

Old Stories No Longer Told

The End of the Anecdotes Tradition of Early China

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Anecdotes were of paramount importance in the written culture of early China, the period from the Zhou Dynasty 周 (ca. 1045–256 BCE) to the former half of the Han Dynasty 漢 (202 BCE–220 CE). The short, freestanding accounts of particular events—“true” or invented—in Chinese history occur in large quantities in a wide range of texts and genres.² Most texts contain at least a few anecdotes, while some texts consist almost entirely of anecdotes. Several early Chinese anecdotes feature unnamed protagonists that are vaguely identified as “someone who was plowing the fields” (*geng tian zhe* 耕田者), “someone who waded through a river in winter” (*dong she shui zhe* 冬涉水者), and so on, with the name of the state where they hailed from casually (and possibly fictitiously) added to give readers at least some background of these persons. The vast majority of early Chinese anecdotes, by contrast, feature actual historical people mentioned by name, such as famous rulers, noblemen, statesmen, archers, officers, inventors, philosophers, teachers, recluses, cooks, and concubines. The most illustrious of these persons each generated an abundance of anecdotes, some of which occur in more than one text. The wording of the anecdotes may differ from text to text, and they may be used for different rhetorical purposes in each new context, but the basic events remain the same. Given the abundance of anecdotes in early Chinese texts, and their importance in these texts, it seems that authors felt compelled to display their knowledge of China’s past and spice up their writings with appropriate anecdotes. In this cultural tradition, they kept on referring to some of the same historical figures, and

telling some of the same stories involving them, thereby creating what could be loosely termed a “corpus” of early Chinese historical anecdotes. The rich and lively tradition of drawing on this corpus of historical anecdotes lasted until the end of the Western Han Dynasty 西漢 (202 BCE–9 CE), and appears to have faded from the Eastern Han Dynasty 東漢 (25–220 CE) onwards, only to make way for new storytelling traditions. It thus seems that as the Western Han Dynasty came to an end, so did a long tradition of discussing and arguing through that particular corpus of historical anecdotes. At the dawn of the Eastern Han Dynasty, a new history was created, with little room for the ancient anecdotes.

This chapter analyzes the anecdotes tradition of early China. It contains three parts. Part 1 is a case study of a single anecdote, which serves as a typical example of the thriving anecdotal tradition of early China, from the earliest Chinese narrative histories to the end of the Western Han Dynasty. Part 2 continues the case study by analyzing what happened to that single anecdote in texts from the Eastern Han Dynasty onwards, thereby illustrating the rapid decline of the anecdotes tradition of early China. Part 3 offers tentative explanations for the decline.

Part 1: A Thriving Tradition

The main protagonist of the anecdote that is central to our case study is the illustrious Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公 (r. 636–628 BCE), whose given name was Chong'er 重耳 (Double Ears), and who was a son of Duke Xian of Jin 晉獻公 (r. 676–651 BCE). In 656 BCE, as Chong'er was in his early forties, a conflict over his father's succession arose when Li Ji 驪姬, his father's favorite concubine, schemed to have the crown prince replaced by her son. She succeeded through a series of intrigues, a tumultuous episode in Jin history known as “the Li Ji Unrest” (*Li Ji zhi luan* 驪姬之亂). The upheaval led the original crown prince to commit suicide and forced Duke Xian's other sons, including Chong'er, to flee. With a small group of loyal and able retainers, such as Zhao Cui 趙衰 and Hu Yan 狐偃, Chong'er traveled from state to state, spending a total of nineteen years in exile. In 636 BCE, supported by his retainers and backed by the army of Qin 秦, the state where he resided at the time and whose ruler he had befriended, Chong'er returned to Jin where he successfully claimed the rulership. Once in power, he implemented major reforms that strengthened Jin, and he

formed strategic alliances that fortified Jin's position among the other states. Two important events solidified his reign. In 635 BCE, he helped the recently ousted King Xiang of Zhou 周襄王 (r. 651–619 BCE) to regain the throne, and for his support he was enfeoffed with Wen 濇, Yuan 原, and other city-states in the royal domain of the Zhou monarchy. In 632 BCE, his army crushed that of Chu 楚 in the epic Battle of Chengpu 城濮, thereby defeating the only state powerful enough to challenge his hegemony.³ This victory effectively made him a hegemon (*ba* 霸), a ruler who, despite lip service allegiance to the house of Zhou above him, reigned supreme as de facto ruler of “all under heaven” (*tianxia* 天下), or the whole world as known to the Chinese at the time. Following his demise in 628 BCE, Chong'er received the posthumous name of Wen 文, and so he is known to history as Duke Wen of Jin.⁴

As with any prominent personality, there is a cornucopia of stories about Duke Wen. In this chapter, I shall focus on one anecdote in particular. The anecdote relates an event that supposedly took place in the winter of 635 BCE, the year after Duke Wen was installed as the new ruler of Jin. In broad strokes, the story goes as follows: Earlier in the year 635 BCE, King Xiang bestows the city of Yuan upon Duke Wen, but the inhabitants of Yuan refuse to give Duke Wen their allegiance. Duke Wen's army thereupon lays siege to Yuan, and he vows to take the city within a specified number of days. At the end of that period Yuan still stands, but just as Duke Wen is giving up the siege, news arrives that the city will not hold out much longer. Duke Wen nevertheless refuses to extend the siege beyond the period that he had promised earlier, for it would mean losing his trustworthiness, which is more dear to him than winning Yuan. Hearing these noble thoughts, the inhabitants of Yuan readily surrender to him.

There are no fewer than six distinct versions of the anecdote in the extant literature from early China. In this chapter I present these versions in what may be the chronological order of the texts in which they appear. These texts are: *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo Commentary), *Guoyu* 國語 (Discourses of the States), *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals of Mr. Lü), *Han Feizi* 韓非子 (Master Han Fei), *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (The Master of Huainan), and *Xinxu* 新序 (Newly Arranged [Anecdotes]). Note that for my argument the sequential order of these texts is of little relevance, as I am more interested in how the distinct versions of the anecdote are used in their relative contexts, than when precisely they were put to writing.

