chunqiu* to become the new king and the state of Lu replacing the Zhou court as the third bond in the cycle frequently appear in He Xiu's annotation to the *Gongyang zhuan*. As two most influential and prominent figures of the *Gongyang* tradition, Dong Zhongshu's and He Xiu's arguments served as the primary impetus to the perception of the *Gongyang zhuan* as the chief advocate for claiming Confucius' making of the *Chunqiu* in achieving the merits akin to that of a king. Du Yu's preface to the *Zuo zhuan*, which states that "Those that speak of the *Gongyang*, also say the phrase 'degrade Zhou and take Lu as the royal court,'"²²⁶ is indicative of such a perception flourishing among later generations. This misinterpretation is not rectified until Kong Yingda, who explicitly states, "The phrase 'Those that speak of the *Gongyang*' refers to He Xiu. As for the phrase 'degrade Zhou and take Lu as the royal court,' it is not the official writing of the *Gongyang zhuan*, but a theorizer's surmise from deducing *Gongyang*'s meaning."²²⁷

The arguments promoted by Dong and He not only became distinctive markers of the *Gongyang* tradition but also the most influential and mainstream views during the early Eastern Han period, bolstered by the dominance of the New Text tradition. This prominence largely stemmed from the Eastern Han dynasty's strategic use of *chen wei* 讖緯 (divination combined

²²⁵ “杞，夏后，不稱公者，《春秋》黜杞，新周而故宋，以《春秋》當新王。” *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 9, 206.

²²⁶ “言《公羊》者，亦云黜周而王魯。” *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 28.

²²⁷ “‘言《公羊》者’，謂何休之輩。‘黜周王魯’，非《公羊》正文，說者推其意而致理耳。” *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 29.

with mystical Ruist belief) to fortify its legitimacy.²²⁸ Dong Zhongshu's interpretations elevated Confucius to the stature of an "uncrowned king," positioning the *Chunqiu* as divinely mandated, thereby making reverence for Confucius and the study of the *Chunqiu* a direct means to maintain legitimacy and achieve great merits. Such an interpretation has endowed the text with great political significance. In the early Eastern Han, the flourishing of weft texts further solidified the connection between Confucius, the *Chunqiu*, and the political needs of the time. While Dong Zhongshu introduced the notion of the "uncrowned king," subsequent prophetic texts mythologized Confucius, portraying him variously as a prophet with foresight who composed rites and regulations (the *Chunqiu*) for the Han dynasty, or as the son of the Black Emperor with extraordinary semi-divine appearance.²²⁹

For example, Xu Yan's *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* cites a passage from the weft texts *Chunqiu shuo* 春秋說, stating: "Confucius gathered the historical records, drew upon ancient diagrams, extrapolated [the meaning of] heavenly changes, made norms for the Han emperor, and explicated diagrams and patents [of investiture], and explicated diagrams and

²²⁸ The *chen* stands for prognostication and *wei* is the counterpart of *jing* 經, which is supposedly to convey the other half of canonical doctrines. Writings pertaining to the *chen wei* is known as the *wei shu* 緯書, which may be translated as literally, weft texts, or apocryphal texts. This chapter will primarily refer to *wei shu* as weft texts. For more discussions on weft texts, see Dull, "A Historical Introduction to Apocryphal (Ch'an-wei) Texts of the Han Dynasty," 6.

²²⁹ For comprehensive studies on the weft texts, one may consult Dull, "A Historical Introduction to Apocryphal (Ch'an-wei) Texts of the Han Dynasty;" and Zhong Zhaopeng, *Chenwei lunlüe* 讖緯論略 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991).

registers.”²³⁰ The text further cites a passage from the *Jieyi lun* 解疑論 conveying a similar view, which reads as follows: “The hunt in the west captured a unicorn signaling Heaven’s mandate leaving Zhou, as the Red Emperor was rising; the unicorn signified an inauspicious omen for Zhou’s demise and auspicious omen for Han’s rise, hence Confucius said, ‘I prefer to entrust [my teachings] to deeds rather than to empty words.’”²³¹ Moreover, the *Yan kong tu* 演孔圖 portrays Confucius as a divine emperor’s son, born amid empty mulberry trees, possessing a formidable presence and a chest inscription that mandates the creation of the divine mandate 符運 to stabilize the world.²³² It further labels him the “uncrowned king” tasked with authoring the *Chunqiu* in response to omens predicting Zhou’s fall, thereby specifically crafting this work for

²³⁰ “丘攬史記，援引古圖，推集天變，為漢帝制法，陳敘圖錄。” *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 1, 3.

²³¹ “西狩獲麟，知天命去周，赤帝方起，麟為周亡之異，漢興之瑞，故孔子曰‘我欲託諸空言，不如載諸行事。’” *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 1, 3.

²³² The term *fu yun*, or divine mandate, is alternatively known as *fu ming* 符命, first appearing in the *Han shu*. It refers to the auspicious omens signifying ruler’s receiving of the mandate from Heaven, thereby confirming the legitimacy of the regime. According to the *Han shu*, *fu ming* served as the essential means through which Wang Mang claimed his legitimacy to usurp the throne. The theory of divine mandate, which flourished during Wang Mang’s Xin dynasty, was subsequently embraced and exploited by the Eastern Han royal house. This concept became a formidable instrument for them to depose Wang Mang, restore the Han dynasty, and extol their governance. The weft texts integrated the theory of divine mandate with Confucius’ authorship of the *Chunqiu*, adapting it to the political demands of the period. Professor David Knechtges translates *fu ming* as “portents for the mandate.” He argues that the *fu ming* were auspicious omens that were interpreted from Heaven confirming Wang Mang’s legitimacy. For more details, please see David Knechtges, “Uncovering the Sauce Jar: A Literary Interpretation of Yang Hsiung’s *Chü ch’ in mei hsin*,” in *Ancient China: Studies in Early Civilization*, ed. David Roy and Tsuen-hsuei Tsien (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1978), 232.

the Han dynasty.²³³ Earlier interpretations compared Confucius to a king by divine mandate, while later weft texts explicitly declare him a demi-god, enhancing his kingly legitimacy. The mentioning of the pattern inscribed on his chest, which commanded the making of rules, primarily serves to emphasize that the *Chunqiu* is a divinely inspired work crafted by Confucius to guide the flourishing Han dynasty, thus serving as ceremonial regulations for governance.

While the weft texts are criticized and condemned by later generations, they were held in high regard during the Eastern Han. As a result, the discourses of the time predominantly centered on concepts such as the “uncrowned king,” “composing the *Chunqiu*,” and “establishing rules for the Han.” For instance, the “Wu neizhuan” 吳內傳 section of the *Yue jue shu* 越絕書 contains a line arguing that Confucius, based in the state of Lu, claimed kingship through his composition of the *Chunqiu*.²³⁴ The *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 also states that Confucius crafted the judgments of the *Chunqiu* to articulate the regulations established by the “uncrowned king.”²³⁵ Zhao Qi 趙岐 (108–201), in his annotation to the *Mencius*, expounded on Mencius’s comments on Confucius’ relationship to the *Chunqiu* specifically in the context of the “uncrowned king.” He argued that the line “I have ventured to make” 竊取之 suggests Confucius’ intent to use the *Chunqiu* to assert himself as the “uncrowned king,” thereby performing the duties of the Son of Heaven.²³⁶

²³³ *Weishu jicheng* 緯書集成 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), 189–195.

²³⁴ “孔子作春秋，方據魯以王。” *Yue jue shu*, in *Sibu congkan chubian*, juan 3, 4a.

²³⁵ “制春秋之義，著素王之法。” Ying Shao 應劭, *Fengsu tongyi*, in *Siku quanshu*, juan 7, 2a.

²³⁶ “竊取之，以為素王也。” “設素王之法，以為天子之事。” *Mengzi zhushu*, juan 8, 267.

The concept of the “uncrowned king” was so widely circulated that even texts emphasizing Confucius’ editorial role could not entirely escape its influence. A notable example is Wang Chong’s *Lun heng*. Beyond his direct remarks concerning Confucius’ editorial engagement with the *Chunqiu*, Wang Chong also integrated elements promoted by the New Text tradition into his text. For instance, in the “Xu song” 須頌 section, he writes: “Thus the *Chunqiu* was composed to formulate rules for the Han, and the *Lun heng* was devised to settle debates for the Han.”²³⁷ In the “Chao qi” 超奇 section, Wang initially acknowledged, once again, the Lu annals as the basis for the extant *Chunqiu*, but continued to identify the *Chunqiu* as the merit of the “uncrowned king” in the succeeding segment.²³⁸ This conflation may be attributed to the fact that Wang Chong did not specialize in the *Chunqiu* or the Ruist Classics. The amalgamation of perspectives found in the *Lun heng*, reflecting both Old and New Text schools of thought, suggests that Wang’s principal aim was to utilize a diverse range of sources to express his viewpoints, rather than engage in an in-depth scholarly discourse on the Classics. Consequently, the concept of “composing the *Chunqiu* to formulate statutes for the Han” observed in the *Lun heng* underscores the substantial influence it wielded during the Eastern Han period, to the extent that even scholars not aligned with Ruist doctrine, such as Wang Chong, were significantly influenced by it.

By this juncture, the veneration of Confucius and the notion of the “uncrowned king” had transcended the domain of the *Gongyang* school and the New Text scholars, thoroughly permeating the contemporary intellectual milieu to become a widely embraced discourse. As a

²³⁷ “是故《春秋》為漢制法，《論衡》為漢平說。” Huang, *Lun heng jiaoshi*, juan 20, 857.

²³⁸ Huang, *Lun heng jiaoshi*, juan 13, 606–610.

result, this rhetoric began to appear in the discussions of some Old Text scholars as well, with Jia Kui emerging as a particularly prominent exponent of this trend. According to Kong Yingda's reference to Jia Kui's "*Chunqiu xu*" 春秋序, which is no longer extant, Jia's view towards the nature of the *Chunqiu* closely aligned with that of the New Text school. He writes: "Confucius examined the historical records, and established regulations of the 'uncrowned king' based on the rights and wrongs."²³⁹ Furthermore, Jia Kui's biography in the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 records a letter Jia presented to Emperor Zhang 漢章帝 (r.75–88), in which he claimed that the content of the *Zuo zhuan* corresponds with the weft texts and diagrams.²⁴⁰ He elaborated on the close connection of the *Zuo zhuan* and the weft texts in the following lines, stating:

Moreover, none of the scholars of the Five Classics provides evidence from weft texts and diagrams to support that the Liu family descends from Yao, whereas *Zuo*'s text uniquely contains clear statements. All scholars of the Five Classics state that Zhuanxu succeeded the Yellow Emperor, and thus Yao does not correspond to the fire virtues. The *Zuo zhuan* considers Shaohao to have succeeded the Yellow Emperor, which is what the weft texts and diagrams refer to as Emperor Xuan. If Yao is not associated with fire, then Han cannot be associated with red. The revelations he provides are indeed numerous and beneficial.²⁴¹

²³⁹ “孔子覽史記，就是非之說，立素王之法。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 29.

²⁴⁰ “臣以永平中上言左氏與圖讖合者。” Fan Ye 范曄, *Hou Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), *juan* 26, 1237.

²⁴¹ “又五經家皆無以證圖讖明劉氏為堯後者，而左氏獨有明文。五經家皆言顓頊代黃帝，而堯不得為火德。左氏以為少昊代黃帝，即圖讖所謂帝宣也。如令堯不得為火，則漢不得為赤。其所發明，補益實多。” *Hou Han shu*, *juan* 26, 1237.

As a well-known Old Text scholar specializing in the *Zuo zhuan*, Jia Kui may have been the first Old Text scholar to actively incorporate arguments promoted by the weft texts in the study of the *Zuo zhuan*. This unique portrayal of the *Zuo zhuan* essentially stems from Jia's awareness of the incomparable dominance of the weft texts at the time.²⁴² Thus, in order to elevate the status of the Old Text school, Jia Kui found himself compelled to employ the interpretations of the New Text tradition. Nevertheless, his approach of compromise frequently attracted criticism from subsequent generations. The comment at the end of Jia Kui's biography writes as follows:

The teachings of Zheng and Jia, enduring through hundreds of years, ultimately came to be regarded as the orthodox doctrine among scholars, though their influence was largely nominal. Huan Tan, due to his disapproval of prophecies, faced exile; Zheng Xing barely avoided a similar fate through his use of modest language, while Jia Kui, adept at aligning his rhetoric with prevailing texts, achieved the greatest distinction and

²⁴² In his letter to Emperor Zhang, Jia remarked that the *Zuo zhuan* was initially established as an official study by Emperor Guangwu, only to be abolished shortly thereafter. He attributed this to the *Zuo zhuan*'s incompatibility with the weft texts and diagrams. Consequently, it can be inferred that Jia Kui's distinctive interpretation of the *Zuo zhuan*, which significantly diverges from the traditional Old Text view, stems from his awareness of the political climate and his resolve to prevent the marginalization of the *Zuo zhuan*. *Hou Han shu*, *juan* 26, 1237. For a comprehensive study of Jia's work on the *Zuo zhuan*, see Yeh, *Han ru Jia Kui zhi Chunqiu Zuoshi xue* 漢儒賈逵之春秋左氏學 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 2021).

prominence. It is indeed tragic that such criteria are used by rulers to evaluate scholarly pursuits!²⁴³

Like Jia Kui, Zheng Xuan also adopted an approach that integrates views from both the Old and New Text traditions. He contended in the *Liu yi lun* 六藝論 that “Following Confucius’ capture of a unicorn during a hunt in the west, he declared himself the ‘uncrowned king’ and set forth rules for future sovereigns who received heaven’s mandate.”²⁴⁴ Although Zheng Xuan’s method of interpreting the main text primarily adhered to the traditions of the Old Text school, he recognized the value in all three commentaries of the *Chunqiu* and extensively incorporated ideas from the Old and New Text scholars, including those employing divinatory and cosmological interpretations. Thus, he not only designated Confucius as the “uncrowned kind” and a sovereign mandated for future generations but also described the *Chunqiu* as the state annals, recorded by the left historian—illustrating a fusion of old and contemporary scholarly insights.

This context demonstrates that by the Eastern Han period, the viewpoints concerning the “uncrowned king” and “formulating regulations for the Han” were highly influential, with scholars from all traditions influenced by the socio-cultural milieu. The discourse on Confucius and the *Chunqiu* was not just a mingling of the terms *xiu* and *zuo* but also a blend of various theories and political agendas. The stance of figures like Jia Kui and Zheng Xuan, who integrated

²⁴³ 論曰：“鄭、賈之學，行乎數百年中，遂為諸儒宗，亦徒有以焉爾。桓譚以不善識流亡，鄭興以遜辭僅免，賈逵能附會文致，最差貴顯。世主以此論學，悲矣哉！” *Hou Han shu*, *juan* 26, 1241.

²⁴⁴ “孔子既西狩獲麟，自號素王，為後世受命之君，制明王之法。” Zheng Xuan, *Liu yi lun*, in *Han Wei yishu chaoben* 漢魏遺書抄本, 4a.

differing perspectives, further obscured the traditional views on whether Confucius was the author or the editor of the *Chunqiu*. The intricate scholarly discourses of the Han dynasty exerted a significant influence on subsequent scholars' perceptions of the relationship between Confucius and the *Chunqiu*. Especially in academic debates after the late Qing era, a considerable number of scholars embraced the notion that Confucius composed the *Chunqiu*. This perspective was adopted by some who inherently supported the New Text tradition, while others misinterpreted the extensive implications historically associated with the term *zuo*. This misinterpretation can largely be traced back to the newly developed idea about Confucius crafting the *Chunqiu* promulgated by Dong Zhongshu and the weft texts, which effectively obscured the originally ambiguous linguistic context of the word *zuo*.

2.1.3 The Influence of New Text School's Proclamation in the Late-Imperial and Modern Era

Dong Zhongshu's theories regarding Confucius, Confucius' relationship to the *Chunqiu*, and the significance of Ruist teachings are best represented by Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927).²⁴⁵ As a dedicated revolutionary in the Republican period, Kang advocated the utilization of Ruist Classics, the *Chunqiu* in particular, to reform the corrupt imperial system. He asserted: “Confucius composed [the *Chunqiu*] upon receiving heaven's mandate in order to change the malady of the diminishing Zhou. He reformed and formulated the system of the new king to pass down to later generations. As empty words carry no proof, he entrusted his teachings to the

²⁴⁵ For a thorough study on Kang Youwei, please see Hsiao Kung-ch'üan 蕭公權, *A Modern China and a New World: K'ang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian, 1858–1927* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975).

Chunqiu. Therefore, the book of *Chunqiu* specifically clarifies reforms, much like the *Da Kong huidian*.²⁴⁶ Kang's views did not arise solely from pure academic discourse. As an important political figure and reformer, his scholarly endeavors predominantly served his political ideologies.²⁴⁷ Therefore, his promotion of reforms was intricately linked to his strategic use of Ruist Classics to justify and implement reforms. This approach to reform, echoing the ideas of Dong Zhongshu, positions Kang within a tradition of reinterpreting Ruist texts for contemporary political ends.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ “孔子受命製作，以變衰周之弊，改定新王之制，以垂後世，空言無征，故托之《春秋》。故《春秋》一書，專明改制，譬猶《大孔會典》云爾。” Kang Youwei, *Chunqiu Dongshi xue* 春秋董氏學, in *Kang Youwei xueshu zhuzuo xuan* 康有為學術著作選 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 112.

It is unclear to which text does the *Da Kong huidian* refers to, as this title only appears in Kang Youwei's writing.

²⁴⁷ Late professor Hsiao pointed out that Kang Youwei was convinced that only through extensive and timely reforms could China be saved from dismemberment at the hands of Western powers. This necessitated demolishing the established tradition, a belief that formed the bedrock for two of Kang's major works on Ruism, one of which is the *Kongzi gaizhi kao* 孔子改制考. Hsiao, *A Modern China and a New World*, 71.

²⁴⁸ Late professor Hsiao noted that Kang frequently made selective use of scholarly interpretations and ideas within the *Gongyang* tradition. Kang held Dong Zhongshu in the highest regard but considered He Xiu's interpretations of secondary importance. However, he did not accept all of Dong's arguments but selected those that served his personal purposes. Hsiao concludes: “It appears that he selected from the Kung-yang doctrines those that he regarded as true (incidentally, those that served his purposes) and ignored those that failed to meet his approval or requirements...K'ang was indeed interested in the Kung-yang school not purely as a scholarly tradition but rather as a school of thought pregnant with social and political meaning.” Hsiao, *A Modern China and a New World*, 73–4.

Another firm supporter of the New Text school views is Ch'ien Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990). He also adopted the Eastern Han concepts initiated by Dong Zhongshu, which revered Confucius and elevated him to the status of the “uncrowned king”, positing, “And in the Han dynasty, the Five Classics must center predominantly around Confucius’ *Chunqiu*. This is because while texts such as the *Shi jing*, *Shu jing*, *Yi jing*, and *Zhou li* are attributed to former kings, only the *Chunqiu* represents a new legal framework, essentially pre-arranged by Confucius for the Han court.”²⁴⁹ To support his argument, Ch'ien Mu specifically referenced the *Mencius*, explicitly stating that the *Chunqiu* mentioned therein solely refers to the version authored by Confucius and views Mencius’s comparison of Confucius with the ancient sage-kings as a profound endorsement of Confucius. Additionally, Ch'ien Mu contended that the *Chunqiu* authored by Confucius exemplifies a model of private historical writing because he himself stated, “Its text is historical, its events concern Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin.”²⁵⁰ This is also why Mencius described the *Chunqiu* as pertaining to affairs of the Son of Heaven, because Confucius, not a court scribe, independently composed an official history.²⁵¹

Through a detailed analysis of various historical materials and the reception history of the relationship between Confucius and the *Chunqiu*, it becomes apparent that Ch'ien Mu’s interpretation of the *Mencius* was influenced by his preconceptions. Embracing the notion of Confucius as the “uncrowned king” who authored the *Chunqiu* to fulfill his royal responsibilities, Ch'ien sought to interpret the discussions in the *Mencius* in a way that supports his own views,

²⁴⁹ Ch'ien Mu 錢穆, *Liang Han jingxue jin gu wen pingyi* 兩漢經學今古文評議 (Beijing: Shagnwu yinshushe, 2001), 277.

²⁵⁰ Ch'ien, *Liang Han jingxue jin gu wen pingyi*, 266–9.

²⁵¹ Ch'ien, *Liang Han jingxue jin gu wen pingyi*, 278.

consequently overlooking the text's original meanings. In reality, Ch'ien's interpretations are marked by considerable confusion. The references to the *Chunqiu* in the *Mencius* convey multiple meanings; the "Li Lou" section explicitly pertains to the Lu annals *Chunqiu*, while the mention of "Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin" encapsulates Mencius's broader characterization of the historiographical approach to all state annals during the Spring and Autumn period, not a self-description by Confucius. However, due to Ch'ien Mu's conviction that Confucius crafted the *Chunqiu*, he denied the existence of the Lu annals, leading to a misinterpretation of these references. His subsequent assertion that the *Chunqiu* was a private historical composition by Confucius is a structure devised to rationalize his viewpoint. This stance fails to negate the inherent historical quality of the *Chunqiu* yet refuses to abandon the premise that Confucius was its composer, thus promoting the idea of private historical authorship.

In summary, Ch'ien Mu's perspective largely stemmed from the influence of New Text scholars who revered Confucius as the "uncrowned king" and an intense focus on the term *zuo*. In fact, Ch'ien Mu's interpretation of the *Mencius* does not imply that Confucius "composed" the *Chunqiu*; forcibly interpreting *Mencius*'s references in the sense of "composing" results in contradictory conclusions. This narrow understanding of the term *zuo* remains one of the significant issues that is characteristic of the arguments posited by scholars since the late Qing period. The phrase "Confucius composed the *Chunqiu*," propagated by Dong Zhongshu and other scholars from the *Gongyang* school during the Han dynasty for political ends, and later accentuated by Kang Youwei and others in the post-Republican period for similar reasons, has led to considerable confusion among modern scholars about the function of *zuo* in early texts. This confusion has even resulted in a misinterpretation where clearly defined terms such as *shan*

ding 刪定 (to reduce and revise) are conflated with *zuo*, all interpreted as denoting the sense of “to create.”

The Japanese scholar Yasui Kotaro 安井小太郎 (1858–1938) cited instances from the *Zuo zhuan* and *Guo yu* to argue that before Confucius’ birth, the *Shi jing* and the *Shu jing* were already regarded as important texts. Specifically, he referenced the twenty-seventh year of Duke Xi from the *Zuo zhuan*, where Zhao Shuai 趙衰 remarks, “The *Songs* and *Documents* are repositories of righteousness,”²⁵² and the twenty-second year of King Ling 周靈王 from the *Guo yu*, where Prince Jin 太子晉 admonishes King Ling, “Consider the *Songs*, *Documents*, and the constitutional words of the people.”²⁵³ These references suggest that the *Shi jing* and *Shu jing* were well-established texts with great significance prior to Confucius, who then employed them for his teachings. Yasui notes: “I do not think that the *Shi* and *Shu* were revised by Confucius, it is highly likely that they were well-established main text before Confucius’ time, who then made use of them! Both texts have prefaces and were traditionally believed to have been composed by Confucius; however, the consensus now is that they were not authored by him, rendering the issue of their authorship non-controversial.”²⁵⁴

²⁵² *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 16, 501.

²⁵³ “觀之詩書，與民之憲言” Xu, *Guo yu jijie*, 101.

²⁵⁴ “我不認為《書經》也經孔子刪定，恐怕是孔子以前已經流行的經典，孔子把它加以利用的吧！《詩》、《書》都有<序>，古人認為孔子所作，其非孔子所作，以成定說。所以此事更不成問題。” Yasui Kotaro 安井小太郎, *Jing xue shi* 經學史, Lian Qingji 連清吉 and Lin Qingzhang 林慶彰 trans. (Taipei: Sanmin shuju ltd.,1996), 9–10.

Yasui's principal argument is that Confucius did not craft the Five Classics but rather adapted them for his purposes. He used the term "shan ding," 刪定 which translates to "reduce and revise"—distinctly different from the sense of "to create." Nonetheless, Yasui appeared to conflate this term with *zuo*, which implies original authorship. He initially asserted that Confucius did not revise (*shan ding*) the text, and later stated he did not author (*zuo*) it, suggesting that he treated *shan ding* as synonymous to *zuo*, both denoting "creation." This interpretation prompts him to call for historical evidence to dispute such a view. As a matter of fact, Yasui's conflation of *shan ding* with *zuo* seems to have been influenced by Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 (1850–1908).²⁵⁵

In his *Jingxue lishi* 經學歷史, Pi Xirui already displayed an ambiguous treatment toward the distinction between *zuo* and *xiu*. He writes:

Upon reading the Classics composed by Confucius, one must grasp his purpose in composing the Six Classics. Despite possessing the virtue of an emperor without holding the actual position, Confucius, in his later years, recognized that his teachings were not being implemented. Consequently, he withdrew to revise the Six Classics to educate successive generations... Such misunderstandings arise from not recognizing Confucius' intent to educate through composing the Six Classics, from rejecting the interpretations of Han scholars, forming subjective views, and denigrating early Ruist scholars. One begins by doubting the Classics, gradually extending to rejecting Confucius' sagely status. Some of them revere the Duke of Zhou to suppress Confucius, others revere Fu Xi and King

²⁵⁵ For a comprehensive English study on Pi Xirui and his *Jingxue lishi* 經學歷史, one may consult Stuart V. Aque, "Pi Xirui and Jingxue lishi," Ph.D. Diss. (University of Washington, 2004).

Wen to suppress Confucius. [In their views,] the Classics, as finalized by Confucius, are not only unused for teaching; they are also not regarded as his creations, but rather attributed to others.²⁵⁶

Initially, Pi suggested that Confucius composed the Classics, yet later he mentioned Confucius' revision of the Six Classics. It is challenging to precisely ascertain Pi's stance based solely on the first segment of the passage. As evidenced earlier, the term *zuo* is notably vague, with both "edit" and "compose" potentially described as *zuo*, while *shan ding*, meaning to reduce and revise, is distinctly clearer. Therefore, interpreting this initial segment as advocating for the revision of the Six Classics is plausible. Nonetheless, examining the subsequent part of the text, which explicitly states Confucius personally crafted and finalized the Six Classics and critiques earlier assertions that the Duke of Zhou was the original author of the General Standards of the *Chunqiu*, and that Confucius merely revised these based on historical sources, it is evident that Pi aligned with the view that Confucius composed the *Chunqiu*. Additionally, he appears to embrace the concept promoted by New Text scholars from the late Western to the Eastern Han periods that Confucius' intention in composing the Six Classics was to establish the moral and political framework for the Han dynasty.

In his work *Xian Qin jingxue shi* 先秦經學史, contemporary scholar Ch'eng Yuan-min 程元敏 examines the distinctions between *xiu* and *zuo* in relation to Confucius and the *Chunqiu*.

²⁵⁶ “讀孔子所作之經，當知孔子作六經之旨。孔子有帝王之德而無帝王之位，晚年知道不行，退而刪定六經，以教萬世... 凡此皆由不知孔子作六經教萬世之旨，不信漢人之說，橫生臆見，詆毀先儒。始於疑經，漸至非聖。或尊周公以壓孔子，或尊伏羲、文王以壓孔子。孔子手定之經，非特不用以教世，且不以經為孔子作，而屬之他人。” Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞, *Jingxue lishi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959; rpt. 1981), 27.

However, his interpretation of some of the sources seems to merit further consideration. For example, Ch'eng proposes the phrase “thus writes” 故書曰 from the *Zuo zhuan* as ostensibly indicating that Confucius composed the text, rather than merely editing it.²⁵⁷ This interpretation challenges the traditional view that considers the *Zuo zhuan* as primarily supporting the notion that Confucius was an editor of the text, thus positioning Ch'eng's argument as a relatively innovative contribution to scholarly discourse. Regarding the phrase “thus writes,” Du Yu suggested it is a conventional expression used by the *Zuo zhuan* to denote modifications made by Confucius to the General Standards. This implies that the alterations were minor revisions to the Lu annals, rather than entirely new compositions by Confucius. Such an interpretation supports the view that the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan* had access to at least some of the original Lu documents, enabling him to discern the edits made by Confucius, further affirming that the *Chunqiu* was a modification rather than a new creation. Furthermore, Ch'eng states: “As for the references by the two Gentlemen to the phrase ‘the renown of the *Chunqiu*,’ both cases involve the sage's editing.”²⁵⁸ Both the sources and Ch'eng's conclusion clearly point to editorial work. Paradoxically, Ch'eng uses these observations to argue that the *Zuo zhuan* attributes the composition of the *Chunqiu* to Confucius.²⁵⁹

In another example, Ch'eng cites a phrase from the first year of Duke Min from the *Gongyang zhuan*, which writes: “[Confucius] made the *Chunqiu* (main text) based on the

²⁵⁷ Ch'eng Yuan-min 程元敏, *Xian Qin jingxue shi* 先秦經學史, vol.1 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshushe, 2013), 100.

²⁵⁸ “兩君子曰‘春秋之稱’以下義同，皆有聖人脩之。” Ch'eng, *Xian Qin jingxue shi*, 100.

²⁵⁹ Ch'eng, *Xian Qin jingxue shi*, 99–100.

Chunqiu (annals).”²⁶⁰ Xu Yan interpreted this to mean “Confucius edited historical records to make the *Chunqiu*; now, saying [Confucius] made the *Chunqiu* based on the *Chunqiu* implies that historical records already possessed the name *Chunqiu*.”²⁶¹ This interpretation is consistent with the view that Confucius edited the Lu state annals. However, Ch’eng contends that this reference serves as solid evidence that the received version of the *Chunqiu* was composed by Confucius, not merely an historical record of Lu.²⁶² In reality, whether composed or edited, the received version of the *Chunqiu* no longer retains the original form of the Lu annals, nor does it carry the same function and nature as its predecessor, regardless of the degree of alteration by Confucius. If Ch’eng interprets “composing” to encompass any degree of alteration that deviates from the original form, then the distinction between “editing” and “composing” may be deemed as superfluous. Yet, he explicitly remarks on the distinction between the two terms at the beginning of this chapter, stating: “In my view, if Confucius personally wrote the *Chunqiu*, it constitutes creation; if it involved revision and correction based on the Lu annals, it is editing.”²⁶³ This distinction transcends mere degree and involves differentiating between original creation and the revision of existing texts.

Despite the clarity in his analysis of materials that support the portrayal of Confucius as an editor, Ch’eng paradoxically asserts that these materials unequivocally demonstrate that Confucius “composed” the *Chunqiu*. This apparent contradiction seems to stem from his

²⁶⁰ “以春秋為春秋。” *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 9, 224.

²⁶¹ “夫子修史記為春秋，今言以春秋為春秋，則史記舊有春秋之名。” *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 9, 224.

²⁶² Ch’eng, *Xian Qin jingxue shi*, 101.

²⁶³ “案孔子手著春秋，自是創作；因魯史記成文而有所修正，自是修。” Ch’eng, *Xian Qin jingxue shi*, 98.

preconceived notions and a restrictive interpretation of the term *zuo*. Such discrepancies underscore a pervasive issue within contemporary scholarship, where the initial deliberate ambiguity associated with the meaning of *zuo* has transitioned into a passive misunderstanding, exemplified by the conflations made by scholars such as Pi Xirui and Yasui Kotaro. These scholars acknowledged the editorial implications in their analyses but permitted their subjective interpretations and the modern connotation of “creation” to dominate their objective examination of the text. Ch’eng’s work epitomizes this phenomenon, where his meticulous gathering of evidence and explicit recognition of “editing” paradoxically culminate in an unwavering assertion of Confucius’ authorship of the *Chunqiu*.

2.1.4 The Rejection of Confucius’ Relationship to the *Chunqiu*

Since the pre-Qin period, scholarly focus has centered on Confucius’ involvement in the creation of the *Chunqiu*. Across various perspectives, the intimate link between Confucius and the text is universally recognized. However, following Liu Fenglu 劉逢祿, the emergence of the Doubting Antiquity School led to a new academic narrative that completely refutes any connection between Confucius and the *Chunqiu*. Prominent figures holding this view include Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 and Qian Xuantong 钱玄同 (1887–1939). Gu’s influential book *Gu shi bian* 古史辨 includes extensive correspondence between him and Qian, primarily centered on challenging and overturning traditional Confucian doctrines, including their rejection of any association between Confucius and the *Chunqiu*.

From the outset, Qian adopted an extreme stance, asserting that the nature of the *Chunqiu* must be a binary choice: either, as the *Gongyang* school claimed, a profound work entirely

composed by Confucius it was authored by Confucius, thereby representing solely his “subtle words and significant judgments” 微言大義 rather than a conventional historical record; or it is merely a historical annal of the state of Lu, devoid of any moral teachings and entirely unconnected to Confucius. He expressed a highly critical view of the *Chunqiu*, denouncing it as unstructured and insignificant. His ultimate assessment, based not on rigorous academic analysis but personal opinion, is that Confucius could not have composed such an “insignificant” history as the *Chunqiu*.²⁶⁴ Qian’s argument is generally filled with personal sentiment and subjective judgments.

Gu Jiegang shared similar views on the *Chunqiu*, considering them unrelated to Confucius, but his skepticism was more academically grounded.²⁶⁵ He highlighted issues such as textual omissions in the *Chunqiu*, arguing that if Confucius had composed them, there should be no lacunae, as such omissions are typical of historical writing. Moreover, he noted that no statements claiming Confucius authored the *Chunqiu* existed before Mencius, whom he considered an utterly unreliable source.²⁶⁶ On the issue of textual omissions, Du Yu had explained in his preface that Confucius’ revisions were intended to correct misleading teachings and provide moral guidance, which reflects Du’s assertion of Confucius’ new intentions. Remaining texts unrelated to moral instruction were left unchanged.²⁶⁷ This demonstrates that Confucius’ purpose in revising the *Chunqiu* was distinctly clear; it was primarily aimed at conveying moral instructions through praise and criticism, rather than functioning as an editor

²⁶⁴ Gu Jiegang, *Gu shi bian*, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 275–6.

²⁶⁵ For a thorough English study of Gu Jiegang, see Lawrence Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China’s New History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

²⁶⁶ Gu, *Gu shi bian*, vol.1, 276–8.

²⁶⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 13.

tasked with compiling and organizing ancient historical records. Consequently, the modifications he made were directly aligned with this instructional objective. Some historical omissions in the text were not modified by Confucius, not due to reluctance, but because he lacked sufficient historical details and refrained from conjecturing the content, thereby preserving these segments unchanged.

Gu's critique primarily targeted the New Text school's excessive reverence of Confucius, suggesting that the idea of Confucius authoring the *Chunqiu* is a later development aimed at elevating Ruist status. Although his point is theoretically valid, like Qian, Gu saw only two outcomes: the *Chunqiu* is either not at all created by Confucius, hence purely a Lu annals, or entirely unrelated to him. This binary view is also linked to his narrow interpretation of *zuo*, influenced by the New Text scholars' emphasis and the modern Chinese usage of the term, leading Gu to equate *zuo* strictly with "creation." In reality, the *Mencius* does not emphasize Confucius' creation of the *Chunqiu*, and Gu's critique is rooted in his misunderstanding, as well as a failure to recognize the nuanced implications of *zuo*, resulting in a dichotomous view that either completely denies or accepts the traditional interpretation.

In summary, the Doubting Antiquity tradition has adopted a critical and deconstructive stance towards historical interpretation, driven by a desire to liberate Chinese thought from the perceived constraints of outdated Confucian ideologies. Qian did not specialize in the study of Ruist Classics; his discussions regarding the *Chunqiu* were chiefly intended to challenge traditional Confucian ideology, rather than to contribute to genuine scholarly discourse. Similarly, Gu, despite providing some academic arguments, was more focused on challenging historical narratives rather than pursuing objective scholarly research. The positions of scholars

like Gu and Qian, though shaped by their contemporary social contexts and political ideals, have significantly influenced later academic discourse.

Among contemporary scholars, Ch'en P'an 陳槃 (1905–1999) and Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (1909–1992) were prominent proponents of the Doubting Antiquity perspective. Ch'en P'an, inheriting the viewpoints expressed in the *Gu shi bian*, outright dismissed the notion of moral instructions within the *Chunqiu* and denies any authorship by Confucius. He argued that the portrayal of Confucius in connection with the *Chunqiu*, as emphasized by the Three Commentaries (the *Zuo*, *Gongyang*, and *Guliang*), primarily serves to elevate Confucius—a tactic employed by Mencius and New Text scholars to promote their respective agendas. According to Ch'en, the extant version of the *Chunqiu* merely constitutes Lu state annals, echoing the assertions of Gu Jiegang and Qian Xuantong. Ch'en's critique of the notion of moral instructions is largely predicated on instances of regicide within the text, posing the rhetorical question of whether Duke Zhou could have possibly legislated preemptively against such acts of regicide if the *Chunqiu* indeed has the editorial standards.²⁶⁸

Consequently, Ch'en P'an's stance on the editorial standards of the *Chunqiu* aligned closely with that of Qian Xuantong, displaying a stark dismissal. He contended that if Confucius did not compose the *Chunqiu*, then they must be entirely unrelated to him, devoid of any instructional content. As such, he regarded Du Yu's suggestions of modifications and reinterpretations as later interpretations, maintaining that the *Chunqiu* has no ties to Confucius. While Ch'en's criticism of the notion that Confucius composed the *Chunqiu* is understandable—

²⁶⁸ Ch'en P'an, *Zuo shi Chunqiu yili bian* 左氏春秋義例辨, vol.1 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1947, rpt.1993), 11–17.

originating from the New Text scholars of the Han dynasty to aggrandize Confucius—his critique of the *Mencius* largely stemmed from an oversight of the nuanced implications of the term *zuo*, just like his predecessors. It is problematic to ascertain Mencius’s exact intention—whether editing or composing—from this term alone. Additionally, combining this with the narrative in the “Li Lou” section suggests a predilection towards “editing.” Hence, subsequent criticisms based on Mencius’s accounts that question Confucius’ relationship with the *Chunqiu* are fundamentally due to a misunderstanding of the original intention.