Version 1: *Zuozhuan*

The *Zuozhuan*, traditionally attributed to a historian named Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 (fl. 6th–5th c. BCE), is one of the earliest Chinese narrative histories.⁵ It describes events that took place between 722 and 463 BCE. In its current form the text serves as a commentary to the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals), the influential chronicle compiled in the state of Lu 魯. In the *Zuozhuan*, the following event is associated with the 25th year of the reign of Duke Xi of Lu 魯僖公 (r. 659–627 BCE), which corresponds to the year 635 BCE in the Gregorian calendar:

In winter, when the Marquis of Jin [i.e., Duke Wen] laid siege to Yuan, he commanded [his troops to capture the city with] three days worth of provisions. When [three days passed and] Yuan did not surrender, he gave the command to quit the place. A spy then emerged [from within Yuan] and exclaimed, “Yuan is about to surrender!” The commanding officers of his army entreated their lord to wait for this, but he replied, “Trust is the precious jewel of a state. It is what the people rely on. If obtaining Yuan means losing my trustworthiness, what would they have to rely on? My loss would be greater [than my gain.]” After his troops retreated a mere one day’s march, Yuan surrendered. He then removed Guan, the Earl of Yuan, to Ji; made Zhao Cui governor of Yuan; and Hu Zhen governor of Wen.⁶

冬，晉侯圍原，命三日之糧。原不降，命去之。諜出，曰：「原將降矣！」軍吏曰：「請待之。」公曰：「信，國之寶也，民之所庇也。得原失信，何以庇之。所亡滋多。」退一舍而原降。遷原伯貫于冀，趙衰為原大夫，狐溱為溫大夫。⁷

This passage offers a number of specific elements that set this version of the anecdote apart from other renderings. To begin, the main protagonist is here referred to both as *hou* 侯, marquis, the hereditary title he carried, and as *gong* 公, “duke,” a term often used in early Chinese texts to refer more broadly to a “lord.”⁸ Other versions of the anecdote, discussed below, exclusively use the latter appellation, *gong*, to refer to him. Also, by providing his troops with provisions for three days, Duke Wen here implicitly vows to take Yuan within that period. In other versions, as we shall see

below, the deadline is set at three, five, seven, or even ten days. Finally, Duke Wen here refers to trustworthiness as “the precious jewel of a state” (*guo zhi bao* 國之寶), an element we find in some other versions of the anecdote, but not all. These are fairly trivial variations between this version of the anecdote and other versions. More telling differences occur at the beginning and end of the passage.

In my understanding, the passage consists of three parts: an introductory phrase (“In winter”), the anecdote proper, and a closing comment (“He then removed . . .”).

The *Zuozhuan* introduces the anecdote by noting that the siege of Yuan took place in winter, and it is the only text to do so. This is, of course, because the *Zuozhuan* is a chronicle that—much like the *Chunqiu* to which it is appended as a commentary—presents events chronologically. The introductory phrase “in winter” connects this anecdote to anecdotes immediately preceding it, which describe events that took place in the spring, summer, and fall of the same year. In other words, the mention of the word “winter” puts the encirclement of Yuan at its correct place within the sequence of events in the year 635 BCE.

The *Zuozhuan* ends this passage by describing the reshuffling of official positions following the surrender of Yuan, and again it is the only text to do so. That the text mentions the removal of the earl of Yuan, who at first refused to give allegiance to Duke Wen, is understandable even without further context. Other elements are less clear. Who is Zhao Cui? Why was he made governor of Yuan? Who is Hu Zhen? Why was he made governor of Wen? How is the governor of Wen related to the siege of Yuan? The answers to these questions lie elsewhere in the *Zuozhuan*. In that text, Zhao Cui is repeatedly mentioned as an early follower of Duke Wen, whom he accompanied from the very beginning of his exile from Jin. Zhao Cui’s governorship of Yuan must be understood as a reward for his many years of loyal service to Duke Wen.⁹ Hu Zhen was a son of Hu Mao 狐毛, who is also described in the *Zuozhuan* as one of Duke Wen’s close confidants. Hu Zhen’s governorship is probably also best understood as a token of appreciation for loyalty. In all likelihood it is mentioned here because the city of Wen was recently bestowed upon Duke Wen by King Xiang, as part of a set of gifts that also included the city of Yuan. In sum, the concluding remarks of the passage do make sense, but only within the larger context of the *Zuozhuan*. They firmly link the account of the siege of Yuan to the larger narrative on Duke Wen and his retainers in the *Zuozhuan*.

Duke Wen receives exceptional coverage in the *Zuozhuan*, as evidenced by “the amount of attention paid to his early years, to his distinctive physical features, and to the assortment of wives that he acquired in the course of his odyssey,” as the translator Burton Watson points out.¹⁰ The *Zuozhuan* is clearly intrigued by this historical figure. The account of his peaceful seizure of Yuan enriches the text’s biographical portrayal of Duke Wen, by narrating an event that occurred in his life and calling attention to one of his supposed character traits: trustworthiness.

In my understanding, the anecdote serves three main functions in the *Zuozhuan*: historical, biographical, and moral. (1) As a commentary to the *Chunqiu*, a highly terse text, the *Zuozhuan* fleshes out the concise entries of that text. With a meager seven brief entries, the year 635 BCE is only sketchily outlined in the *Chunqiu*, and so as part of the *Zuozhuan* commentary, the anecdote adds detail to the history of the year that witnessed the siege of Yuan. (2) Within the context of the *Zuozhuan*, a text fascinated with the illustrious Duke Wen, the anecdote adds biographical detail to his life. (3) Still, perhaps the most important function of the anecdote is moral. As Watson points out, the aim of the *Zuozhuan* is to edify, and as a result “its lessons are overwhelmingly political and moral in nature.”¹¹ This also holds true for lessons involving Duke Wen, and the account of the siege of Yuan is no exception. The *Zuozhuan* generally paints a positive picture of Duke Wen, namely that of a ruler whose years in exile made him humble and well-suited to become a hegemon.¹² One of his fine qualities was trustworthiness, for which the anecdote serves as an apposite example, as it suggests that trustworthiness on the part of the lord creates loyalty by the subjects. This moral significance of the anecdote is made explicit elsewhere in the *Zuozhuan*. When Duke Wen was about to mobilize his people for battle, an advisor warned him that “the people do not yet understand trustworthiness” (*min wei zhi xin* 民未知信), and it is said that in response to this Duke Wen “attacked Yuan to show them trustworthiness” (*fa Yuan yi shi zhi xin* 伐原以示之信).¹³ In sum, in the *Zuozhuan* the anecdote serves to highlight the values of trustworthiness and loyalty which ideally bind the lord and his people.