Regarding his objections to the General Standards, Ch’en’s argument that questioning the establishment of statutes and ritual conventions against regicide based on Duke Zhou’s personal virtues seems to lack credible evidence. Such critiques often impose contemporary scholars’ biases onto ancient figures without substantial grounding. The General Standards in the text pertain to ritual laws intended to guide behavior. The presence of such standard indicates precedence necessitating standardized writing convention to display moral judgments and to warn the populace. Duke Zhou, in his capacity as an assistant to the king, formulated these rules based on the overarching needs and practical requirements of the state, independent of his personal virtues. Questioning why Duke Zhou would legislate on serious offenses overlooks the pragmatic and moral imperatives of governance. If rules were not established, overlooking or trivializing such incidents would only serve to obscure their gravity. Therefore, challenging the existence of the editorial standards from this perspective reflects a misinterpretation by modern scholars, projecting their moral values onto ancient practices without persuasive justification.

Yang Bojun, who annotated the *Zuo zhuan*, exhibited a profound understanding of both the *Chunqiu* and the *Zuo zhuan*. Consequently, his perspectives, particularly on questioning the

relationship between Confucius and the *Chunqiu* as well as the existence of the editorial standards within the text, are considered authoritative by many contemporary scholars. Yang's skepticism primarily stemmed from two considerations: First, taking the *Lun yu* as a basis, he questioned the absence of any mention of Confucius' significant contribution—whether as editor or author—to the *Chunqiu* within the *Lun yu*. Second, he pointed to the variations in writing style among different scribes, questioning why Confucius did not standardize the literary aspects while editing the text.²⁶⁹ Yang concluded that Confucius' only genuine connection to the Lu *Chunqiu* was utilizing it as a textbook for teaching his disciples.²⁷⁰

The first point brought forth by Yang is not unique to him but is a recurring theme within the Doubting Antiquity tradition, previously discussed by scholars like Gu Jiegang. Cheng Sudong 程蘇東 specifically addresses this in his work, positing that although Confucius edited the *Chunqiu*, he did not utilize it for instructional purposes. Prior to the canonization of the *Chunqiu* as a Ruist Classics, the teaching materials employed by the ancients underwent a transition from the so-called “four teachings” 四教 to the “Six Cannons” 六藝. Cheng's analysis of various early historical texts indicates that the royal teachings in the Pre-Qin period comprised the *Shi* 詩, *Li* 禮, *Yue* 樂, and *Shu* 書. The first three texts were used primarily by the Zhou people for learning ritual and music, with the *Shu* serving as a purely instructional text on the ideals pertaining to “kingly politics” 王道政治.²⁷¹ Notably, while instances from the *Guo yu*

²⁶⁹ Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 5–9.

²⁷⁰ Yang, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, 15–16.

²⁷¹ Cheng Sudong 程蘇東, *Cong liuyi dao shisan jing* 從六藝到十三經, vol.1 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2017), 24–47.

show occasional use of the *Chunqiu* for instructing royal family members, the primary educational framework consisted of the aforementioned four teachings. Thus, it may be surmised that it was not Confucius who selected these texts for pedagogical purposes; they were traditional texts for teaching rites, music, and governance, later reorganized and utilized by Confucius, an argument that also seems to align with Yasui Kotaro's interpretation. As for the *Chunqiu* and *Yi jing*, although also edited and revised by Confucius, they were not employed as textbooks; these texts were canonized after the decline of the Zhou dynasty when subsequent generations sought to define Confucius as a sage. This could also explain why texts like the *Analects* omit any reference to the *Chunqiu*—presumably because Confucius did not utilize it to teach his disciples.

Cheng Sudong illustrates the transition process from “four teachings” to “Six Cannons” by examining changes from the *Mencius* to the *Xunzi* 荀子. Cheng argues that the entirety of the *Mencius* lacks any mention of the *Yi jing* and does not associate the *Chunqiu* with the other four texts. In fact, discussions in the *Mencius* refer to the *Chunqiu* either in isolation or alongside other historical records from the Spring and Autumn period. Cheng contends that the concept of “Six Cannons” is neither mentioned nor alluded to in the *Mencius*. In contrast, the *Xunzi* begins to juxtapose the “four teachings” texts with the *Chunqiu*, indicative of the manifestation of the concept of “Six Cannons” that became prevalent in the Western Han era. However, Cheng also observes that the *Xunzi*, when discussing canonical learning, typically references “*Shi, Shu, Li, and Yue*”, excluding the *Chunqiu* or *Yi jing*. This pattern is also evident in the “Tian xia” section of the *Zhuangzi*, affirming that until the late Warring States period, the “four teachings” remained

the traditional educational canon, and the broader discourse on integrating the *Chunqiu* and *Yi jing* into this framework had not yet been normalized.²⁷²

Yang Bojun also took issue with *Zuo zhuan*'s account from the twenty-eighth year of Duke Xi, which writes: "The marquis of Jin summoned the king, to be seen by the standards equivalent of a vassal lord, and also commanded the king to hunt."²⁷³ According to the *Zuo zhuan*, this entry serves to provide an explanation for the account recorded in the main text, which reads: "The Heavenly King hunted at Heyang."²⁷⁴ The *Zuo zhuan* compiler posited that Confucius deems the original account as inappropriate instance of a vassal commanding a king, thus warranting textual modification. The phrase "thus writes" observed in the commentary is precisely utilized to indicate this as Confucius' Transformed Standards 變例, not a General Standard. Du Yu, drawing from the *Zuo zhuan*, suggested that the original text from the Lu annals might have read "The marquis of Jin summoned the king, and also commanded the king to hunt" or something similar.²⁷⁵ However, Yang Bojun challenged this with a citation from the *Zhushu jinian* which records "King Xiang of Zhou meets with the lords at Heyang" 周襄王會諸侯於河陽, asserting this as proof that the historical records of the time did not incorporate phrases such as "The marquis of Jin summoned the king."²⁷⁶

²⁷² Cheng, *Cong liuyi dao shisan jing*, vol.1, 98.

²⁷³ "晉侯詔王，以諸侯見，且使王狩。" *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 16, 525–6.

²⁷⁴ "天王狩於河陽。" *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 16, 508.

²⁷⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 16, 508; 526.

²⁷⁶ Yang, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, 7.

Furthermore, the “Jin shijia” 晉世家 section in the *Shi ji* notes, “Confucius examined the historical records up to Duke Wen. As for the remarks such as ‘Lords do not command kings,’ and ‘the king hunted at Heyang,’ they represent that which are tabooed by the *Chunqiu*.”²⁷⁷ Yang interpreted Sima Qian’s account as indicating that the original Lu annals likely documented “the king hunted at Heyang” 王狩河陽 and despite potential discrepancies with the *Zhushu jinian*, the text lacks the controversial phrase pertaining to the marquis of Jin. This leads to the conclusion that the existing version of the *Chunqiu* reflects the original Lu annals without any editorial intervention by Confucius.²⁷⁸ This perspective, while inheriting various critical viewpoints from the *gu shi bian*, presents specific challenges to the traditional views of Confucius as either the composer or editor of the *Chunqiu*. In contrast to earlier, simpler forms of skepticism, Yang’s argument was grounded in scholarly analysis, thus is considered by many as compelling evidence that Confucius neither edited nor composed the *Chunqiu*.

However, in response to Yang’s assertions, Chang Yi-jen 張以仁 (1930–2009) and Fu Gang offer well-substantiated counterarguments. Professor Fu raises critical questions regarding the authenticity of the *Zhushu jinian* as a reliable source for the original Jin annals. Notably, these records were unearthed during the Western Jin period and pertain to the state of Wei 魏, which had become independent following the division of Jin, with Wei’s rulers originally being Jin nobles. Thus, while Wei might have retained some historical materials relevant to Jin, or possibly familial records, these would naturally differ from the official Jin annals compiled by

²⁷⁷ “孔子讀史記至文公，曰：‘諸侯無詔王’，‘王狩河陽’者，春秋諱之也。” *Shi ji*, juan 39, 1668.

²⁷⁸ Yang, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, 6–7.

court scribes. Consequently, Professor Fu argues that post-independence, Wei would have needed to compile its own national history, either by basing on the Jin *Sheng* or historical records from other states. This would potentially lead to two scenarios, either transcribing the existing Jin annals verbatim or making certain degree of modification to it. In reality, the *Zhushu jinian* displays evident features indicative of a modified outcome. The most compelling evidence is found in its use of a posthumous title for the Zhou king in the phrase “King Xiang of Zhou meets with the lords at Heyang.” The scribes could not have possibly referred to the contemporary king by this title in the original records.²⁷⁹ Professor Fu also highlights that even if Yang’s interpretation—that Confucius originally read a text stating “the king hunted at Heyang”—were correct, the phrasing directly conflicts with that found in the *Zhushu jinian*. This text describes a “meeting with the lords,” with the term of “meeting,” or *hui* 會, denoting typical convention of lordly assemblies in the *Chunqiu*, which clearly demotes the sovereign to a lordly status. Conversely, the phrase “the king hunted at Heyang” suggests a royal authority, elevating the king above the lords.²⁸⁰ Therefore, these records imply significantly different contexts, rendering Yang Bojun’s reliance on the *Zhushu jinian* to validate the original text problematic.

Regarding Yang’s interpretation of the twenty-eighth year record in the *Zuo zhuan*, Chang Yi-jen contended that Yang’s sentence segmentation is flawed, leading to misinterpretations of the passage.²⁸¹ Chang followed the segmentation by Du Yu and Kong Yingda, who interpreted

²⁷⁹ Fu, “Kongzi xiu Chunqiu yu Chunqiu yili lun” 孔子修《春秋》与《春秋》義例論, *Wenxue yichan*, 2 (2019): 13.

²⁸⁰ Fu, “Kongzi xiu Chunqiu yu Chunqiu yili lun,” 13.

²⁸¹ Chang I-jen, *Chunqiu shi lunji* 春秋史論集 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1990), 10–14.

the phrase “thus writes” as a standard format used in the *Zuo zhuan* to denote Confucius’ Transformed Standards, suggesting the entire phrase should be understood as: Confucius said, “Using a vassal’s command to a sovereign as instruction is inappropriate.” Consequently, Confucius amended it to “The Heavenly King hunted at Heyang.”²⁸² In contrast, Yang’s segmentation treats “thus writes” as part of *Zuo zhuan*’s attribution to Confucius’ remark, altering the entire statement to: Confucius said, “Using a vassal’s command to a sovereign as instruction is inappropriate. Therefore, the Lu annals was documented as ‘The Heavenly King hunted at Heyang.’”²⁸³ Fu Gang concurs with Chang, noting that Du Yu explicitly mentioned that the *Zuo zhuan* employs both the general and Transformed Standards for elucidating the main text, with the Transformed Standards typically indicated by phrases like “it writes” 書曰 or “does not record” 不書. In the passage from the twenty-eighth year, the *Zuo zhuan* first presents a comment by Confucius, followed by “thus writes” which conforms to its established pattern for modifications.

Additionally, Fu’s analysis of the phrasing in the *Shi ji*, as cited by Yang, indicates that its content mirrors that of the twenty-eighth year passage, suggesting that the material likely originated from the *Zuo zhuan*. Despite drawing upon this source, direct transcription was impractical; therefore, some textual modifications were made, resulting in an inadvertent alteration to the narrative. Fu argues that interpreting the significance of the passage in the *Shi ji* should not rely solely on ambiguous or isolated passages but must encompass a comprehensive

²⁸² In this segmentation, “thus writes” is understood as conveying “consequently, Confucius amended it to...”

²⁸³ In this scenario, “thus writes” is understood as “therefore, the Lu annals was documented as...”

examination of the author's perspectives and the overall purpose of the text.²⁸⁴ As previously discussed in this article, the *Shi ji* explicitly affirms that Confucius edited and reorganized the *Chunqiu* with a distinct intention. Sima Qian, in the “Kongzi shijia” section states:

Thus, when the vassals of Wu and Chu self-proclaimed as kings, the *Chunqiu* downgraded them, referring to them as “junzi;” the assembly at Tantu actually summoned the Zhou sovereign, yet the *Chunqiu* discreetly recorded “The Heavenly King hunted at Heyang;” such instances were utilized to regulate the contemporary era. The significance of these demotions was later acknowledged by sovereigns who further elaborated on them. When the moral judgments of the *Chunqiu* were upheld, then the disorderly subjects and undutiful sons feared them.²⁸⁵

This unequivocally indicates that Confucius not only revised the *Chunqiu* but also modified the original text from the twenty-eighth year and incorporated moral instructions to guide the era.

The trend of doubting antiquity, which has fostered a stance opposing any connection between Confucius and the *Chunqiu*, has profoundly influenced not only Chinese scholars but has also found considerable acceptance among Western scholars. Newell Ann Van Auken, in her work on the three commentaries to the *Chunqiu*, contends that the *Chunqiu* is a Lu state annals concerning ritual practice set forth by the Duke of Zhou. She argues that the notion of Confucius editing or crafting the *Chunqiu* is a later interpretation, primarily superimposed by the *Gongyang*

²⁸⁴ Fu, “Kongzi xiu Chunqiu yu Chunqiu yili lun,” 13–14.

²⁸⁵ “故吳楚之君自稱王，而春秋貶之曰‘子’；踐土之會實詔周天子，而春秋諱之曰‘天王狩於河陽’；推此類以繩當世。貶損之義，後有王者舉而開之。春秋之義行，則天下亂臣賊子懼焉。” *Shi ji*, *juan* 47, 1943.

zhuan and *Guliang zhuan* to promote Ruist agenda by asserting that the *Chunqiu* embodies Confucian morality.²⁸⁶ This view aligns closely with the arguments of Gu Jiegang and Qian Xuantong associated with the Doubting Antiquity tradition. Like many predecessors, Van Auken misinterprets the character *zuo*, and mistakenly attributes Mencius initial credit for naming Confucius as the author of the *Chunqiu*. Intriguingly, Van Auken attempts to provide new insights to support this traditional claim by proposing that within the *Zuo zhuan* there embeds the so-called “direct passages.” She argues that the “direct” passages represent the earliest stage of interpreting the Lu annals, which were incorporated by *Zuo zhuan*’s compiler from various source texts that are no longer extant. Van Auken emphasizes the composite nature of the *Zuo zhuan*, typical of many Western scholars. She categorizes the text’s content into two main units: the “direct” passages, potentially originating from other source texts and representing an early interpretation of the *Chunqiu* as annals based on the ceremonial practices and ritual legacies of the Duke of Zhou; and all other passages, particularly those containing remarks by the Gentleman and Confucius, which express moral judgments in line with Ruist traditions.

Through her analysis of the *Zuo zhuan* as a composite text, Van Auken challenges Confucius’ involvement with the *Chunqiu* entirely, attributing all moral judgments and other elements to later Ruist interpolations. In her conclusions, she intriguingly leans towards crediting the Duke of Zhou with the creation of the *Chunqiu*—a departure from traditional attributions that have never linked the duke directly with the crafting of the Lu annals.²⁸⁷ The only established connection is his role in setting forth the regulations and rituals used as standards by scribes in

²⁸⁶ Newell Ann Van Auken, *Commentarial Transformation of the Spring and Autumn* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).

²⁸⁷ Van Auken, *Commentarial Transformation of the Spring and Autumn*, 213.

compiling official annals. Van Auken’s viewpoint may have been inherited from that of Pi Xirui, who briefly mentioned the phrase “The Duke of Zhou composed the *Chunqiu*” 周公作春秋 in his *Jingxue lishi*.²⁸⁸ However, Pi did not provide any concrete evidence to support this claim, nor did he pay much attention to elaborate on its significance. Based on the overall context of his discussion, Pi’s delineation may have stemmed from his misinterpretation of Kong Yingda’s exegesis of the *Zuo zhuan*, which traces the origin of “Chunqiu” to the Duke of Zhou. Kong’s argument is actually intended to convey that the state annals *Chunqiu* adhered to the standards formulated by the Duke of Zhou, but Pi Xirui misconstrued the meaning to literally convey that the Duke of Zhou composed the *Chunqiu*.²⁸⁹

It is noteworthy that in her most recent publication, Van Auken appears to have revised her perspective on the nature of the *Chunqiu*. While maintaining that the *Zuo zhuan* is a composite of Pre-Qin history and later Ruist interpolations, she contends that it is misleading to view the *Chunqiu* as merely a binary choice between the Lu annals and a work composed by

²⁸⁸ Pi, *Jingxue lishi*, 20.

²⁸⁹ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 10–11.

The discussion pertains to Han Xuanzi’s journey to Lu where he examined the *Yi* and *Chunqiu*. It is impossible that the Duke of Zhou could have composed the Lu annals for two most obvious reasons. First of all, while the Duke of Zhou was enfeoffed with the state of Lu, he had never taken up his post in Lu. It was Boqin 伯禽 who became the first proper Lu ruler. Second of all, the historical records of Lu span from its initiation to the last year of its last ruler, the Duke of Zhou passed away long before the Lu reached to the second ruler. It has been explicitly argued and proved in the first chapter that the writing of the *Chunqiu* was specifically managed by court scribes, the grand scribe in particular. The attribution of the making of the annals *Chunqiu* to the Duke of Zhou, therefore, should not be considered as more than a mere misunderstanding of the historical sources.

Confucius. She concludes that the *Chunqiu* refers to both the Lu annals and the editorial efforts of later generations, whether by Confucius or others.²⁹⁰

In summary, a rigorous examination of the long-standing debate regarding Confucius' relationship with the *Chunqiu* reveals that attitudes have evolved through several stages. Initially, in the Pre-Qin era, the dominant view was that Confucius merely edited the Lu annals, which then formed the extant version of the *Chunqiu*. With the rise of the Han dynasty and the New Text school, a new perspective emerged, suggesting that Confucius crafted the *Chunqiu* to establish statutes specifically for the Han dynasty. This view was either completely embraced or partially accepted by later scholars, especially those aligned with the New Text tradition. However, with the advent of the Doubting Antiquity tradition during the Republican era, a new trend began to significantly influence modern scholarship, ultimately rejecting any involvement of Confucius with the *Chunqiu*.

In this evolution of perspectives, unlike the early view that Confucius merely edited the *Chunqiu*, the subsequent interpretations, suggesting either Confucius' authorship or complete disassociation, emerged later due to closely related motivations. These views were not formed in isolation but were responses to specific socio-political contexts and needs. Figures such as Dong Zhongshu during the Western Han sought to elevate Confucius by ascribing to him a divine mandate in composing the *Chunqiu*, a view that later facilitated the consolidation of imperial power in the Eastern Han. Conversely, figures like Qian Xuantong and Gu Jiegang, representing the Doubting Antiquity tradition, linked their scholarly critiques to revolutionary aims, positioning Ruism as antithetical to modernizing China. Their criticisms echoed earlier

²⁹⁰ Van Auken, *Spring and Autumn Historiography* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2023), 215.

manipulations of Confucius' image to promote reformation by Kang Youwei, underscoring the political underpinnings of their academic arguments.

Central to these debates is the term *zuo*, which historically encompasses a wide array of meanings, including but not limited to editing and composing. The term's ambiguity prior to the Han dynasty requires meticulous, objective analysis to determine its intended use in earlier texts. However, New Text scholars exploited this ambiguity, emphasizing the "create" connotation of *zuo* to further their ideological agendas. This interpretation proliferated in subsequent scholarship, influencing those not deeply engaged in the academic debate. This misinterpretation has extended into modern discussions, where *zuo* is predominantly understood as "to craft," leading to a constrained interpretation of historical accounts concerning Confucius' involvement with the *Chunqiu*. Critics from the Doubting Antiquity school often reference the *Mencius* when questioning Confucius' authorship of the *Chunqiu*, attributing it as the origin to such arguments. While their initial premise is valid, the materials they challenge may not be suitable. It was Dong Zhongshu who distinctly utilized *zuo* in the sense of "creating." Closer examination of the *Mencius* suggests an alignment with *xiu*, reflecting attitudes prevalent in the Pre-Qin era. The misinterpretation of *zuo* has been exacerbated by deliberate reinterpretations by Han scholars. As a result, many have uncritically adopted a definitive interpretation of the term, assertively citing texts that describe Confucius as merely editing the *Chunqiu* as evidence of his authorship.

The ongoing debate regarding whether Confucius composed the *Chunqiu* or was unrelated to it highlights a broader issue: external motivations and the overinterpretation of *zuo* have distorted the understanding of the *Chunqiu*'s historical significance. Professor Fu Gang astutely points out that if Confucius had not edited the *Chunqiu*, thereby establishing some connection with the text, it remains unclear why the *Chunqiu* alone survived when other Pre-Qin

historical texts were destroyed in the Qin fires. The preservation and transmission of the *Chunqiu* owe primarily to the efforts of Ruist scholars; without Confucius' edits, their motivation to preserve this text becomes inexplicable.

The involvement of Confucius in editing the *Chunqiu* is well documented in classical texts such as the *Mencius*, *Zhuang zi*, *Zuo zhuan*, *Gongyang zhuan*, *Shi ji*, and *Han shu*. Scholars like Du Yu and Kong Yingda, authoritative commentators on the *Zuo zhuan*, underscored in their prefaces that Confucius based his work in the existing Lu annals, adhering to and elucidating the Duke of Zhou's legacy to bridge past and future governance practices. The content predominantly mirrors established state governance norms and rules instituted by the Duke of Zhou, predating Confucius, who merely revised them to form a coherent whole. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), interpreting a statement in the *Mencius* about “the affairs of the Son of Heaven” 天子之事, posited that it was merely a rhetorical strategy employed by Confucius to instill awe, not an indication of any real authority to assign rewards or punishments. Indeed, Confucius lacked the power to adjudicate personal merits or demerits.²⁹¹ Zhu Xi also explicitly stated that the *Chunqiu* was based on, and edited from, older Lu historical records. The methodologies prescribed in the *Chunqiu* for chronicling events were not innovations by Confucius but adhered to established scribal practices.²⁹² This strongly supports the perspective that Confucius edited, rather than authored, the *Chunqiu*.

²⁹¹ Li Jingde 黎靖德 ed., *Zhu zi yulei* 朱子語類 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), *juan* 83, 2146–7.

²⁹² Li, *Zhu zi yulei*, *juan* 83, 2146.

2.2 The Editorial Standards of the *Chunqiu*

The precise nature of Confucius' involvement with the *Chunqiu* is pivotal not only for interpreting the *Zuo zhuan* and the formation of its writing style, but also forms the basis for discussions about the moral judgments embedded in the main text. Differing views on his role lead to varied interpretations of these judgments: proponents of his authorship argue that all moral judgments within the *Chunqiu* are Confucius' creations, whereas those who view him as an editor believe he merely adjusted the existing standards, integrating his own moral views along the process. Conversely, some scholars repute any relationship between Confucius and the *Chunqiu*, viewing the text as merely an annalistic record devoid of any moral judgments.

This discourse also accommodates scholars who hold a more nuanced view. For instance, although Gu Jiegang rejected a direct connection between Confucius and the *Chunqiu*, he did not completely dismiss the presence of the editorial standards, attributing them instead to the efforts of scribes—a stance also shared by Yang Bojun. Zhu Xi, while recognizing Confucius' editorial role, criticized the subjective nature of deriving moral judgments from mere glossing on a single word, a process he views as often inconclusive. Both Gu and Zhu contributed valuable perspectives, highlighting the necessity of clearly defining what constitutes the editorial standards within the *Chunqiu*.

2.2.1 Definition on the Editorial Standards

The editorial standards, in their broadest interpretation, refer to specific writing conventions established within the *Chunqiu*. Du Yu differentiated these standards into the General Standards and Transformed Standards, with the former purportedly instituted by the

Duke of Zhou, providing a structured framework for all state annals. Adherence to these standards ensured the uniformity required for the cohesive account of the *Chunqiu*. The presence of such conventions implies a set of corresponding standards governing the documentation of significant state events and legal traditions, uniformly represented across varied political and legal contexts. Regardless of Confucius' direct involvement, these standards are intrinsic to the text. The *Zuo zhuan* mentions the General Standards first in the seventh year of Duke Yin, and Du Yu notes: "As for *Zuo zhuan*'s exposition of the General Standards to clarify the conventions, they stem from the state's established practices, the rules handed down from the Duke of Zhou, and the scribal texts' traditional patterns. Confucius then refined these into a comprehensive text."²⁹³ This interpretation diverges from previous Ruist scholars who posited that Confucius crafted the text, hence considering all General Standards as his innovations. Du Yu contested this, suggesting that the standards reflect broad, major state statutes, not merely conventions pertaining to the *Chunqiu* main text. This analysis, derived from a meticulous examination of the *Zuo zhuan*, is notable for its departure from conventional scholarly consensus.

Moreover, the establishment of these rules by the Duke of Zhou does not imply that he originated all legal frameworks; historical records indicate that each dynasty had its distinct writing conventions and ritualistic standards, which the Duke of Zhou revised and standardized. Kong Yingda cited the *Zhou li*, which specified the "eight rules," including categories for "Official Accomplishments" 官成 and "Official Regulations" 官法. Zheng Xuan interpreted

²⁹³ “其發凡以言例，皆經國之常制，周公之垂法，史書之舊章。仲尼從而脩之，以成一經之通體。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 16.

The first mentioning of the General Standards is found in the first commentary entry from the seventh year of Duke Yin. See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 4, 121.

“Official Accomplishments” as the formalized duties performed by government offices, suggesting that royal officials historically operated within defined legal parameters, thus the General Standards in the *Chunqiu* represent the scribes’ frameworks for recording and finalizing events.²⁹⁴

Transformed Standards represent enhancements to the General or Traditional Standards,²⁹⁵ imbued with Confucius’ new interpretations that were a product of his editorial efforts in compiling the *Chunqiu*. The Transformed Standards consistently adhere to specific expressions documented in the *Zuo zhuan*, such as *shu* 書 (writes), *bu shu* 不書 (does not write), *xian shu* 先書 (writes first), *gu shu* 故書 (thus writes), *bu yan* 不言 (does not say), *bu cheng* 不稱 (does not refer), and *shu yue* 書曰 (it writes). Du Yu interpreted these as “a means of indicating [the differences between] old and new standards and elucidating the profound significance [of the text], hence they are termed Transformed Standards.”²⁹⁶ These are not innovations crafted by Confucius, but adaptations of existing standards used to articulate his interpretations. For instance, Du Yu analyzed the incident involving the crown prince of Xu, Zhi 許世子止, who inadvertently caused his father, Duke Dao’s 許悼公 death by letting the duke drink his unprescribed medicine, which the *Chunqiu* records as “the crown prince of Xu, Zhi, murdered his lord, Mai.”²⁹⁷ Du Yu contended that regicide was not Zhi’s intention; rather, Duke Dao’s death was an accidental consequence. Nevertheless, the main text deliberately uses the

²⁹⁴ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 17.

²⁹⁵ The General Standards is also referred by Du Yu as Traditional Standards 舊例 to form comparison with the altered standards represent Confucius’ “new interpretations” 新意.

²⁹⁶ “皆所以起新舊，發大義，謂之變例。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 19.

²⁹⁷ “許世子止弑其君買。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 48, 1589; 1590.

term “regicide” to highlight the severity of the action, serving as a cautionary example for future generations. This implies that the original Lu records likely did not use the term “regicide,” which is typically reserved for acts of regicide committed by a disloyal subject. Therefore, this deviation from conventional usage suggests that Confucius, during his editorial work on the *Chunqiu*, altered the original text, employing “regicide” innovatively to convey his evaluation.

2.2.2 Scholarly Treatments of the Editorial Standards

Having established that Confucius edited, rather than composed, the *Chunqiu*, it follows that the text should contain editorial standards. Given the editorial nature of his work, not all standards within the text should be attributed directly to Confucius. Du Yu’s interpretation likely represents the closest portrayal of the actual circumstance. It is worth noting that the *Chunqiu* does not uniformly express praise or blame, and not every sentence conveys a standard. For example, the entry from the first year of Duke Yin’s reign, detailing “and the [duke] formed an alliance with Song people at Su,”²⁹⁸ merely records a significant event without imparting any moral judgment. The *Zuo zhuan* notes the significance of this event as “initiating communication,” which is unrelated to the editorial standards.

However, subsequent scholarly debates concerning the existence of the editorial standards often reflect personal moral assumptions about legislative practices in the Pre-Qin period or manifest an undue focus on the uniformity and completeness of ancient evaluative

²⁹⁸ “及宋人盟於宿。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 2, 52.

norms. For instance, Dan Zhu, who frequently questioned the standards regarding regicide, extermination 滅, and reference to a former lord's name 赴名, speculated whether the Duke of Zhou had preemptively established such norms that seem unkind and disrespectful.²⁹⁹ These doubts lack a substantial foundation and predominantly reflect Dan's personal moral standards, which depict the Duke of Zhou as an idealized paragon of virtue unlikely to institute such norms. Nevertheless, as a political figure, the Duke of Zhou legislated based on practical needs and circumstances, independent of personal moral considerations. The perceived unkindness or disrespect of these norms are interpretations by later scholars, lacking universal applicability. Furthermore, Kong Yingda explicitly stated that the ritual rules were not instituted by the Duke of Zhou but existed across the Three Dynasties, and the duke merely adapted them for his era.³⁰⁰ Therefore, it seems overly reductive to question the legitimacy of these norms based solely on his personal virtue.

Ch'en P'an suggested that the fifty General Standards discussed by Du Yu are merely his personal interpretations and are not explicitly defined as such in the *Zuo zhuan*.³⁰¹ This perspective has found favor among scholars, some of whom associate it with Du Yu's intellectual background.³⁰² However, Du Yu's assertions were grounded in his analysis of the *Zuo zhuan*, where he identifies the concept of General Standards from the use of "general" 凡 in the text, as

²⁹⁹ Lu, *Chunqiu jizhuan zuanli*, *juan* 1, 13b–14a.

³⁰⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 17.

³⁰¹ Chen, *Zuo shi Chunqiu yili bian*, 49.

³⁰² Several scholars made similar arguments, one of whom is Fang Tao 方韜. Please refer to Fang Tao, "Du Yu 'Zhou gong zuo fanli' tanwei" 杜預 "周公作凡例" 探微, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu*, (2011): 100–106.

exemplified by phrases like “generally, the travels of female members related to the vassal lords are recorded only for the queen” 凡諸侯之女行，唯王后書 and “generally, when lords provide relief in disasters or denounce guilts, it is in accordance with the rites” 凡侯伯救患、分災、討罪，禮也. The number “fifty” categorizes the instances of “general” mentioned within the *Zuo zhuan* and is not an invention of Du Yu. He further clarified that although only the General and Transformed Standards carry moral judgments, the majority are neutral norms 非例, indicated by the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan* to summarize themes.³⁰³ Thus, Ch’en P’an’s critique that the events spanning over 240 years in the *Chunqiu* cannot be fully captured by these fifty General Standards, nor do all of them entail significant editorial moral judgments,³⁰⁴ was preemptively addressed by Du Yu. Du also noted that while many standards reflect moral judgments through specific word choices, comprehensive understanding necessitates analyzing multiple phrases in context with the *Zuo zhuan*.³⁰⁵ Contrary to the *Gongyang* and *Guliang*, which frequently infer Confucius’ subtle intentions from single words, Du Yu advocated a more extensive textual analysis and deliberate engagement with the text.

³⁰³ In summary, Du Yu posited that the editorial standards can be divided into three types: the general and Transformed Standards that typically convey moral judgments of either the scribes or Confucius; and the neutral norms that do not carry any judgment and are not related to Confucius’ subtle intentions. They merely represent the *Zuo zhuan* compiler’s effort to call attention to important patterns or conventions from a scribal perspective. For instance, the entry from the first year of Duke Yin records an established alliance between the states of Song and Lu. The *Zuo zhuan* annotates this event by writing the phrase “[This] sets the beginning” 始通也, to indicate the initiation of a pattern, marking the beginning of Lu and Song’s long-term diplomatic interaction. See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 20–21; *juan* 2, 71.

³⁰⁴ Chen, *Zuo shi Chunqiu yili bian*, 48.

³⁰⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 24–26.

Critics of the editorial standards frequently exhibit a stringent perspective, applying absolute criteria to assess these norms. They contend that since Confucius edited the *Chunqiu*, which includes these editorial standards, every statement should manifest a moral implication, and every incident should align seamlessly with these judgments. Any inconsistencies or ambiguities are seized upon to dispute the general applicability of these standards. This inflexible approach is not only rooted in skepticism towards ancient texts but is also influenced by the overly interpretative analyses by post-Han scholars, who sought to read every aspect through a lens of commendation or criticism. However, no system is without its imperfections; the General Standards serve as broad guidelines derived from historical precedents, and it is unavoidable that they do not encompass every scenario from the later Spring and Autumn period. This necessitated Confucius' modifications of these existing norms to introduce new interpretations. Du Yu further observed that Confucius did not modify all the original entries—some remained unaltered if they did not undermine the intended moral teachings, and others were unchangeable due to the absence of necessary materials.³⁰⁶ The compiler of the *Zuo zhuan* also encountered difficulties due to the antiquity of the events recorded, with some sources already lost, thus impeding accurate correction or supplementation.³⁰⁷ These limitations imply that neither Confucius nor the *Zuo zhuan* compiler could completely rectify or supplement lacunae in the historical accounts, causing subsequent scholars to struggle with establishing a comprehensive framework of the editorial standards. Overinterpretation and the incessant insertion of new moral judgments are understandably met with criticism, but to assert that the editorial standards are completely non-existent represents a shift to another extreme.

³⁰⁶ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 13–15.

³⁰⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 27.

Zhu Xi critically addressed the validity of deriving moral judgments from single words, stating:

The *Chunqiu* straightforwardly records contemporary events, reflecting the governance and decline of the era, without basing praise or blame on individual words... Thus, Confucius compiled the *Chunqiu* grounded in factual accounts, teaching readers to perceive the events as they occurred. How can one ascertain whether he utilized the old historical texts or not? To rigidly assert that this word belongs to Confucius, and that word is from the old annals is unverifiable.³⁰⁸

Zhu Xi's perspective is pragmatic and grounded in textual analysis. If Confucius amended the *Chunqiu* to address deficiencies in the old norms, the specific alterations he made remain unclear, since the existing norms were already established, and Confucius' revisions were intended merely to correct discrepancies to align with traditional practices. Consequently, it is impossible to discern in the final text which parts were amended by Confucius, and which remain from the original historical documents. Zhu Xi further argues:

The entries in the *Chunqiu*, such as when a certain individual undertook a certain action, are derived from and edited based on the old Lu annals. Today, when individuals interpret the *Chunqiu*, they frequently assert that a particular word criticizes a specific person. Such interpretations suggest that Confucius arbitrarily exercised personal bias in assigning praise or blame. He merely recorded the events as they unfolded, and the

³⁰⁸ “《春秋》只是直載當時之事，要見當時治亂興衰，非是於一字上定褒貶...故孔子作《春秋》，據他事實寫在那裡，教人見得當時事是如此，安知用舊史與不用舊史？今硬說那個字是孔子文，那個字是舊史文，如何驗得？” Li, *Zhu zi yulei*, juan 83, 2144–5.

inherent virtues or vices become apparent without forced interpretation. To argue otherwise, one would require access to the original Lu texts to compare and contrast the edits. How is this possible to achieve?³⁰⁹

Zhu Xi did not completely reject the existence of the editorial standards but critiqued the tendency of contemporary scholars to over-interpret such judgments. Determining the precise changes Confucius made, and how he made them, is impractical without the original Lu texts for comparison, rendering any speculative interpretations of specific words or phrases as fundamentally futile.

Zhu Xi's perspective largely concurred with that of Kong Yingda. In his annotations, Kong Yingda stated that the historical records were composed by various scribes, asserting that the length or brevity of the accounts bears no inherent moral significance. He argued that forcibly linking every phrase to the editorial standards is implausible. The concept of the fifty General Standards, which *Zuo zhuan*'s compiler attributed to the Duke of Zhou, was not strictly confined to these fifty; rather, it acknowledged that some norms had been lost by the time Zuo compiled his commentary, thereby not presenting a comprehensive overview. Additionally, the term "general" as used in the *Zuo zhuan* does not represent an exhaustive expression of Zhou norms but is primarily an abstract by Zuo that summarizes the thematic essence and wording and is not a strict recount of the original text. Within Zuo's abstracts, there are instances where the standards vary within a single example.³¹⁰ Kong Yingda affirmed that the editorial standards

³⁰⁹ “《春秋》所書，如某人為某事，本據魯史舊文筆削而成。今人看《春秋》，必要謂某字譏某人。如此，則是孔子專任私意，妄為褒貶。孔子但據直書而善惡自著。今若必要如此推說，須是得魯史舊文，參校筆削異同，然後為可見，而亦豈復可得也？” Li, *Zhu zi yulei*, juan 83, 2146.

³¹⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 17.

indeed exist; however, later generations of scholars must integrate the main text with the *Zuo zhuan* and understand the broader context while discerning the specific details. Numerous passages in the main text lack inherent moral significance, or while they may carry moral implications, the original historical materials are lost and beyond examination. Therefore, it is imprudent to insist on embedding the editorial standards in every line of text. This discussion posits that adopting a more measured approach to interpreting the existence of the editorial standards is prudent. Despite varying interpretations of these norms, all three commentaries of the *Chunqiu*—from different traditions and perspectives—recognize the presence of the editorial standards, lending credibility to their consensus.

2.2.3 Examples of the Editorial Standards

The existence of the editorial standards is essential for interpreting the *Chunqiu* properly. Consider the main text from the second year of Duke Yin, which records: “Wuhai led an army and entered Ji.”³¹¹ The *Gongyang zhuan* suggests that this description aims to criticize Wuhai. Conventionally, as a minister of Lu, Wuhai should have been mentioned by his last name or formal title, similar to “Prince Wuhai” 公子無駭. Examples of this convention may be found in the twenty-seventh year of Duke Xi, which writes: “Prince Sui led an army and entered Qi.”³¹² The absence of a title for Wuhai, therefore, indicates a deliberate departure from this convention to signal disapproval. The *Gongyang zhuan* explains this criticism is due to “his action in annihilating” 疾始滅也, reflecting *Chunqiu*’s condemnation of state destruction. The records

³¹¹ “無駭帥師入極。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 2, 74.

³¹² “公子遂帥師入杞。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 16, 498.

“enter,” yet the *Gongyang zhuan* contends that it was actually an annihilation, which was euphemized for the state’s great maleficence. Thus, Wuhai’s name is intentionally omitted as a mark of condemnation.³¹³

The implications of Wuhai’s actions extend throughout his life, as reflected in subsequent records. For instance, an entry from the eighth year of Duke Yin mentions, “In winter, the twelfth month, Wuhai died.”³¹⁴ The consistent omission of his title across entries points to continued censure due to his initial destructive actions, as interpreted by the *Gongyang zhuan*. This pattern contrasts with other entries, like those from the first and fifth years of Duke Yin, where individuals like “Prince Yishi” 公子益師 and “Prince Qu” 公子驅 retained their titles in the accounts of their deaths,³¹⁵ thus highlighting Wuhai’s unique treatment as disparagement.

A similar case is presented in the fourth year of Duke Yin, where an entry in the fourth year of Duke Yin states, “In autumn, Hui led an army and met with the duke of Song, the marquis of Chen, the Cai people, and the Wei people to attack the state of Zheng.”³¹⁶ Hui’s lack of a noble title similarly indicates condemnation. The *Gongyang zhuan* asserts this criticism stems from his “complicity in regicide,” referring to the assassination of Duke Yin. Therefore, the main text criticizes Hui without using the honorific “Prince.”³¹⁷ However, since Prince Hui undertook the assassination on behalf of Duke Huan, he was acknowledged with his title during

³¹³ *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 2, 36–38.

³¹⁴ “冬，十有二月，無駭卒。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 4, 126.

³¹⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 2, 53; juan 3, 104.

³¹⁶ “秋，翬帥師會宋公、陳侯、蔡人、衛人、伐鄭。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 3, 97.

³¹⁷ *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 2, 52–54.

Huan's reign. From these examples, it is evident that without a grasp of the editorial standards, one would merely perceive the *Chunqiu* as a registry of names, lacking insight into the implicit commendations or condemnations, thereby rendering a comprehensive understanding of the text unattainable.

The *Chunqiu* is also replete with examples illustrating Confucius' Transformed Standards. For instance, the twenty-fourth year of Duke Xi records: "In winter, the Heavenly King exited to reside in the state of Zheng."³¹⁸ Typically, the travels of vassal lords are recorded with terms such as *chao* 朝 (attend) or *ben* 奔 (flee), with *chao* being the norm. *Ben* is generally reserved for lords who have lost their territory and seek refuge in another state. The terms *chu* 出 (exit) and *lai* 來 (come) are used to differentiate between external and internal boundaries; *chu* indicates departure, appropriate for movements from one's own state to another or between external states. However, the realm of the Heavenly King, theoretically encompassing all under heaven, negates the relevance of internal versus external distinctions. The term *ju* 居 (reside) usually indicates that the entire realm is his domain, making the use of *chu* for the Heavenly King atypical. Kong Yingda interprets the phrase "exited to reside" 出居 as analogous to a vassal's "exit to flee" 出奔.³¹⁹

The *Zuo zhuan* highlights this usage as one of Confucius' Transformed Standards, explicitly noting such alterations with "thus it is written." Normally, the term *chu* is not applied to the king. Du Yu posited that its inclusion here serves as a critique of the Zhou king, who

³¹⁸ “冬，天王出居于郑。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 15, 475.

³¹⁹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 15, 475.

demonstrated only the filial piety expected of a common man without assuming his broader responsibilities towards the realm. He departed the royal city to escape familial strife, giving the term *chu* a distinct negative connotation. This interpretation is further supported by a contrast with an event from the twenty-third year of Duke Zhao, where King Jing of Zhou 周敬王, though residing outside the royal city at Diqian 狄泉, is not described with the term “exit to reside.”³²⁰ This omission underlines the exceptional use of *chu* in the earlier entry as a deliberate editorial choice by Confucius, meant to convey disapproval. Such insights into the Transformed Standards demonstrate the necessity of recognizing these editorial nuances to fully grasp the interpretive depths of the *Chunqiu*'s narratives.

This dissertation proposes that a measured acceptance of the editorial standards in the *Chunqiu* is most appropriate. It is a well-substantiated view that these judgments exist, articulated both through scribal conventions established by the Duke of Zhou and through adaptations introduced by Confucius. Confucius' revisions, based on the Lu annals, adhered to pre-established writing norms. These standards were not conceived by Confucius; suggesting otherwise would erroneously attribute the authorship of the *Chunqiu* to him. The notion of “General Standards” refers to ritual norms applicable at the time, which scribes did not typically specify what each standard entailed, so much of what appears in the extant *Chunqiu* is derived from the summaries and generalizations by the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*. Moreover, the extensive temporal span of these records means that by the era of Confucius and the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*, many original materials were no longer available, precluding a fully comprehensive revision or transmission.

³²⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 50, 1647.

Luo Chengjiong 駱成駟 (dates unknown, active during the Republican era) contends: “What then defines a standard? Each pronouncement has its own category and system, akin to the ancients who observed from above and scrutinized from below, deriving lessons appropriate to each scenario. Thus, there were never delineations on specific events triggering specific standards or unfolding general principles —such trivia and complexities, chewing on words and biting on letters, would the sagely words be so wastefully verbose?”³²¹ Thus, he concluded that while the editorial standards are not all-encompassing within the main text, interpreting the main text through these lenses is indispensable. The ideal approach is to “seek the essence of the main text without rigid adherence and understand the editorial standards without getting entangled in them.”³²²

Pinpointing praise or blame in every word or phrase is extraordinarily challenging, and frequently, the text of the main text does not directly relate to any specific standard. However, outright denial of the existence of the editorial standards is unwarranted. Based on the insights of scholars such as those from the Three Commentaries, Du Yu, and Kong Yingda, we can ascertain the presence of these judgments and synthesize various interpretations to enhance our understanding of the *Chunqiu* and its commentaries. Nonetheless, achieving complete decipherment of *Chunqiu*'s implied meaning would likely require consulting Confucius himself directly, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

³²¹ “又何所謂例耶？然其立言自有方類，則自有體制。亦如古人所謂仰觀俯察，近取遠法，各如其事而已。固未嘗云某事用某起例，某事用某發凡，細碎繁雜，咬文嚼字，聖人立言，豈如是之費辭乎？” Luo Chengjiong, *Zuo zhuan Wushi fanli* 左傳五十凡例 (1927), 1a.

³²² “求經而不執於經，明例而不泥於例。” Luo, *Zuo zhuan Wushi fanli*, 2b.

Chapter Three: *Zuo zhuan*'s Nature and Style

In the preceding two chapters, we have thoroughly examined two critical questions: the characteristics of early Chinese historical texts and the precise nature of the *Chunqiu*. Addressing these questions first is essential for they are pivotal in unraveling the core issue of this dissertation: the nature and purpose of the *Zuo zhuan*. One's understanding of the nature of the *Zuo zhuan* directly influences how its recorded events and writing style are interpreted. Scholars who view the *Zuo zhuan* as a commentary on the *Chunqiu* tend to interpret it in conjunction with the *Chunqiu*, primarily using it to complement the main text. Conversely, those who question the relationship between the *Zuo zhuan* and the *Chunqiu* often treat the *Zuo zhuan* as an independent work, deliberately set apart from the *Chunqiu*. Understandably, these two opposing stances lead to divergent perspectives. Proponents of the former position argue that the writing style and format of the *Zuo zhuan* are constructed to indicate the purport of the *Chunqiu*. As Du Yu suggested, the praise and criticism are derived from events and patterns rather than the interpretation of individual words. Advocates of the latter view prefer to attribute the content and style of the *Zuo zhuan* to general historical writing. When the writing techniques of the *Zuo zhuan* diverge from conventional historiographic practice they further classify it as a speculative and unverified type of historiography (miscellaneous history) to account for the anomalies. These conflicting viewpoints have continuously alternated in the discourse on the nature of the *Zuo zhuan*, making it difficult to reach a consensus.

This chapter will first analyze and summarize the two major attitudes toward the nature of the *Zuo zhuan* since the Han period, examining the arguments and evidence provided by both sides and assessing their validity. The latter part of the chapter will focus on the unique mode of annotation adopted by the *Zuo zhuan*, namely the elucidation of the main text through historic

accounts, exploring the rationale behind its employment and how this unconventional exegetical approach led to the formation of the distinctive writing style of the *Zuo zhuan*.

3.1 *Zuo zhuan's Nature*

Historically, there have been two primary perspectives on the nature of the *Zuo zhuan*. The traditional and earliest view considers the *Zuo zhuan* to be a commentary on the *Chunqiu*, while the other perspective regards it as a historical text. Among those who treat it as a historical text, their views can be further divided into two sub-groups: one considers the *Zuo zhuan* as an independent historical work with no connection to the *Chunqiu*, while the other does not entirely deny its association with the main text but classifies it as a historical text based on its content. Sima Qian in the *Shi ji* states as follows: “Lu gentleman Zuo Qiuming feared that each disciple would have their own interpretation, losing the truth. Thus, he compiled the *Zuoshi Chunqiu* based on Confucius’ historical records.”³²³ Ban Gu in the “*Yiwen zhi*” section remarks, “Qiuming feared that each disciple would interpret according to his own understanding, losing the truth. Thus, he wrote the commentary based on the original events to make clear that Confucius did not explicate the main text with empty words.”³²⁴ He further notes, “[Liu] Xin believed that Zuo Qiuming’s likes and dislikes aligned with those of the sage, and that he personally met Confucius, whereas the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentaries were by those who

³²³ “魯君子左丘明懼弟子人人異端，各安其意，失其真，故因孔子史記具論其語，成左氏春秋。” *Shi ji, juan 14*, 509–10.

³²⁴ “丘明恐弟子各安其意，以失其真，故論本事而作傳，明夫子不以空言說經也。” *Han shu, juan 30*, 1715.

came after the seventy disciples. Comparing those who only heard of the sage to those who personally met him, it is clear that their accounts differ in detail.”³²⁵ Whether Zuo Qiuming was indeed the compiler and whether he actually met Confucius are topics necessitating separate discussions. However, Ban Gu’s claim that the *Zuo zhuan* is not only a commentary on the *Chunqiu* but also the earliest and the most authentic representation of Confucius’ teachings among the three commentaries is significant. Ban first stated that Qiuming wrote the commentary on the *Chunqiu* to prevent later generations from misinterpreting it. As for the *Gongyang*, *Guliang*, and a few other commentaries, they were created only after oral transmission became widespread in later times.³²⁶

Besides Sima Qian and Ban Gu, Wang Chong in his “An shu” 案書 section also provided concrete evidence to support *Zuo zhuan*’s authenticity and its status as the commentary that most accurately captures the essence of the *Chunqiu*. Wang states as follows:

The *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* was discovered beneath the walls in Confucius’ residence. During Emperor Wu’s reign, King Gong of Lu demolished Confucius’ instruction hall to build a palace, discovering thirty lost chapters of the *Chunqiu*, which included the *Zuo zhuan*. *Gongyang Gao*, *Guliang Zhi*, and *Huwu*’s works all annotate the *Chunqiu*, each with different approaches, but the *Zuo zhuan* is closest to the truth. How is this verified? The *Li ji* was created in the hall of Confucius’ residence. Sima Qian, a wise man of the Han period, contends that the words of the *Zuo zhuan* align with these two texts, while

³²⁵ “歆以為左丘明好惡與聖人同，親見夫子，而公羊、穀梁在七十子後，傳聞之與親見之，其詳略不同。” *Han shu*, *juan* 36, 1967.

³²⁶ *Han shu*, *juan* 30, 1715.

Gongyang Gao, Guliang Zhi, and Huwu's interpretations do not. Moreover, the various scholars are far removed from Confucius' time; being distant is not as good as being near, and hearing is not as good as seeing.³²⁷

This view generally aligns with those of Sima Qian and Ban Gu. Additionally, the “Xiao Cheng huangdi ji er” 孝成皇帝紀二 section of the *Qian Han ji* 前漢紀 records, “Initially, Zuo Qiuming of Lu also wrote a commentary on the *Chunqiu*.”³²⁸ Xu Shen in the preface to the *Shuowen jiezi* also states, “When Confucius wrote the Six Classics, Zuo Qiuming composed the commentary on the *Chunqiu*.”³²⁹ Huan Tan 桓譚 (23–56) further remarked in the *Xin lun* 新論, stating as follows: “The *Zuo zhuan* is to the *Chunqiu* main text as the lining is to the garment; they complement each other. Without the commentary, even a sage pondering for ten years could not comprehend the main text.”³³⁰ It is evident that Han scholars shared an unequivocal and

³²⁷ “《春秋左氏傳》者、蓋出孔子壁中。孝武皇帝時，魯共王壞孔子教授堂以為宮，得佚《春秋》三十篇，《左氏傳》也。公羊高、穀梁寘、胡毋氏皆傳《春秋》，各門異戶，獨《左氏傳》為近得實。何以驗之？《禮記》造於孔子之堂，太史公、漢之通人也，左氏之言與二書合，公羊高、穀梁寘、胡毋氏不相合。又諸家去孔子遠，遠不如近，聞不如見。” Huang, *Lun heng jiaoshi*, juan 29, 1161–3.

³²⁸ “始魯人左丘明。又為春秋作傳。” Xun Yue 荀悅 (148–209), *Qian Han ji*, in *Siku quanshu*, juan 25, 4a.

³²⁹ “至孔子書六經，左丘明述春秋傳。” Duan, *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 757.

³³⁰ “《左氏傳》於經，猶衣之表裡，相待而成。經而無傳，使聖人閉門思之，十年不能知也。” This text is no longer extant; the most comprehensive record is found in the “Quan Hou Han wen” 全後漢文 section of an extensive anthology on classical Chinese prose compiled by Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843). See Yan Kejun, *Quan Hou Han wen*, in *Quan Shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958; rpt. 1985), juan 14, 546. A more recent edition of the *Xin lun* is edited by Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之 in 2009. See Zhu Qianzhi, *Xinji ben Huan*

consistent attitude toward treating the *Zuo zhuan* as a commentary on the *Chunqiu*. Furthermore, figures like Ban Gu, Wang Chong, and Huan Tan even considered the *Zuo zhuan* the foremost among the three commentaries, not only because it was closer in time to the *Chunqiu* but also because its annotation best captured the sage's intent.

Why, then, did the notion of the *Zuo zhuan* as a historical text emerge in later periods? This development is closely related to its unconventional method of elucidating the main text through historical events. The *Zuo zhuan* records a vast array of historical events, often in greater detail than the *Chunqiu*, providing clear accounts of their causes, processes, and outcomes. Its meticulous and rich documentation of the governmental affairs, diplomacy, military affairs, and ritual regulations of the Spring and Autumn period underscores its historical characteristics. This unique writing style differs significantly from the traditional modes of annotation adopted by Ruist scholars, who focused on philological interpretations. *Zuo zhuan*'s tendency to use events to supplement the missing logical connections between events within the *Chunqiu*, with fewer explicit explanations of the main text's significances, further accentuates its historical nature, leading to criticism from later scholars.

3.1.1 The *Zuo Zhuan* as a Historical Text

The Song erudite Zhu Xi was among the first literati to consider the *Zuo zhuan* as a text pertaining to the historical tradition, which distinguishes it from commentaries of the canonical tradition such as the *Gongyang* and the *Guliang*. The rationale behind this differentiation lies in

Tan Xin lun 新輯本桓譚新論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009). For English translation, please consult Timoteus Pokora, *Hsin-Lun (New Treatise) and Other Writings by Huan T'an (43 B.C. –28 A.D.)* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1975).

the fact that the *Zuo zhuan* has a large number of historical accounts but contains a smaller number of passages that impart moral lessons. Conversely, the *Gongyang zhuan* and the *Guliang zhuan* are replete with moral lessons and judgments but are marked by a dearth of historical accounts and a plethora of inaccuracies.³³¹ Zhu's assertion that the *Zuo zhuan* has a large number of historical accounts but a smaller number of passages that impart moral lessons pertains to the commentary's unconventional mode of annotation that appears unsuitable for a textual exegesis characterized by its emphasis on construing the wording of the main text. In fact, this perspective entails a clear differentiation between the historical accounts found in the *Zuo zhuan* and the rest of its commentaries, which conform more closely to the Ruist mode of interpretation and thus preclude any unorthodox interpretation from being classified as a canonical text. Wang Xi 王皙 (dates unknown), another Song scholar, was also well aware of the unconventional mode of annotation in the *Zuo zhuan*. Initially, he praised the work for "excelling in examining ancient history, and thoroughly encompassing divergent opinions. [It is] well-provided with those events accounted in the *Chunqiu*."³³² However, he subsequently criticized the commentary for "forming an independent work apart from the *Chunqiu*. Thus, it has an obsession with divergent opinions, and the selection and arrangement [of the materials] exceeds the proper limits. As for the sage's subtle intentions, they are frequently overlooked or neglected."³³³

³³¹ Li, *Zhuzi yulei*, *juan* 83, 2152.

³³² "善覽舊史，兼該眾說，得《春秋》之事跡甚備。" Wang Xi 王皙, *Chunqiu huanggang lun* 春秋皇綱論, in *Siku quanshu*, *juan* 5, 10a.

³³³ 于經外字成一書，故有貪惑眾說，采掇過當。至聖人微旨，頗亦疏略。 See Wang, *Chunqiu huanggang lun*, *juan* 5, 10 a.

The recognition of *Zuo zhuan*'s unique approach of elucidating the main text through historical details, thereby distinguishing it from the Ruist mode of annotation, likely emerged well before the time of Zhu and Wang. Lu Chun's 陸淳 *Chunqiu jizhuan zuanli* compiled during the Tang dynasty incorporated a comment made by his teacher Dan Zhu on the *Zuo zhuan*.³³⁴ Dan Zhu noted the extensive records of historical events in the *Zuo zhuan*, which not only excelled in encompassing accounts of every state but also succeeded in richness and scrutiny. Nevertheless, he contended that the attention paid to explaining the significance and judgment of the main text was insufficient. Accordingly, Dan Zhu postulated that the extant version of the *Zuo zhuan* consists of two parts: the written records of the historical accounts of each state, which the compiler obtained and lectured on; and the elucidation of the standards and teachings conveyed in the main text, which he passed down orally, and were recorded and combined with the historical accounts by later scholars.³³⁵ In Dan's view it was this diverse, yet somewhat chaotic, transmission of the *Zuo zhuan* that contributed to its appeal, which he characterizes as

³³⁴ The disdain for the commentarial and sub-commentarial approach to the main text had become common in the post-rebellion era (approx. 8th cent.). The leading figures of this period include Dan Zhu, Zhao Kuang 趙匡 (dates unknown; active in the 8th cent.), and Lu Chun. For a detailed study on the Tang dynasty *Chunqiu* scholarship, please see David McMullen, *State and Scholar in T'ang China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 67–105.

³³⁵ See Lu, *Chunqiu jizhuan zuanli*, *juan* 1, 4b.

For an exhaustive study on Dan Zhu, please see Wong Hon-meng 黃漢明, "Non-mainstream intellectual phenomenon in the mid-Tang period: characteristics of Dan Zhu's (724-770) *Chunqiu* study and related social background" 中唐儒學思想的異采: 啖助 (724-770) 治《春秋》的特點及其相關社會背景, M.A. Thesis, University of Hong Kong, 2013. See also, You-yu Chiang 江右瑜, "The differences between Dan-Zhu's and Zhao-Kuang's explanations of *Chunqiu*" 啖助與趙匡《春秋學》之異同, *Xingda renwen xuebao*, vol. 37 (2006): 187–221.

“although abundant in narratives, it was sparing in explicating the meaning. The rights and the wrongs are intertwined, making it difficult to verify.”³³⁶ It is worth noting that Dan Zhu and Wang Xi, while criticizing *Zuo zhuan*’s historical features as a distraction from elucidating the *Chunqiu*, did not deny its annotative nature as a member of the Three Commentaries. Their discussions and criticisms were still conducted within the framework of treating the *Zuo zhuan* as a commentary on the *Chunqiu*.

The argument that ultimately prompted the peak of skepticism over the authenticity of the *Zuo zhuan* was initially posited by Liu Fenglu. Liu contended that the *Zuo zhuan* originated as a pseudograph forged by Liu Xin during the Han dynasty, and thus he discredited the authenticity of the *Zuo zhuan* from its very foundation.³³⁷ Kang Youwei further extended Liu’s argument by contending that Liu Xin specifically divided the *Guo yu* to forge the *Zuo zhuan*.³³⁸ These scholars’ viewpoints marked a watershed moment in the scholarly debate over the *Zuo zhuan*. Prior to their times, doubts had been raised regarding the authorship and classification of the *Zuo zhuan*. Nonetheless, the authenticity of the *Zuo zhuan* as a genuine commentary on the *Chunqiu* main text composed in the Pre-Qin period had not yet been called into question. The arguments

³³⁶ “敘事雖多，釋義殊少，是非交錯，混然難證。” See, *Chunqiu jizhuan zuanli*, juan 1, 5a.

³³⁷ Liu Fenglu, *Zuoshi Chunqiu kaozheng* 左氏春秋考證 (Beiping: Pushe chubanshe, 1933). For a comprehensive English scholarship on Liu Fenglu, see Benjamin Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: The Ch’ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in the Late Imperial China* (CA: University of California Press, 1990), 214–256.

³³⁸ For more details on Kang’s arguments, see Kang Youwei, *Xinxue weijing kao* 新學偽經考 (Beijing, Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2010). In addition to Hsiao Kung-ch’üan’s work, one may also consult Wong Yong-tsu’s book for another thorough English study on Kang Youwei. See Wong Young-tsu, *Beyond Confucian China: The Rival Discourses of Kang Youwei and Zhang Binglin* (London: Routledge, 2010).

put forth by Liu and Kang not only introduced a new perspective to the field of *Zuo zhuan* studies, but also exerted a profound influence on subsequent scholars.

One such scholar was Hu Nianyi 胡念貽 (1924–1982), who largely accepted the views of Qing scholars who considered the *Zuo zhuan* an independent historical record composed in the Pre-Qin period, despite his rejection of arguments claiming that the text was forged by Liu Xin or was extracted from the *Guo yu*. Hu argued that all the exegetical passages, such as “the gentleman says” 君子曰 and “it (the main text) writes,” 書曰 were later interpolations, and that the integrity of *Zuo zhuan*’s narratives would not be compromised by their removal. This ability to separate the exegetical passages from the rest of the narrative distinguishes the *Zuo zhuan* from the *Gongyang* and the *Guliang* and suggests that the *Zuo zhuan* was not originally intended as a commentary on the main text.³³⁹

In summary, skepticism regarding the relationship between the *Zuo zhuan* and the *Chunqiu* has undergone four stages of development. The first stage began during the Western Han period with a dispute between the New Text and Old Text scholars. The second stage was enriched during the Tang and Song periods with the recognition of the historical value of *Zuo zhuan*’s accounts. The third stage during the Qing and Republican periods was characterized by arguments that completely rejected the authenticity of the *Zuo zhuan*. The fourth stage, which is ongoing, is the acceptance, with minor adjustment, of Liu Fenglu’s and Kang Youwei’s arguments by modern and contemporary scholars. Setting aside the doubts raised during the Western Han period, which were only briefly mentioned in the “*Yiwen zhi*” without elaboration

³³⁹ Hu Nianyi 胡念貽, “*Zuo zhuan de zhenwei he xiezuozuo shidai de wenti kaobian*” 左傳的真偽和寫作時代的問題考辨, *Wen shi* 11 (1981): 3–4.

on their rationale,³⁴⁰ the Tang and Song scholars, such as Dan Zhu, Zhu Xi, and Wang Xi, merely drew attention to a difference between the mode of annotation found in the *Zuo zhuan* and the one commonly used by Ruist scholars. The main skeptics of the claim of *Zuo zhuan*'s relationship to the *Chunqiu* are the group of *jinwen* scholars represented by Liu Fenglu. While there may be disagreements among these scholars regarding the identity of the person responsible for appending the exegetical passages to the *Zuo zhuan*, they have arrived at a consensus regarding *Zuo zhuan*'s true identity as an unclassified historical record of the Pre-Qin era. The core basis for this argument lies in the feature of the flexible nature of the exegetical passages in the *Zuo zhuan*, which appear to be detachable and do not affect the integrity of the rest of the narratives.

3.1.2 Controversy: A Ruist Construal of *Zhuan* vs. The Definition of *Zhuan* in the Pre-Qin

One of the main issues confronting arguments challenging the authenticity and the nature of the *Zuo zhuan* concerns a very narrow definition of the term *zhuan* 傳 (v. to annotate, to commentate; n. annotation, commentary), also pronounced as *chuan* in its verb form.³⁴¹ The

³⁴⁰ The *Han shu* records a letter addressed to court erudites by Liu Xin contending on the authenticity of the *Zuo zhuan*, and its close relationship to the *Chunqiu*. In this letter, Liu Xin contests the notion that *Zuo zhuan* does not elucidate the *Chunqiu*, attributing it to personal biases and power struggles between the two Ruist traditions. This reference indirectly reveals the emergence of the view that rejects *Zuo zhuan*'s relationship to the *Chunqiu* during the Western Han and suggests for a possible linkage to the contention between the Old and New Text schools at the time. See *Han shu*, *juan* 36, 1968–1971. For English translation of this letter, see Eva Yuen-wah Chung, “A Study of the ‘Shu’ (Letters) of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220),” Ph.D. Diss. (University of Washington, 1982), 482–88.

³⁴¹ John Henderson conducted a meticulous study on the origins, dimensions, and apotheosis of commentaries in different civilizations and traditions, with an emphasis on China and Ruism. In this

comments put forth by scholars such as Zhu Xi, Dan Zhu, and Wang Xi are likely based on a specific mode of annotation that is defined and shaped by canonical texts such as the *Mao Shi* 毛詩, the *Gongyang zhuan*, and the *Guliang zhuan*. It is worth noting that most commentaries on Ruist Classics were annotated by Ruist scholars, with the exception of the *Zuo zhuan*, which was annotated by a scribe. As the number of canonical modes of annotations increased with the spread of the Ruist tradition, this mode became a common approach to annotation since the Latter Han. Consequently, it created an impression that the Ruist mode of exegesis is the only orthodox way to elucidate the Classics. Previous discussions on this topic have fallen prey to this misconception of *zhuan*, and the entirety of their arguments was based on the assumption that the Ruist mode of annotation, which involves explicating the meaning of the main text by exhaustively interpreting their words and lines, is the *only* mode of annotation. This is particularly evident in Dan Zhu's postulation that the content of the *Zuo zhuan* was passed down from Zuo Qiuming to his disciples through lectures, and that explications of the meaning of the *Chunqiu* were transmitted orally. These arguments reveal strong influences from the typical Ruist

study, Henderson points out two scales of definition of commentary. In the broadest sense, commentary may include any forms of interpretation encompassing almost all human acts, artifacts, contexts, and texts. The narrowest definition involves a direct running gloss on a canonical text. In general, he argues that commentaries have evolved over time and have served not only as repositories of learning but also as encyclopedias, covering many of the major literary genres in premodern civilizations.

Similarly, Michael Puett also argues that the notions of text, authorship, and commentary in the early Chinese literary tradition were debated and redefined from the fourth century BCE to the fourth century CE in an endless process of accretion. For more details on commentaries and Classics, see John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). See also, Michael Puett, "Text and Commentary: The Early Tradition," in *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature*, ed. Wiebke Denecke et al. (NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 112–122.

mode of annotation, which was often transmitted orally through lectures between a teacher and a student.³⁴² In this mode, the significance of the main text is conveyed through responses to questions put forth by the student.

In reality, there was no particular definition or standard regarding the basic form of annotation in the Pre-Qin period. The *Shuowen jiezi* glosses *zhuan* as *ju* 遽, which means a fast courier or a relay-station.³⁴³ These two terms are glossed as mutually interchangeable.³⁴⁴ According to a line in the “Xing fu” 行夫 section of the *Zhou li*, *zhuan* is used as a binomial phrase with *ju*: “The title *xing fu* refers to the person in charge of insignificant matters such as *zhuan ju* (the chariots or horses used for replaying messages) for the state. These messages typically include the auspicious and inauspicious events that occurred in the state, and do not require proper ritual practice.”³⁴⁵ Zheng Xuan explained this line as follows: “It is similar to

³⁴² Regarding the oral transmission tradition observed in commentaries on some of the Ruist Classics, Henderson points out that it may be traced to oral modes of discourse and transmission as well as to the practice of various forms of divination in early Chinese culture. See, Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary*, 68.

While many scholars argue that the explanations of the Ruist Classics, particularly the primary commentaries on the *Chunqiu*, were transmitted orally much of the Western Han period, such a topic necessitates a separate discussion. This thesis does not attempt to delve deeply into this subject matter but aims simply to point out the potential rationale behind the criticisms made by scholars such as Dan Zhu and Wang Xi on *Zuo zhuan*'s “unconventional” mode of annotation.

³⁴³ For an in-depth etymological study on the word *zhuan/chuan*, see Edmond Lien, “Reconstructing the Postal Relay System of the Han Period,” in *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, ed. Antje Richter (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 32–33.

³⁴⁴ Duan, *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 377.

³⁴⁵ “行夫掌邦國傳遽之小事，媿惡而無禮者。” *Zhou li zhushu*, *juan* 38, 1210.

those who ride the messenger horse or chariot to relay messages in the present day.”³⁴⁶

According to the *Zhou li* and Zheng Xuan, the term *zhuan* was first used to refer to chariots and horses employed to relay messages, and could be extended to mean the courier who rides on these vehicles. The term was then extended to carry other meanings. Another passage in the “Si guan” 司關 section of the *Zhou li* records the term *jie zhuan* 節傳. Zheng Xuan glossed *zhuan* in this binome to mean the documents for moving from one place to another.³⁴⁷ According to Duan Yucai, the usage of *zhuan* in the “Si guan” was derived from the meaning of *zhuan ju*. He states: “all appellations that are extensions of the sense of twisting and turning are referred to as *zhuan*. Terms like *zhuanzhu* (derivative cognate) and *liuchuan* (to circulate) are good examples of this.”³⁴⁸ In Duan’s view, the definition of *zhuan* in the Pre-Qin period was broad, encompassing anything that twisted and turned. Examples from several Pre-Qin texts reveal that the glossing

³⁴⁶ *Zhou li zhushu*, juan 17, 454.

³⁴⁷ “傳如今移過所文書。” *Zhou li zhushu*, juan 17, 454.

³⁴⁸ “則凡輾轉引申之稱皆曰傳，而傳注、流傳是也。” Duan, *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 377.

Baxter and Sagart (B&S) reconstructed the Old Chinese form of *zhuǎn* 轉 (輾轉, to toss and turn), *zhuàn* 傳 (what has been transmitted), and *chuán* 傳 (to transmit) as *tron?, *N-tron-s, and *m-tron respectively. According to B&S, the prefix *N- typically derives stative intransitive verbs from transitive verbs; the suffix *-s has various functions, one of which is to nominalize verbs; and the prefix *m- changes a noun into a volitional verb, among other functions. This reconstruction aligns with the historical evidence and the explanations of Zheng Xuan and Duan Yucai. It seems that both *zhuàn* 傳 and *chuán* 傳 can be traced back to the same verb root *zhuǎn* 轉, corresponding to Duan’s argument that the term *zhuan* includes all appellations that are extensions of the sense of twisting and turning.

Consequently, it may be surmised that the term *zhuan* in the Pre-Han era designated a broad and vague meaning of anything that has been transmitted or twisted and turned from something else, rather than a very specific definition of “commentaries composed in relation to Ruist Classics using a philological approach.” See William Baxter and Laurent Sagart, *Old Chinese—A New Reconstruction* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 54–60.

style of annotation promoted by Ruist scholars was rare. Instead, many commentaries focused on appending historical accounts and anecdotes to the main text.

The term *zhuan yue* 傳曰 (the commentary says, or the tradition says) appears multiple times throughout the *Xunzi*. In the “Fei xiang” 非相 section, a line reads as follows: “Thus it is referred to as one is able to enhance the value of that which he values. The commentary/tradition says: ‘Only a gentleman can enhance the value of that which he values.’ This is what it means.”³⁴⁹ Similarly, in the “Zheng lun” 正論 section, one states: “To deceive and entrap the fools with such means in order to gain profits, this is what is referred to as great perfidy. The commentary/tradition says: ‘To put others in danger in order to gain safety for oneself, to harm others in order to gain profit for oneself.’ This is what it is referring to.”³⁵⁰ Yang Liang 楊儵 (appx. Mid-Tang, dates unknown) noted in his commentary that all of the “commentary says” passages in the *Xunzi* are records of the accounts from the past.³⁵¹ The “Liang Huiwang xia” 梁惠王下 section of the *Mencius* also records a passage which reads as follows: “King Xuan of Qi asked: ‘King Tang exiled Jie, and King Wu led a punitive expedition against Zhou. Have there been such things?’ Mencius replied: ‘They are recorded on *zhuan*.’”³⁵² According to Zhao Qi’s

³⁴⁹ “夫是之謂為能貴其所貴。傳曰：‘唯君子為能貴其所貴。’此之謂也。” Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842–1917), *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), *juan* 3, 86.

³⁵⁰ “以欺愚者而淖陷之，以偷取利焉。夫是之謂大奸。傳曰：‘危人而自安，害人而自利。’此之謂也。” Wang, *Xunzi jijie*, *juan* 12, 340.

³⁵¹ Wang, *Xunzi jijie*, *juan* 1, 27.

³⁵² “齊宣王問曰：‘湯放桀，武王伐紂，有諸？’孟子對曰：‘於傳有之。’” *Mengzi zhushu*, *juan* 2, 64.

commentary, *zhuan* here refers to commentaries.³⁵³ Based on various examples from several Pre-Qin texts and Duan Yucai's gloss, it appears that annotations in the Pre-Qin period were not limited by strict standards or writing styles. They could take various forms and serve various purposes as long as they were an extension from the main text. The exegetical approach adopted by Ruist scholars is but one way of annotating, just as *Zuo zhuan*'s approach, which uses historical accounts to elucidate the main text, is another valid form of commentary in the Pre-Qin period.³⁵⁴ Therefore, it would be inaccurate to disqualify the *Zuo zhuan* as a commentary, as many New Text scholars have done. Such a view reflects a partial construal of the term *zhuan*, which stems from a misunderstanding of its definition and usage.

In conclusion, a subjective premise was established since the inception of the arguments raising doubts on the nature of the *Zuo zhuan*. This premise served as the basis for all perceptions and analyses concerning the text. Scholars who adhered to this premise upheld traditional Ruist commentaries as the ideal model. Consequently, anything that cannot be comprehended or explained from a Ruist viewpoint is regarded as unconventional and hence subject to skepticism. Clearly, arguments that challenge the authenticity of the *Zuo zhuan* by questioning the atypicality of its mode of annotation are not well-founded. Therefore, the alternative explanations provided by these arguments frequently lead to unsatisfactory results.

³⁵³ “於傳文有之矣。” *Mengzi zhushu*, *juan 2*, 64.

³⁵⁴ For more discussions on the form and definition of commentary, please see Fu, “Lun *Zuo zhuan* de xingzhi,” 51–4; and Chang, *Xushi yu jieshi*, 1–33.

3.1.3 The *Zuo zhuan* as a Commentary to the *Chunqiu* Main Text

As previously mentioned, although Tang and Song scholars began to criticize the *Zuo zhuan* for its excessive focus on historical facts, they did not yet classify it as a historical text. Instead, they continued to regard it as a commentary on the main text, aligning with earlier perceptions of its nature. The significant shift occurred with Liu Fenglu, who disputed the authenticity of the *Zuo zhuan*, contending it was a forged text derived from the *Guo yu*. While later scholars did not fully accept this radical view, they did expand on the notion of the *Zuo zhuan* as an independent historical text separate from the *Chunqiu*. In modern times, this interpretation has gained widespread acceptance, regardless of whether one acknowledges its relationship with the *Chunqiu*. This can largely be attributed to the characteristics of the *Zuo zhuan* that align with modern understandings of “history” and “historiography,” as well as to the fact that past critics often reproached the *Zuo zhuan* for its excessive focus on historical details. As a result, its historical dimension is increasingly seen as its defining feature.