Version 2: *Guoyu*

The *Guoyu* is another early Chinese narrative history.¹⁴ Although the text is demonstrably written by several hands, Zuo Qiuming is nevertheless traditionally seen as its author. This is because the *Guoyu* and the *Zuozhuan*,

also ascribed to him, largely overlap in scope and content. A major difference between the two texts is that the emphasis in the *Guoyu* is more on the sayings, rather than the doings, of rulers and other dignitaries. Also, the *Guoyu* organizes material per state, and chronologically only within each state. There are one or more chapters devoted to each of these states: Zhou 周, Lu 魯, Qi 齊, Jin 晉, Zheng 鄭, Chu 楚, Wu 吳, and Yue 越. Occupying nine chapters out of a total of twenty-one, Jin receives more attention than any other state in the *Guoyu*. In the fourth chapter on Jin, we find this version of the anecdote:

When Duke Wen attacked Yuan, he ordered [his troops to capture the city] with three days worth of provisions. When three days passed and Yuan did not surrender, the duke gave orders to withdraw his army and quit the place. A spy then emerged [from within Yuan] and exclaimed, “Yuan will not last more than one or two days!” The commanding officers of his army reported this to the duke, who replied, “If obtaining Yuan means I will lose my trustworthiness, with what would I lead my people? You see, trustworthiness is what the people rely on. It must not be lost.” And so they quit the place, but as soon as they reached Mengmen, Yuan asked to surrender.

文公伐原，令以三日之糧。三日而原不降，公令疏軍而去之。諜出，曰：「原不過一二日矣！」軍吏以告，公曰：「得原而失信，何以使人？夫信，民之所庇也，不可失。」乃去之，及孟門，而原請降。¹⁵

There are some minor variations between this version of the anecdote and the one in the *Zuozhuan* quoted above. For starters, this passage contains no more than the anecdote proper: it has no phrases at the beginning and end informing the reader that the siege took place in winter and that several officials found new jobs after the surrender of Yuan. Also, this passage does not refer to trustworthiness as “the precious jewel of a state,” as does the *Zuozhuan*. Finally, this passage does not measure the retreat of Duke Wen’s army as a one-day march, but more specifically mentions that they had reached the nearby mountain pass of Mengmen 孟門 when Yuan surrendered.¹⁶

In the *Guoyu*, the fourth chapter on the state of Jin consists in its entirety of chronologically arranged passages narrating the words and deeds

of Duke Wen. The passage immediately preceding the account of the attack on Yuan describes how Duke Wen and his army besieged another walled fortification in the spring of 635 BCE, half a year before they encircled Yuan. He initially planned to take that fortification by military means, but won the population over by his outstanding character—as was the case with Yuan. The passage immediately following the siege of Yuan describes how Duke Wen in 632 BCE defeated the state of Chu in the famous Battle of Chengpu that effectively made him the most powerful ruler of his day and age.

In sum, the *Guoyu* resembles the *Zuozhuan* in that the purposes of the anecdote are historical, biographical, and moral, as both texts place the siege of Yuan in the larger context of Duke Wen's actions and highlight his virtuous conduct. This is hardly surprising because, as Kierman notes, “the Chinese chroniclers compiled their record moralistically, narrating battles in a way to prove that those who won deserved to do so.”¹⁷

Version 3: *Lüshi chungiu*

The *Lüshi chungiu* is a voluminous and well-organized work compiled around 239 BCE under the patronage of Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (d. 235 BCE), chancellor of the state of Qin. The encyclopedic text contains three major parts—“Almanacs” (*ji* 紀), “Examinations” (*lan* 覽), “Discussions” (*lun* 論)—each subdivided into an apparently auspicious number of books, chapters, and sections. Broadly speaking, the Almanacs discuss human activities in correspondence with the workings of the seasons, the Examinations focus on governance, and the Discussions are somewhat incoherent passages on the exemplary behavior of worthy rulers.¹⁸ In Book 19 of the *Lüshi chungiu*, which is part of the Examinations, we find this version of the anecdote:

When Duke Wen of Jin attacked Yuan, he agreed with his officers on a period of seven days [to capture the city]. When seven days passed and Yuan did not capitulate, he gave the command to quit the place. A collaborating officer then exclaimed, “Yuan is about to capitulate.”¹⁹ The officers in command of his army entreated the duke to wait for this, but he replied, “Trust is the precious jewel of the state. If obtaining Yuan means losing this treasure, I will not do it.” Thereupon they quit the place. The next year he again attacked Yuan. This time he agreed with his officers that they would return home only after they had

obtained Yuan. When the inhabitants of Yuan heard about this, they surrendered. When the inhabitants of Wei heard about this, they regarded Duke Wen as the epitome of trustworthiness and therefore also gave their allegiance to him.²⁰

Hence, the saying “obtaining Wei by launching an offensive against Yuan” refers to this episode. It is not that Duke Wen did not desire to obtain Yuan. Rather, he thought it best not to obtain Yuan if obtaining it meant being untrustworthy. Because he insisted on obtaining Yuan through sincere trustworthiness, it was not merely Wei that gave him allegiance. Duke Wen may properly be termed a man who “knew how to seek what he desired!”²¹

晉文公伐原，與士期七日，七日而原不下，命去之。謀士言曰：「原將下矣！」師吏請待之。公曰：「信，國之寶也。得原失寶，吾不為也。」遂去之。明年復伐之，與士期必得原然後反，原人聞之乃下。衛人聞之，以文公之信為至矣，乃歸文公。故曰「攻原得衛」者，此之謂也。文公非不欲得原也，以不信得原，不若勿得也。必誠信以得之，歸之者非獨衛也。文公可謂知求欲矣。²²

Lü Buwei and his team clearly had a liking for drama. In their version, the deadline for defeating Yuan is seven days, not just three. Also, Duke Wen does not retreat a mere one-day's march but a full year, only to come back with an emboldened promise the next year. Finally, in this rendering of the story Duke Wen does not win just one city, but two, a double victory that inspired the early Chinese equivalent of the saying of two birds with one stone.