However, as detailed in Chapter One, the belief that the *Zuo zhuan* fits the definition of a historical text is a misunderstanding developed by later generations. According to the conventions of early Chinese historical writing, *Zuo zhuan*'s style, content, format, and purpose do not conform to the definition of a Pre-Qin historical text. classifying it strictly as a historical text does not account for the development of its unique quasi-narrative style. Traditional historical texts are composed of brief, discrete entries that record events without the detailed descriptions or narrative continuity evident in the *Zuo zhuan*. If the *Zuo zhuan* were intended as a historical text, it would neither need to nor be able to produce such a narrative style. To understand the origins of its distinctive style, one must look beyond conventional classifications of “historical texts.”

Consequently, although many people view the *Zuo zhuan* as a historical text, either due to prevailing beliefs or personal perspectives, numerous scholars have strongly rejected this view. For instance, Liu Shipei cited a passage from *Yanshi chunqiu* 嚴氏春秋’s reference to the “Guan Zhou” 觀周 section, which mentions Zuo Qiuming and Confucius observing Zhou’s historical records together, with Confucius compiling the *Chunqiu* and Qiuming writing the commentary.³⁵⁵ The “Guan Zhou” section is a chapter found in the *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語, composed by Han dynasty *Gongyang* scholars. This passage reveals *Gongyang* school’s acknowledgment of *Zuo zhuan*’s commentarial status. Additionally, Liu Shipei cited Liu Xiang’s detailed account of the transmission process of the *Zuo zhuan* in the *Bie lu*, noting that although Liu Xiang studied the *Guliang zhuan* and often raised doubts about the *Zuo zhuan*, he was able to delineate *Zuo zhuan*’s transmission history in his own treatise. Thus, it can be ascertained that *Guliang* scholars also recognized the *Zuo zhuan*.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ Liu, *Liu Shipei shixue lunzhu xuanji*, 27.

It is worth noting that, Liu’s argument was based on *Yanshi chunqiu*’s interpretation of the “Guan Zhou” section, which only exists in excerpts cited by Shen Wen’e 沈文阿 (503–563). The extant version of the “Guan Zhou” section in the *Kongzi jiayu* does not explicitly state the identity of the person accompanying Confucius to Zhou, but merely uses the ambiguous designation of “a subordinate official” 屬臣. See *Kongzi jiayu*, in *Sibu beiyao*, vol. 52, *juan* 3, 19.

³⁵⁶ Liu Shipei’s reference to the *Bie lu* was extracted from Kong Yingda’s citation recorded in his exegesis of Du Yu’s preface to the *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*. The complete citation provided by Kong reads as follows: “Zuo Qiuming instructed Zeng Shen, Shen instructed Wu Qi, Qi instructed his son Qi, and Qi instructed Duo Jiao of Chu. Duo Jiao composed *Chao cuo* in eight volumes and taught it Yu Qing. Yu Qing then composed [another] *Chao cuo* in nine volumes and taught it to Xun Qing. Xun Qing then instructed Zhang Cang.” 左丘明授曾申，申授吳起，起授其子期，期授楚人鐸椒。鐸椒作《抄撮》八卷，授虞卿；虞卿作《抄撮》九卷，授荀卿；荀卿授張倉。 As a well-known scholar of the *Guliang* tradition, Liu Xiang certainly would not have spoken in favor of the *Zuo zhuan*. Moreover, Liu

In his work *Saden no seiritsu to so no tenkai* 左傳の成立とその展開, the Japanese scholar Kamada Tadashi 鎌田正 (1911–2008) offered a detailed discussion and critique of Liu Fenglu and Kang Youwei’s assertions denying the authenticity of the *Zuo zhuan*. He evaluated the merits and shortcomings of *Zuo zhuan* studies from the Han dynasty onwards. Kamada argued that the claim that the *Zuo zhuan* is a forged text by Liu Xin is an unfounded misconception. This misunderstanding arose primarily because, after the establishment of *Chunqiu* studies, the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* schools intentionally excluded the *Zuo zhuan* to solidify their own positions.³⁵⁷ Kamada emphasized that the *Zuo zhuan* was the earliest among the three commentaries to be compiled. Since the *Chunqiu* was based on the annals of the state of Lu, the *Zuo zhuan* used historical facts as its main mode of annotation. This approach, which included extensive ancient astronomical and calendrical data as well as principles of statecraft, contributed significantly to the *Zuo zhuan* surpassing the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentaries and becoming the most influential among the three in later periods.³⁵⁸ This multifaceted nature became more pronounced through the work of Du Yu and subsequent scholars who meticulously combed through Liu Xin’s *Zuo zhuan* studies, forming a mature system based on empirical data.³⁵⁹

Kamada’s research recognizes the historical characteristics of the *Zuo zhuan* but consistently emphasizes that it was originally intended as a commentary on the *Chunqiu*, making

Xiang’s time precedes that of Liu Xin, it can be ascertained that Liu Xin did not forge the *Zuo zhuan* as contended by Liu Fenglu and several other scholars. See *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 15.

³⁵⁷ Kamada Tadashi, *Saden no seiritsu to so no tenkai* (Tokyo: Tashukan, 1963), 361

³⁵⁸ Kamada, *Saden no seiritsu to so no tenkai*, 763

³⁵⁹ Kamada, *Saden no seiritsu to so no tenkai*, 759

it the earliest and most faithful to the significances of the main text among the three commentaries. In Kamada's view, the primary characteristic of the *Zuo zhuan* is undoubtedly that of a commentary on the *Chunqiu*. Its historical nature is a secondary attribute, a "by-product" of its mode of annotation. This historical aspect should not be used to arbitrarily classify it as an independent historical text unrelated to the *Chunqiu*. Kamada's perspective is further elaborated in Professor Fu Gang's latest article.

Professor Fu argues that the primary nature of the *Zuo zhuan* is that of a Classics' commentary, similar to the *Gongyang zhuan* and *Guliang zhuan*. The key difference between the *Zuo zhuan* and the other two lies in the identity of its compiler and the resultant method of exegesis. The *Gongyang zhuan* and *Guliang zhuan* were written by Ruists, while the *Zuo zhuan* was compiled by a court scribe, whose perspective is reflective of a scribal consciousness. Under the premise of elucidating the main text, *Zuo zhuan*'s compiler paid close attention to the causal relationships between events recorded in the *Chunqiu*, thus presenting a deep understanding of the logical progression of events. The commentary also includes assessments of the feasibility and justification of historical events. This attention was partly derived from the compiler's own scribal consciousness and partly from the *Chunqiu* itself. The accounts of events spanning the two hundred and forty-two years of the Spring and Autumn period within in the *Chunqiu* were essentially based on official historical records. Thus, whether in the original Lu records or Confucius' edited version, both texts inherently reflect historical characteristics. It would be difficult to completely avoid these historical traits when writing a commentary on such a text. However, due to the compiler's scribal consciousness, the *Zuo zhuan* amplifies its inherent historical nature. Approaching from a scribe's perspective, the compiler meticulously examines

the causes and outcomes of events, thereby imbuing the *Zuo zhuan* with distinct historical characteristics.³⁶⁰

Hence, Fu asserts that the historical nature of the *Zuo zhuan* is subordinate to its role as a Classics' commentary. Although the *Zuo zhuan* exhibits many historical features in its writing approach and details, its primary purpose remains the elucidation of the *Chunqiu* rather than serving as an independent historical record.³⁶¹ Therefore, while *Zuo zhuan*'s historical aspects are undeniable, they should be recognized as secondary attributes. Ultimately, Fu argues that the *Zuo zhuan* fundamentally remains a commentary on the *Chunqiu*, which is its foremost characteristic and the purpose of its composition. The historical elements are merely a means of exegesis and should not be conflated with *Zuo zhuan*'s primary nature as a commentary to the main text.

Thus, the nature of the *Zuo zhuan* is now unequivocally clear. This thesis contends that the *Zuo zhuan* is, first and foremost, a commentary on the *Chunqiu*. However, it should be noted that it comments on Confucius' revised version of the *Chunqiu*, rather than the original annals of the state of Lu. Based on our tracing of the reception history of the *Zuo zhuan*, it is evident that early scholars generally regarded it as a commentary on the *Chunqiu*. The only criticisms of its commentarial nature came from the Han dynasty's New Text scholars. However, the dispute between the New Text and Old Text scholars was largely a struggle for academic and social dominance. As a representative of the Old Text school, the *Zuo zhuan* was consistently challenged by the New Text scholars who aimed to undermine the Old Text school's standing.

³⁶⁰ Fu, "Lun Zuo zhuan de xingzhi," 54.

³⁶¹ Fu, "Lun Zuo zhuan de xingzhi," 54.

Prior to Liu Fenglu, although there were critiques of *Zuo zhuan*'s excessive focus on historical details, no one truly denied its nature as a commentary. However, following Liu Fenglu, the rise of the Doubting Antiquity movement led to increasing skepticism about the *Zuo zhuan*. These critiques often followed a similar pattern: questioning a particular aspect or characteristic of the *Zuo zhuan*, then broadly denying the traditional understanding of the text and proposing new interpretations to explain the contentious features. Common new interpretations included ideas such as “the *Zuo zhuan* is an independent Pre-Qin historical text,” “the *Zuo zhuan* is a composite text with all exegetical content being later interpolations,” and “the *Zuo zhuan* is a forged text split from the *Guo yu*.”

These doubts and new interpretations share a common flaw: they rely on certain preconceptions. Those who claim the *Zuo zhuan* is a historical text rather than a commentary often hold a very specific definition of what constitutes a commentary, excluding anything that does not fit this definition. Additionally, they have a specific concept of “history,” leading them to classify anything with similar characteristics as historical. However, definitions should be applied cautiously, as the meanings of concepts evolve over time. The criticisms of the *Zuo zhuan* for not fitting the conventional mode of commentary often stem from a narrow perspective influenced by the specific exegetical practices upheld by Ruist scholars, overlooking the fact that these practices are only one mode of annotation. Similarly, those who regard the *Zuo zhuan* as a historical text base their understanding of “history” developed in later eras, failing to consider the historical context of the Pre-Qin period. Therefore, these interpretations tend to be somewhat reductive and partial. While they seem to provide a more “reasonable” explanation for the unique historical characteristics of the *Zuo zhuan*, they fail to account for its other features and introduce additional complexities.

For instance, as discussed in Chapter One, the *Zuo zhuan* differs significantly from Pre-Qin “Chunqiu” style official annals clearly indicating that it does not conform to this type of historical writing. There is also insufficient evidence to suggest that a genre of historical writing similar to the *Zuo zhuan*, separate from the “Chunqiu” style, existed in the Pre-Qin period. Another common argument for classifying the *Zuo zhuan* as a historical text is that it contains more detailed and coherent historical accounts than the *Chunqiu*. If the *Chunqiu*, with its brief entries, is considered a historical text, then the more detailed *Zuo zhuan* should also be regarded as such. However, there are many entries in the *Chunqiu* that lack correspondence in the *Zuo zhuan*. While the *Chunqiu*, despite its brevity, records significant events related to the state of Lu, the *Zuo zhuan* should not omit these important events if it were truly a historical text, especially considering it often provides more detailed accounts than the *Chunqiu*.

Consequently, the detailed accounts in the *Zuo zhuan* cannot be fully explained if viewed as an independent historical text. The persistence of later scholars in classifying the *Zuo zhuan* as a historical text and denying its connection to the *Chunqiu* primarily stems from a narrow understanding of what constitutes a commentary. If we accept that the concept of commentary and the mode of annotation in the Pre-Qin period did not follow a strict definition, then the historical characteristics of the *Zuo zhuan* may not prove to be problematic after all.

3.1.4 Structural Evidence within the *Zuo zhuan*

Viewed from *Zuo zhuan*’s overarching framework, it is closely aligned with the *Chunqiu* and should be read in conjunction with it. The *Chunqiu*, edited by Confucius, selects two hundred and forty years of historical accounts from Lu’s lengthy state annals, beginning with

Duke Yin and ending with Duke Ai. Similarly, the *Zuo zhuan* also starts and concludes with these two specific rulers. If the *Zuo zhuan* were truly a historical text, why would it, like the *Chunqiu*, exclusively cover events from the period of Duke Yin to Duke Ai, rather than beginning from the enfeoffment of Duke Zhou and the ascension of Boqin 伯禽? Liu Zhiji traced the inception of Lu state annals to the Duke of Zhou, stating as follows: “The compilation of the *Chunqiu* began with Ji Dan and was completed by Confucius.”³⁶² Du Yu, in his preface, mentioned that Han Xuanzi’s reference to the *Chunqiu* pertains to the annals of the state of Lu, indicating that Lu’s historical records existed before Duke Yin.³⁶³ Furthermore, *Zuo zhuan*’s reference to events during the reign of Duke Hui of Lu may also serve as solid evidence, as it delineates events from Duke Hui’s period without dedicating a full section to him like the rest of Lu rulers,³⁶⁴ which is inconsistent with the logic of historical records.

There are several explanations of why *Chunqiu* begins with Duke Yin. One of the views posits that the *Chunqiu* aims to honor Duke Yin, as he was regarded as a virtuous ruler who ceded his power as an exemplar of the type of virtuous rulership much admired in the Western Zhou. Yin was also associated with King Ping of Zhou, the first king of the Eastern Zhou.³⁶⁵

³⁶² “《春秋》之作，始自姬旦，成於仲尼。” Liu Zhiji, *Shi tong*, in *Siku quanshu*, *juan* 14, 3b. Victor Xiong has recently published an English translation of the *Shi tong*. See Victor Cunrui Xiong, *A Thorough Exploration in Historiography: Shitong* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2023).

³⁶³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 10.

³⁶⁴ This pertains to the “prologue” preceding the first entry of Duke Yin. It is evident that *Zuo zhuan*’s compiler was well-aware of historical details related to Yin’s predecessors, but he deliberately only included excerpts from previous records. This indicates that the omission of records before Duke Yin was a conscious choice rather than due to a lack of sources. See *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 2, 38–41.

³⁶⁵ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 32–33.

However, some believe the main text starts with Duke Yin criticizing the decline of the Zhou rituals and the ensuing chaos.³⁶⁶ Other scholars suggest it begins with Duke Yin to condemn Duke Huan and others.³⁶⁷ Each of these interpretations is speculative and based on tenuous evidence. Nonetheless, it is certain that Confucius' decision to start the *Chunqiu* with Duke Yin was a deliberate personal choice, imbued with significant meaning.

The *Chunqiu* ends in the spring of the fourteenth year of Duke Ai. The *Guliang zhuan* offers little explanation, while the *Gongyang zhuan* suggests this year is significant due to the appearance of *lin* 麟 (unicorn), an unusual sight that also serves as an auspicious omen, prompting Confucius to complete the *Chunqiu* to restore order.³⁶⁸ This interpretation held sway among later scholars, to the extent that even scholars like Kong Yingda and Du Yu adopted this view. *Lin*'s significance as a royal symbol is debatable, as the interpretation very much fits conventional Ruist assumptions. However, the fact that ancient scholars cited the appearance of this exotic beast as Confucius' motivation to edit the *Chunqiu*, suggests that *Gongyang zhuan*'s assertion may not be entirely unfounded. Furthermore, the fact that Confucius died in the sixteenth year of Duke Ai's reign, just two years after the conclusion of the *Chunqiu*, may also have influenced the decision to end the text in the fourteenth year.

Both the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentaries end in the fourteenth year; however, the *Zuo zhuan* extends its commentary by two additional years, concluding in the sixteenth year, the year of Confucius' death. This extension has been used by later scholars as evidence to argue against its status as a commentary. In fact, according to Kong Yingda, the *Zuo zhuan* also

³⁶⁶ Fang Bao 方苞, *Chunqiu tonglun* 春秋通論, in *Siku quanshu*, juan 1, 2a.

³⁶⁷ Wang, *Chunqiu huanggang lun*, juan 1, 6b.

³⁶⁸ *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 28, 718–21.

originally ended in the fourteenth year. The additional two years were included by Confucius' disciples to record his death, relying on subsequent Lu annals.³⁶⁹

Moreover, the *Zuo zhuan* frequently contains explanatory passages that clearly refer to events from another primary text. If viewed as an independent text, these explanations are difficult to justify. For example, in the first entries for Duke Yin and Duke Zhuang, the *Zuo zhuan* provides explanations for why their ascensions to the throne are not mentioned. This omission implies the existence of another text that did not record their ascensions, and the *Zuo zhuan* offers clarification on this point.³⁷⁰ Similarly, the *Zuo zhuan* provides an explanation for why the word *ke* 克 (v. to conquer) is used in the phrase “the duke of Zheng conquered Duan at Yan” 鄭伯克段於鄆.³⁷¹ This term is used because of “Duan’s lack of brotherly conduct” 段不弟, which led to the perception that the duke of Zheng and Duan were “two rulers of opposing states” 如二君.³⁷² However, this phrase appears only in the *Chunqiu* and not in *Zuo zhuan*’s account of their conflict. Without the context provided by the *Chunqiu*, such explanations in the *Zuo zhuan* would be incoherent.

Another example can be found in the third year of Duke Yin, where the *Zuo zhuan* notes King Ping’s death on the *renxu* 壬戌 day, but because the Zhou court reported the date of *gengxu* 庚戌, “thus it is recorded as such” 故書之.³⁷³ For whom is this “thus” intended as an explanation? It is certainly not for the *Zuo zhuan* itself. As an independent text, having already

³⁶⁹ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 35.

³⁷⁰ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 2, 43, 55; juan 8, 246, 249.

³⁷¹ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 2, 49.

³⁷² *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 2, 62.

³⁷³ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 79, 82.

correctly recorded the year of King Ping's demise, further explanation would not be necessary. The mention of the *gengxu* day clearly indicates that another text recorded this date, and the *Zuo zhuan* found it necessary to clarify why it was written this way. This type of annotation demonstrates the complementary relationship between the two texts. These three examples, drawn from the records of Duke Yin alone, help to explain the numerous explicit explanatory notes throughout the *Zuo zhuan*, emphasizing its supplementary role to the *Chunqiu*.

3.2 Elucidating the *Chunqiu* with Historical Accounts and the Forming of *Zuo zhuan*'s Structure

Like the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentaries, the *Zuo zhuan* is unmistakably a commentary on the *Chunqiu* main text. However, it has attracted significant attention and scrutiny due to its unique method of interpreting the main text through historical events. This distinct approach sets it apart from other commentaries and results in an unprecedented and relatively systematic quasi-narrative structure. Given that the *Zuo zhuan* was intended to serve as a commentary on the main text, why did its compiler abandon the conventional Ruist mode of annotation in favor of this distinctive approach? Furthermore, how is this choice related to the shaping of the text's final form? This thesis posits that the unique style of the *Zuo zhuan* originated from its interpretive needs. These needs compelled the compiler to adopt the method of elucidating the main text through historical events, filling in textual lacunae, arranging sequences, and revealing causal relationships to explain the moral judgments within the main text. Consequently, the various writing techniques employed in the commentary predominantly serve the ultimate purpose of interpreting the *Chunqiu*. It is this specific objective and the nature of the text that led to the convergence of certain stylistic elements, resulting in its final form.

Therefore, it can be said that the quasi-narrative structure of the *Zuo zhuan* is both an accidental and an inevitable outcome.

3.2.1 Elucidating the Main Text through Events: Passivity vs. Proactivity

Why is it said that interpretive needs led the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan* to choose to elucidate the main text through historical events? This statement involves both passive and active motivations and can be analyzed from several perspectives. First, as a commentary, *Zuo zhuan*'s focus and writing style were significantly influenced by the primary text, the *Chunqiu*. Unlike other Ruist Classics such as the *Shi*, *Shu*, and *Li*, which encompass various teachings on ritual and governance, the *Chunqiu* takes its form from a state annals. Therefore, its content and central themes are predominantly event-driven, a characteristic that was determined from the outset. A notable feature of the *Chunqiu* is that the evaluations are not expressed through explicit and lengthy expositions but are instead embedded within the events themselves. This places the “event” element at the very core. Therefore, to explain a text centered on historical events, the focus must also shift toward these events.

Furthermore, the concealed judgments in the *Chunqiu* are sometimes hidden not behind a single event but a series of related events. The moral evaluations typically emerge at the outcome rather than during the process, akin to the conclusion of a thesis which, although appearing at the end, encompasses the entire content of the thesis. Readers who only examine a single chapter may find it difficult to grasp the full meaning of the final conclusion. Following prevailing historiographical conventions, the *Chunqiu* presents only one segment of a series of events. Yet

Confucius, in reviewing the historical records, often derived his judgments from the overall development of events.

Regarding Confucius' review of historical records, there are two notable accounts. The first is found in Kong Yingda's *Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, which quotes Shen's comments, saying: "The *Yanshi chunqiu* cites the 'Guan Zhou' section, saying: 'When Confucius was about to edit the *Chunqiu*, he traveled with Zuo Qiuming to the Zhou archive and reviewed the records maintained by the Zhou scribe. Upon returning, he edited the *Chunqiu* while Zuo Qiuming provided the commentary. Together, these texts served as complementary parts.'"³⁷⁴ The account of Confucius visiting the Zhou archive is also recorded in the *Shi ji*. Sima Qian mentioned in the "Shier zhuhou nianbiao" section that Confucius "traveled westward to observe the Zhou archive" 西觀周室,³⁷⁵ and again in the "Kongzi shijia" section, he noted that Confucius visited Zhou to consult with Laozi on ritual matters, who was appointed as a *zhu xia shi* 柱下史 (a scribe title akin to the role of royal scribe).³⁷⁶ These accounts support the credibility of Confucius' observation of the Zhou records.

³⁷⁴ "《嚴氏春秋》引《觀周篇》云：‘孔子將修《春秋》，與左丘明乘如周，觀書於周史，歸而修《春秋》之經，丘明為之傳，共為表裡。’" *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 1, 15.

³⁷⁵ *Shi ji*, *juan* 14, 509.

³⁷⁶ *Shi ji*, *juan*, 47, 1909. This account is also recorded in the *Kongzi jiayu*, see *Kongzi jiayu*, *juan* 3, 19.

According to Sima Zhen's 司馬貞 annotation to the *Shi ji*, this was commonly used throughout the Zhou and Qin dynasties and is analogous to the role of a royal scribe. The term *zhu xia shi*, meaning "scribe below the pillar," refers to the position typically occupied beneath the pillars in the royal court. Sima also cited Laozi as a notable example, stating that he served as a *zhu xia shi* in the Zhou court. See *Shi ji*, *juan* 96, 2675.

Moreover, judging by *Zuo zhuan*'s documentations of Confucius' comments on the events recorded in the *Chunqiu*, it is evident that Confucius possessed a thorough understanding of the historical affairs of various states. For example, in the eleventh year of Duke Xuan, the main text records: "On the *dinghai* day, the king of Chu entered Chen."³⁷⁷ The *Zuo zhuan* explains that due to the chaos caused by Xia Zhengshu's 夏徵舒 regicide in Chen, the Chu forces took advantage of the situation to invade Chen, intending to make it a county of Chu. However, Shenshu Shi 申叔時 advised the king against it, and the king heeded his advice and restored Chen.³⁷⁸ The "Haosheng" 好生 section of the *Kongzi Jiayu* records Confucius' reflections on this event, stating:

Confucius, upon reading the historical records, came across the account about the restoration of Chen by Chu, and exclaimed: "How commendable is the king of Chu, who values a single word of trust over a state with a thousand chariots! If it were not for the faithfulness of Shenshu, the significance of the admonishment could not have been conveyed, and if it were not for the wisdom of King Zhuang, one could not have accepted such advice."³⁷⁹

This indicates that Confucius was well-versed in the history of Chu, for otherwise, he could not have known that the king of Chu accepted Shenshu Shi's admonishment and restored Chen based solely on the single phrase in the *Chunqiu*.

³⁷⁷ "丁亥，楚子入陳。" *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 22, 721.

³⁷⁸ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 22, 724–5.

³⁷⁹ "孔子讀史，至楚復陳，喟然歎曰：‘賢哉楚王，輕千乘之國，而重一言之信！匪申叔之信，不能達其義，匪莊王之賢，不能受其訓。’" *Kongzi jiayu*, juan 2, 16.

Additionally, in the twenty-ninth year of Duke Xiang, the *Chunqiu* records: “Gao Zhi of Qi fled to Beiyan.”³⁸⁰ The *Zuo zhuan* notes that Gao Zhi was actually exiled by Gongsun Chai 公孫蚤 and Gongsun Cao 公孫竈, but the text records it as “fled” 奔. The *Zuo zhuan* states that Confucius intentionally changed “exiled” to “fled” to attribute the fault to Gao Zhi.³⁸¹ This demonstrates that Confucius was also familiar with the historical records of Qi.

Another perspective is found in the *Han shu*, which states that Confucius and Zuo Qiuming reviewed records from the Lu archives together. Given that Yan Pengzu’s era preceded that of Ban Gu, it is highly possible that Ban was aware of the account in the *Yanshi chunqiu* that was compiled by Yan Pengzu.³⁸² However, Ban still asserted that Confucius examined records from the Lu archive rather than the Zhou archive, suggesting there may have been a basis for this claim. Additionally, the Yuan scholar Huang Ze 黃澤 (1259–1346) argued that Confucius’ revision of the *Chunqiu*, being an epochal task intended to endure for generations, must have been conducted with meticulous scrutiny. As the *Chunqiu* was an official annal managed by court

³⁸⁰ “齊高止出奔北燕。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 39, 1250.

³⁸¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 39, 1274.

³⁸² The *Yanshi Chunqiu* is no longer extant; however, Ma Guohan 馬國翰 (1794–1857) had collected the fragments of this work under the title “Gongyang Yanshi Chunqiu” 公羊嚴氏春秋 and incorporated them into the *Yuhan shanfang jiyi shu*. Notably, the “Jingji zhi” section of the *Sui shu* cites Yan’s version of the *Gongyang zhuan*. The Japanese scholars Kōzen Hiroshi 興膳宏 (1936–2023) and Kawai Kozo 川合康三 have annotated the “Jingji zhi” and listed all editions of Yan Pengzu’s version of the *Gongyang zhuan*. Ma Guohan’s work is included among three other editions under the title “Chunqiu gongyang zhuan,” suggesting a common origin. See Ma Guohan, *Yuhan shanfang ji yishu* 玉函山房輯佚書, juan 31, in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, juan , vol.1202, 258; Kōzen Hiroshi and Kawai Kozo, *Zuishi Keisei shi shoko* 隋書經籍志詳攷 (Tokyo: Kyuko shoin, 1993), 144.

scribes and not accessible to ordinary individuals, if the Lu scribe had not presented the records to Confucius, how could he have known all the details? Furthermore, given that Confucius edited the *Chunqiu* shortly after returning to Lu from Wei, with only two years left before his death, it would have been impossible for him to complete such a substantial editing project without the support of the original Lu annals.³⁸³ Huang's arguments provide a credible hypothesis about the actual circumstances surrounding the revision of the *Chunqiu*, which may further support the notion that Confucius indeed had access to various historical records.

The examples cited above substantiate the credibility of Confucius reviewing both the Lu and Zhou records. Consequently, Confucius' moral evaluations were not merely composed of abstract moral critiques but were based on his analysis and judgment of various historical events. These analyses and judgments were necessarily derived from Confucius' familiarity with and understanding of historical affairs. Therefore, most of the materials incorporated in the *Zuo zhuan* must have been known to Confucius. From this perspective, the method of interpreting the main text through historical events and the attention to detail in the *Zuo zhuan* exhibit a degree of passivity. *Zuo zhuan*'s compiler did not choose this mode of annotation entirely on his own initiative; rather, interpreting the *Chunqiu* necessitated such an approach. Only through this method could the hidden thoughts and judgments be fully revealed. The interpretation of principles through events arises from the fact that these principles originate from the events themselves. The occurrence of an event is due to specific individuals making certain actions or decisions at particular times and places. Confucius' reflections are, in fact, reflections on these individuals and their actions. Depending on the circumstances, factors such as relationships,

³⁸³ Huang's comments are primarily preserved and cited in his student, Zhao Fang's 趙沅 (1319–1369) work. See Zhao Fang, *Chunqiu shi shuo* 春秋師說, in *Siku quanshu*, *juan* 1, 12b–13b.

personalities, time, and place can be crucial in determining the development of an event. These factors are often concealed within the historical details omitted in the main text. Only by thoroughly understanding the events can one discern the critical factors and subsequently comprehend Confucius' moral evaluations and their origins.

Furthermore, Sima Qian explicitly stated that Zuo Qiuming composed his commentary to elucidate the meanings within the main text because he feared that his disciples, each forming their own interpretations, would lose the true essence. This assertion was not solely Sima Qian's view; as Professor Fu Gang indicates in his article, there is clear documentary evidence in the *Li ji* that supports such a claim. The "Tan Gong" 檀弓 section records a dialogue unfolding between Zengzi 曾子, Youzi 有子, and Ziyou 子遊 regarding Confucius' statement, "In losing [title and wealth], one should wish to quickly return to poverty; in death, one should wish to quickly decompose."³⁸⁴ Zengzi, having heard Confucius make this statement, believed it reflected Confucius' overall attitude towards worldly matters. In contrast, Youzi insisted that this was Confucius' comment in a specific context and did not represent his general view. Later, Zengzi learned from Ziyou the complete circumstances under which Confucius made the statement and confirmed that Youzi's interpretation was correct.³⁸⁵ This source indicates that even scholars as learned as Zengzi could not accurately interpret Confucius' true intentions solely from his words without knowing the specific events and related details. Hence, the necessity of *Zuo zhuan*'s mode of interpreting the main text through events becomes evident: only by supplementing as

³⁸⁴ “喪欲速貧，死欲速朽。” *Li ji zhengyi*, juan 8, 266.

³⁸⁵ *Li ji zhengyi*, juan 8, 266–7.

much relevant event information as possible can one approximate the original context in which Confucius made his judgments.

Our previous question was why the *Zuo zhuan* adopted a method divergent from traditional interpretations. Now, the question evolves: since interpreting the main text through historical events is the key to unlocking the profound meanings within the *Chunqiu*, why did the other two commentaries not adopt this approach? This is an issue relating to the proactive side of the *Zuo zhuan* compiler's choice of the distinctive annotation method. A critical factor is the identity of the *Zuo zhuan*'s compiler as a court scribe. The method of interpreting the main text through events differs from traditional exegetical techniques, requiring the commentator to possess both a mastery of historical sources and a deep understanding of historical practice. Thus, employing this method involves both the consciousness and the capability of the compiler.

The *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentators were traditional Ruists, accustomed to interpreting the sage's intentions through a philological lens by focusing on sentences and words. In ancient times, historical sources were collected and archived by scribes, and the compiled state annals were not accessible to ordinary people, let alone the vast and complex array of various historical materials. Consequently, the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentators due to their identities and academic training lacked both an emphasis on and sensitivity to historical events. Additionally, they did not have access to the relevant historical sources. This lack of detailed information prevented them from forming a comprehensive understanding of the overall historical development of the Spring and Autumn period, further hindering their ability to accurately grasp the implicit connections between events and the rationale behind Confucius' moral judgments.

In contrast, the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*, who was a court scribe and possibly reviewed historical records with Confucius, possessed a clear understanding of the close relationship between the text's moral judgments and historical events. Accurately using relevant historical events to explain Confucius' judgments and the reasons behind them is an exceedingly challenging task. This process is akin to navigating a destination with dozens of paths, each heading in different directions. The commentator must reconstruct or identify a similar path to explain how Confucius traveled from point A to point B. While this task cannot be completed with absolute certainty, possessing comprehensive knowledge of each path and its related information is undoubtedly the most useful and essential condition for accurately reconstructing the intended path. In terms of materials, *Zuo zhuan*'s compiler had access to various bamboo slips, notes, and historical records from different periods, providing a solid foundation for supplementing textual lacunae and other details within the main text. However, merely having access to these materials was insufficient. More importantly, the compiler's familiarity with these materials, had an understanding of the writing conventions practiced by court scribes, and a comprehensive knowledge of historical events—collectively referred to as scribal consciousness—were crucial.

The *Chunqiu* encompasses a vast historical span of two hundred and forty years, during which countless events occurred, some of which are recorded in the *Chunqiu* while others are not, either in detail or entirety. The entries in the *Chunqiu* are formatted as discrete statements, with no explicit display of causal relationships between them. Reconstructing the logical development of events by supplementing these entries requires the commentator to meticulously categorize all events recorded over these two hundred and forty years, discern their internal connections, and precisely identify their sequence within a series of events. For the events

recorded in the main text, the commentator must determine whether these events exhibit interconnectivity and, if so, whether the relationships are direct or indirect. If these events form a larger series, the commentator must also identify any missing links that are not recorded in the main text and utilize available materials to fill these lacunae. These tasks demand a highly specialized knowledge and experience, an overall grasp of historical development, and the ability to discern whether the recorded content aligns with the historical process. The commentator's familiarity with scribal conventions and various historical materials is crucial for managing these details. For instance, as discussed in Chapter Two, the phrase "Receiving the earl of Beiyang in Yang" in the *Chunqiu* was misinterpreted by the *Gongyang zhuan* due to a lack of understanding of the scribal conventions and insufficient knowledge of historical details. Conversely, the *Zuo zhuan*, with its thorough knowledge of historical events, easily identified the writing pattern in the text and recognized that "Yang" was an alternate name for "Tang," demonstrating its deep knowledge of geographical context.

3.2.2 The Forming of Quasi-Narrative Construct: Detail vs. Structure

How did this unprecedented quasi-narrative style of the *Zuo zhuan* come into being? The key to understanding this may lie in its "distinctiveness." Regardless of subsequent interpretations of *Zuo zhuan*'s style, its uniqueness is undeniable. Scholars have rigorously studied and discussed its writing style precisely because it presents a very mature and comprehensive structure, one that had no recognizable precedent and no contemporaneous texts of a similar nature. The emergence of this unique method of expression must have been driven by distinctive factors, resulting in a significant transformation. Conventional practice would

typically yield predictable outcomes; however, it was precisely through pivotal shifts in this process that a new path could be forged within the existing literary framework.

What, then, is the most distinctive feature of the *Zuo zhuan* in its role as a commentary to the Classics? Based on the previous discussion, the primary factors are its method of interpreting the Classics through historical events and the historiographical awareness of its compiler. There are two notable “unconventional” aspects to consider. First, Confucius based his work on the state annals of Lu, the *Chunqiu*, which differ significantly in form and purpose from the *Shi*, *Shu*, *Li*, and *Yue*—texts previously utilized as instructional materials for royal education.

Traditionally, Ruists employed exegetical methods suited to texts like the *Shi*, *Shu*, and *Li*, which were instructional in nature and were also taught by Confucius to his disciples. Due to this tradition, Ruists continued to apply the same interpretative approaches to the *Chunqiu*, failing to recognize that a shift in focus and nature had occurred, rendering the traditional methods inappropriate. In contrast, the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*, with a profound understanding of historical matters, astutely recognized the uniqueness of the *Chunqiu* and opted to interpret it through the lens of historical events. But how exactly did these shifts contribute to the *Zuo zhuan* forming a structure that parallels the later concept of narrative? To delve deeper into this question, it is essential to momentarily pause our main discussion and identify the foundational elements that contribute to *Zuo zhuan*’s distinctive style.

Later scholars, when examining the writing style of the *Zuo zhuan*, invariably approach the discussion through the lens of narrative theory. This has resulted in a convergence of Chinese and Western perspectives and has sparked debates on “literary narrative” versus “historical narrative.” For instance, scholars such as C.Y. Wang and David Schaberg have applied Western literary narrative theory to analyze the elements present in *Zuo zhuan*’s writing. According to this

theory, the most fundamental unit of all narrative writings is “anecdote,” as narrative itself is a “story” told or written by a storyteller, making “fiction” an indispensable element.³⁸⁶ Building on this, C.Y. Wang perceptively identifies four universal elements in narrative texts—plot, character, viewpoint, and meaning—all of which are evident in the *Zuo zhuan*. Consequently, discussions from this perspective treat the events in the *Zuo zhuan* as individual stories with fictional foundations, leading some scholars to question the authenticity and reliability of the historical events described in the text.

Conversely, another group of scholars, including Chang Su-ch’ing, Li Lung-hsien, and Chang Kao-p’ing, argue that the *Zuo zhuan* should be considered a “historical narrative.” This perspective emphasizes that, unlike literary narratives which are often fictional, the historical events described in the *Zuo zhuan* are relatively credible and grounded in historical reality. Chang Su-ch’ing asserts that the term “narrative” in the Chinese context has a specific connotation, distinct from the fiction-based narrative theory prevalent in the Western context, and this distinction is exemplified by the writing style of the *Zuo zhuan*. In Chinese tradition, discussions of “narrative” are closely intertwined with historical writing, differing significantly from the Western notion of narrative. According to Chang, the genre of “historical narrative” not only possesses detailed plots and arrangements but also holds substantial historical value in its content.³⁸⁷ Similarly, Li Lung-hsien contends that not all narrative writings are fictional. In the Chinese tradition, historical authenticity and narrative writing are not mutually exclusive. By

³⁸⁶ For instance, Schaberg writes: “...but anything contributes to narratives, which are at base anecdotal.” As for anecdotes, he follows Joel Fineman’s definition: “anecdote is the primary means of projecting the illusion of the real and the particular within the historical text.” See Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 172–4; Wang, “Early Chinese Narrative: The Tso-Chuan as Example,” 3.