In my understanding, the anecdote proper runs from the opening line “When Duke Wen of Jin attacked Yuan” to “also gave their allegiance to him.” The remainder of this passage, from “Hence, the saying” to the end, evaluates the anecdote and embeds it within the larger textual unit, which is chapter 6 in book 19 in the *Lüshi chungju*. Book 19 is “concerned with the techniques by which a ruler can ‘employ the people,’ that is, make them willing to die for his causes,” as the translators Knoblock and Riegel point out.²³ Chapter 6, titled “Using Desire” (*wei yu* 為欲), highlights the importance of desires from the perspective of the ruler. If the people are without desires, they will have no incentive to work, making it difficult for the ruler to employ them. The more they desire, the easier it will be

for the ruler to manipulate them into working for him. Now, the anecdote about the siege of Yuan comes at the very end of the chapter. It is related to the chapter's central theme because Duke Wen desired Yuan but not at all costs. He is therefore explicitly identified as someone who "knew how to seek what he desired" (*zhi qiu yu* 知求欲).

This is the only anecdotal example in the otherwise essayistic chapter. It is perhaps somewhat strange that Lü Buwei and his team selected this particular anecdote. Whereas the chapter focuses on how rulers can make use of the desires of their people, the anecdote shows the benefits for rulers if they temper their own desires. Perhaps the idea is that, for the system of "using the people's desires" to work, it is of utmost importance that the ruler himself knows how to control his own desires. Duke Wen serves as an apposite example of such a ruler. He desired Yuan, but not at all costs, and by patiently displaying his trustworthiness, in the end he effortlessly gained even more than what he initially desired. Incidentally, the next chapter in the *Lüshi chungiu* is titled "Valuing Trustworthiness" (*gui xin* 貴信), and the anecdote of Duke Wen could have easily—and perhaps more appropriately—served as an example there as well. Quite possibly the anecdote serves to bridge the two chapters.

In the *Zuozhuan* and the *Guoyu*, the anecdote forms part of historical narratives—chronological descriptions of events in the life of Duke Wen, in the state of Jin, and in the year 635 BCE—but both texts also deploy the anecdote to articulate a didactic message about trustworthiness. In the *Lüshi chungiu*, by contrast, the anecdote is detached from its historical context, and used instead as an example in an expository essay on "using desires" as a specific technique of rulership. The emphasis in the *Lüshi chungiu* appears to be on knowing how to get what one desires, which can easily be misconstrued as an argument in favor of endless greed. It is perhaps for this reason that the text specifically adds the quality of sincere trustworthiness (*cheng xin* 誠信), as if it wants to make clear that Duke Wen was truly trustworthy and not just feigning trustworthiness to gain territory.

It seems that the *Zuozhuan*, *Guoyu*, and *Lüshi chungiu* all use the story to exemplify or illustrate an aspect of Duke Wen's character but they make different claims about what should be highlighted about him. The *Zuozhuan* and the *Guoyu* emphasize the importance of trustworthiness, whereas in the *Lüshi chungiu* the moral value of trustworthiness is subordinated to the art of "knowing how to go after what you desire," which is probably why the text has to emphasize that Duke Wen's trustworthiness was sincere. This shows how different didactic points might be drawn from the same

anecdote. Below we will see how other texts draw their didactic points from this anecdote.

Version 4: *Han Feizi*

The *Han Feizi* is named after Han Fei 韓非 (ca. 280–233 BCE) who, being born into the ruling family of the state of Han 韓, was the only early Chinese thinker of noble descent. The text, probably largely written by himself, contains essays on law, power, and other aspects of statecraft.²⁴ The *Han Feizi* contains six chapters, all titled “Chushuo” 儲說 (Collection of Illustrative Examples), in which anecdotes illustrate the point the author is trying to make. In one of the chapters, we find this version of the anecdote:

When Duke Wen of Jin launched an offensive against Yuan, he [made his troops] bundle ten days of provisions and accordingly agreed with his grandees on a period of ten days [to capture the city]. When ten days had passed since their arrival and Yuan did not capitulate, he sounded the bells of retreat, put an end to the military operation and quit the place. One of his officers then emerged from within Yuan and exclaimed, “In three days, Yuan will capitulate!” His entire cabinet and all his confidants remonstrated, saying, “Look, Yuan’s food supplies are depleted and their morale is exhausted. Would you not wait a little for this?” He replied, “I had agreed with my troops on a period of ten days. If we do not quit, I will lose my trustworthiness. If obtaining Yuan means losing my trustworthiness, I will not do it.” Thereupon he put an end to the military operation and left. When the inhabitants of Yuan heard this, they said, “How can we not give our allegiance to a lord as trustworthy as this one?!” Thereupon they surrendered to the duke. When the inhabitants of Wei heard this, they said, “How can we not follow a lord as trustworthy as this one?!” Thereupon they surrendered to the duke.

When Confucius heard about this, he made the following note, “Trustworthiness is what causes someone to obtain Wei by attacking Yuan.”

晉文公攻原，裹十日糧，遂與大夫期十日，至原十日而原不下，擊金而退，罷兵而去。士有從原中出者曰：「原三日即下矣！」群臣左右諫曰：「夫原之食竭力盡矣，君姑待之？」

公曰：「吾與士期十日。不去，是亡吾信也。得原失信，吾不為也。」遂罷兵而去。原人聞曰：「有君如彼其信也，可無歸乎？」乃降公。衛人聞曰：「有君如彼其信也，可無從乎？」乃降公。孔子聞而記之曰：「攻原得衛者信也。」²⁵

This reading of the anecdote is more discursive than the ones we saw earlier. Here, Duke Wen's advisors are allowed to explain why they oppose a troop withdrawal, and the inhabitants of Yuan and Wei similarly explain their reasons for surrendering to Duke Wen—all in direct speech. Similar to the version in the *Lüshi chungiu*, this version maintains that the surrender of Yuan was followed by the spontaneous surrender of Wei. A major difference between the two versions, however, is that the “two cities with one siege” saying, whose origin is not specified in the *Lüshi chungiu*, is here attributed to Confucius. As Michael Hunter notes, why Confucius “was felt to be an appropriate mouthpiece for the one comment but not the other is an open question.”²⁶

The “Chushuo” chapters in the *Han Feizi* start with a series of political “guidelines” (*jing* 經) that are explained through what the text calls “illustrative examples” (*shuo* 說). The guideline for which the Siege of Yuan anecdote serves as an illustrative example is this:

Once small trust is completed, large trust is established. That is why the enlightened ruler gradually builds up trust. If penalties and punishments are not trusted, instructions and prohibitions will not be carried out. For illustrative examples, see “Duke Wen’s offensive against Yuan” and “Ji Zheng saves people from starvation.”