³⁸⁷ Chang Su-ch’ing, *Xushi yu jieshi—Zuo zhuan jingjie yanjiu*, 29–30.

referring to works like the *Zuo zhuan* as “historical narrative,” one acknowledges that historians, like literary writers, employ imagination and fictional elements in their descriptions of events. However, a fundamental difference remains: history records events that actually occurred, not fabricated ones, and describes elements such as space, sequence, and causality based on historical evidence. In contrast, literary narratives focus on events that could possibly occur, allowing for greater fictional latitude.³⁸⁸

It is worth noting that Andrew Plaks, in comparing Chinese and Western narrative traditions, also observes that Western theory places “storytelling” at the core, emphasizing the importance of “fiction” in narrative writing. In contrast, Chinese tradition prioritizes historiography in narrative writing, with fiction occupying a secondary position. Therefore, in the dissemination of Chinese narratives, “seeking truth” becomes a crucial objective. Because these two narrative traditions are rooted in different core principles, Chinese scholars generally accept the authenticity of the recorded content in narratives and do not excessively question or emphasize their fictionality, as Western scholars do.³⁸⁹ This view largely aligns with those of Li and Chang.

Regardless of the perspective adopted, these various interpretations are fundamentally derived from recent Western narrative theorists, who retroactively apply modern theoretical frameworks to ancient contexts. Terms such as “literary narrative” and “historical narrative,” as well as their associated theories, did not exist during the Pre-Qin period and remained strange concepts to *Zuo zhuan*’s compiler. These theoretical frameworks are primarily tools that help

³⁸⁸ Li, *Xianqin lianghan lishi xushi yulun*, 507–8; 542–3.

³⁸⁹ Plaks, “Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative,” 312–4.

contemporary scholars analyze distinctive characteristics presented in the *Zuo zhuan* and provide interpretations that resonate with modern viewpoints.

When we adjust our perspective, it becomes evident that while we cannot directly apply modern theories to define the development and nature of early texts, the features identified by these theories do, to some extent, reflect the actual content of those texts. The major conflict between Western narrative theory and the Chinese concept of “historical narrative” lies in the degree of “fiction” involved. Despite this, there is a consensus that the *Zuo zhuan* demonstrates core traits of narrative writing. If we set aside the controversial notion of “fiction” and further deconstruct narrative theory, we discover that at its core, narrative fundamentally concerns itself with events. Plaks argues that our common understanding of “narrative” is that it is a literary mode that “relates a series of human events.”³⁹⁰ However, records such as those found in the Lu annals are also events; for these events to form a coherent narrative, they must be meaningfully connected through logical sequences. This approach aligns with C.Y. Wang’s discussion on narrative elements such as plot and meaning, which relates to the development and arrange of events for a particular purpose. Furthermore, not just any events are worthy of recording; they are recorded because they result from significant human actions. Since narratives involve human agents, the descriptions of events naturally incorporate character portrayals.

From this perspective, one may say that narratives exist inherently in our lives; they are simply a latent presence that writing makes explicit. Thus, narrative is not solely a fictional structure devised by writers; it is fundamentally entwined with the natural world. David Wang 王德威 contends: “If we view history as a record of past human activities or a form of ideological

³⁹⁰ Plaks, “Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative,” 314.

expression, it inevitably involves the process of comparing and arranging individual events and thoughts to create a narrative sequence. In other words, history can be seen as a type of narrative writing with its own discourse style.”³⁹¹ To slightly modify this insightful argument, it is not merely historical processes that are narrative in nature; the very existence of events embodies a narrative with inherent causality and coherence. When expressed through language, this narrative may manifest in diverse forms, whether by disrupting, maintaining, or enhancing its continuity. The specific mode of presentation is dictated by the narrator’s objectives, underscoring the interplay between narrative structure and the writing purpose.

Returning to the primary discussion, the quasi-narrative style of the *Zuo zhuan* is attributable to its mode of annotating the Classics through historical events, which involves supplementing both the fragmented development of these events and the overly simplified details found in the original texts. Building on C.Y. Wang’s theory, narrative elements can broadly be categorized into three types: plot and structure, which constitute the narrative’s skeleton; characters, spatial settings, and locations, which form the narrative’s flesh; and perspectives and meanings, which dictate the selection of details and the arrangement of the narrative structure. *Zuo zhuan*’s mode of annotation aptly provides both structure and rich detail required for narrative writing.

The *Zuo zhuan* enhances the main text in two primary ways: it supplements specific events and elaborates on the processes through which these events unfold. The main text,

³⁹¹ “我们若视历史为人类以往活动的记录或理念的一种类型，必然会牵涉到将个别事件、思维组织排比，以形成叙述串联的过程。换句话说，历史可视为一种拥有本身话语类型的叙事陈述。” David Der-wei Wang, *Xiangxiang zhongguo de fangfa*—*Lishi, xiaoshuo, xushi* 想象中国的方法——历史·小说·叙事 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2003), 299.

constrained by stringent writing conventions, reduces expansive historical records into concise entries, retaining only the most crucial bullet points that typically include only the principal actors and the locations directly of the events. The compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*, employing scribal notes and other archival materials, enriches these narratives by filling in additional contexts, such as the causes and consequences of the events, other significant figures involved, and further geographical details. This approach transforms brief, isolated entries into comprehensive and logically coherent narratives.

To illustrate this point, consider an entry from the fifteenth year of Duke Xuan in the *Chunqiu*. In that year, the state of Jin waged war against the state of Lu 潞, leading to Lu's destruction and the capture of its ruler, Ying'er 嬰兒.³⁹² The *Zuo zhuan* provides an in-depth narrative that delineates the rationale behind Jin's invasion. It appears that the conflict was precipitated by Feng Shu 豐舒, a prominent and powerful Lu minister, who murdered the primary consort of the Lu king—a woman who was also the elder sister of Duke Jing of Jin. Despite this provocation, Jin's response was not immediate. The narrative details a lengthy internal debate among Jin's ministers, reflecting on the strategic implications of attacking Lu. Many ministers were apprehensive about directly confronting Feng Shu, given his renowned capabilities, and proposed waiting until his retirement. Bo Zong 伯宗, however, advocated for immediate action against Feng Shu, citing numerous offenses by the Di people. He argued that moral transgressions must be met with punitive measures, regardless of the perpetrator's strength

³⁹² The original text reads as follows: “In the sixth month, on the *guimao* day, the Jin army annihilated the Lu clan of Chi Di, and returned with the king of Lu, Ying'er.” 六月癸卯，晉師滅赤狄潞氏，以潞子嬰兒歸。 *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 24, 764.

or talent, asserting that talent that contravenes moral norms is inherently destructive. Bo Zong's persuasion ultimately swayed Duke Jing to wage war on Lu. Following Lu's defeat, Feng Shu fled to the state of Wei 衛, but was subsequently extradited to Jin and executed.³⁹³

This account from the *Zuo zhuan* contrasts sharply with the straightforward military campaign suggested by the main text entry, which might be interpreted as merely a hegemonic maneuver by Jin to conquer another state. Formally, the main text presents the event as primarily involving Duke Jing of Jin and the king of Lu. Through its detailed supplements from various historical records and archives, the *Zuo zhuan* reinterprets this simplistic interpretation and reveals a narrative rooted in vengeance. The event was not arbitrary but was triggered by specific, well-documented provocations. The process is also noteworthy. The veracity of Bo Zong's persuasive discourse is difficult to ascertain—it could reflect some artistic intervention taken by *Zuo zhuan*'s compiler to impart moral lessons, or it could derive from documented hearsays that the compiler faithfully integrated into the narrative. Regardless, this discussion exposes the spectrum of opinions within Jin at the time, which is essential for understanding its political dynamics. In the narrative, the conflict centers not on Duke Jing and the king of Lu, but rather between Duke Jing and Feng Shu. Initiated by Feng Shu's actions, the conflict ultimately culminates in his death.

The entries supplemented in the commentary form a complete storyline rich with characters, each defined by their role in the unfolding events. This multifaceted event spans several moments and locations, crafting a dynamic narrative space. The causal relationships are meticulously delineated in the commentary, demonstrating the fundamental characteristics of

³⁹³ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, juan 24, 769–71.

narrative writing. These detailed descriptions stem from historical notes that the compiler, acting as a court scribe, thoughtfully selected and integrated, enriching the sparse annalistic entries to create a context where characters, plot, and setting are vividly brought to life.

In addition to supplementing details, the *Zuo zhuan* plays a pivotal role in bridging gaps across a series of related events, aiming to ensure the events' logical progression is coherent and clear. The structure of a text is predominantly reflected through the strategic arrangement of its content. The narrative structure is a well-ordered structure, possessing a clear beginning, development, climax, and conclusion. Events in the main text often exist in isolation, making it challenging to discern the connections between them. The *Zuo zhuan* addresses this issue by supplementing numerous passages that explicitly clarify the relationships among related events while also filling in many missing links in the narrative.

For example, the main text from the twenty-second year of Duke Xi records two events: an alliance of the states of Song 宋, Wei, Xu 許, and Teng 滕 against Zheng 鄭 in the summer, and another from winter details a battle at Hong 泓 that concludes with Song's defeat.³⁹⁴ At first glance, these entries might seem unrelated, but they are intricately connected through several critical supplements provided by the *Zuo zhuan*, forming a cohesive narrative structure. The first addition, set before the attack on Zheng by the Song alliance, recounts the incident of the earl of Zheng's visit to the state of Chu, which precipitated the duke of Song's decision to attack Zheng. The second supplement, positioned just before the Chu-Song battle, clarifies the immediate cause of the conflict: Chu's intervention to aid Zheng. The grand marshal of Song strongly advised

³⁹⁴ Hong is the name of a river. It is approximately located in modern Tuocheng 拓城 county, Henan 河南 province. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 15, 460.

against direct confrontation with Chu, contending that the Heaven has long abandoned the descendants of Shang 商, the duke's ambition to revive the lineage contravenes Heaven's will. Nonetheless, Duke Shang of Song 宋殤公 opted to engage in battle. elaborates on the progression of the battle, offering detailed reasons for Song's defeat. It highlights Duke Shang's rigid adherence to ritual propriety, including his refusal to launch surprise attacks before Chu forces were properly arrayed. Following the battle, Song's defeat, Duke Gong's injury, and the public condemnation are described in detail. The account concludes with a thorough critique by Zi Yu 子魚, which emphasizes Duke Shang's failure to display the ruthlessness expected of a hegemon, maintaining instead commitment to righteousness.³⁹⁵

Overall, the *Zuo zhuan* supplements the narrative by focusing on three main aspects: the event's initial cause, the causal links between successive incidents, and the ultimate significance that emerges from the outcomes. These additions effectively weave disparate and seemingly unrelated events into a cohesive narrative marked by development, upheaval, and reflection. Furthermore, the supplementary entries provide extensive background details, introducing secondary characters like Zi Yu and the grand marshal, who are absent from the main text. The commentary also incorporates elements of foreshadowing and enhances the dramatic impact, making the narrative more compelling. For instance, Zi Yu predicted at the beginning of Duke Shang's attack on Zheng that this would be the source of all calamities, a prediction that comes to fruition with Duke Shang's defeat, as narrated through Zi Yu's critiques.³⁹⁶ The grand

³⁹⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 15, 460–4.

³⁹⁶ Zi Yu commented on Song's attack on Zheng, stating: "This is what we refer to when we say, 'Calamities reside here.'" 所謂禍在此矣。 *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 15, 460.

marshal's admonitions reveal Duke Shang's true intentions and subtly foreshadow the disastrous outcome of the battle. These prophecies, while possibly artistic embellishments by the compiler, are centered around existing content in the main text. Their purpose is not solely for dramatic effect but carefully integrated with the existing content to reconstruct the progression of events in detail, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of the lessons and critiques embedded within the narrative.

The *Zuo zhuan* places great emphasis on causality and logical coherence. The instances cited are merely illustrative one of its methods to enhance the main text; other include detailing outcomes or explicating initial causes. Entries that might appear isolated or disjointed in the main text gain continuity and completeness through the *Zuo zhuan*'s supplements, transforming them into various small, interconnected event sequences. This supplementation not only fosters an orderly exposition of events—encompassing their initiation, process, and outcomes—but also contributes significantly to the text's manifestation of a quasi-narrative structure. Furthermore, because the supplemented events are not mentioned in the main text, this results in the presence of entries that do not correspond to the *Chunqiu*, a phenomenon that will be explored in depth in Chapter Four.

While interpreting the main text through the lens of historical events lends ostensible narrative traits—detail and structure—to the *Zuo zhuan*, the core aspects of “viewpoint” and “meaning” hinge on the “subtle expressions of significant meanings” conveyed in the *Chunqiu*. Often, scholars analyze the *Zuo zhuan* as if it were an independent work, regardless of its connections to the *Chunqiu*. This approach focuses on extracting narrative elements from the commentary, interpreting “meanings” or “moral judgments” as reflective of the compiler's intentions. While the *Zuo zhuan* contains judgments that deviate from orthodox Ruist thought—

likely representing the compiler's personal evaluations—it primarily serves to elucidate the commendations and criticisms embedded in the main text. This explication of *Chunqiu*'s moral evaluations is the fundamental reason for the extensive detailing of events within the *Zuo zhuan*. Therefore, the distinctive quasi-narrative style of the *Zuo zhuan* emerges from the interplay between the *Chunqiu* and the commentary, a synergy that shapes its unique narrative structure. This distinct structure would not reach its final form if either element were removed from the equation.

In summary, the emergence of the quasi-narrative style in the *Zuo zhuan* is contingent upon its role in elucidating the event-focused *Chunqiu*. It was the *Chunqiu* that took Lu official annals as its foundation; thus, the event-based framework was already established by the time Confucius edited the annals. This initiated the earliest quasi-narrative writing in China, developing through several stages. Initially, the chronologically ordered state records of Lu provided an implicit framework suitable for narrative formation. Confucius' critical editing of the annals involved selecting portions of these records, reorganizing them into a coherent whole, and embedding moral judgments. This transformation turned the *Chunqiu* from a collection of disconnected historical records into a unified whole with moral implications. While the narrative structure had not yet fully formed, the foundational conditions for its development were already established. Ultimately, the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan* refined this structure by adopting the method of interpreting the main text through historical events. This approach involved filling lacunae in the text to add essential details and coherence, thereby clarifying the logical progression of events. This process clarified the logical progression of events and made the underlying moral judgments explicitly visible.

The success of this final step was largely due to the compiler's role as a court scribe, which provided him with the capability to recognize the significance of events in annotating the *Chunqiu*. Equipped with extensive knowledge and resources, the compiler was able to explore intrinsic connections between events. His role as a court scribe was not only evident in his acute understanding of event relevance but also in his narrative approach. The primary goal was to elucidate the meanings within the main text, requiring a detailed explanation of events to expose hidden meanings. Decisions about which events to include, how to sequence them to convey specific meanings, and how to judge their rationality and significance were all informed by the compiler's deep understanding of historical documentation and scribal practices. Thus, the quasi-narrative structure of the *Zuo zhuan* is a product of a court scribe's writing method and thoughtful historical analysis, integrated with elucidative objectives. Its realization depended on an intricate interweaving of commentary with the main text, ensuring tight integration with the *Chunqiu* to form its narrative structure.

Chapter Four: Commentaries without Main Text Counterparts 無經之傳

As previously discussed, the formation of the quasi-narrative structure in the *Zuo zhuan* originates from the interpretation of the principles and appraisals within the *Chunqiu*. This development was facilitated by the unique perspective and mindset of its compiler's scribal identity, which diverged from those of traditional Ruist scholars. His distinctive approach enabled a new angle in interpreting the main text. The confluence of these factors laid the groundwork for the *Zuo zhuan* to pioneer an unprecedented method of exegeting the Classics. Specifically, the unique quasi-narrative style of the *Zuo zhuan* was achieved through the materials the compiler had access to and his selective use of them. However, what truly characterizes the distinctive exegetical method of the *Zuo zhuan* and endows it with its renowned narrative literary qualities is the *wujing zhi zhuan* 無經之傳 (commentaries without main text counterpart). This section will provide a detailed analysis of the essence of *wujing zhi zhuan* and its significant contribution to the formation of the distinctive structure in the *Zuo zhuan* through a comprehensive examination and classification of this concept.

Discussions regarding *wujing zhi zhuan* primarily revolve around whether the *Zuo zhuan* is a commentary on the *Chunqiu* main text.³⁹⁷ In order to comprehend the essence of these commentaries analyze their role in the composition of the *Zuo zhuan* it is essential to understand the historical conception of the term and the context in which related discussions have taken place. Since Ban Gu's compilation of the "Yiwen zhi" of *Han shu* in the Han dynasty, the *Zuo zhuan* has been listed alongside the *Gongyang zhuan*, the *Guliang zhuan*, the *Zoushi zhuan* 鄒氏

³⁹⁷ To be succinct, I shall use the abbreviation WJZZ to refer to *wujing zhi zhuan*, or "commentaries without main text counterparts" in all subsequent discussion.

傳, and the *Jiashi zhuan* 夾氏傳 under the title “Chunqiu Gujing” 春秋古經.³⁹⁸ These five commentaries are collectively known as the Five Commentaries of the *Chunqiu* 春秋五傳. In the preface to the “Yiwen zhi,” Ban Gu explicitly stated that “The *Chunqiu* is divided into five,”³⁹⁹ thereby providing evidence for the existence of the Five Commentaries. However, by the time of the Eastern Han dynasty, both the *Zoushi zhuan* and *Jiashi zhuan* had been lost, leaving only the *Zuo zhuan*, *Gongyang zhuan*, and *Guliang zhuan* as the Three Commentaries of the *Chunqiu* 春秋三傳. While there has been more than two thousand years of endless discussions and debates about the *Chunqiu* main text, the *Gongyang* and the *Guliang* have never been questioned regarding their relationship to the *Chunqiu*. However, the complex nature of the *Zuo zhuan* has posed multiple difficulties for interpretation due to the text’s comprehensiveness, unique narration, and distinct mode of annotating the main text. One of the arguments against the classification of the *Zuo zhuan* as a commentary on the *Chunqiu* main text is the inclusion of passages that do not pertain to the *Chunqiu* text.

The essence of the term *wujing zhi zhuan* is precisely captured by its name. It generally refers to a group of entries in the *Zuo zhuan* without a corresponding text in the *Chunqiu* main text. These entries often provide detailed accounts of historical events in one or several paragraphs without explicit explanation of their relationship to the main text or the justification for their inclusion. This feature has made WJZZ seem obtrusive, adding to the commentaries’ appeal as independent of the main text. Notable examples of WJZZ include the entry recounting

³⁹⁸ This list is based on Liu Xin’s *Qi lue*, which is no longer extant. See *Han shu*, *juan* 30, 1701; 1712–1714.

³⁹⁹ “春秋分為五,” *Han shu*, *juan* 30, 1701.

the exchange of hostages between the Zhou court and the state of Zheng 鄭 recorded in the third year of Duke Yin,⁴⁰⁰ as well as a lengthy dialogue in that same year between a Wei official, Shi Que 石碯 and the Wei prince Zhou Xu 衛公子州吁.⁴⁰¹ It is worth noting that Shi Que's admonishment of Prince Zhou Xu occurred prior to the succession of Duke Huan of Wei 衛桓公. Duke Huan was installed in the thirty-seventh year of King Ping of Zhou, while the year in which this event was recorded in the commentary is the fifty-first year of King Ping. Evidently, this event is a flashback to an earlier episode that was deliberately placed here by *Zuo zhuan's* compiler.

Despite being scattered across different years, some events recounted in WJZZ reveal strong correlations. They can often be extracted from the text and rearranged into a cohesive whole, thereby uncovering the full development of a larger event. For instance, the fifth year of Duke Yin records an attack led by Earl Zhuang of Quwo 曲沃莊伯 on the city of Yi 翼 with assistance from the states of Zheng and Xing 邢.⁴⁰² Subsequent events are recorded in the sixth year of Duke Yin, the second and the third year of Duke Huan, respectively.⁴⁰³ The combination of these four incidents constitute an exhaustive account of how Duke Wu of Jin 晉武公, as a collateral descendant from Quwo, supplanted the heir designate, and laid the foundation for the prosperity of the state of Jin. These events took place before the establishment of official diplomatic relations between the states of Jin and Lu. As such, the *Chunqiu* did not incorporate

⁴⁰⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 3, 84–88.

⁴⁰¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 3, 90–93.

⁴⁰² *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 3, 111.

⁴⁰³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 4, 117; juan 5, 175–178; juan 6, 182–183.

them into its account, as Lu lacked an official channel to receive reports on matters related to Jin. It can be surmised that the content in the *Zuo zhuan* was supplemented by its compiler through other records. Given the various instances of WJZZ's detachment from the *Chunqiu* main text, many scholars have questioned the relationship of the *Zuo zhuan* to the *Chunqiu*.

4.1 The Reception History of WJZZ

Few pre-modern scholars have raised questions about *wujing zhi zhuan*. Those who challenged *Zuo zhuan*'s authenticity using WJZZ as evidence mainly concentrated on establishing it as a historical record rather than a canonical text. Quan Deyu 權德與 (759–818), who was the prime minister at the court of Emperor Xianzong of the Tang dynasty 唐憲宗 (r. 712–756), characterized the *Zuo zhuan* as well as Du Yu's annotation as follows: “*Zuoshi* has ‘commentaries without main text counterparts.’ Du’s work then ‘rearranged [Zuo’s] commentaries to divide the main text.’ They are indeed splendid and opulent, but I worry that they have lost the fundamental.”⁴⁰⁴ This line possibly represents one of the earliest extant passages to explicitly mention the term WJZZ in criticizing the *Zuo zhuan*.

Another important figure who explicitly rejected *Zuo zhuan*'s relationship to the *Chunqiu* using WJZZ as direct evidence is Cui Shi 崔適 (1852–1924), who was greatly influenced by the arguments put forth by Liu Fenglu and Kang Youwei. In addition to fully embracing Liu and Kang's viewpoints, Cui Shi also identified four types of texts that Liu Xin was accused of

⁴⁰⁴ “《左氏》有無經之傳，杜氏又錯傳分經。誠多艷富，慮失根本。” See “Mingjing cewen qidao” 明經策問七道, in *Quan Zaizhi wenji* 權載之文集, in *Sibu congkan chubian*, juan 40, 16b.

“borrowing” from the *Guo yu* to form the *Zuo zhuan*. Of these, WJZZ was the first to be questioned. According to Cui, “The first is called commentaries without main text counterparts...As for commentary that elucidates the main text, if there is no corresponding main text, then it cannot be considered a commentary. It is thus part of the *Guo yu*.”⁴⁰⁵ This statement marked the first time in two millennia that a scholar explicitly referred to WJZZ, a category that was only obliquely mentioned in previous discussions, as primary evidence questioning *Zuo zhuan*’s relationship to the *Chunqiu*.

The debate over whether Liu Xin drew material from the *Guo yu* to forge the *Zuo zhuan* has not yielded compelling evidence and has not gained widespread acceptance among later scholars. Nonetheless, many other views put forth by Liu, Kang, and Cui, including the notion that “entries without main text counterparts are not commentaries on the main text,” have been embraced by modern scholars, particularly those affiliated with the New Text tradition and the Doubting Antiquity school.⁴⁰⁶ For instance, Zhao Guangxian 趙光賢 (1910–2003) conducted a comprehensive analysis contending that the narratives in the *Zuo zhuan* can be considered as an independent whole. According to Zhao, there are three main pieces of evidence that refute the claim that the *Zuo zhuan* is a commentary on the *Chunqiu* main text. First, there are several texts in the main text without corresponding text in the *Zuo zhuan*. Secondly, the commentary contains

⁴⁰⁵ “一曰無經之傳...夫傳以釋經，無經則非傳也。是國語也。” See Cui Shi 崔適, *Shiji tanyuan* 史記探源, *juan* 1, 3a–b.

⁴⁰⁶ For a comprehensive study on the *Zuo zhuan* scholarship from 1919 to 2009, see Zhang Xinke 張新科 and Wang Xiao’ou 王曉鷗 ed., *Zuo zhuan xueshu dang’an* (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2016). See also, Shen Yucheng 沈玉成 and Liu Ning 劉寧, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan xueshi gao* 春秋左傳學史稿 (Jiangsu: Jiangsu chubanshe, 1992).

WJZZ. Lastly, Zhao points to discrepancies between the calendars in the main text and those found in the *Zuo zhuan*.⁴⁰⁷

It appears that, for scholars who refute *Zuo zhuan*'s commentarial status, their most compelling piece of evidence is the existence of *wujing zhi zhuan*. While there is a diversity of scholarship related to this topic, it is ultimately founded on one straightforward rationale: entries without main text counterparts are not commentaries on the main text. This view on the nature of WJZZ has been taken for granted by many modern scholars and continues to form the foundation for new arguments challenging different aspects of the *Zuo zhuan*. However, few have thoroughly examined the nature and significance of WJZZ, resulting in the neglect of a critical issue that cast doubt on its relationship to the *Chunqiu*.

4.1.1 Controversies Regarding the Dispute over WJZZ: Commentaries with Main text Counterparts vs. Commentaries without Main text Counterparts

A thorough examination of the aforementioned discussions reveals a critical issue, which is that views challenging the nature of the *Zuo zhuan* have not taken into account a crucial premise: the existence of a significant corpus of entries in the *Zuo Zhuan* with main text counterparts. The identification of “commentaries without main text counterparts” is only plausible by comparing them with the other commentaries that do have their counterparts in the main text. This problem raises several critical issues. For instance, why do WJZZ exist when most of the text is comprised of entries with main text counterparts? Furthermore, theories

⁴⁰⁷ For detailed discussion, see Zhao Guangxian 趙光賢, “Zuo zhuan bianzhuan kao” 《左傳》編撰考, *Zuoguo lishi yanjiu wenxian yanjiu jikan* 2 (1981): 135–153.

posited by Cui Shi, Zhao Guangxian, and Hu Nianyi, which propose that the historical accounts and WJZZ constitute an earlier historical record reflecting the original state of the *Zuo zhuan*, must address the rationale behind the compiler's decision to leave a segment of the text unedited. This creates an inconsistency about which later scholars raised questions. This is particularly significant considering that much of the text had already undergone the process of editing. Unfortunately, these important issues have been left unaddressed and even unnoticed in previous scholarship that rejects the relationship of WJZZ to the main text. Consequently, explanations provided without a thorough examination of these questions cannot withstand scrutiny.

For instance, Liu Fenglu took issue with the name of the *Zuo zhuan* and argued that a different text called the *Zuoshi chunqiu* 左氏春秋 existed during the Pre-Qin period. Drawing on the ordering of individual words in the name, Liu posited that the nature of the text is comparable to that of the *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 and the *Yushi chunqiu* 虞氏春秋 and shares a significant resemblance to the *Guo yu*. Regarding the better-known name the *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan*, Liu argued that it was a forgery by Liu Xin, who not only falsified the text but also changed its name. However, surmising that a text is a forgery based solely on the variety of its titles is unconvincing. First, it is difficult to determine the basis for the claim that the *Zuo zhuan* was originally named the *Zuoshi Chunqiu*.⁴⁰⁸ Liu did not provide further evidence to indicate his

⁴⁰⁸ Liu argued that the *Zuo zhuan* is juxtaposed with the *Duoshi zhuan* 鐸氏傳 and *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, which proves that it is not an annotation of the *Chunqiu*. Thus, the title of the book was originally called the *Zuoshi Chunqiu*. Liu did not clarify the source he was referring to in his discussion of the aforementioned texts. It is possible that Liu was referring to Ban Gu's listing in the "Yiwen zhi," as this is the earliest source that provides a complete record of works in the *Chunqiu* category. However, in Ban Gu's text, the *Zuo zhuan* is clearly written as *Zuoshi zhuan* and is listed as the first title of the *Chunqiu* category, followed by the *Gongyang zhuan* and then the *Guliang zhuan*. Therefore, it is unclear

source for arguing that the *Zuoshi Chunqiu* was the earliest and the only name for the *Zuo zhuan* at a certain stage. Moreover, it is common knowledge that several early Chinese texts are referred to by multiple titles. One notable example is the *Shi jing* 詩經, which is also known as the *Shi* 詩 (The Songs), the *Shi sanbai* 詩三百 (The three hundred songs), and the *Sanbai pian* 三百篇 (The three hundred poetic pieces). Similarly, a survey of the ways in which the *Zuo zhuan* was mentioned in the past reveals a list of several interchangeable names, such as the *Zuoshi zhuan* 左氏傳, the *Zuoshi Chunqiu zhuan* 左氏春秋傳, and the *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan* 春秋左氏傳, among others. However, no special significance has been associated with these variations.

Closer examination of the latter part of Liu's argument raises doubts about its validity. The *Yanzi chunqiu* is a text that records the deeds and utterances of Yanzi 晏子 (578–500 BC), similar in nature to a historical biography.⁴⁰⁹ The *Yushi chunqiu*, on the other hand, is more problematic, for the text is no longer extant. The only information available regarding its nature is derived from the study by the Qing scholar Ma Guohan, who summarized the *Yushi chunqiu* as a text that records the various practices of the “horizontal and vertical alliance” 合縱連橫 of the persuaders during the Warring States period.⁴¹⁰ As for the *Guo yu*, it is a text written in a “form

whether Liu Fenglu made an error in his interpretation of the source or whether he was referring to an unidentified source. See Liu, *Zuoshi chunqiu kaozheng*, 46. *Han shu*, *juan* 30, 1712–1714.

⁴⁰⁹ Exactly who compiled this text is a subject of debate. It can be ascertained that Yanzi could not have authored the entire text, as much of the content was written after his death. Some scholars argue that it was compiled by Mohists, while others contend that it was compiled by Ruists. For more details, please refer to David Knechtges and Taiping Chang ed., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, vol.3 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1868–9.

⁴¹⁰ Ma, *Yuhan shanfang ji yishu*, *juan* 65, in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, v.1204, 106–109.

in which states are separated” 國別體, which records the speeches and conversations of rulers and statesmen in the Pre-Qin period. It is evident that the three texts mentioned by Liu Fenglu represent entirely different works in terms of nature, genre, writing style, and content. It is therefore reasonable to question what type of work Liu was referring to in his characterization of the original form of the *Zuo zhuan*. Gu Jiegang presented an improved version of this argument in the early twentieth century, suggesting that the *Zuo zhuan* was originally a miscellaneous history, similar to the *Guo yu*, *Zhanguo ce*, *Shuo yuan* 說苑, *Xin xu* 新序, *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, and others.⁴¹¹ While Gu’s explanation is more specific than Liu’s, it still suffers from the same logical fallacy as its predecessor. Even setting aside the irreconcilable differences between the compositional format of the *Zuo zhuan* and that of the aforementioned texts, those texts cannot be classified into a single category. By uniformly referring to these as “unclassified histories” 雜史, Gu Jiegang creates more questions that require further explanation.⁴¹² For example, Shen Yucheng 沈玉成 (1932–1995) had noted that the Pre-Qin miscellaneous history that supposedly represents the original form of the *Zuo zhuan* is only a product of the imagination of the “Doubting Antiquity” scholars. To this day, no one has been able to define the features of the text or when or where it came into existence.⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ Gu Jiegang and Liu Qiyu 劉起鈞, *Chunqiu sanzhuang ji Guoyu zhi zonghe yanjiu* 春秋三傳及國語之綜合研究 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1988), 30–40.

⁴¹² For instance, Gu would have to define what he meant by the term “unclassified history,” since some of the texts he mentioned clearly belong to other categories. He would also have to provide evidence for the existence of individually compiled histories in the Pre-Qin era and describe in detail the circumstances of their formation and circulation.

⁴¹³ Shen Yucheng and Liu Ning, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan xueshi gao*, 375.

Furthermore, with regard to the argument posited by scholars like Gu Jiegang and Hu Nianyi, which contends that the exegetical passages in the *Zuo zhuan* were later interpolations as discussed in section 3.1.1, there are questions surrounding some of the details, and the specific issues raised are worthy of further investigation. However, utilizing this argument as the basis for asserting that patterns such as “the Gentleman says” did not exist during the time of *Zuo zhuan*’s composition seems arbitrary. Yang Xiangkui 楊向奎 (1910–2000) published an article in 1936 titled “Lun *Zuo zhuan* zhi xingzhi ji qi yu *Guo yu* zhi guanxi” 論《左傳》之性質及其與《國語》之關係 (Discourse on the nature of the *Zuo zhuan* and its relationship with the *Guo yu*), which presents extensive evidence to support the authenticity of the phrases “Confucius says” and “the Gentleman says” as original sections of the *Zuo zhuan*.⁴¹⁴

In 2022, Xu Yuan 徐淵 conducted a meticulous textual analysis of the *Zuo zhuan* by classifying its commentaries into six subtypes, observing their combination patterns and ratios, and cross-examining the results with other Pre-Qin and excavated texts. Xu posits that there is compelling evidence for the existence of comments in the form of “the Gentleman says” before the Han dynasty and that they most likely predate texts such as the *Han Feizi* and the *Yanzi chunqiu*.⁴¹⁵ While an in-depth discussion of the authenticity of the exegetical passages in the *Zuo zhuan* would require a separate scholarly study, it is undeniable that the findings presented by

⁴¹⁴ Yang Xiangkui 楊向奎, “Lun *Zuo zhuan* zhi xingzhi ji qi yu *Guoyu* zhi guanxi” 論《左傳》之性質及其與《國語》之關係, *Shixue jikan* 2 (1936): 41–81.

⁴¹⁵ Xu Yuan 徐淵, “Chunqiu *Zuo zhuan* chengshu ji qi butong shuxing wenben zucheng guanxi kaosuo” 《春秋左傳》成書及其不同屬性文本組成關係考索, in *Xin jingxue* 新經學, Deng Bingyuan 鄧秉元 ed., vol.9 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2022), 77–99.

scholars such as Yang and Xu provide compelling arguments that suggest a much more favorable circumstance for the authenticity of the *Zuo zhuan* as a commentary on the *Chunqiu* main text, thereby rendering the arguments put forth by Gu Jiegang and Hu Nianyi less convincing.

4.1.2 Pro-WJZZ Renditions: Du Yu and Kong Yingda

Regarding the purpose of WJZZ, Du Yu offered a comprehensive explanation in his preface to the *Zuo zhuan*. He began by distinguishing four types of commentaries found in the text including: those with main text counterparts and those without; those with commentaries that precede or succeed the main text texts; and commentaries that show variation in wording. Despite their different forms, Du Yu contended that all of these commentaries served the sole purpose of explicating the *Chunqiu* main text.⁴¹⁶ Furthermore, he argued that the particular style of commentary observed in the *Zuo zhuan* was an inevitable result, rather than an arbitrary one. *Zuo zhuan*'s mode of annotation was influenced by two factors. First, as a scribe, possibly in the Lu court, Zuo Qiuming had the opportunity to personally examine a copious collection of texts allowing him to “exhaustively record events and speeches” 廣記備言. Moreover, the accounts recorded in the *Chunqiu* are summaries of various historical narratives, details of which are too intricate to be comprehensively documented.⁴¹⁷

As discussed in Chapter One, the state records of the Pre-Qin period followed strict standards. Matters were initially recorded on separate *jian* (bamboo slips), and important affairs were later transcribed onto *ce* (a larger unit of *jian* consisting of multiple bamboo slips bound

⁴¹⁶ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 14.

⁴¹⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 15.

with cord to form a volume). Consequently, official annals of states only contain concise summaries deduced from more detailed records of events.⁴¹⁸ Furthermore, Confucius' editorial focus in the *Chunqiu* was on conveying his reflections and teachings observed from past events, rather than on the details themselves. Nevertheless, later scholars seeking a comprehensive understanding of the editorial standards and the teachings set forth in the main text must ascertain the omitted details that are relevant to the formation of those judgments and standards. Therefore, while the utilization of WJZZ, along with other types of commentaries identified by Du Yu may seem convoluted in elucidating the main text, its purpose is profound and far-reaching. A thorough comprehension of these commentaries can enable later scholars to “trace beginnings and sum up endings, seek for the branches, and pursue the exhaustive end.”⁴¹⁹

In accordance with Du Yu's observations, Kong Yingda explicitly noted the presence of WJZZ in the *Zuo huan* alongside the main text without commentary counterparts. The former serves to “expand the words” 廣文 by citing various sources and collecting ample accounts and examples of the past. Conversely, the absence of corresponding commentary in the latter is attributable to Zuo Qiuming's lack of knowledge regarding the specific event, rendering him reluctant to offer tentative, inaccurate annotations.⁴²⁰ In his conclusion, Kong Yingda contends: “The purpose of the [various types of] commentaries is solely to exhaustively explicate the meaning of the main text. Thus, these writings have taken on different forms. That is all.”⁴²¹ This

⁴¹⁸ For detailed discussions on the Pre-Qin scribal standards, please see section 1.2 of Chapter One of this dissertation.

⁴¹⁹ “原始要終，尋其枝葉，究其所窮” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 14.

⁴²⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 27.

⁴²¹ “傳期於釋盡經意而已，是故立文不同也。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 14.

citation precisely grasps the ultimate nature and purpose of *Zuo zhuan*'s "unconventional" style of annotation.⁴²² Such commentaries in the *Zuo zhuan*, regardless of whether they have main text counterparts or not, and whether they follow the corresponding years or break away from the order of related main text texts, serve as distinct techniques utilized by the compiler to attain the ultimate objective of comprehensively expounding the meaning conveyed in the *Chunqiu*. As a result, these commentaries play a pivotal role in enabling subsequent generations to grasp the profound teachings of Confucius.