小信成則大信立，故明主積於信。賞罰不信，則禁令不行。說在文公之攻原與箕鄭救餓也。²⁷

Readers who wish to know about the gradual accumulation of trust may follow Han Fei’s directions and read the anecdotes (further on in the text) about Duke Wen who, having gained the trust of Yuan also gained the trust of Wei, and Ji Zheng, who explains how three different kinds of trust may prevent starvation among the population.

In the *Han Feizi*, similar to the *Lüshi chungiu* discussed above, the anecdote is detached from its historical context and used instead to illustrate a political principle. The main difference between the two texts is that in

the former, the anecdote shows rulers the best way to go after what they desire, whereas in the latter it shows how a ruler can gradually accumulate trust. By showing the inhabitants of Yuan he is a man of his word, he ensures that both Yuan and Wei pledge their allegiance to him—a small act of trust on the part of the ruler inspiring a large act of trust on the part of the people, as the “guideline” in the *Han Feizi* puts it.

Version 5: *Huainanzi*

The *Huainanzi* is a voluminous work written under the auspices of Liu An 劉安 (ca. 179–122 BCE), the King of Huainan 淮南王. It was supposedly finalized around 139 BCE, for in that year it was presented to Liu An’s nephew, Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE). In twenty-one chapters, the *Huainanzi* discusses a range of topics (cosmology, military, and so on), a thorough understanding of which can lead one to become an exemplary ruler.²⁸ In one chapter we find this version of the anecdote:

When Duke Wen of Jin attacked Yuan, he agreed with his grantees on a period of three days [to capture the city]. When three days passed and Yuan did not surrender, Duke Wen gave the command to quit the place. The commanding officers then exclaimed, “Yuan will surely surrender in another day or two!” Their lord replied, “When I agreed with my grantees on three days, I did not realize Yuan could not be made to capitulate in this period. If I do not put an end to this military operation now that the three days are over, it would mean obtaining Yuan by losing my trustworthiness. I will not do it.” When the inhabitants of Yuan heard about this, they said, “How could we refuse to surrender to a lord like this?” They promptly surrendered. When the people of Wen heard about this, they also asked to surrender.

As Laozi puts it, “Dark, dim, inside it lies the essence. The essence is quite genuine, inside it lies trust.” Also, “fine words can buy honor, fine deeds can add people.”²⁹

晉文公伐原，與大夫期三日。三日而原不降，文公令去之。軍吏曰：「原不過一，二日將降矣。」君曰：「吾不知原三日而不可得下也，以與大夫期，盡而不罷，失信得原，吾弗為

也。」原人聞之曰：「有君若此，可弗降也。」遂降。溫人聞，亦請降。故《老子》曰：「窈兮冥兮，其中有精，其精甚真，其中有信。」故「美言可以市尊，美行可以加人。」³⁰

This passage occurs in *Huainanzi* chapter 12, titled “Daoying” 道應 (Responses of the Way). The chapter contains over fifty anecdotes, each coupled with one or more sayings attributed to Laozi 老子 (trad. 6th c. BCE), the mythical founder of Daoism. The anecdotes relate the abstruse teachings of Laozi to the real world. In this particular case, the anecdote of the siege of Yuan illustrates teachings that can be found in chapters 21 and 62 of the received *Laozi*.

Chapter 21 of the *Laozi* contains the following passage that paints a poetic image of the Way (*dao* 道), the guiding principle of the universe:

The Way is something elusive and evasive. Evasive, elusive, inside it lies an image. Elusive, evasive, inside it lies something substantial. Dark, dim, inside it lies the essence. The essence is quite genuine, inside it lies trust.³¹

道之為物，惟恍惟惚。惚兮恍兮，其中有象；恍兮惚兮，其中有物。窈兮冥兮，其中有精；其精甚真，其中有信。³²

This *Laozi* passage is almost as unfathomable as the Way itself. Interpretations differ widely. For instance, the last word, *xin* 信, is variously translated as “evidences” (Chan), “truth” (Cleary), “true genuineness” (Lafargue), and “something that can be tested” (Lau). It is this word, which also means “trust” or “trustworthiness,” that links the *Laozi* passage to the Duke Wen anecdote in the *Huainanzi*. By linking the two, Liu An and his team appear to say that by attributing more value to “trust” than to military gain, Duke Wen values the very essence of the Way. It is therefore no surprise that the inhabitants of Yuan and Wen, upon realizing this, gladly surrender to him.

Chapter 62 of the *Laozi* contains a statement that can be translated as “fine words can buy, honorable deeds can add people” (美言可以市，尊行可以加人).³³ The last two words of the Chinese sentence, *jia ren* 加人, are often translated as “raise [someone] above others.” In the context of the *Huainanzi*, I would translate these words more literally as “add people” in the sense of “attracting people to oneself.” By linking the *Laozi* statement to the anecdote, Liu An and his team present Duke Wen as someone whose fine words bought him honor and whose fine deeds caused the people of Yuan and Wen to pledge allegiance to him.

In sum, in the *Huainanzi* the anecdote serves to illustrate the teachings of Laozi, as it occurs in a chapter that consists in its entirety of similar combinations of historical anecdotes and *Laozi* quotes.³⁴

Version 6: *Xinxu*

The *Xinxu* is a collection of anecdotes compiled under the auspices of the imperial librarian Liu Xiang 劉向 (ca. 79–8 BCE). A prolific writer, Liu Xiang is also responsible for the compilation of the *Bielu* 別錄 (Separate Records), *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Stratagems of the Warring States), *Shuoyuan* 說苑 (Garden of Illustrative Examples), *Lienüzhuan* 列女傳 (Biographies of Exemplary Women), and other texts. The received text of the *Xinxu* contains 165 anecdotes, arranged in ten chapters. The first five chapters all carry the unimagined title “Zashi” 雜事 (Miscellaneous Affairs). One of these affairs is this version of the anecdote:

When Duke Wen of Jin attacked Yuan, he agreed with his grantees on a period of five days [to capture the city]. When five days passed and Yuan did not surrender, Duke Wen gave the command to quit the place. His officers then exclaimed, “Yuan will surely surrender in another three days; you may want to wait for that.” Their lord replied, “If obtaining Yuan means losing my trustworthiness, I will not do it.” When the inhabitants of Yuan heard about this, they said, “It is impossible not to surrender to a lord as righteous as this.” So they promptly surrendered. When the inhabitants of Wen heard about this, they also asked to surrender. Hence, the saying “Wen surrenders by attacking Yuan” refers to this episode. Thereupon many regional lords gave their allegiance to him. Next, he invaded Cao and attacked Wei, gathered heads of state at Jiantu, and after the pact with Wen he crushed the southern state of Chu. He then paid respect to the royal house of Zhou, which completed his achievements as a hegemon, making him the second hegemon after Duke Huan of Qi. His basic trustworthiness comes from his attack on Yuan.

晉文公伐原，與大夫期五日，五日而原不降，文公令去之。吏曰：「原不過三日，將降矣，君不如待之。」君曰：「得原失信，吾不為也。」原人聞之曰：「有君義若此，不可不降。」遂降，溫人聞之，亦請降。故曰：「伐原而溫降。」此之謂也。

於是諸侯歸之，遂侵曹，伐衛，為踐土之會，溫之盟，後南破強楚，尊事周室，遂成霸功，上次齊桓。本信，由伐原也。³⁵

The title of the text in which this passage appears, *Xinxu*, translates as “Newly Arranged [Anecdotes].” The stories it contains are not new, but borrowed from earlier texts, edited, and placed in a new sequential order. The chapter in which this passage appears is full of anecdotes involving a wide range of historical figures. These anecdotes are not arranged chronologically, but more or less thematically. Overall, they illustrate how rulers may win over the population by their virtue. The anecdote immediately preceding the account of the siege of Yuan describes how trustworthiness played a major role in the process by which Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685–643 BCE) became a hegemon. In sum, it seems that within this *Xinxu* chapter, the two anecdotes form a mini-cluster that highlights the importance of trustworthiness for a ruler, with two powerful hegemons as an example.

This case study analyzed one anecdote in six distinct versions, each with a unique purpose depending on the context in which it appears. The anecdote may serve a historical purpose by showing what happened in 635 BCE, or by fleshing out the history of the state of Jin. It may serve a biographical purpose, by adding detail to the eventful life of Duke Wen. It may also serve as a vivid illustration in an essay about getting what one desires, or about the importance of trustworthiness. Finally, when combined with quotations from the *Laozi*, it may serve to show the essence and importance of that foundational scripture. Early Chinese texts readily incorporated the account of the Siege of Yuan, and many other anecdotes for that matter, because they could be molded to suit a range of rhetorical purposes and hence served as powerful building blocks in arguments. Taken together, the anecdotes seem to have constituted a pool of material that anyone in those days could—and may even have been expected to—draw upon to ornament and illustrate their writings. In fact, one will be hard pressed to find a narrative text that does not contain a single anecdote.³⁶ In sum, this pool of anecdotes formed an integral part of the intellectual framework of writers and readers in those days, which is why they occur in such large numbers, for so many different purposes, in such a wide range of texts.

Part 2: A Fading Tradition

Until the end of the Western Han Dynasty, it was apparently a must in almost any text to draw upon the large “corpus” of historical anecdotes,

that is, anecdotes about actual historical figures, such as Duke Wen of Jin. Soon afterwards, however, the corpus seems to have lost its appeal, as the tradition of incorporating these particular anecdotes in texts gradually faded. By way of an example, let us return to our case study, the Siege of Yuan, and examine how it is received after the end of the Western Han.

In the two-thousand years following the fall of the Western Han, only a handful of essays, commentaries, and encyclopedias refer to the Siege of Yuan. Here are a few examples:

The *Shuijingzhu* 水經注 (Commentary on the Waterways Classic), compiled by Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (d. 527), provides a wealth of information regarding the courses of rivers in China. The commentary to the chapter on the Ji River 濟水 explains that one source of this river is located northeast of Yuan 原. The commentary then goes on to say that “It is this city that, long ago, surrendered to Duke Wen of Jin when he attacked it with trustworthiness” (昔晉文公伐原以信，而原降，即此城也).³⁷ The commentator does not provide the anecdote in full, as the authors of texts discussed above did. That said, he is obviously well-informed of Duke Wen’s military endeavor, its geographical location, and the moral lesson it teaches, and by briefly and casually referring to the anecdote, even without quoting it in full, he obviously expects his readers to be familiar with the story as well.

The *Liuzi xinlun* 劉子新論 (Master Liu’s New Discussions), a text that also dates from the sixth century, contains a chapter titled “Lüxin” 履信 (Treading on the Topic of Trustworthiness). The chapter identifies human activity as the essence of being human, and trust as the foundation of all activities. It presents four historical figures as beacons of trustworthiness:

Duke Huan [of Qi] did not violate his pact with Cao Gui; [Duke] Wen of Jin did not break his promise when attacking Yuan; Wu Qi did not hold back the reward he promised for moving the shafts of his carriage; Marquis [Wen of] Wei did not skip the appointment he made with his game warden.

齊桓不背曹劌之盟，晉文不棄伐原之誓，吳起不虧移轅之賞，魏侯不乖虞人之期。³⁸

The Siege of Yuan is here part of a series of historical maxims, brief references to episodes in history that are narrated in with more detail in the *Zuozhuan*, *Han Feizi*, *Zhanguoce*, and other early Chinese texts. The casual references require knowledge of the historical events to be fully appreciated as examples of trustworthiness. This passage in *Liuzi xinlun* obviously

expects its audience to possess this historical knowledge, which suggests that at the time the Siege of Yuan was well-known.

The *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance), compiled and published in 1084 under the leadership of the historian Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), is a chronological narrative of the history of China. To one historical event Sima Guang adds a comment in which he dilates on trustworthiness, a quality he familiarly refers to as “the greatest precious jewel of the people’s lord” (人君之大寶). Using the same four historical examples of trustworthiness as the *Liuzi xinlun*, he notes that “Duke Wen of Jin did not covet the gains of an attack on Yuan” (晉文公不貪伐原之利).³⁹

The *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era), a voluminous encyclopedia created under the auspices of Li Fang 李昉 (925–996), quotes line for line the Siege of Yuan version as it occurs in the *Lüshi chungiu*, including the comment that Duke Wen was a man who “knew how to seek what he desired.”⁴⁰ Whereas the *Lüshi chungiu* passage serves as an example of “using desires,” the *Taiping yulan* incorporates the passage in a chapter on trustworthiness.