The essential nature of WJZZ was recognized as early as the Tang and Song periods, and its function as a literary technique was unequivocally articulated in the works of Du and Kong. Nonetheless, many later scholars have overlooked its function and refused to consider it as an organic whole, which resulted in various doubts and questions. Despite the numerous arguments that attempted to use WJZZ as compelling evidence to discredit the *Zuo zhuan*, only a few scholars, such as Zhao Shengqun 趙生群 and Zhao Boxiong, have made an effort to defend it.⁴²³ These two scholars have each written a study of *Zuo zhuan*'s WJZZ, elaborating on the various circumstances for utilizing it and its relationship to the main text through meticulous classification and analysis. In conclusion, both works present a cohesive discourse that attests to

⁴²² In this context, I have enclosed the term "unconventional" in quotation marks since for something to be considered unconventional, there must first be a convention. However, as explained in an earlier section of this chapter, the conventional mode of annotation that was widely accepted, particularly for Ruist Classics, involved a biased interpretation of the term *zhuan*. This interpretation imposed standards and restrictions on the term that were not present before the Han period.

⁴²³ Zhao Shengqun 趙生群, *Chunqiu jingzhuan yanjiu* 春秋經傳研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000); Zhao Boxiong, "Zuo zhuan wujing zhi zhuan kao" 左傳無經之傳考, *Wen shi* 49 (1999): 23–39.

the annotative nature of WJZZ with convincing evidence. Nevertheless, the works of Zhao Shengqun and Zhao Boxiong primarily aim to clarify the relation between WJZZ and the main text, and a comprehensive survey of its crucial function in the formation of *Zuo zhuan*'s unprecedented style of writing has yet to be conducted.

4.2 Classification and Analysis of WJZZ

This dissertation argues that *wujing zhi zhuan* serves as one of the primary techniques employed by the *Zuo zhuan* to achieve an exhaustive elucidation of the *Chunqiu*. The historical accounts contained in WJZZ are not irrelevant to the main text; rather, they are a mechanism used to explain the cause of an event and its subsequent development. The ultimate purpose is to enable readers to delve into and uncover the rationale and true purport of the main text. In the process of achieving this ultimate purpose, a writing style that conforms to the modern definition of “narrative writing” emerges as an unintended consequence. Below, I will provide a classification of WJZZ into twelve categories, accompanied by a thorough analysis of the distinctive features that pertain to each category. This analysis aims to clarify the various functions of WJZZ in annotating the main text, as well as the narrative features that are produced in the process.

1. **Filling in textual lacunae in the main text** 補經之闕

The existence of numerous textual lacunae within the *Chunqiu*, created for various reasons, often impedes the logical progression of related events. The *Gongyang zhuan* and the *Guliang zhuan* typically adopted one of two approaches to address such gaps, either by offering inadequate explanations or by leaving them unaddressed. Such limitations arise from

their insufficient knowledge of the historical background of the events in question, which in turn hinders the ability of later scholars to obtain an accurate understanding of the past. Fortunately, the command of historical accounts displayed in the *Zuo zhuan* facilitates a comprehensive understanding of many of these gaps.

Ex.1: In the sixteenth year of Duke Cheng 魯成公, a main text entry recounts the following event: “On the last day of the sixth month, the Duke of Jin battled with the King of Chu and the Earl of Zheng at Yanling. The armies of Chu and Zheng lost the battle.”⁴²⁴ It is apparent that at the time the states of Chu and Zheng had formed an alliance to withstand their common enemy, the state of Jin. However, just a year prior to this record, a main text entry in the fifteenth year of Duke Cheng recounts another event, where the state of Chu attacked the state of Zheng, suggesting a hostile relationship between the two states.⁴²⁵ The record of the entanglement between Chu and Zheng ends after the text from the fifteenth year, and it is not mentioned again until the record from the sixteenth year, indicating they had suddenly formed an alliance.

This lacuna in the main text’s records creates confusion for readers regarding the rationales behind the two formerly hostile states’ drastic shift in attitudes, as well as the role played by the state of Jin in the process. Unfortunately, neither the *Gongyang zhuan* nor the *Guliang zhuan* offer insight into these missing links. The only comments included are glosses

⁴²⁴ “甲午晦，晉侯及楚子、鄭伯戰於鄆陵。楚子、鄭師敗績。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 28, 886.

⁴²⁵ The specific text reads: “In the sixth month of summer, the King of Chu attacked Zheng.” 夏六月，楚子伐鄭。 See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 27, 880.

on words such as *shi* 師 and *bai* 敗.⁴²⁶ Attempting to comprehend this portion of the main text using the traditional Ruist approach of annotation results in total confusion. As major vassal states, the conflicts between the states of Jin, Chu, and Zheng greatly impacted the overall situation in the Spring and Autumn period. The gap between the two events severely hinders readers from correctly deciphering the meaning of the text. For example, do these events indicate Confucius' disdain for the untrustworthiness of Zheng and the impropriety of Jin? Our interpretation of their significance may result in serious misunderstandings based on the limited details provided.

Recognizing the significance of this lacuna, the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan* addressed the issue by amending an entry in its commentary in the sixteenth year of Duke Cheng. According to this entry, in the previous spring, the state of Chu sent Prince Cheng 公子成 as envoy to seek peace with the state of Zheng with the land of Ruyin 汝陰.⁴²⁷ Consequently, the state of Zheng betrayed its long-time ally, the state of Jin, and formed an alliance with Chu at Wucheng 武城, which resulted in the battle between these three states at Yanlin mentioned at the beginning of this discussion. In addition to providing a precise explanation for the development of the relationship between the three states, this entry also serves another important purpose. A commentary provided by Du Yu immediately succeeding this entry reads as follows: “[This is to] set the premise for Jin’s attacks on Zheng” 為晉伐鄭起。⁴²⁸ Subsequent main text entries offer several accounts related to a series of attacks led by the

⁴²⁶ *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 18, 461; 465. *Chunqiu Guliang zhuan zhushu*, juan 14, 268; 269.

⁴²⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 28, 888.

⁴²⁸ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 28, 888.

state of Jin on Zheng. In light of this observation, it can be argued that this entry of WJZZ not only addresses the lacuna between events in the main text, but also sets forth the premise for subsequent developments.

Ex.2: The main text from the eighth year of Duke Xi reads as follows: “In summer, the Di people attacked the state of Jin.”⁴²⁹ The commentary from the same year includes an account predating this attack that meticulously delineates an antecedent event involving Jin’s aggression towards the Di people, thereby unveiling the root of the ensuing tensions. According to Du Yu’s annotation, the attack launched by the state of Jin upon the Di people transpired two years earlier.⁴³⁰ However, no mention of this event can be found in the *Chunqiu* from the sixth year of Duke Xi or any preceding year. The main text focuses solely on documenting the aftermath, neglecting to address the genesis of the conflict. Consequently, the commentary supplies the missing context, thereby preserving the narrative’s continuity. It is noteworthy that this particular WJZZ, unlike the previous example, subtly unravels the causality linking the two events, accomplished through a dialogue among three generals hailing from the state of Jin.

To summarize the dialogue in a few sentences, subsequent to their triumph in the conflict, the Jin general Liang Youmi 梁由靡 recommended an immediate pursuit of the retreating Di forces. Conversely, the Commander in Chief, Li Ke 裡克, indicated that he was reluctant to exacerbate tensions with the Di army. He was concerned that a relentless pursuit might drive the enemy into a situation reminiscent of a “cornered beast,” which could provoke a

⁴²⁹ “夏，狄伐晉。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 13, 404.

⁴³⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 13, 404.

counteroffensive by inciting them to regroup and retaliate. In alignment with Liang Youmi's perspective, another general from Jin, Guo She 郭射, was concerned that any perceived hesitation could potentially be interpreted as an indication of vulnerability. He further posited that this apparent weakness might embolden the enemy, motivating them to seek retribution once they had successfully recuperated from their losses.⁴³¹ As substantiated by the attack recorded in the eighth year, it is evident that the Di people indeed sought retribution from the state of Jin.

The brilliance of this WJZZ lies in its capacity to elucidate the motivations and rationale behind the attack initiated by the Di people, while also characterizing the nature of the attack. Upon initial review of the main text, the event transpiring in the eighth year might appear as merely an invasion of the state of Jin by the Di people. This was not unusual during the period given the pervasive cultural and geopolitical tensions between the northern nomadic tribes and the Central Plain. Yet, closer examination suggests that this event was less of an aggressive invasion and more of a calculated act of revenge. This observation prompts an intriguing question: how did the opportunity for retaliation arise for the Di people, particularly following their substantial defeat by the Qi forces? The commentary sheds light on this mystery, revealing that the indecisiveness of the Jin army inadvertently exposed their vulnerability, presenting the Di army with an opportunity for retribution. Therefore, the conflict in the eighth year was not merely a retaliation by the Di people, but also a direct consequence of the Jin general's own actions. Without the supplemental insights offered by

⁴³¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 13, 404–5.

the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*, our understanding of the rationale behind the Di army's invasion of the state of Jin would undoubtedly remain less comprehensive and exhaustive.

2. **All-encompassing** 包通上下

This category bears similarities with the “Filling in lacunae” category. However, it typically addresses lacunae across a series of events, rather than merely supplementing critical information between two events. The primary focus of this type of WJZZ is to elucidate the rationale behind the occurrence of an event, or a series of events, as well as the consequences that were omitted in the main text. It aims to present a sense of completeness, granting a well-defined initiation and conclusion to a sequence of events, thus ensuring coherence and continuity between antecedent and subsequent events. Consequently, it provides later generations a better understanding of the intrinsic logic within related main text entries and commentaries.

Ex.1: A WJZZ from the eleventh year of Duke Xuan 魯宣公 records as follows:

In the Battle of Li, the Earl of Zheng escaped and returned to the state of Zheng. From then on, the state of Chu had not been able to realize its intent. The state of Zheng, on one hand, accepted covenant [with the state of Chu] at Chenling, on the other hand, also sought to serve the state of Jin.⁴³²

This passage, recorded at the end of the eleventh year's commentary, serves as a comprehensive summary of the course of actions undertaken by the Zheng people. It

⁴³² “厲之役，鄭伯逃歸，自是楚未得志焉。鄭既受盟於辰陵，又徼事於晉。” See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan 22*, 725.

encapsulates multiple events such as the “Battle of Li,” the “covenant at Chenling,” and [Zheng] “sought to serve the state of Jin.” To comprehend the meaning and purpose of this entry solely based on the main text and the commentary from the eleventh year presents a considerable challenge. In fact, this passage serves both as a summary and a foreshadowing of a sequence of events precipitated by the Earl of Zheng’s recurring vacillation and betrayal amid the contention between the states of Chu and Jin, extending from the sixth year of Duke Xuan until the twelfth year.

In the sixth year of Duke Xuan, a WJZZ records an attack led by the Chu people on the state of Zheng, culminating in the resolution where the Chu army “secured peace and returned.”⁴³³ Du Yu interpreted this attack as identical to what the commentaries from the ninth and eleventh years have referred to as the “Battle of Li.”⁴³⁴ However, according to the commentaries from the ninth and eleventh years, despite the King of Chu having “secured peace and returned,” the state of Zheng did not submit to Chu due to the fact that the Earl of Zheng managed to escape and return home. Consequently, the main text documents a gathering between the states of Lu and Jin, Song, Wei 衛, Zheng, and Cao at Heirang 黑壤 in the seventh year of Duke Xuan.⁴³⁵ According to the commentary from this year, the intended

⁴³³ “取成而還。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan 22*, 706.

On the gloss of *cheng* 成, a commentary from the sixth year of Duke Yin reads as follows: “In the past, the Earl of Zheng sought *cheng* with the state of Chen, but the Marquis of Chen did not permit it.” 往歲鄭伯請成於陳，陳侯不許。Du Yu provided a note to this commentary, stating that “*cheng* is treated the same as *ping*” 成猶平也, which translates to “peace” or “tranquility.” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan 4*, 118.

⁴³⁴ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan 22*, 706.

⁴³⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan 22*, 707.

purpose of this meeting was to forge alliances. However, the state of Jin seized this opportunity to detain the ruler of Lu due to the existing discord between the two states. The main text intentionally used the term *hui* 會 (meeting) rather than *meng* 盟 (alliance), arguably as a wording used to obscure the humiliation faced by Duke Xuan.⁴³⁶ Subsequent to this gathering, the states of Jin, Song, Wei, Zheng, and Cao reconvened in the ninth month of the ninth year of Duke Xuan to form alliances at a place known as Hu 扈.⁴³⁷ This action provoked the state of Chu, leading to a renewed act of aggression against the state of Zheng in the following year. The outcome of this conflict precipitated the direct involvement of the state of Jin, which deployed an army, led by the renowned general Xi Que 郤缺, to aid the Zheng forces. Ultimately, this resulted in the defeat of the Chu army at Liufen 柳棼.⁴³⁸

A thorough examination of the main text entries ranging from the seventh year to the ninth year reveals that there was a sustained alliance between the states of Jin and Zheng. Nevertheless, a puzzling event transpired in the tenth year, where the main text documents a joint attack on the state of Zheng launched by the states of Jin, Song, Wei, and Cao. This development raises a critical question: considering the previously established alliances between the states of Zheng and Jin and Jin's aid to the state of Zheng in the preceding year, what motivated the state of Jin to initiate this potent attack in the tenth year? The rationale underpinning Jin's action becomes even more perplexing when taking into account another incident documented in the main text—the incursion of the state of Zheng by the Chu army

⁴³⁶ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 22, 709.

⁴³⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 22, 714.

⁴³⁸ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 22, 716.

in the winter of the same year. The main text lacks explicit documentation of Zheng's betrayal of Jin or any indications of reconciliation between the two states following the tenth-year attack. This absence of critical information, in the context of related yet incongruent events, does not reveal the rationale behind Chu army's repeated attacks on Zheng. To reconcile these inconsistent developments, the *Zuo zhuan* provides a crucial supplement in the tenth year. It suggests that the Zheng people, apprehensive about potential resentment from the state of Chu after the ninth-year defeat, sought preemptively to make peace with the state of Chu. This decision prompted the punitive attack on the state of Zheng by the united forces led by Jin.⁴³⁹ The ensuing peace between the states of Jin and Zheng following this battle signified Zheng's renewed act of betrayal against Chu, which led to Chu's punitive attack in the tenth year, culminating in their substantial defeat by the Jin army who drove them back to Yingbei. 穎北.⁴⁴⁰

Intriguingly, in the eleventh year of Duke Xuan, shortly after Xi Que aided the state of Zheng in defeating the Chu forces, the Earl of Zheng once again betrayed the state of Jin by forming an alliance with the King of Chu at Chenling. However, this alliance proved ephemeral. According to the eleventh-year commentary, which brings us full circle to the beginning of this discussion, the Zheng people sought to offer their service to the state of Jin soon after the meeting at Chenling. The constant and repeated vacillation of the Zheng people eventually culminated in the siege of the state of Zheng by the Chu army in the twelfth year of Duke Xuan.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 22, 720.

⁴⁴⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 22, 720.

⁴⁴¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 23, 727.

In the aftermath of Duke Huan of Qi's demise, a power vacuum emerged within the Central Plains due to the absence of a dominant hegemon capable of uniting the various vassals. Thereafter, the Zheng people extended their allegiance to the state of Chu. Nevertheless, confronted with the formidable power of Jin, they frequently shifted their allegiance, vacillating between the states of Chu and Jin in a pattern marked by its inconsistency and unpredictability. The series of campaigns occurring between the sixth and eleventh years of Duke Xuan exemplify the consequences precipitated by the relentless vacillation of the Zheng people between the two states, reflecting their inability to firmly commit to one side. The initial segment of the WJZZ in the eleventh year elucidates the causes leading to this series of conflicts, while the subsequent segment focuses on delineating the connection between the consequences of later developments and previous events. Du Yu took special notice of this WJZZ, characterizing it as "encompassing both upward and downward" 上下包通.⁴⁴² Kong Yingda further elaborated on the significance of this phrase in his *Zhengyi*, reading as follows:

The term 'up' refers to [the Battle of] Li, the term 'down' refers to [the covenant of] Chenling, and the mid-point encompasses the [meeting at] Heirang. These collectively pertain to the meaning of which the passages in the *Zuo zhuan* are interconnected, from the preceding one to the succeeding one.⁴⁴³

From the perspective of narrative coherence in the main text, the events recorded in the eleventh year primarily focus on the formation of an alliance between the states of Zheng,

⁴⁴² *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 22, 725.

⁴⁴³ “上指厲，下指辰陵，中包黑壤。此皆傳上下相句通之義也。” See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 22, 725.

Chu, and Chen at Chenling. Notably, there is no subsequent mention of Zheng's request to serve Jin. This omission introduces a discernible incongruity when juxtaposed with the account from the twelfth year, which details the siege of the state of Zheng by the King of Chu. The WJZZ from the eleventh year serves a pivotal role in bridging this narrative lacuna by providing crucial details of events that were omitted. However, this WJZZ serves more than merely filling in the lacunae within the main text. Its primary intent is to clarify the sequential logic and causal relationships among the related main text entries and the commentary entries. These contributions enable a more comprehensive understanding of an overarching event unit, characterized by clear beginnings and endings, and defined by its causal sequences.

In summary, the primary cause of the siege of Zheng in the twelfth year can be traced to the "Battle of Li" that transpired in the sixth year. Though the alliance formed at Heirang in the ninth year occurred after the "Battle of Li" and appears more directly related to Chu's incursion on Zheng in the ninth year,⁴⁴⁴ the *Zuo zhuan* refrains from attributing the alliance at Heirang as the root cause. Instead, it traces the origin of these events back to the "Battle of Li." This attribution emanates from the notion that the resentment of the Chu people was aggravated after the "Battle of Li," particularly when the Duke of Zheng managed to escape

⁴⁴⁴ The incursion refers to the attack following the reconsolidated alliance among the states of Jin, Song, Zheng, Wei, and Cao at Hu. The preference for the 'Alliance at Heirang' as a key temporal marker over the more recent event at Hu stems from the understanding that the Hu meeting functioned primarily as a continuation of the dialogue initiated at Heirang. The original meeting occurred in the seventh year at Heirang; however, due to a dispute between the states of Jin and Lu, the conference faced complications. The alliance at Hu in the ninth year seemingly served as a deliberate endeavor to fortify the bond initially established at Heirang, concurrently seeking to exclude the state of Lu from the pact.

and return home. In this light, the alliance formed at Heirang merely provided a tangible pretext for Chu's attack on Zheng. The ultimate siege of the state of Zheng by the Chu army in the twelfth year should not be seen as an isolated incident. It emerges as a consequential outcome, a culmination of an accumulated resentment and discontent originating from the "Battle of Li."

Conversely, the consequences of the Earl of Zheng's betrayal of Chu and his escape during the "Battle of Li," despite having initially made peace, should not be underestimated. This seemingly unconnected action inadvertently sowed the seeds of tension, culminating in the escalated conflict that manifested as the siege of the state of Zheng in the twelfth year. The sequence of events unfolding from the sixth to twelfth year of Duke Xuan is notable for both its multiformity and granularity, with incidents scattered across various years. These features render the task of identifying the developmental sequence and inherent connections of these events a formidable challenge for later exegetes. Indeed, comprehending the intricate cause-and-effect logic underlying these events through solitary examination of the text would be particularly difficult. Through its WJZZ, the *Zuo zhuan* provides a lucid illustration of this broad series of events. This approach serves not only to enlighten future scholars by illuminating a method for interpreting these main text entries, but it also exemplifies *Zuo zhuan*'s understanding that historical events are intertwined in a tapestry of intricate logical relationships.

Ex.2: A similar passage of the "All-encompassing" category occurs in the ninth year of Duke Xiang 魯襄公, in which the main text records a series of events involving a joint attack on the state of Zheng by the states of Jin, Lu, Song, Wei 衛, Cao, Ju 莒, Zhu 邾, Teng 滕, Xue

薛, and Qi 杞. This event is followed by an agreement to form an alliance at Xi 戲 in the twelfth month of the same year.⁴⁴⁵ According to Du Yu, the state of Zheng was also included as a member of the ensuing alliance formed at Xi.⁴⁴⁶ This interpretation is also partially substantiated by another main text that documents an attack on Zheng, led by the Chu army. However, the main text lacks further records of the developments unfolding after Chu's attack. It remains unclear whether this attack yielded any consequences, and whether the state of Zheng honored the covenant or betrayed the alliance and submitted it to the state of Chu. Upon reviewing another main text entry, which recounts an attack on the state of Song led by Zhen 貞, the Prince of Chu, and Zhe 輒, the grandson of Duke of Zheng, it seems evident that Zheng indeed betrayed the alliance and swore covenant with the Chu people.⁴⁴⁷

While small hints are dispersed across the main text, specific interconnections and the course of development within these isolated events remain unexplained. This leaves readers with a fragmented understanding of the ambiguously related events. Our comprehension is marginally enhanced by an account recorded in the commentary from the ninth year of Duke Xiang. This passage details a dialogue among several influential Zheng princes that took place immediately after the account of Chu's attack on Zheng. The princes Zikong 子孔 and Zijiao 子蟯 disapproved of the idea of making peace with the state of Chu, while Zisi 子駟

⁴⁴⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 30, 986.

⁴⁴⁶ Du's annotation reads as follows: "If [the main text mentions] an attack on the state of Zheng, while subsequently writing the term "to form alliance," then it can be understood that the state of Zheng accepted the covenant." 伐鄭而書同盟，則鄭受盟可知。See, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 30, 986.

⁴⁴⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 31, 1009.

and Zizhan 子展 insisted on forming an alliance with the Chu people. The dispute eventually concluded with an alliance formed with the state of Chu at Zhongfen 中分, largely facilitated by Zisi's dominant position as the ruling minister of Zheng.⁴⁴⁸ This commentary, by encompassing the preceding alliance at Xi and connecting it with the forthcoming joint attack on the state of Song, shapes the series of events into a coherent unity. Moreover, the divergent opinions within the state of Zheng and the evident preference of the ruling party, as disclosed in this passage, serve to provide a firm basis for the constant vacillation and betrayal of the Zheng people between the states of Jin and Chu.

3. Omissions according to the standards 於例不書

During the Spring and Autumn period, scribes adhered to certain conventions in the recording of state annals. Consequently, many accounts—regardless of their inherent significance—were excluded from the official annals if their documentation did not accord with the writing standards.⁴⁴⁹ These events are supplemented in the commentary by the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*.

Ex.1: The commentary from the first year of Duke Yin writes as follows: “In the fourth month of summer, Bi Bo led an army and built a fort at Lang. This is not recorded [in the main text] because it was not an order commanded by the duke.”⁴⁵⁰ According to Du Yu,

⁴⁴⁸ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 30, 1006.

⁴⁴⁹ The role of scribes in early China involved many aspects, including but not limited to read and write state records, divination, and ritual ceremonies. This section only highlights scribes' role in recording state annals. For a comprehensive discussion on the scribal tradition, please refer to Chapter One.

⁴⁵⁰ “夏，四月，費伯帥師城郎。不書，非公命也。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 2, 57.

every action of a ruler is recorded. Therefore, all entries recorded in the official annals by the scribes are indeed the ruler's orders.⁴⁵¹ The *Zhengyi* elaborates on the significance of this interpretation, stating as follows:

As for the phrase 'all entries recorded in the official annals by the scribes are indeed the ruler's orders,' it means that only actions executed under the ruler's orders are recorded in the official annals. It does not mean that [the scribes] only began the process of recording when commanded to do so by the ruler.⁴⁵²

Thus, it can be inferred that, under normal circumstances, actions such as Bi Bo leading an army to fortify Lang would be recorded in the main text, for such an expedition is considered a major action "initiated by the ruler." Nevertheless, for actions to be recorded in the official annals, they need to be first and foremost commands issued by the ruler. In this case, Bi Bo did not receive an official order from the Duke of Lu and thus the scribes of Lu excluded this important affair from the annals. Similarly, Confucius' version of the *Chunqiu* was strictly based on the official annals of Lu, and thus it could not arbitrarily disregard the established standards or insert new content. The deliberate inclusion of this omitted account in the *Zuo zhuan* serves two important purposes: it exemplifies the General Standards, particularly the event specified as "unrecorded because it was not by the ruler's order" 非公命, 不書 in the *Chunqiu* main text; and it foreshadows the eventual victory of Wuhai 無駭 over the state of Ji 極.

⁴⁵¹ “凡君舉則必書，史之策書皆君命也。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 2, 57.

⁴⁵² “史之策書皆君命者，謂君命所為之事乃得書於策，非謂君命譴書方始書也。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 2, 57.

According to the commentary from the second year of Duke Yin, Wuhai 無駭, who served as the minister of works, obtained a major victory over the state of Ji and invaded its territory.⁴⁵³ This victory was built upon the groundwork laid by Bi Bo's fortification of Lang in the preceding year. Without the geographical advantage achieved through Bi Bo's military expedition, the following event might not have unfolded as recorded in the *Chunqiu*. The meticulousness and ability to detect the interrelationships among events are prominent features consistently displayed throughout the *Zuo zhuan*. There are numerous examples of passages in the *Zuo zhuan* serving a structural role in addition to their content-oriented functions. Collectively, these accounts exemplify the compiler's rigorous rationale in arranging the events in filling in the textual lacunae.

Ex.2: An entry from the commentary in the eighth year of Duke Ding reads as follows: "In summer, Guo Xia and Gao Zhang of Qi attacked our western border. Shi Yang, Zhao Yang, and Xun Yan of Jin came to our aid."⁴⁵⁴ The first half of this passage aligns with the main text from the same year; however, the latter half, concerning Jin's aid to Lu, remains unexplained.⁴⁵⁵ According to Du Yu, the state of Jin provided aid to the state of Lu. Nonetheless, it was not documented in the official annals because the army of Qi had already retreated from the Lu border, and as a result, the Jin forces did not actually enter Lu's territory. Further explanation is provided in the *Zhengyi*, stating that all other instances of

⁴⁵³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 2, 74.

⁴⁵⁴ “夏，齊國夏、高張伐我西鄙。晉士鞅、趙鞅、荀偃救我。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 55, 1812.

⁴⁵⁵ The specific content of this main text entry reads as follows: "In summer, Guo Xia of Qi led an army to attack our western border." 夏，齊國夏帥師伐我西鄙。 *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 55, 1807.

vassal lords aiding one another are consistently recorded in the *Chunqiu*. Therefore, this event, by convention, should also have been recorded in the main text. The decision to omit this particular event could perhaps be attributed to the fact that the Qi forces had already retreated from the state of Lu before the Jin army's arrival. This precluded the Jin army from formally entering Lu's territory, which, by definition, does not constitute the action of rescue.⁴⁵⁶ If this event were indeed recorded in the official annals, it seems that the scribes would have been confronted with a contradiction. Employing the term "aid" to faithfully represent the fact could result in a violation of the established standards. Conversely, avoiding such terminology might introduce a series of challenges in accurately and truthfully conveying the event in question.

This rather intricate situation inevitably arose from the stringent and meticulous conventions of writing and ritual standards that governed the composition of the official annals. Conversely, the *Zuo zhuan*, which was composed as a commentary to the *Chunqiu*, enjoyed relatively more flexibility in terms of writing conventions. This allowed the compiler to supplement the important aforementioned account in the commentary in the form of a WJZZ. As for the assertion that the Jin army did not formally enter the state of Lu, it can be corroborated by referring to the subsequent commentary entry. The ensuing passage recounts a meeting between Duke Ding of Lu and the Jin army at Wa 瓦.⁴⁵⁷ According to the *Zhengyi*, Wa was located in the state of Wei 衛.⁴⁵⁸ The fact that Duke Ding had to travel to the Wei

⁴⁵⁶ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 55, 1812.

⁴⁵⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 55, 1812.

⁴⁵⁸ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 55, 1812.

territory to meet the Jin aiding forces serves as solid evidence that the Jin army indeed remained outside of the Lu border.

Ex.3: The commentary from the sixteenth year of Duke Xiang records an important campaign launched by Xun Yan and Luan Yan 樂廩 of Jin on the state of Chu, known as the “Battle of Zhanban” 湛阪之役. This attack was a revenge for the battle at Yangliang 揚梁. The outcome of this battle ended with the Jin army exploiting its major victory by pursuing the Chu forces to its city gate.⁴⁵⁹ Based on Du Yu’s interpretation, this account was not recorded in the *Chunqiu* because the state of Lu did not receive an official report.⁴⁶⁰ Nevertheless, this campaign signifies one of the many power struggles between the states of Jin and Chu, as well as the essential process that ultimately enabled Jin to assert its hegemony. The inclusion of this account is necessary for a proper understanding of the respective strategic situations among states in the Spring and Autumn period.

There are many reasons for the occurrence of “omissions according to the standards” in the *Chunqiu*, necessitating individual examination of specific events. In general, the two most common conventions within this category are the “not recorded because it was not the ruler’s order” and the “not recorded because it was not officially reported.” Other conventions, such as the “not recorded because one did not meet the duke,” 不見公，不書 and the “not recorded because the incident was not considered a natural disaster” 不為災，不書 appear to be applied more restrictively and are typically tied to specific events.

⁴⁵⁹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 33, 1079.

⁴⁶⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 33, 1079.

4. Tracing beginnings in order to sum up endings 原始以要終

There are numerous instances in the *Zuo zhuan* where a WJZZ, while functioning as the consequence of a series of events, begins by recounting a prior event. This practice is used to establish the genesis of the outcome, an approach Du Yu referred to as “trace beginnings to sum up endings” in his preface to the *Zuo zhuan*.⁴⁶¹ Typically, the recounted events have already been recorded previously. The *Zuo zhuan* intentionally reiterates these antecedent events within the unfolding outcomes to highlight the causal relationships between them.

Ex.1: The main text from the ninth year of Duke Yin recounts Duke Yin’s meeting with the Duke of Qi in winter at Fang 防. According to the *Zuo zhuan*, the purpose of this meeting was to plan an attack on the state of Song.⁴⁶² The content of this passage is also recorded in the main text, but the rationale behind this maneuver is not mentioned in the *Chunqiu*.⁴⁶³ Close scrutiny of previous contents reveals that the state of Song remained a loyal ally of the state of Lu. The two states maintained a steady peace since the alliance formed at Su 宿 in the first year of Duke Yin. It appears rather uncanny for the state of Lu to suddenly collaborate with another state to attack its long-time ally. Fortunately, a valuable insight into this mystery may be gleaned from two consecutive WJZZ passages preceding this account. The passages read as follows:

The Duke of Song did not serve the king. The Earl of Zheng, serving as the left minister of the king, acted on the king’s order and launched a punitive attack on Song.

⁴⁶¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 1, 15.

⁴⁶² *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 4, 134.

⁴⁶³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 4, 133.

The Song people, harboring resentment towards the duke for the “Battle of Breaching-the-Outer City Walls,” did not announce the commands [to Lu]. Infuriated by this, the duke cut off the exchange of envoys with Song. In autumn, an official of Zheng came to inform [the state of Lu] about the attack on Song with the king’s order.⁴⁶⁴

The assertion that the Duke of Song did not serve the king functioned merely as an excuse for the Earl of Zheng to petition the king for an order, thereby commanding the vassals to attack the state of Song. The rationale for this campaign was entrenched in the long-standing discord between the two states.

According to the commentary from the fifth year of Duke Yin, the state of Song had previously seized territory from the state of Zhu. The Zhu people promptly reported the matter to the state of Zheng that culminated in a joint attack on Song. The combined forces of Zheng, the Zhou king and Zhu managed to breach Song’s outer city walls.⁴⁶⁵ In response, the state of Song immediately dispatched an envoy to the state of Lu to request aid, but the appeal was not heeded. According to a dialogue between Duke Yin and the Song envoy recorded in the *Zuo zhuan*, the duke inquired about the position of the enemy forces. On hearing that the enemy had not yet reached the state, he declined to provide aid. According to Du Yu, the envoy intentionally chose the phrase “not yet reaching to the state,” knowing that Duke Yin was merely using the question as an excuse to refuse assistance. This infuriated the envoy.⁴⁶⁶ The discord between the states of Song and Lu can be traced to this very event. The “Battle of Breaching-the-Outer-City-Walls” 入

⁴⁶⁴ “宋公不王。鄭伯為王左卿士，以王命討之，伐宋。”“宋以入郟之役怨公，不告命。公怒，絕宋使。秋，鄭人以王命來告伐宋。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi, juan 4*, 134.

⁴⁶⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi, juan 3*, 114.

⁴⁶⁶ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi, juan 3*, 115.

郭之役 mentioned in the commentary from the ninth year also pertains to this attack. Upon recognizing how previous complications contributed to the final campaign in the ninth year, the *Zuo zhuan* succinctly reiterates relevant events to elucidate for its readers the possible rationale behind the atypical behaviors and decisions of the states of Song and Lu.

Ex.2: The commentary from the eighteenth year of Duke Zhuang 魯莊公 recounts an attack on the state of Chu by the Ba people 巴 in winter.⁴⁶⁷ The motive for this attack can be traced to the sixth year of Duke Zhuang, prompting the *Zuo zhuan* to provide a summary of the antecedent at the beginning of the passage to indicate the genesis of this matter. Ba's betrayal of Chu evidently was incited by an unexpected attack on the state of Shen 申 by King Wen of Chu. This attack unsettled the state of Ba, who fearing of suffering a similar fate to that of the state of Shen, decided to launch a preemptive strike on Nachu 那處 to secure the initiative. This resulted in a major victory for the state of Ba, with a continued pursuit of the Chu forces leading all the way to their city gate. With the recognition that the Chu army could not hold the city, Yan Ao 閻敖, the governor of Nachu, consequently abandoned the city and escaped. Yan's actions deeply enraged King Wen, leading him to execute Yan Ao as punishment. This decision, in turn, sparked a rebellion within the Yan clan, leading to prolonged turmoil within the state of Chu. The Ba people seized this opportunity and launched another attack on Chu in the eighteenth year.⁴⁶⁸ This example underscores that the military expedition in the eighteenth year was driven by complex

⁴⁶⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 9, 297.

⁴⁶⁸ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 9, 297. The attack on the state of Shen occurred in the sixth year of Duke Zhuang. See, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 8, 261.

underlying causes, emerging from a series of events. Without this information, it would be difficult to fully understand the intricate disputes between the states of Ba and Chu.

One might notice that in the preceding passage recounting the sixth-year attack there is a seemingly unrelated account that transpired in the remote past. This account concerns the establishment of the city Nachu and a high-official, Dou Min 鬪緡.⁴⁶⁹ Contrary to initial impressions, this apparently extraneous account exemplifies *Zuo zhuan*'s commitment to its principle of "trace beginnings in order to sum up endings." Many of the circumstances and details relating to the attacks in the sixth and eighteenth years are lucidly addressed in the commentary. However, the terms "Yan Ao" and "Nachu" seem enigmatic, for even though they play pivotal roles in the cause that led to the ultimate attack, their significance remains obscure. To enable utmost clarity and comprehension, the *Zuo zhuan* recounts the origin of Nachu, the central location where all actions unfolded, to offer an overarching presentation of all important information pertaining to the event in question. In an alternative perspective, the relocation of Quan 權 to Nachu was precipitated by an act of rebellion committed by Dou Min, the governor of Quan, which inevitably resulted in his execution. Consequently, from this incident, Nachu was considered a place where officials incited rebellion and were punished for it. The later episode involving Yan Ao can be interpreted as a duplication of Dou Min's destiny.

5. **Foreshadowing subsequent events** 為後事張本

There are certain resemblances between this category and the previous one, but they function in the exact opposite manner. category four typically recounts an earlier event while unfolding the consequences of a series of events to explain the causes leading to a particular result. This

⁴⁶⁹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 9, 297.

category, on the contrary, serves as a kind of foreshadowing in the *Zuo zhuan*. It refers to the process in which an early event that is directly or indirectly related to a subsequent event (which may occur in the same year, or in the previous year or several years prior) recorded in the main text is recapitulated in the commentary as a form of preliminary exposition. These types of commentaries are not directly involved with the main text entries from the same year, but rather provide background information, causes, or a foreshadowing of events transpiring in the subsequent month or year.

Ex.1: According to an entry in the main text in the fifth year of Duke Xiang, a Lu official, Shusun Bao 叔孫豹, journeyed to the state of Jin accompanied by Wu 巫, the crown prince of Zeng 曾.⁴⁷⁰ A corresponding passage in the commentary reads as follows:

Mushu met with the crown prince Wu of Zeng in the state of Jin to finalize the process of formally acknowledging Zeng as the tributary state of Lu. The text says ‘Shusun Bao and the crown prince Wu of Zeng traveled to Jin; this is treating [the crown prince of Zeng] as a Lu official.’⁴⁷¹

While this passage sheds light on the reason for Shusun Bao’s journey with the Zeng crown prince to the state of Jin, the account raises several problems.

The *Zuo zhuan* took particular notice of the absence of the conjunction word *ji* 及 (and) in the *Chunqiu*, which was used to distinguish between the ministers of the two states. This omission is not accidental. Instead, it arranges the two individuals sequentially to underscore

⁴⁷⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 30, 966.

⁴⁷¹ “穆叔覲鄆大子巫於晉，以成屬鄆。書曰「叔孫豹、鄆大子巫如晉」，言比諸魯大夫也。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 30, 967. Mushu is another name for Shusun Bao.

Zeng's subordinate status to Lu.⁴⁷² This deliberate arrangement aligns well with the aforementioned text, "to finalize the process of formally acknowledging Zeng as the tributary state of Lu." Yet considering the phrasing of both the main text and the commentary entry from the fifth year, the event in question is evidently the culmination of a broader process. This represents the final step in a process that could only transpire once the state of Zeng had explicitly declared its intention to become a tributary state of Lu and obtained the necessary approval to do so. The journey of Shusun Bao and Wu to the state of Jin served merely to finalize arrangements that had been established in previous episodes—episodes that were omitted from the *Chunqiu*. Consequently, readers may find it puzzling as to why the state of Zeng sought to become a tributary to the state of Lu, and why the finalization of this process occurred in the seemingly unrelated state of Jin. This absence of an initiating context in both the main text and the fifth-year commentary can leave readers with a fragmented understanding of the developmental trajectory of these events.

To address the missing links and context, the *Zuo zhuan* supplements an entry in the winter of the fourth year of Duke Xiang detailing a previous episode that prompted the journey in the fifth year. Evidently, in this year Duke Xiang journeyed to the state of Jin to receive instructions in governance. During this visit, the duke sought approval from the ruler of Jin on taking the state of Zeng as its tributary state. Initially, the Duke of Jin refused Lu's request, fearing that this would allow Lu to further expand its influence. However, the Duke of Jin eventually acquiesced after an eloquent persuasion from Meng Xianzi 孟獻子.⁴⁷³ Given that the request was made in

⁴⁷² *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 30, 967.

⁴⁷³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 29, 958.

the court of Jin and that the duke sought the Jin ruler's approval, it was only natural to finalize the ritual under the supervision of Jin.

In regard to the main text entry from the fifth year, the *Zhengyi* provides a note that illuminates the ritual protocol that governed the interactions among various vassal states during the Spring and Autumn period.⁴⁷⁴ It is clear that minor states were not permitted to engage in direct communication with other states, which often led to these smaller states taking on a tributary role to the more significant states. This practice is exemplified by incidents such as Qi's request for Zhu's tributary status and Song's request for Teng to become its tributary state in the twenty-seventh year of Duke Xiang.⁴⁷⁵ Consequently, the state of Zeng, being of even lesser stature than Zhu and Teng, presumably lacked the authority to journey to the hegemonic state of Jin unaccompanied. The omission of the conjunction *ji* in the main text from the fifth year is indicative not only of Zeng's tributary status, but also reflects the ritual norms that governed the interactions among vassal states.

Ex.2: Apart from the numerous passages that foreshadow events detailed in the main text, several others ensure the coherence of events within the commentary itself. In other words, these passages fulfill the same function as the rest of the category but focus mainly on providing missing context for events recounted in the commentary, acting, in effect, as a commentary on the commentary. For example, an entry in the third year of Duke Huan records an affair concerning a minor state, Rui 芮. The mother of the Earl of Rui, disapproving of the earl's indulgence in maintaining an excessive number of consorts, ousted him from Rui, resulting in his

⁴⁷⁴ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi, juan 29, 958.*

⁴⁷⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi, juan 38, 1219.*

forced residence in the state of Wei 魏.⁴⁷⁶ According to Kong Yingda's note, which cites its source as the *Shi ben*, both the Rui and Wei states descended from the Ji 姬 clan.⁴⁷⁷ Given their shared lineage and geographical proximity, it is understandable that the Earl of Rui chose to reside in Wei after his expulsion.⁴⁷⁸

This passage does not seem to have direct relevance to any of the main text entries within the same year, or those preceding or following it. The documentation of this event solely functions to provide a context for the subsequent attack by the state of Qin on the state of Rui, which is recorded in the commentary from the following year. The commentary from the fourth year of Duke Huan reads as follows: "In autumn, the army of Qin invaded the state of Rui and suffered defeat. This was due to Qin's underestimation of its enemy."⁴⁷⁹ The Qin army, underestimating the state of Rui as a minor state of limited capability, suffered an unanticipated defeat. Unwilling to accept this setback, Qin allied with the royal forces during winter, besieging the state of Wei and successfully capturing the Earl of Rui.⁴⁸⁰ The rationale behind Qin's capture of the Earl of Rui is apparent. However, without the foreshadowing narrative provided in the commentary from the third year of Duke Huan, detailing the Earl of Rui's relocation to Wei, the subsequent episode

⁴⁷⁶ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 3, 184.

⁴⁷⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 6, 186.

⁴⁷⁸ According to Du Yu's annotation, the state of Rui was located in Linjin 臨晉 County, Fengyi 馮翊 Prefecture, which is approximately modern Linyi 臨猗 County, Shanxi Province. The state of Wei was located in Hebei 河北 County, Hedong 河東 Prefecture, which is approximately modern Yuncheng 運城 County, Shanxi Province. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 6, 184.

⁴⁷⁹ “秋，秦師侵芮，敗焉，小之也。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 6, 186.

⁴⁸⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 6, 186.

involving Qin's siege of Wei with the explicit intention of apprehending the Earl of Rui could leave readers in considerable confusion.

6. **Anteceding the main text to initiate the narration** 先經以始事

Among the various types of WJZZ in the *Zuo zhuan*, entries of this category received notable attention. The most famous and paradigmatic example is the account concerning Duke Hui of Lu, Zhongzi, and Shengzi that is found in the commentary prior to the first entry of the *Chunqiu*. This entry, which precedes the main text, provides an in-depth portrayal of the inner palace dynamics of the preceding ruler of Lu. It primarily addresses the hierarchical positions of several consorts and the progeny they respectively brought forth.⁴⁸¹

As is widely acknowledged, the *Chunqiu* begins with the first year of Duke Yin's reign, when the duke officially assumed power in the state of Lu. All accounts recorded in the main text pertain to events that occurred following his succession. At first glance, it seems perplexing that the *Zuo zhuan* chose to insert an apparently arbitrary account about the previous generation that disrupts the orderly arrangement of the *Chunqiu*. However, a more meticulous examination of the first *juan* of the *Chunqiu* unveils a deeper purpose inherent in this conspicuous yet isolated passage.

Upon a detailed examination of the "Duke Yin" section, there are several unusual phrases that are not conventionally used in the rest of the text. For instance, according to the editorial standards, the phrase "the duke ascended the throne" 公即位 should be written every time a new ruler ascends the throne. However, in Duke Yin's case, the *Chunqiu* only records the official time

⁴⁸¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 2, 38–42.

of the year, omitting any formal declaration of the new ruler's enthronement.⁴⁸² Furthermore, a WJZZ in the tenth month of the first year of Duke Yin records the reburial of Duke Hui.⁴⁸³ As the interment of a ruler is considered a major state event, it would have undoubtedly been recorded in the official annals. However, this event is undocumented in the *Chunqiu*. The *Zuo zhuan* attributes this omission to Duke Yin's absence from the ceremony—an explanation that prompts further questions. Given that Duke Hui was both the ruler and Duke Yin's father, it is difficult to conceive of a scenario in which Duke Yin would be absent from this interment. Du Yu posited that Duke Yin's absence stemmed from his status as merely a regent for the state, filling in temporarily for the rightful heir designate, Huan, who was too young to succeed. Consequently, Duke Yin did not feel entitled to preside over the ceremony.⁴⁸⁴ This explanation also accounts for the absence of an official announcement of Duke Yin's succession at the beginning of the main text.

The explanations provided by the *Zuo zhuan* and Du Yu lead readers toward a more fundamental issue. Despite Duke Yin and Huan both being progeny of Duke Hui, Duke Hui inexplicably chose the newborn Huan as crown prince over the adult Duke Yin. The rationale behind this decision, as well as the certainty of Duke Yin's role as regent as posited by the *Zuo*

⁴⁸² There are only four instances in the *Chunqiu* where the phrase “the duke ascended the throne” is not recorded, each attributed to a specific reason. The first instance is when Duke Yin assumed power, with the subsequent three instances corresponding to Duke Zhuang, Duke Min, and Duke Xi respectively. It is worth noting that, although in Duke Ding's case, this phrase also appears to be absent, it is in fact recorded in the sixth month as opposed to the customary first month. This is due to Duke Ding's succession to the throne occurring in the sixth month of that year. See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 2, 43; *juan* 8, 246; *juan* 11, 345; *juan* 12, 364; *juan* 54, 1671–2.

⁴⁸³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 2, 71.

⁴⁸⁴ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 2, 55.

zhuan, requires further examination. To effectively address the complexity of these issues, the *Zuo zhuan* introduces a prologue before the main narrative that traces the root cause and sets the stage for the unfolding scene. According to this prologue, Duke Yin's decision to wield power without ascending the throne finds its roots in his family origins: his mother was a concubine to Duke Hui, while Duke Hui's principal consort, Zhongzi, was the mother of Huan. Despite being the elder, Duke Yin was considered an illegitimate son. Motivated by a reverence for traditional rites and his father's expressed desires, Duke Yin refrained from claiming the throne. This predicament is intrinsically tied to the interrelationships among the previous ruler and his consorts, a context that does not directly correspond to the account of Duke Yin following his regency in the primary text. Given the substantial chronological divergence, incorporating this account directly into the main commentary could be problematic. Conversely, inserting this passage prior to the main text provides the main text with a prelude and a lucid elucidation of the subsequent narrative.

Ex.2: The main text from the fourth year of Duke Yin records the regicide committed by the Wei prince, Zhou Xu, against his ruler Wan 完.⁴⁸⁵ In the *Chunqiu*, any matter pertaining to regicide is considered a major event. However, the text only briefly notes the outcome of the dispute between Zhou Xu and Duke Huan of Wei (personal name, Wan), without mentioning the causes leading to this act of regicide. Thus, the *Zuo zhuan* supplements this primary account with a passage in the third year of Duke Yin detailing Zhou Xu's lineage and the general background of the royal house of Wei. According to this prelude, both Wan and Zhou Xu were illegitimate sons of Duke Zhuang of Wei 衛莊公. However, since Wan was raised under the care of

⁴⁸⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 3, 95.

Zhuangjiang 莊姜, Duke Zhuang's primary consort, he was treated as the rightful heir. Zhou Xu's mother, by contrast, held a much lower position as merely a favored concubine of Duke Zhuang. Despite this, Zhou Xu greatly benefitted from his mother's favored status and also benefitted from Duke Zhuang's marked affection for him, which contributed to the development of a temperament characterized by both petulance and a predilection for warfare. The Wei minister, Shi Que, once admonished Duke Zhuang to cease favoring Zhou Xu, but the duke rejected his advice and continued to indulge the prince until Duke Huan's ascension to the throne.⁴⁸⁶ This account provides an explicit delineation of the kinship dynamics within the royal court of the state of Wei, the upbringing of Zhou Xu and the formation of his petulant nature. It forms a context for interpreting Zhou Xu's ensuing regicidal actions and his deeds following his usurpation.

It is worth noting that this prologue is recorded in a separate year that differs from the main account. While the two accounts are juxtaposed, the prologue is recorded at the end of the third year. In contrast, the main account is documented at the beginning of the fourth year. As was mentioned in the earlier section of this chapter, Shi Que's admonishment of Duke Zhuang occurred in the thirty-seventh year of King Ping's reign (734 BC), antedating considerably the year in which this account is recorded in the *Zuo zhuan* (720 BC). Hence, it is evident that *Zuo zhuan's* choice of supplementing this account was not constrained by chronology but must have been a deliberate arrangement. The approach illustrated in the previous example of inserting a prologue prior to the main text is only applicable at the beginning of the text, much like the

⁴⁸⁶ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 3, 90–3.

function of a preface in contemporary writing.⁴⁸⁷ However, once the primary narrative is underway, a rigorous framework governing content composition and sequencing takes over. Given that the main text entries forms a tightly knitted continuum, weaving commentary entries within this established progression risks introducing a chronological inconsistency and potentially compromises the integrity of the main text entries. Thus, in an effort to uphold format uniformity while preserving the arrangement of the main text entries, this particular “antecedent-the-main text” commentary has been strategically allocated to the preceding year, positioned in close proximity to the four-year main text to signify its function.

7. **Succeeding the main text to exhaust the significance** 後經以終義

There are places in the *Zuo zhuan* where the major development of an event is recorded in a certain year in the *Chunqiu*, but the related consequence is unmentioned. In such cases, *the Zuo zhuan*, in addition to annotating the major event, also traces the outcome and documents the result in its respective year. The intention of this approach is to achieve a comprehensive depiction of events, thus allowing the inherent significance to be thoroughly revealed through their eventual outcomes. These outcomes often transpire significantly later than the main events documented in the main text. Despite this chronological separation, the documentation of these outcomes is principally intended to resonate with the antecedent development. Consequently, from a stylistic perspective, this annotation method exhibits a “post-main text” disposition.

Ex.1: In the twenty-second year of Duke Zhao 魯昭公, the *Chunqiu* records the disorder of the royal house of Zhou following the interment of King Ping in the sixth month of that year.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁷ Note that Durrant et al. suggest this is a preface to the main text. See Durrant et al., *Zuo Tradition*, 5.

⁴⁸⁸ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 50, 1635.

The subsequent passages record two accounts: Duke Wen of Liu 劉文公 and Duke Mu of Shan 單穆公 placing Prince Meng 猛 (also known as King Dao of Zhou 周悼王) in Huang 皇, and Duke Wen of Liu and Duke Mu of Shan escorting Prince Meng into the royal capital.⁴⁸⁹ Both events are representative of the chaotic power struggles following the upheaval within the royal house. The commentary from the same year elaborates on the chaos within the royal house, including both the entries with main text correspondence and those without a corresponding main text. These commentaries thoroughly depict the sequence of events: from the causes of the royal disorder, through the various conflicts, to the ultimate outcome—the ascension of King Jing 敬王 to the throne.⁴⁹⁰

The main text limits its account of the royal court's upheaval to the context of the twenty-second year, providing no references in the ensuing entries. The annotations in the commentaries from the same year are considered comprehensive and exhaustive. Yet, the *Zuo zhuan* supplements this with a WJZZ in the eighth year of Duke Ding, detailing punitive assaults on the cities of Gu 穀, Yili 儀栗, and Meng 孟. Each of these was separately led by Duke Wu of Shan 單武公 and Duke Huan of Liu 劉桓公⁴⁹¹ whose actions eventually brought stability to the Zhou house disorder. The disarray that began in the twenty-second year of Duke Zhao was not resolved until eighteen years later. Despite the main text's incomplete portrayal, the *Zuo zhuan* pursued an exhaustive recounting of the events to achieve its interpretive objectives.

⁴⁸⁹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 50, 1636.

⁴⁹⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 50, 1638–44.

⁴⁹¹ Duke Wu of Shan was the son and heir of Duke Mu of Shan, while Duke Huan of Liu was the son of Duke Wen of Liu. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 55, 1806. On the account of the punitive attacks, see *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 50, 1810.

However, it is important to note that this method of annotation has inherent limitations. From the perspective of narrative coherence there is a considerable eighteen-year span separating the event's onset and conclusion interlaced with a variety of unrelated events of varying significance. This interposition presents the reader with a formidable challenge, necessitating an in-depth recall of previous details and an ability to connect subsequent sections of text coherently. Regardless, it is both necessary and inevitable for the *Zuo zhuan* to document the events in accordance with their chronology in an effort to maintain the historical accuracy of the events.

Ex.2: The main text from the second year of Duke Ai records Zhao Yang of Jin escorting Kuaikui 蒯聵, the crown prince of Wei 衛, to Qi 戚.⁴⁹² The commentary from the same year records two accounts: Duke Ling of Wei 衛靈公 intending to designate his younger son, Prince Ying 郢 (also known as Zinan 子南), as the new crown prince, and the escorting of Kuaikui to Qi by the Jin army after Duke Ling's demise. Subsequently, in the fifteenth year of Duke Ai, the *Zuo zhuan* provides further details regarding Kuaikui's scheme, conceived in collaboration with his elder sister, Princess Bo 伯姬, to return to the state of Wei, which precipitated the flight of Duke Chu of Wei 衛出公 to Lu.⁴⁹³ Despite the eight-year span separating this account from the main

⁴⁹² *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 57, 1860.

Although the crown prince of Wei, Kuaikui, had always had irreconcilable differences with the primary consort of Duke Ling, Lady Nanzi 南子, it was his failed attempt at her assassination that precipitated his flight to the state of Jin for refuge. This resulted in Zhao Yang escorting him to Qi in the second year. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 56, 1846–7.

⁴⁹³ Duke Chu of Wei was the son of Kuaikui, who was named the successor to the throne after Duke Ling's demise. With Kuaikui's return, Duke Chu was forced to flee the state and take refuge in Lu. Consequently, Kuaikui ascended the throne, known as the Later Duke Zhuang of Wei 衛后莊公 to

event transpiring in the second year, the ultimate purpose of this fifteenth-year record is to exhaustively account for the significance of Kuaikui's journey to Qi.

Intriguingly, the account of Kuaikui returning to the state of Wei and Duke Chu of Wei fleeing to the state of Lu is also recorded in the first entry of the sixteenth year of Duke Ai in the *Chunqiu*.⁴⁹⁴ Du Yu suggested that this chronological discrepancy between the main text and the commentary is a consequence of *Chunqiu*'s meticulous adherence to the official report received by the state of Lu. Instances where an event's documentation in the main text is recorded after its actual occurrence year are found scattered across the *Chunqiu*. A comprehensive analysis of these instances will be presented in the eleventh category of this study.

In the *Zuo zhuan*, there are two justifications for documenting the event in the fifteenth year rather than placing it with *Chunqiu*'s sixteenth-year record. Firstly, the event in question indeed transpired in the fifteenth year. Serving as the commentary to the main text, the *Zuo zhuan* did not follow the conventions for official recording, thereby maintaining the historical accuracy of the account. Secondly, this commentary entry not only serves to call attention to the significance of the event recorded in the second year, but also foreshadows the chronicle of the next year. This dual function becomes evident upon examining the content of the sixteenth-year main text and the corresponding commentary. The main text from the sixteenth year begins with the account of Kuaikui's entry into Wei and concludes with the flight of Duke Chu of Wei to the state of Lu, both of which are referred to in the commentary of the fifteenth year. Conversely, the commentary for the sixteenth year only mentions the circumstances surrounding Mancheng's 瞞

distinguish him from the previous Duke Zhuang of Wei 衛前莊公. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 59, 1941–3.

⁴⁹⁴ See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 60, 1944.

成 flight to Song,⁴⁹⁵ and does not mention Duke Chu's escape to Lu. Given that Du Yu refrained from adding the phrase “[this account] does not have commentary” 無傳 under the main text, it can be inferred that the commentary of the fifteenth year fully encapsulates the main text from the subsequent sixteenth year.⁴⁹⁶

In summary, the commentary from the fifteenth year is complex, demonstrating multi-functional attributes. Structurally, it comports with the definition of WJZZ. In terms of content, it closely correlates with the main text from the sixteenth year. It also serves to fully elaborate on the meaning of the previous event. Thus, Kong Yingda identified it as an example of “succeeding the main text to exhaust the significance.” It also foreshadows the ensuing account of Mancheng and Chushi Bi's 褚師比 flight to Song in the following year. Nevertheless, this mode of foreshadowing should not be interpreted as a prediction of upcoming events, but rather as a kind of post-narrative chronology which can be seen as a practice that incorporates preceding events after the timeline has unfolded.

8. **Supplementing the unrecorded major affairs** 重大事件未書而補敘

Events within this category generally concern major affairs during the Spring and Autumn period. While the rationale behind the omission of these affairs in the *Chunqiu* may be attributed to various factors (i.e., was not officially reported, or the affair was not relevant to the state of Lu), the *Zuo zhuan* primarily incorporated these into the WJZZ for their inherent significance that was essential for a proper comprehension of the historical reality of that period.

⁴⁹⁵ Mancheng was the Minister of Education in the Wei court, who fled with Duke Chu, along with several other Wei officials including Chushi Bi, following Kuaikui's return to Wei. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 60, 1944–5.

⁴⁹⁶ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 60, 1944.

Ex.1: Perhaps the most salient example of this category is the account detailing the exchange of hostages between the Zhou court and the state of Zheng, as recorded in the third year of Duke Yin.⁴⁹⁷ This entry can be divided into three sections. The commentary begins with a summary of the discord between the Zhou court and Duke Zhuang of Zheng 鄭莊公, a discord stemming from King Ping's intent to divide the earl's power by offering an equally influential appointment to the Duke of Guo 虢公 within the royal court. This act incited resentment in the Zheng people toward the royal house. In an effort to demonstrate their mutual trust, King Ping consented to an exchange of hostages with Duke Zhuang resulting in the situating of Prince Hu 王子狐 in the state of Zheng and Prince Hu 公子忽 within the Zhou court. The discord between the two parties drastically escalated in the second section when, following King Ping's demise, the Zhou court expressed its intention to allow the Duke of Guo to take charge of all governmental affairs. This decision eventually led to Zheng's retribution by dispatching Zhai Zu 祭足 to prematurely reap all the wheat and paddy rice within the lands of Wen 濇 and Chengzhou 成周.⁴⁹⁸ The account concludes with a "Gentleman says" 君子曰 comment, in which the improper deeds of both the king and Duke Zhuang are condemned.

The reasons for this account's omission are not explicitly addressed in the *Zuo zhuan* or Du Yu's annotations. One could posit that it was not recorded by the scribes of Lu due to either a lack of report received by the state on the matter, or perhaps an intentional omission by the

⁴⁹⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi, juan 2*, 84–88.

⁴⁹⁸ Zhai Zu is better known as Zhai Zhong 祭仲 (?–682 BC). He was the ruling minister (equivalent of the modern position of Prime Minister) of the state of Zheng.

Both Wen and Chengzhou were lands ruled under the jurisdiction of the Zhou court.

scribes to evade potential embarrassment to the ruler. Nevertheless, this event signifies the first time during the Spring and Autumn period in which a vassal lord explicitly expresses his contempt and disrespect toward the Zhou court. Despite the diminished authority and its weakened control over the vassal states of the Zhou court, the king and the feudal lords generally upheld a semblance of harmony. Zheng's actions, however, demonstrate the emergence of the feudal states power and the concurrent decline of the royal power. The documentation of this event indicates the deterioration of ritual propriety and ceremonial music at the court and foretells the beginning of enduring power struggles among various vassal lords.

Ex.2: The commentary from the third year of Duke Cheng records a major event, notably that the state of Jin officially established six corps.⁴⁹⁹ The significance of this event is clearly revealed in Du Yu's annotation, which states that the Jin army had always maintained three military corps since its inception. The expansion of its military to six corps underscores Jin's encroachment on royal prerogatives in terms of both the scale and the norms of ritual propriety. This act unequivocally highlights Jin's desire to claim hegemony over the realm. As for encroaching on royal prerogatives, the "Xia guan" 夏官 section of the *Zhou li* writes as follows: "In general, when establishing armies, 12,500 men form one corp. The king has six corps, major states have three corps, second-major states have two corps, and minor states have one corp."⁵⁰⁰ In another account recorded in the fourteenth year of Duke Xiang, the passage reads as follows:

The armies returned from their attack on the state of Qin. The [Duke of] Jin subsequently relinquished the new additions of his armed forces; this is considered an act in accordance

⁴⁹⁹ “十二月甲戌，晉作六軍。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 26, 822.

⁵⁰⁰ “凡製軍，萬有二千五百人為軍。王六軍，大國三軍，次國二軍，小國以軍。” *Zhou li*, juan 28, 873.

with the rites. Major states should not exceed half the number of the Son of Heaven's troops. The Zhou court established six corps, thus, for major ones among the various vassal states, three corps were sufficient.⁵⁰¹

It is evident from both passages that the number "six" in military context is the prerogative of the Son of Heaven; only the king of Zhou was allowed to maintain an establishment of six corps. Although according to the *Zuo zhuan*, the state of Jin did not formally claim its hegemony until the fifteenth year of Duke Zhuang, the expansion of its army to six corps serves as solid evidence that the state of Jin was already equipped with sufficient strength and ambition to command the various vassal lords.

In general, any matter pertaining to the hegemonic state was perceived as important. Each movement and decision involved a wide range of geopolitical dynamics, especially when the matter in question represents Jin's first explicit encroachment on royal authority, which signals an unambiguous intent to achieve parity with, or even supplant royal power. Even though the event is unrecorded in the main text, for historical reasons to provide a more comprehensive account, it was necessary to incorporate this event within the commentary.

9. Supplementing accounts that were tabooed by the Lu scribes and the main text 魯史

有所避諱，經亦避而不書，傳補之

The *Chunqiu* is replete with examples that show Lu scribes frequently altered their phrasing or entirely omitted certain accounts in order to observe established taboos. This practice is explored in Du Yu's annotation, specifically in a text from the eleventh year of Duke Yin, which

⁵⁰¹ “師歸自伐秦。晉后舍新軍，禮也。成國不過半天子之軍。周為六軍，諸侯之大者，三軍可也。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 32, 1062–3.

reads as follows: “In the case where an actual act of ‘regicide’ is committed, yet [the scribes] denote it as a ‘demise,’ accompanied with an omission of the location in which the duke expired, this indicates that the bamboo slips observed certain taboos.”⁵⁰² The specific event under discussion is the regicide of Duke Yin that was orchestrated by Duke Huan. Du Yu employed this example to reveal the taboo practices maintained by the Lu scribes.

Regarding the taboo conventions during the Spring and Autumn period, the *Zhengyi* cites two compelling examples to illustrate the intricacies inherent to the subject. First, it draws attention to Confucius’ appreciation of Dong Hu’s straightforward recording of “Zhao Dun’s regicide of his ruler,” which attests to the scribes’ duty to uphold historical accuracy. Subsequently, the *Zhengyi* emphasizes the occasional necessity for scribes to adhere to taboos, as evidenced by the omission of the phrase “the duke ascended the throne” in Duke Xi’s reign.⁵⁰³ The *Zuo zhuan* regards this omission as conformity to the rites, for it tabooed the malfeasance of the state. The *Zhengyi* further strengthens its argument by listing several men: Kunwan 鬃頑 of Zheng, Yangsheng 陽生 of Qi, and Jun 麇 of Chu—rulers who all met their end through regicide.⁵⁰⁴ In

⁵⁰² “實弑書薨，又不見地者，史策有所諱也。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 4, 139.

⁵⁰³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 4, 139–140.

For detailed accounts on Zhao Dun’s attempt to murder Duke Ling of Jin and the omission of the phrase “the duke ascended the throne” in Duke Xi’s reign, please see *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 21, 679–688; *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 12, 367.

⁵⁰⁴ Kunwan is the personal name for Duke Xi of Zheng 鄭僖公 (r.570–566 BC). Yang Sheng is also known as Duke Dao of Qi 齊悼公 (r. 489–485 BC). Jun is better known as Jia Ao 郟敖 (?–541 BC), the *Chunqiu* refers to him as the King of Chu, Jun 楚子麇. *Jun* 麇 is a loan character for *jun* 麇. According to Du Yu, the Chu people referred to those of who died before officially becoming the king of Chu as *ao* 敖. Jia 郟 is the name of the place in which Jun was buried. For accounts regarding the demises of Kunwan, Yangsheng, and Jun, please see *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 30, 974, 979–980; *Chunqiu*

each case, the report received by the state of Lu uses the word *zu* 卒 (a relatively neutral word, meaning “pass away” or “meet one’s end”) as opposed to *shi* 弑 (regicide or parricide).⁵⁰⁵ Thus, it can be surmised that the practice of tabooing the malfeasance of the state was commonly employed among the vassal states during the Spring and Autumn period.

Ex.1: A commentary entry from the sixteenth year of Duke Zhao reads as follows: “In spring, the first month of the royal calendar, the duke was in the state of Jin and the Jin people detained the duke. This was not recorded because it was considered a taboo.”⁵⁰⁶ Duke Zhao’s journey to the state of Jin occurred in the winter of the fifteenth year of his reign. The *Zuo zhuan* explains that the purpose of this journey was related to the meeting at Pingqiu 平丘.⁵⁰⁷ Details regarding Duke Zhao’s journey to Jin in the fifteenth year are further elaborated in a note provided by Du Yu, which reads as follows: “At the meeting at Pingqiu, the duke did not join the alliance, and Jisun was detained [by the state of Jin]. Now that he has been released, [the duke] then traveled to the state of Jin to offer an apology [for the Pingqiu meeting].”⁵⁰⁸ Duke Zhao’s journey to the

Zuo zhuan zhengyi, juan 58, 1902–03; *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 41, 1309, 1344–6, respectively. For Du Yu’s note on *ao*, see *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 9, 288.

For further details on the standards regarding *Chunqiu*’s recording practices on regicides, please refer to Du Yu’s and Kong Yingda’s annotations from the fourth year of Duke Xuan. See, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 21, 698–9.

⁵⁰⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 4, 140.

⁵⁰⁶ “春，王正月，公在晉，晉人止公。不書，諱之也。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 47, 1552.

⁵⁰⁷ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 47, 1547.

⁵⁰⁸ “平丘會，公不與盟，季孫見執，今即得免，故往謝之。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 47, 1547.

The Pingqiu meeting was a meeting to swear a covenant between the states of Jin, Liu, Song, Qi 齊, Wei 衛, Zheng, Cao, Lü, Zhu, Teng, Xue, Qi 杞, and minor Zhu 小邾 occurred in the thirteenth year

state of Jin in the fifteenth year was an act of contrition, yet he was not released back to his state until the summer of the sixteenth year.⁵⁰⁹

According to the *Zhengyi*, in the case where the ruler is absent from his own state, the officials in charge of the state should report this absence to the ancestral temple each month, specifying the exact location of the ruler and the reason for his absence. If the ruler was absent from the state at the beginning of the year, this account should be included in the official annals. An instance of this practice can be found in the main text from the twenty-ninth year of Duke Xiang, which records Duke Xiang's presence in the state of Chu. The *Zuo zhuan* interprets this passage as an explanation for Duke Xiang's failure to visit the ancestral temple at the beginning of that year.⁵¹⁰ Consequently, the absence of Duke Zhao from Lu during the spring of the sixteenth year should have been documented in *Chunqiu*. However, since the duke was absent due to being held captive by Jin—a circumstance deemed disgraceful—he did not report his imprisonment to the ancestral temple. Thus, the scribes observed the taboo and omitted this incident from the annals. The recounting of this omission in the *Zuo zhuan* helps readers to understand the conventions governing scribal taboos during the Spring and Autumn period.

Ex.2: The commentary from the eighth year of Duke Ai records an alliance formed between the states of Lu and Qi.⁵¹¹ Typically, any event pertaining to Lu forming alliances with other states would invariably be recorded in the *Chunqiu*, for matters of this nature were deemed major

of Duke Zhao. The purpose is to denounce and punish the state of Lu for constantly attacking its allied states of Zhu and Lü. For details, please see *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 46, 1509, 1528.

⁵⁰⁹ The main text from the sixteenth year of Duke Zhao records that he returned home from the state of Jin in summer. “夏，公至自晉。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 47, 1552.

⁵¹⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 39, 1250.

⁵¹¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 58, 1899.

affairs. However, this incident was omitted from the main text. While the *Zuo zhuan* does not offer an explanation for this omission, Du Yu confirmed in his note that this account was indeed omitted due to taboo considerations.⁵¹² The genesis of this taboo can be traced to the fifth year of Duke Ai, where Prince Yangsheng (Duke Dao of Qi) sought refuge in the state of Lu following the demise of Duke Jing of Qi 齊景公. During this period, Ji Kangzi 季康子, the ruling minister of Lu, promised his sister's hand in marriage to Yangsheng. Later, upon Yangsheng's return to the state of Qi and subsequent ascension to the throne, he journeyed back to Lu to claim his bride. However, it was revealed that Ji Kangzi's sister had been involved in an adulterous relationship with her uncle, Ji Fanghou 季魴侯. Acknowledging this scandalous situation, Ji Kangzi did not dare to marry his sister to Duke Dao. The unfulfilled promise enraged Duke Dao, leading to a joint attack on Lu by the states of Qi and Wu. This attack persisted until autumn, when Qi and Lu finally reconciled and formed an alliance.⁵¹³

The Lu scribes treated this alliance as taboo for two reasons. First, the state of Lu was under attack due to the disgraceful conduct of the Ji clan's princess—an affair deemed reprehensible. Second, the cessation of the attack by the states of Qi and Wu only transpired after the Lu army's capitulation and preemptive pursuit of peace with Qi, a result that signified Lu's defeat and humiliation. Historically, scribes, entrusted with the documentation of official annals, were compelled to operate from a perspective of state interest. This responsibility required them to possess a comprehensive understanding of societal affairs and practical wisdom involving a multitude of considerations. Consequently, despite the unfolding of events, those events that were considered the malfeasance of the state could be omitted, a discretion permitted within the

⁵¹² *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 58, 1899.

⁵¹³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 58, 1898.

rules of ritual propriety of the time. However, the *Zuo zhuan*, because of its mode of composition, often strays from the official annals. Although instances of strategic omissions occur occasionally, the intent of *Zuo zhuan* in many cases is twofold: first, to shed light on the inherent meaning within the main text, and second, to ensure the comprehensive portrayal of related historical events. This approach allows for a fuller appreciation of their respective significances.

10. Affairs that were recorded later than their actual occurrence 事發於前，經記於後

This type of commentary is not considered as genuine WJZZ, but an outcome achieved through structural arrangements by recording events later than their actual chronologies in the *Chunqiu*. The most common motivation for this delayed documentation is *Chunqiu*'s stringent adherence to the reports received by the state of Lu. Even in the case where the scribes acknowledged the event in question transpired in the previous autumn, they would still have to record it in the following winter, for the report had been written as such. Consequently, this delayed recording practice may have misled later scholars who did not know the rationale for this anomaly. Given its knowledge of the event, the *Zuo zhuan* supplements pertinent details to the chronology of the event to provide elucidation for future readers.

Ex.1: In the spring of the fifth year of Duke Xi, the main text records the arrival of an envoy from the state of Jin in Lu, reporting the murder of Crown Prince Shensheng 申生 by the Duke of Jin.⁵¹⁴ However, the *Zuo zhuan* records the prince's demise in the twelfth month of the fourth year of Duke Xi. Du Yu resolves this discrepancy between the *Chunqiu* and the *Zuo zhuan*, attributing it to *Chunqiu*'s adherence to the content of the report from Jin.⁵¹⁵ In contrast, the *Zuo*

⁵¹⁴ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 12, 385.

⁵¹⁵ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 12, 385.

zhuan faithfully records the event as it transpired in the previous winter and supplements it with extensive background information. This passage, though seemingly a WJZZ, aligns closely with the fifth-year main text. In addition to depicting the true circumstances of the account, the passage also demonstrates characteristics typical of the “antecedent the main text to initiate the narrative” category. It dedicates a great portion of the passage to unravel the series of events that led Shensheng from his position as the crown prince of Jin to his eventual flight to Xincheng 新城, culminating in his tragic end.

The noteworthy discrepancy between this commentary entry and the fifth-year main text is apparent not only in chronology but also in content. According to the commentary, Shensheng met his end through suicide, whereas the main text records that he was killed by the Duke of Jin. All discrepancies stem from the report presented by the Jin envoy. In this case, the state of Jin not only declared it had executed Shensheng but also dispatched an envoy to relay the report, purporting to “broadly announce his (Shensheng’s) faults” 廣聲其罪.⁵¹⁶ Kong Yingda further posited that the Lu scribes did not rigidly adhere to the phrasing of the report, but altered the wording to attribute the murder of Shensheng directly to the Duke of Jin, rather than neutrally documenting it as a state execution. This arises from the fact that the intricate details of the event were widely circulated and known to the Lu scribes. Consequently, they altered the wording of the report in a manner that subtly criticized the Duke of Jin for his transgressions.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁶ According to Du Yu’s *Shili* 釋例, the states of Lu and Jin had not dispatched envoys to each other for an extended period. A mere report of Shensheng’s death would not necessitate the dispatch of an envoy. Yet, the Duke of Jin made a deliberate choice to send an envoy to deliver the news, a strategy intended to disseminate Shensheng’s alleged faults. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 12, 385.

⁵¹⁷ Kong Yingda based this interpretation on the *Gongyang zhuan*, which posits that the explicit identification of the Marquis of Jin as the murderer of Shensheng was a gesture of criticism. The purpose

Ex.2: A main text entry from the eighteenth year of Duke Cheng reads as follows: “The state of Jin put its official Xu Tong to death.”⁵¹⁸ The commentary records this event in the leap month of the previous year and attributes the actual killing of Xu Tong to two specific figures: Luan Shu 欒書 and Zhonghang Yan 中行偃 (better known as Xun Yan 荀偃). Du Yu suggested that this discrepancy can be ascribed to *Chunqiu*’s adherence to the report received. The *Zhengyi* notes that officials were seldom referenced by their names in the *Chunqiu*, thus it can be surmised that the references to “Xu Tong” and “official” denote two distinct incidents: the killing of the Three Xis 三郤 and the killing of Xu Tong.⁵¹⁹ Both incidents, whether relating to the killing of the Three Xis or Xu Tong, originated from personal vendettas rather than state-sanctioned punishments. The decision by the compiler of the *Chunqiu* to consolidate these two incidents, presenting them as actions undertaken by the state, is informed by the actions of the Three Xis and Xu Tong. Their conduct during their lifetimes had a deleterious impact on both the state and

was to proclaim the duke’s fault and to assert Shensheng’s innocence. Furthermore, the commentary from the fifth year of Duke Xi also records that the Jin envoy reported the execution of Shensheng to the state of Lu, with no mention of the Duke of Jin. Thus, it can be surmised that the Lu scribes intentionally altered the wording of the report. Moreover, when annotating this passage, the commentary did not use the term “the text says,” which indicates that this is a change made by the Lu scribes rather than the edition by Confucius. See, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 12, 385; *Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, juan 10, 252.

⁵¹⁸ “晉殺其大夫胥童。” *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 28, 918.

⁵¹⁹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 28, 910.

The killing of the Three Xis is recorded in the seventeenth year of Duke Cheng. “Three Xis” is a collective reference for the three Jin Officials from Xi clan: Xi Qi 郤錡, Xi Chou 郤犇, and Xi Zhi 郤至. For details regarding the Three Xis and their demises, please see *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 28, 914–5.