The *Kongzi jiyu* 孔子集語 (Collected Sayings of Confucius), compiled by Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1753–1818), collects sayings ascribed to Confucius. It includes the Siege of Yuan anecdote in the version of the *Han Feizi*, which as we have seen attributes the saying “obtaining Wei by attacking Yuan” to Confucius.

These examples suffice to show that after the Western Han Dynasty, texts either briefly referred to the Siege of Yuan, expecting readers to be familiar with the historical event and its moral lesson, or they quote in full one of the earlier versions of the anecdote, including any comment the earlier authors attached to the anecdote. What authors after the Western Han do not do, however, is create new versions of the anecdote and embed these as illustrative examples in their essays. In other words, to authors from the Eastern Han onwards, the Siege of Yuan may still be known, and what it signifies (the importance of trustworthiness) may still be understood, but the anecdote itself is no longer actively used.

This case study of just one anecdote is suggestive of a much broader trend. Until the end of the Western Han, writers strongly felt a need to draw upon a corpus of historical anecdotes to strengthen their arguments by molding the anecdotes in certain ways. From the beginning of the Eastern Han, we no longer see that strong urge in the surviving literature, even though some authors still referred—often through brief maxims—to some of the more famous early Chinese historical anecdotes.

Part 3: Musings on the End of a Tradition

Why did the corpus of early Chinese anecdotes lose its appeal? Why did authors grow less inclined to draw from the pool of early Chinese anecdotes to reinforce their writings? It is not easy to pinpoint the cause of the decline of tradition, and there might not even be one single cause for the decline. More likely, several concurrent trends combined to bring about the decline. Here are my musings on several of those trends.

If we wish to find out why the early Chinese anecdotes lost their appeal, we should ask ourselves what caused their appeal in the first place. After all, it is quite remarkable that writers over a span of several centuries, from the Warring States to the Han, and in various literary genres, mention some of the same historical figures and draw upon the same pool of anecdotes for their writings. It seems that these historical figures, and the events they were involved in, and the lessons to be learned from those events, were part of the intellectual framework of the literate classes in early China. When expressing their thoughts in writing, authors reinforced the very framework from within they wrote. This self-perpetuating system among the cultural elites of early China not only led scholars to sprinkle their writings with anecdotes, but also to create entire collections of anecdotes. The most prominent person in this regard is the prodigious imperial librarian Liu Xiang, who lived at the end of the Western Han and was responsible for several influential collections of anecdotes. For example, he is said to have compiled the *Xinxu*, *Shuoyuan*, *Zhanguoce*, and *Lienüzhuan*. With all these collections of anecdotes occurring around the same time, mainly through the efforts of one man, it is hard to imagine how that achievement could be topped. Of course, one could rearrange the anecdotes in yet another collection, but that would add little new to what had already been done so many times before. So it seems that by the end of the Western Han Dynasty, the intensive usage of anecdotes had reached its natural peak, and that the massive interest in anecdotes by Liu Xiang and his peers paradoxically also led to the decline of the tradition, as there was little new that could be done with the old stories.

Little over a decade after Liu Xiang passed away, Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE–23 CE) seized the throne and founded a new dynasty. It was short-lived and followed by what is generally termed the “restoration” of the Han dynasty. Traditional historiography divides the Han dynasty in two, with Wang Mang’s interregnum as an uncomfortable anomaly in between. Still, his aptly named Xin 新 (“New”) Dynasty was a something of a watershed in Chinese history. For one thing, it enabled scholars to take a critical look at their tradition,

and see where it had gone wrong. To be sure, earlier scholars had also viewed history with a critical eye. As David Schaberg notes:

Only with Sima Qian does a theme of historical verification become at all prominent, and even his *Shiji* includes much anecdotal material that is acknowledged to be unverifiable, legendary, and useful more for its lessons than for its historical truth.⁴¹

The same could be said for some of the scholars who lived after Liu Xiang. They, too, appreciated the early Chinese anecdotes more for the lessons that can be drawn from them, than for their historical truth.

One of the first truly critical minds is Wang Chong 王充 (27–100 CE), who lived right after the Xin at the beginning of the Eastern Han. Tradition has it that he was born into a family of humble origins, and that he enjoyed reading books in bookstalls in the capital city, with no financial means to actually buy the books he read. As an autodidact, Wang Chong grew to become one of the most critical thinkers of his time. He was highly skeptical of many beliefs, theories, and practices of his contemporaries. In his *Lunheng* 論衡 (Balanced Discourses), a voluminous book completed around 50 CE, anecdotes play a significantly less prominent role than in the texts produced in previous centuries. For example, although his book consists of more than 200,000 words, Wang Chong mentions the Siege of Yuan not even once, and Duke Wen only twice.⁴² By contrast, the *Huainanzi*, which was compiled almost two centuries earlier and is half the *Lunheng* in size, does mention the Siege of Yuan anecdote and it brings up Duke Wen in no fewer than seven chapters. Similarly, the *Lüshi chunqiu*, compiled almost three centuries before the *Lunheng* and also roughly half its size, likewise contains the Siege of Yuan anecdote and it mentions Duke Wen over a dozen times. Duke Wen clearly does not hold the same appeal for Wang Chong as he did for Lü Buwei and Liu An. Other historical figures can count on Wang Chong's attention, but he views the anecdotes that involve them with a critical eye. For example, Duke Huan of Qi, the first of the so-called hegemonies, is said to have married his seven cousins, which would have been a major faux pas even in early China—that is, if it were true. Wang Chong for one does not think it was true. In a chapter titled “Shuxu” 書虛 (Falsehoods in Books), we find this passage:

It has been recorded that Duke Huan of Qi married his seven cousins. That cannot be true, for it would be incest and a violation of the laws of consanguinity. [. . .] Had Duke Huan married

his seven cousins, his viciousness would have left behind that of [the tyrants] Jie and Zhòu. [. . .] The *Chunqiu* commends the smallest merit and condemns the slightest wrong. For what reason then did it not condemn the great crime of Duke Huan? [. . .] Why was the *Chunqiu* so hard upon Duke Xiang, recording his lewdness, and why so lenient to Duke Huan, concealing his crime and having no word of reproof for it? [. . .] The fault of Duke Huan consisted in his too great condescension towards the ladies of his harem. Six concubines enjoyed his special favor, and five princes contended to become his heirs. [. . .] People hearing of these six favorites, and that no distinction was made between the sons of his wife and his concubines, then said that he misbehaved himself with seven cousins.⁴³