For detailed account on Xu Tong, see *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 28, 914–8.

its people, causing widespread chaos and undermining moral standards. Consequently, the main text purposefully altered its phrasing, invoking the authority of the state to underscore the culpability associated with these four individuals. When annotating this passage, the *Zuo zhuan* specifically utilizes the term “thus, it writes” to encapsulate the nature of the text.⁵²⁰ In employing this term, the *Zuo zhuan* not only clarifies that the phrasing within the passage is a result of Confucius’ editing (the original text of the Lu *Chunqiu* may have been recorded based on actual events), but it also sheds light on the motivations behind *Chunqiu*’s decision to consolidate two independent incidents, occurring months apart, into a single unified event.⁵²¹

Within this category, there are numerous cases where the main text and commentary entry occur in the same year. This situation often arises when the actual occurrence of the event and its recording in the main text falls within the same year but in different months. As the *Zuo zhuan* is arranged annalistically, main text entries and commentaries that are merely months apart inevitably end up recorded within the same year.⁵²² This arrangement may present the appearance of “commentaries with main text counterparts” focusing on rectifying details in the main text. Nevertheless, these commentaries fundamentally align with the nature of the WJZZ within the “Affairs that were recorded later than its actual occurrence” category.

⁵²⁰ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 28, 917.

⁵²¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 28, 917.

⁵²² For instance, the main text from the fourteenth year of Duke Wen records the regicide of the Qi ruler She 舍 by the Qi prince Shangren 商人 (Duke Yi of Qi 齊懿公) in the ninth month. However, the commentary documents the actual occurrence of this event in the seventh month. In another case, the main text records the defeat of the royal court by Maorong 茅戎 in the autumn of the first year of Duke Cheng, whereas the commentary records it in the third month. For detailed information on these two accounts, please see *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 19b, 631–633; juan 25, 787–788.

11. Changing the order of events for narrative purposes 為敘事而改序

Occasionally, the *Zuo zhuan* will reorder the sequence of events to ensure a more fluent narration and to elucidate its inherent implications by either advancing or postponing the narrative. As the events in question are either accounted for in the year prior or would be addressed in the subsequent year, the commentary often avoids superfluous restatement in the year corresponding to the main text, thereby resulting in the occurrence of WJZZ.

Ex.1: In the ninth year of Duke Ding, a commentary entry records Ziming 子明 warning the Duke of Song about Yue Daxin 樂大心, stating that Yue Daxin will cause harm to the Dai 戴 lineage, and bring chaos to the state. In the next section of this passage, the commentary records the exile of Yue Daxin.⁵²³ However, in reality, Yue Daxin did not flee to the state of Cao 曹 until autumn of the tenth year of Duke Ding.⁵²⁴ This incident signifies an intentional chronological adjustment made by the *Zuo zhuan* which advances the timeline of the event. Moreover, since Yue Daxin's flight has already been documented in the ninth year, no further annotation is provided following the corresponding main text in the tenth year. This mode of composition essentially prioritizes the needs of seamless historical narration and in effect sacrifices a certain level of factual accuracy. From the perspective of this entry, the motivation behind the commentary's order adjustment lies in the first half of the passage. This entry begins with the incident where Yue Daxin feigns illness as a pretext to decline the order from the Duke of Song, thereby refusing to journey to the state of Jin to form an alliance. This progression subsequently

⁵²³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 55, 1817–8.

⁵²⁴ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 56, 1826.

precipitates the confrontation between Ziming and Yue Daxin, as well as Ziming's prophetic admonition to the Duke of Song concerning Yue Daxin's impending insurrection.

The event in which the Duke of Song ordered Yue Daxin to attend the alliance at the state of Jin in the ninth year is an established historical fact. This incident not only accurately depicts Yue Daxin's character but also provides the context for the subsequent developments. The precise timing and veracity of the dialogue between Ziming and Yue Daxin, along with Ziming's forewarning to the Duke of Song, are difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, when viewed from the logic of the sequence of events, this interaction is likely to have occurred before Yue Daxin's flight. The insubordination of Yue Daxin, exemplified by his refusal to obey the duke's order, served as the precipitating event, causing an escalating atmosphere of tension between himself and the Duke of Song. This situation was exacerbated by the personal animosity between Ziming and Yue Daxin. The failure of their communication ultimately led to Ziming presenting his complaint to the Duke of Song, thereby providing a credible pretext for the duke to punish Yue Daxin. This sequence of events forms a logical, cohesive narrative. However, Ziming's accusation essentially functions more as a prediction than as the determinative outcome of the unfolding development, rendering the exact implications of his prophetic assertion uncertain. Therefore, the *Zuo zhuan* strategically advances the incident that was to transpire in the subsequent year to this juncture in the narrative, effectively bringing the dialogue to a conclusion that resonates with Ziming's prophetic remark.

Ex.2: The commentary from the eleventh year of Duke Cheng records a passage pertaining to the family of Zishu Shengbo 子叔聲伯. The initial segment of this passage recounts the family

background of Shengbo, whose mother was an unrecognized concubine of Shuxi 叔肸.⁵²⁵ Later, when Shengbo's mother remarried Guan Yuxi 管于奚, an official of Qi, and gave birth to a son and a daughter after being abandoned by Shuxi, Shengbo took his half-siblings under his wing.⁵²⁶ A critical juncture occurs following Xi Chou's diplomatic mission to the state of Lu, during which he sought a wife from Shengbo, culminating in his marriage to Shengbo's half-sister, an act that effectively removed her from her then husband, Shi Xiaoshu 施孝叔. It is worth noting that, until this point, the events portrayed all unfold within or prior to the eleventh year of Duke Cheng. The latter section of this passage, however, consists of accounts that all transpired in the seventeenth year of Duke Cheng.⁵²⁷ The subsequent narrative continues with the record of Shengbo's sister's return, accompanied by her two newborn children, following Xi Chou's death, and includes a conversation with her former husband after he drowned the infants in the Yellow River. The focus of this latter half of the passage lies in Shengbo's half-sister's accusation of Shi Xiaoshu's for being unable to protect his own wife or to love another man's orphans as well as her vow to cut ties with Shi Xiaoshu.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁵ Shuxi was the brother of Duke Xuan.

Shengbo's mother gave birth to Shengbo without formalizing her betrothal before entering Shuxi's 叔肸 chamber. Therefore, Mujiang 穆姜, the primary consort of Duke Xuan, refused to consider Shengbo's mother as a sister-in-law. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 27, 856.

⁵²⁶ Shengbo offered an official position to his half-brother in the Lu court and married his half-sister to Shi Xiaoshu 施孝叔, the fifth-generation descendent of Duke Hui. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 27, 856.

⁵²⁷ The *Chunqiu* records the death of Xi Chou in the twelfth month of the seventeenth year of Duke Cheng. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 28, 910.

⁵²⁸ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 27, 856–7.

A thorough comparison between the main text and the commentary reveals that although this entry remarks on both the visit of Xi Chou to Lu and his subsequent demise, the main plot and protagonists presented in the account bear no relation to the main text, thereby rendering it a WJZZ. According to the *Zhengyi*, the purpose of incorporating this passage into the commentary is to portray the unrestrained and immoral character of Xi Chou, which, to a certain degree, resonates with the demise of the Three Xis recounted in the seventeenth-year commentary.⁵²⁹

In terms of chronology, the latter portion of the entry should logically be situated in the seventeenth year of Duke Cheng in which the misdeeds of the Three Xis are recounted. However, the *Zuo zhuan* deviates from this order and notably advances it to the eleventh year, a deliberate rearrangement aimed at enhancing the narrative structure. While the eleventh-year commentary may ostensibly serve the purpose of highlighting the immoral deeds of Xi Chou,⁵³⁰ its narrative focus predominantly revolves around Shengbo and his sister. The narrative structure clearly divides into two halves: the former segment provides an essential background and initiates the main sequence of events, while the latter delivers the outcome and illuminates the consequence of individual actions. Thus, whether judging from the dynamics among the characters or thematic relevance, the latter segment seems much more suitably situated within the chronicle of the eleventh year. After all, the import of Shengbo's sister emerges exclusively from the contextual underpinnings of her coerced marriage to Xi Chou and her subsequent

⁵²⁹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 17, 857.

⁵³⁰ It can be surmised that Xi Chou had heard of the beauty of Shengbo's sister prior to his official visit to Lu. Xi Chou's sole intent in seeking a wife from Shengbo was to claim Shengbo's sister, who was already married. However, out of fear of Xi Chou's prevailing authority and status, neither Shengbo nor Shi Xiaoshu dared to refuse. This account explicitly unveils the extent of Xi Chou's power and his arrogant disposition.

abandonment by her spouse. Conversely, the commentary from the seventeenth year emphasizes the portrayal of the collective malevolence of the Three Xis, rather than the discrete enumeration of Xi Chou's misdeeds.⁵³¹

12. **Conveying comments of the *Zuo zhuan* from a historical perspective** 《左傳》從史的角度出發，表達《傳》的評價

Entries within this category bear less correlation with the specific events or their inherent meanings presented in the main text. They predominantly reflect the comments or judgments of *Zuo zhuan*'s compiler emanating from a scribe's perspective. Some of these passages function as the bridge between commentary entries, while others display *Zuo zhuan*'s own understanding of the historical past. In a broader scheme, many entries within this category can be structurally aligned with one of the aforementioned categories, such as “foreshadowing” or “tracing the beginnings.” Still, these entries serve more than simply foreshadowing or tracing the origin of an event; they also incorporate the compiler's personal viewpoint, thereby necessitating the establishment of a distinct category for them. The parameters of this category of WJZZ are broad, and this dissertation merely presents examples to illuminate the overall paradigm. The encapsulated content can be dissected or further classified based on individual circumstances.

Ex.1: There are two entries in the commentary from the twenty-fifth year of Duke Zhao that deserve special attention. The first records Shusun Chuo 叔孫婁's diplomatic mission to the state of Jin and a brief exchange with Yue Daxin; the second recounts a meeting at Huangfu 黃父 among Zhao Yang, Yue Daxin, and others to discuss matters regarding stabilizing the royal house

⁵³¹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, juan 28, 9.14–5.

and transporting provisions to the royal court.⁵³² While both entries appear to correspond with the main text, the focus of these entries bears no direct relevance to them.⁵³³ The first commentary entry is primarily centered around the conversation between Shusun Chuo and Yue Daxin and the predicted outcome of Yue Daxin's impending flight. Conversely, the second entry records various responses to the proposal to deliver grain to the royal house, with a particular emphasis on the actions of Yue Daxin. While the commentary references the meeting at Huangfu, the unwillingness of the Song people to provision the royal court with grain bears no relation to the content of the main text, thus justifying the classification of this entry as a WJZZ. When considered together, these two entries prominently feature Yue Daxin as the central figure. Notably, both narratives are unified by a common conclusion—the prophetic assertion of Yue Daxin's forthcoming flight. As noted by Du Yu, both commentaries serve to foreshadow Yue Daxin's flight to Cao in the tenth year of Duke Ding. Their connection to the events detailed in the main text from the twenty-fifth year of Duke Zhao is marginal, suggesting that these entries primarily function as narrative instruments, employed strategically to present accounts pertaining to Yue Daxin.

Establishing the veracity of the content within these passages is challenging for it remains unclear whether the dialogues and prophetic assertions are accurate historical accounts or literary

⁵³² *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi, juan 51*, 1664; 1666–7.

⁵³³ The corresponding main text entry from the twenty-fifth year of Duke Zhao records as follows: “In spring, Shusun Chuo journeyed to the state of Song” 春，叔孫婁如宋。The subsequent main text reads as follows: “In summer, Shu Yi met with Zhao Yang of Jin, Yue Daxin of Song, Beigong Xi of Wei, You Ji of Zheng, along with the officials of Cao, Zhu, Teng, Xue, and Minor Zhu at Huangfu” 夏，叔詣會晉趙鞅、宋樂大心、衛北宮喜、鄭游吉、曹人、邾人、滕人、薛人、小邾人於黃父。See, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi, juan 51*, 1662.

embellishments. Despite these uncertainties, it can be discerned that the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*—having perceived the interrelation of several incidents within the diverse sources—ascertained an inherent causality after scrutinizing these fragmented pieces of information. On a broader spectrum, the two commentaries under discussion do not necessarily disengage from the overall narrative. Instead, they enrich the details of the events presented in the subsequent main text entries. However, the incorporation of these two ostensibly unrelated passages that foreshadow the ensuing events is indicative of the *Zuo zhuan* compiler’s personal reflections and evaluations rather than representing the connotations inherent in the main text.

Ex.2: The commentary from the twentieth year of Duke Zhao records a dialogue between the Marquis of Qi and Yanzi 晏子 on the differences between *he* 和 (in harmony with) and *tong* 同 (identical to; conform to).⁵³⁴ This is a WJZZ, which also seems to function as an isolated account, bearing no ostensible relation with other events. The core focus of this commentary is an exploration of the concept of governance from a ruler’s perspective, specifically elucidating the ideal state of “harmony” that should exist between a sovereign and his ministers. It then contrasts this idealized state with the mere act of “conformity” to the ruler, exemplified by the case of Liangqiu Ju 梁丘據. This dialogue essentially presents a comprehensive philosophical discourse on the principles of state administration. Even though it bears no direct connection with the main text or its adjacent commentaries, the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan* attributes significance to this theoretical framework for governance. Thus, given the pertinent characters involved and the chronology of the event, this philosophical discourse finds its place within the commentary.

⁵³⁴ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi, juan* 49, 1612–20.

In the commentary from the twentieth year of Duke Zhao, there are three dialogues between Duke Jing of Qi 齊景公 and Yanzi. Each of these dialogues delves into a distinct topic, and they all are considered WJZZ, serving identical functions.⁵³⁵ The *Chunqiu* does not contain any discourse that corresponds to the *Zuo zhuan* text. This may have been motivated by the compiler's desire to call attention to the profound purport embodied in the main text, or it may convey his personal viewpoint. Regardless of their alignment or disparity with the teaching of Confucius, these commentaries predominantly represent the social norms and political ideologies that the *Zuo zhuan* compiler esteemed at the time. As such, they serve more significantly as reflections of these societal and philosophical principles, rather than purely expository interpretations of the *Chunqiu* or its inherent principles.

The *Zuo zhuan* contains a substantial number of WJZZ, and some commentaries feature unique characteristics that do not fully align with a specific category, necessitating individual attention. The twelve categories delineated in this dissertation only encapsulate the general situation commonly seen in WJZZ, aiming to offer a broad depiction and characteristic features of these entries for pertinent academic discourse.

⁵³⁵ The first dialogue unfolds subsequent to Duke Jing of Qi's affliction with malaria. In this context, Yanzi seized the opportunity, presented by the matter of whether to punish the priest and the scribe, to admonish Duke Jing on the moral conduct befitting a ruler. The second dialogue is regarding the differences between *he* and *tong*. The last conversation pertains to a discourse on life and death. See, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 49, 1608 –20.

4.3. WJZZ and Narrative Strategies

Through a rigorous classification and analysis of the aforementioned twelve types of WJZZ this scholar contends that the most essential nature of WJZZ is to fill in textual lacunae within the *Chunqiu*. Specifically, the first, second, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh categories emphasize the continuity and interrelatedness of events, as well as the smooth progression of their inherent logic. These six types of commentaries elucidate and enhance the events portrayed in the main text using diverse techniques—be it precursory, supplementary, or interposed. In doing so, they imbue the originally isolated and fragmented narratives within the main text with an augmented sense of coherence and relevance. In contrast, the third, eighth, ninth, and twelfth categories place more emphasis on isolated events. Unlike the events from the previous six categories of commentaries which serve as structural bases, these events present themselves as standalone incidents. Each event holds indisputable relevance to either the context of their time or the broader historical span of the Spring and Autumn period. Certainly, this putative relevance may reflect, to a great extent, the personal judgment of the *Zuo zhuan* compiler. There are many incidents in the commentary that were included because its compiler felt that these should have been included within the *Chunqiu* but were omitted for various reasons. Still, there is a small portion of the *Zuo zhuan* text that bears no direct relationship to the main text entries but instead fully reflects the compiler's personal contemplations on historical occurrences and value judgments. As for categories ten and eleven, they only ostensibly conform to the characteristics of WJZZ. However, these two categories actually do not constitute genuine WJZZ, and their absence of correspondence to the main text is an outcome of particular circumstances, rather than a defining attribute of their content.

Upon inspection, we find that, although the quantity of WJZZ entries is significant, they generally fall into one of two “filling in textual lacunae” categories. The first category centers on event supplementation, not for isolated events, but as pivotal components missing from a continuum of events. The objective is to enhance the structural integrity of the narrative. Its inherent logic adheres to the natural occurrence and progression of events, each cause yielding an effect, thereby precipitating another event or a series of events along with their consequential outcomes, a phenomenon commonly referred to as “development.” Conversely, the second category is devoted to supplementing singular incidents that rarely are associated with other events. The objective here is to highlight the inherent significance of the particular event, thereby enriching the content and detailing the main text without necessitating structural modifications.

If we follow the arguments set forth by C.Y. Wang and define “narrative” in its broader sense, then the essential components of this term inevitably consist of both a story and a storyteller.⁵³⁶ Delving deeper, this mode of writing intrinsically entails the interlinking and sequencing of a succession of human-centered events. This approach fundamentally incorporates four components: plot, characters, viewpoints, and meaning. Here, “plot” refers to a sequence of events that have undergone deliberate arrangements. The unfolding of these events necessitates chronological order and a process of transformation. Moreover, a degree of cohesion is indispensable amongst these events, forging a reciprocating bond between antecedent and subsequent occurrences.⁵³⁷ From a structural perspective, these are the most prominent and essential characteristics of the narrative genre.

⁵³⁶ Plaks, “Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative,” 309–13; Wang, “Early Chinese Narrative: The Tso-Chuan as Example,” 3.

⁵³⁷ Wang, “Early Chinese Narrative: The Tso-Chuan as Example,” 4–7.

As for the *Zuo zhuan*, one of the primary reasons it is regarded as an exemplar of the earliest mature narrative composition in Chinese literature in part stems from its display of a structured framework consistent with later narrative theories. This framework is marked by elements such as arrangement, cohesion, sequencing, and progression. These distinctive characteristics are primarily conveyed through the WJZZ. Given that the *Chunqiu* main text was formed based on the Lu annals *Chunqiu*, its format inevitably follows the Lu annals, characterized by a succinct record of encapsulated and condensed events. Furthermore, due to its function as an official annal, the *Chunqiu* is intrinsically a compilation of notable events of the time recorded across different periods by generations of scribes. Consequently, its content assumes the form of a concise summary that is characterized as both isolated and lacking coherence.

If the compiler emulated the approach adopted by the traditional Ruist scholars, which is renowned for its stringent adherence to the *Chunqiu* and refraining from providing additional insights that are not explicitly expressed in the main text, then the resulting structure would be as fragmented and disparate as the *Chunqiu* itself, akin to the *Gongyang* and *Guliang*. This, however, is where the *Zuo zhuan* diverges. Preserving only the commentaries that correspond to the main text within the *Zuo zhuan* would, despite their richly detailed and unique character, yield a structural outcome parallel to that of the *Chunqiu* and the other two commentaries. It is the presence of WJZZ that connected these salient events, installing them with tightly knit arrangements and cohesive development. Through amending the various textual gaps between the main text entries, these WJZZ transform into linking threads between the events delineated in the *Chunqiu*. They effectively forge these events into a coherent narrative, underpinned by causality and enhanced by extensive contextual details.

However, unlike later narrative texts, the mode of writing observed in the *Zuo zhuan*, which ostensibly conforms to the notion of “narrative writing,” was not a deliberate achievement. Rather, it emerged incidentally as a consequence of a linear progression during the process of composition. As highlighted above, the essential nature of WJZZ is to fill in various textual lacunae within the *Chunqiu*, thereby ensuring a cohesive narrative and allowing the occurrence and progression of events to follow a logical course. But why does the *Zuo zhuan* emphasize these qualities in its composition? The reason lies in the overarching goal of the *Zuo zhuan*. It strives not only to elucidate the judgments found within the *Chunqiu* but more significantly to illuminate the underlying processes that gave rise to these judgments.

If we draw an analogy between the *Chunqiu* main text and a mathematical problem, then the main text only embodies the question and the ultimate answer. Readers can mechanically replicate the result but would never be able to comprehend the strategy and perspective that lay behind the solution, let alone apply them to other problems. It is only by meticulously restoring the omitted steps that one can truly understand the detailed problem-solving approach, comprehend why certain problems yield specific answers, and genuinely fulfill the learning process. This analogy represents the precise guiding principle behind *Zuo zhuan*'s composition. Guided by this framework, the compiler of the *Zuo zhuan* first sifts through and classifies the content of the *Chunqiu*, and then supplements necessary details based on a vast repository of gathered materials. It is noteworthy that the *Chunqiu* takes the dominant position within this relationship. The specific content and methods by which the *Zuo zhuan* supplements the *Chunqiu*, and even the exact location of these supplemented texts, depend upon the main text.

The diverse techniques of filling in lacunae exhibited in the twelve categories of WJZZ discussed in this dissertation—such as setting the stage or providing background information by

interposing it prior to the event, disclosing the outcome or summarizing after the event, and interlacing it between events to ensure coherence—are all contingent upon the specific circumstances of the events as delineated in the main text and the relationship between these events, their context, and surrounding incidents. This subordinate nature of WJZZ is largely due to the fact that, from the standpoint of event causality and cohesiveness, a particular main text entry only addresses a certain link within a sequence. The role of the *Zuo zhuan* is to supplement the overlooked remaining parts in its annotations. The precise location of these additions is contingent upon the specific place the main text holds within the overall sequence. Since different locations within a sequence embody varied functions and significances, the narrative perspective would naturally be adjusted accordingly during the recounting process. When this compositional mindset has connected a majority of main text entries into a coherent whole, it will inevitably exert influence over the general writing approach. Consequently, we observe the inclusion of a number of passages within the *Zuo zhuan* that bear no direct relation to the main text but are closely connected to other commentary entries (i.e., Category Five, Ex.2). The ultimate intent is to achieve a sense of congruence within the overarching mode of writing without appearing disparate and chaotic.

4.4 Conclusion

In summary, the manifestation of features that correspond to the modern definition of a coherent “narrative structure” within the *Zuo zhuan* did not arise from its compiler’s conscious intent to depict a complete “story.” The formation of these structural characteristics necessitates a crucial precondition: the commentary is formed around and guided by the *Chunqiu* main text. To a certain extent, the so-called “complete narrative” or “story” is already an existing fact, for it is

the essence of all sequential human-centric occurrences. If an event is capable of precipitating another event, developing further consequences, then this progression must invariably be fluid and continuous, rather than fragmented or abrupt. The *Chunqiu*, guided by its inherent demands and restrictions, utilizes a disjointed method of selectively recording events, emphasizing salient points while compromising the narrative's natural continuity. In contrast, the *Zuo zhuan*, during its process of supplementing and amending gaps within the *Chunqiu*, restored the majority of previously omitted links, ultimately reinstating the narrative continuity disrupted by the official annals and the main text.

Certainly, when this initial act of supplementation gradually unveils the underlying narrative, thus increasing the compiler's stock of knowledge it is possible that the compiler is motivated to employ additional techniques to maintain and enrich such features (as demonstrated in Category Twelve). However, *Zuo zhuan*'s enterprise is an act of filling in lacunae in order to supplement the missing parts in the main text that may otherwise impair comprehension. When considered in isolation, the content of WJZZ fails to forge a comprehensive, coherent, and mature historical narrative. It was in fact the *Chunqiu* main text, meticulously edited by Confucius, that initially conceptualized and connected the extensive historical accounts recorded in the Lu annals into a unified "general history." Following this foundational work, the *Zuo zhuan* further augmented this narrative, achieving fluidity and continuity in both its form and style. Only through the integration of these two texts can we achieve a comprehensive and seamlessly narrated historical account of the Spring and Autumn period.

For these reasons, I posit that the structural narrative feature of the *Zuo zhuan* is an incidental, rather than an intentional, outcome manifested explicitly through WJZZ. If we dissociate WJZZ and solely focus on commentaries with main text correspondence, the

overarching structure of the *Zuo zhuan* parallels that of the *Chunqiu* main text, both of which lack continuity and progression, thereby precluding the formation of a lucid narrative.

Alternatively, when concentrating exclusively on WJZZ, these supplementary elements alone—devoid of the main textual framework (the main text)—also fail to construct a coherent, meaningful narrative. It is only through an integration of these constituents—by clearly articulating the primary objective of the *Zuo zhuan* (elucidating the *Chunqiu*), its adopted strategy (a systematic approach invoked by filling in textual lacunae, that is, WJZZ), and by accurately discerning the interrelationship between the methods employed by the *Zuo zhuan* and the *Chunqiu*—can we eventually perceive in the final work a narrative structure. This structure, brought to fruition by the convergence of multiple factors, is subsequently identified by later generations as embodying distinctive narrative attributes.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

At the beginning of this dissertation, I posed a core question: how was the *Zuo zhuan* composed in such a unique way. Among the myriad topics related to the *Zuo zhuan*, extensive scholarship has focused on its writing style, attesting to its allure and significance in the study of Classical Chinese literature. However, as I pointed out in the “Prologue,” the majority of these studies examine the *Zuo zhuan* through a narrow lens. Within this perspective, the *Zuo zhuan* is not only treated as an independent text but also defined as a specific genre——narrative. Scholars of both the East and the West have conducted meticulous analyses of *Zuo zhuan*’s composition by deconstructing the text into core elements based on various narrative theories. This approach provides insightful and enlightening interpretations of *Zuo zhuan*’s writing techniques and significantly enhances our understanding of its literary achievements. But how was this writing style, the so-called “narrative,” first achieved in early China? Was it an intentionally orchestrated outcome by *Zuo zhuan*’s compiler, or was it a coincidental result? Most crucially, why did this style, so closely resembling the modern concept of “narrative,” manifest itself in the *Zuo zhuan* and not in any other Pre-Qin text? Bearing these questions in mind, we set out on the journey to inquire into the formation of *Zuo zhuan*’s unique structure.

Solving this thorny question necessarily entails a significant effort to examine several broader topics beyond the literary analysis of *Zuo zhuan*’s structure and techniques. Asking how and why the *Zuo zhuan* achieved its composition essentially requires an investigation of its nature and purpose. Thus, understanding its relationship to the *Chunqiu* and its emphasis on historical details becomes a crucial task. The complexity of this task is considerably heightened by *Zuo zhuan*’s extraordinary intricacy. Scholars have debated almost every aspect of the *Zuo zhuan*, ranging from its status as a historical or canonical text and the identity of its compiler, to

its relationship with the *Chunqiu*. Scholars have offered insights on these various issues and raised further questions since the Han period. The entanglement of different arguments and the introduction of new concepts make it a formidable challenge to navigate through these extensive arguments and reach a conclusive answer. Consequently, this dissertation has broken down the process into four distinct steps, or chapters, each addressing a crucial issue related to the ultimate decipherment of the formation of the quasi-narrative structure of the *Zuo zhuan*. To recapture the essence of these four chapters and attempt to tie them together, I will briefly summarize the core questions and findings for each chapter here.

Scribes in the Pre-Qin Period: This chapter explored the roles and traditions of scribes and their writings in the Pre-Qin period, establishing the historical context necessary to understand the historical features of the *Zuo zhuan*. The purpose was to examine the claim of the *Zuo zhuan* as a Pre-Qin historical record. By tracing the scribal traditions in early China and its concept of *shi* 史, I attempted to reveal the long-overlooked misconceptions of *shi* in the Pre-Qin context. The inception and evolution of the terms *shi* and *shi guan* 史官 in early China, the establishment and development of the scribal system, the duties of scribes, the standards for recording events, and the distinctions between scribal records and the modern conception of “history” were scrutinized. I have posited that scribes operated under strict guidelines formulated by figures such as the Duke of Zhou. Both the format and conventions regarding historical records in the Pre-Qin period, especially during the Zhou and Spring and Autumn periods, were strictly regulated by the royal court. *Zuo zhuan*’s utilization of both traditional and non-traditional materials and writing conventions highlights both the compiler’s close association with the scribal identity and an evident deviation from the practice of compiling official annals. I concluded that treating the *Zuo zhuan* as an independent historical text is largely influenced by

the modern concept of “history,” which did not exist in the Pre-Qin era. The structure of the *Zuo zhuan*, while corresponding to the modern concept of history, does not conform to the definition of historical writing in the Pre-Qin period, rendering the classification inappropriate and misleading.

The Chunqiu and Confucius: The second chapter delved into the relationship between the Chunqiu and Confucius, investigating Confucius’ editorial role in its creation. This is pertinent to understanding the *Chunqiu* as a Ruist canonical text and the existence of the *yi li* 義例, or editorial standards. I began by tracing the reception history of Confucius’ relationship with the *Chunqiu*, presenting how views have evolved over time and the social and political factors related to them. It appears that one of the arguments proponents used to claim that Confucius composed the *Chunqiu* was based on the misinterpretation of the word *zuo* 作 in early China, which carried a much vaguer meaning and was often used interchangeably with other verbs such as *xiu* 修. Traditional views on Confucius’ involvement with the *Chunqiu* lean toward an editorial nature. While Dong Zhongshu and the *Gongyang* school’s claims that Confucius created the *Chunqiu* long held sway, these claims were essentially founded on the political and ideological agendas associated with the New Text school. I concluded that Confucius did not author the *Chunqiu*; instead, he meticulously selected and modified the existing annals of the state of Lu, infusing them with his moral judgments. This selection and modification process transformed the *Chunqiu* from mere Lu official annals into a unified whole imbued with didactic interpretations.

Zuo zhuan’s Nature and Style: This chapter examined the nature of the *Zuo zhuan* and how its distinct mode of annotation contributed to the formation of its quasi-narrative structure.

It serves as a culmination of the insights developed in the previous chapters, setting the stage for the determination of *Zuo zhuan*'s true essence. After scrutinizing the format and conventions of Pre-Qin historical records and the nature of the *Chunqiu*, it was revealed that the primary purpose of the *Zuo zhuan* is to serve as a commentary on the *Chunqiu*, edited by Confucius. *Zuo zhuan*'s notable historical features predominantly manifest themselves through extensive supplementation of historical accounts and a distinctive scribal consciousness that diverges from the traditional Ruist mode of annotation. Importantly, past critiques of *Zuo zhuan*'s so-called "unconventional" approach stemmed from their adherence to a "conventional" Ruist exegetical method, exemplified by the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentaries. However, this perceived "orthodox" mode of commentary was not necessarily applicable in the Pre-Qin period. While recognizing *Zuo zhuan*'s historical features is crucial, it should not be mistaken as the core of the text. I maintained that the choice of *Zuo zhuan*'s specific mode of annotation was inherently linked to the format and nature of the *Chunqiu*, which places events at the center of its composition. Moreover, *Zuo zhuan*'s ability to discern this pivotal fact and comprehensively annotate the *Chunqiu* through the supplementation of a rich corpus of historical accounts and notes owes much to the scribal identity of its compiler. I also argued that *Zuo zhuan*'s writing style is primarily achieved through the supplementation of historical details for the specific purpose of filling in textual lacunae within the main text to elucidate the subtle significances hidden within the text.

Commentaries without Main Text Counterparts: The fourth chapter focused on the commentary entries in the *Zuo zhuan* that lack corresponding entries in the *Chunqiu*, known as *Wujing zhi zhuan* 無經之傳 (WJZZ). This chapter serves as a concrete illustration of how the *Zuo zhuan* incorporates elements such as arrangement, coherence, and event progression into the

text by filling textual lacunae in the main text, contributing to a systematic structure akin to that of a narrative. The first part explored the reception history of WJZZ, noting how these entries were primarily treated as isolated and irrelevant accounts, signifying *Zuo zhuan*'s independence from the *Chunqiu*. I also discussed the issues arising from such treatment and concluded that by viewing WJZZ as an organic whole, we uncover a unique method employed by *Zuo zhuan*'s compiler, which plays a crucial role in revealing the underlying moral judgments and restoring the narrative continuity that the *Chunqiu*'s selective recording often disrupts. The second part focused on categorizing these commentaries into twelve types, each with specific examples that demonstrate the various ways WJZZ supplements textual lacunae within the main text. In general, these types of WJZZ can be categorized into those that emphasize the continuity and interrelatedness of events and those that focus on isolated events. The former group enhances the coherence and relevance of the narrative by supplementing the main text with necessary details, while the latter provides context and significance to standalone incidents.

Through a rigorous and thorough examination, I contend that *Zuo zhuan*'s quasi-narrative style is both an unintentional and inevitable outcome. By unintentional, I mean the absence of a readily available concept of "narrative" in the Pre-Qin period. The compiler of the *Zuo zhuan* did not deliberately choose a mature writing style equipped with various narrative techniques; nor was he aware that he was composing in a "narrative" style. The amalgamation of different narrative elements in the *Zuo zhuan* to form a coherent whole required three primary factors: Confucius' editing of the *Chunqiu*, the *Zuo zhuan* serving as a commentary on the *Chunqiu* main text, and the *Zuo zhuan* compiler's scribal consciousness. As emphasized by C.Y. Wang, Plaks, Schaberg, and Li Lung-hsien, the core elements essential for any narrative writing are plot,

character, perspective, and meaning. These elements also contribute to the perception of the *Zuo zhuan* as a narrative.

However, on closer examination, I discovered that the manifestation of these various narrative features was not solely achieved through the *Zuo zhuan* but required a collaborative effort from all three works: the Lu annals *Chunqiu*, the *Chunqiu* main text, and the *Zuo zhuan*. As pointed out in Chapter Three, the most essential element at the heart of narrative is “event.” Consequently, the prerequisite for a narrative is writing that focuses on events resulting from human actions. This prerequisite was first fulfilled not by the *Zuo zhuan*, but by the annals *Chunqiu* serving as the foundation for the *Chunqiu* main text and ultimately, the *Zuo zhuan*. Confucius’ editing of the *Chunqiu* continued this legacy by maintaining the overall structure and content of the former text. However, all Pre-Qin state annals followed a similar convention and format, and simply centering on events does not provide all necessary conditions for the formation of a narrative. It was two changes made by Confucius that further propelled the process: the selection of a segment of the Spring and Autumn history and the embedding of his moral judgments. The former transitioned the originally discrete historical records into a unified whole with a relative degree of coherence and uniformity. The latter granted the straightforward records moral significance, which is essential in narrative writing since the ultimate goal of telling a story, according to Schaberg and Wang, is to convey moral evaluation.

Lastly, the *Zuo zhuan*, functioning as a commentary to the *Chunqiu* main text, aims to reveal the hidden judgments of Confucius and the rationale behind each judgment. The only way to do so is by filling in the omitted details and accounts in the main text. Through this process, the *Zuo zhuan* restores the disrupted event progression and interconnectivity in the *Chunqiu*, carefully arranges the sequence to ensure a logical development, and fills in various details that

contribute to the progression of the event. Since the majority of these supplementations were provided to fill in the missing links within the *Chunqiu*, on the surface, they seem to lack corresponding entries in the main text. However, it would be arbitrary to consider these entries as irrelevant; for they constitute the very reason for the display of a quasi-narrative structure. Together, these various conditions and factors converge in the *Zuo zhuan*, through its compiler's scribal consciousness and the purpose of elucidating the *Chunqiu*, to form a coherent style that is often characterized as "narrative."

In conclusion, the formation of *Zuo zhuan*'s unique writing style is an outcome of several key factors. It may be said that the inception of narrative writing in early China resulted from the convergence of scribal practices and the Ruist tradition. Central to this development is *Zuo zhuan*'s nature as a commentary on the Classics, which serves as the core and prompts all subsequent development. However, it cannot be just any main text but specifically the *Chunqiu*, as this text provides the prerequisite for the formation of a narrative—events. Confucius' edition of the *Chunqiu* is crucial; without it, the *Zuo zhuan* would not exist. It is precisely Confucius' choice to use the *Chunqiu* annals to convey his personal judgments that introduced the significance to be narrated. One may argue that the convergence between scribal practices and Ruist purposes already takes place here. The *Zuo zhuan* further enhanced this convergence and made it more apparent.

Finally, the *Zuo zhuan* compiler's identity as a scribe endowed him with the sensitivity to discern the uniqueness of the *Chunqiu* and the capability to utilize diverse historical materials. The specific display of writing techniques parallel to narrative writing is partially related to the scribal convention and consciousness, represented in his attention to details and logical progression, and the astute awareness of possible connections between different events. It is for

this reason that I assert *Zuo zhuan*'s quasi-narrative structure is both unintentional and inevitable. It is unintentional because *Zuo zhuan*'s compiler did not compile this text with the deliberate use of narrative as the medium. It is inevitable because the crucial factors were well-aligned when this scribe decided to elucidate the *Chunqiu* main text by restoring the path that led Confucius to his evaluations.

By adopting an approach that does not focus on deconstructing *Zuo zhuan*'s structure and techniques through the lens of narrative concepts, we discover a formation process, distinctive from the Western narrative, that is unique to early China. As scholars of the West and the East have debated about the historical accuracy of the events depicted in the *Zuo zhuan*, it appears that the answer lies in neither a literary nor a historical interpretation, but a canonical one. Both the “fictionality” and the over-emphasized “historicity” promoted by Western and Eastern narrative theories present limitations to finding the true nature of the *Zuo zhuan*. As informative as these approaches are in the interpretation of the literary aspects of the text, one must gauge beyond the narrative scope to trace the origin. The writing style that we are paying so much attention to serves merely as the outcome of the compiler's endeavor in trying to achieve his purpose. It is the quest to uncover this purpose without any presupposition that helps us to fathom the rationale and process by which *Zuo zhuan*'s unique style came into being.

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