傳書言：齊桓公妻姑姊妹七人。此言虛也。夫亂骨肉，犯親戚 [. . .] 桓公妻姑姊七人，惡浮於桀，紂 [. . .] 《春秋》采毫毛之美，貶纖芥之惡，桓公惡大，不貶何哉？ [. . .] 《春秋》何尤於襄公，而書其奸？何宥於桓公，隱而不譏？ [. . .] 案桓公之過，多內寵，內嬖如夫人者六。有五公子爭立 [. . .] 世間內嬖六人，嫡庶無別，則言亂於姑姊妹七人矣。⁴⁴

Wang Chong is one of the first persons to treat anecdotes about historical figures with a grain of salt. As Schilling and Ptak point out in their study of stories involving Duke Huan, Wang Chong rectifies some crazy stories and “admonishes the reader to be critical with literary works.”⁴⁵ What we are witnessing here with Wang Chong is the beginning of a critical look at the historical veracity of anecdotes. Up to that point this was hardly the case, as Schaberg points out:

Historicity mattered to the users of anecdotes, but as a complement to rhetorical aims rather than as a goal in its own right. The details of events often drifted and changed as an anecdote was retold over the centuries, and there is little to suggest that discrepancies of this kind troubled Warring States and early Han writers. Facts were not entirely open to manipulation, but it is significant that, in all the debates of the era, writers so rarely saw fit to question the details of each other's accounts.⁴⁶

Wang Chong is one of the first to question the details of earlier accounts. And once the details are being questioned, the account itself loses some of

its authority, and hence some of its appeal. This is not to say that people stopped producing anecdotes or that people lost interest in history, but the large corpus of early Chinese anecdotes that includes the account of the Siege of Yuan was no longer a must for Wang Chong and the writers after him.

Conclusion

The point of this chapter is not to argue that authors from the Eastern Han onwards no longer used anecdotes in their writings, or even that the specific corpus of early Chinese historical anecdotes fell into oblivion after the Western Han. To the contrary, we often find brief references to early Chinese historical anecdotes in later texts, which suggests that to the authors and their readers the stories were still known and relevant. I merely want to point out that the intensive and almost compulsory use of a specific set of anecdotes—a tradition that led no fewer than six texts to include a variant of the Siege of Yuan story—until the end of the Western Han, stands in marked contrast to the modest use of the corpus after the Western Han. To be sure, anecdotes continued to be important, but the fall of the Western Han was the start of a new period that created its own anecdotes. The culmination of this process is the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (A New Account of the Tales of the World), compiled and edited by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444), which contains over a thousand anecdotes about historical figures from the Han Dynasty and beyond. It seems that by that time, anecdotes about earlier Chinese historical figures had gone past their expiration date.

Notes

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2. This definition of the word *anecdote* is based on Lionel Gossman, "Anecdote and History," *History and Theory* 42 (2003): 143.

3. For more on this battle, see Frank A. Kierman, Jr., "Phases and Modes of Combat in Early China," in *Chinese Ways in Warfare*, eds. Frank A. Kierman, Jr., and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 47–56.

4. For an extensive study of early narrative accounts of Duke Wen, see Jeff Bissell, "Literary Studies of Historical Texts: Early Narrative Accounts of Chong'er, Duke Wen of Jin" (PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin, 1996). For a study of historical accounts of Duke Wen's ascendancy, see David W. Pankenier, "Applied Field-Allocation Astrology in Zhou China: Duke Wen of Jin and the Battle of Chengpu (632 B.C.)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119, no. 2 (1999): 261–79. For a translation of select *Zuozhuan* stories on Duke Wen, see Burton Watson, *The Tso Chuan: Selections From China's Oldest Narrative History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), chapters 11–14.

5. For more on the *Zuozhuan*, see for instance Bernhard Karlgren, *On the Authenticity and Nature of the Tso Chuan* (Göteborg: Elanders boktryckeri aktiebolag, 1926); Ronald C. Egan, "Narratives in the *Tso Chuan*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 37, no. 2 (1977): 323–52; John C. Y. Wang, "Early Chinese Narrative: The *Tso-chuan* as Example," in *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Andrew H. Plaks (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 3–20; and Anne Cheng, "Ch'un ch'iu 春秋, Kung yang 公羊, Ku liang 穀梁 and Tso chuan 左傳," in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe, Early China Special Monograph Series 2 (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), 67–76.

6. Cf. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics, Vol. 5: The Ch'un Tsew with The Tso Chuen* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc, 1994), 196; Watson, *Tso Chuan*, 53n.8.

7. *Zuozhuan*, Xi 25.4. *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 1:435–436.

8. As the ruler of Jin, he carried the hereditary title of *hou* 侯, which is conventionally translated as "marquis." Following his demise, he was often referred to as *gong* 公, a title customarily translated as "duke," but which often translates more loosely as "ruler," "prince," or "lord." It would probably be more appropriate to refer to him in English as Lord Wen, but for the sake of consistency across the present volume, and in correspondence with the many other publications in which he is referred to as Duke Wen, I will opt for that as well. For more on the problematic translation of *gong* as "duke," see C. N. Tay, "On the Interpretation of *Kung* (Duke?) in the *Tso-chuan*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 93, no. 4 (1973): 550–55.

9. A related passage in the *Zuozhuan* explicitly mentions Zhao Cui's loyalty as the reason for making him governor of Yuan. In that passage, when Duke Wen wonders whom he should put in charge of Yuan, he is reminded that: "Formerly, Zhao Cui followed you on your peregrinations with a pot of food, and never ate

from it even when he was starving.” 昔趙衰以壺飧從徑，餒而弗食 (*Zuozhuan*, Xi 25.6; *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 1:436; cf. Legge, *Tso Chuen*, 196).

10. Watson, *Tso Chuan*, xix.

11. Watson, *Tso Chuan*, xx.

12. This picture differs from other texts, such as the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects). In that text, Confucius denounces Duke Wen as “crafty and lacking integrity” (*jue er bu zheng* 譎而不正). *Lunyu* 14.15; cf. D. C. Lau, *The Analects* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 126.

13. *Zuozhuan*, Xi 27.4 (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 1:447; cf. Legge, *Tso Chuen*, 201–02; Watson, *Tso Chuan*, 53). This passage suggests that Duke Wen, when preparing his people for the Battle of Chengpu, besieged Yuan to show them what it means to be trustworthy. Chronologically this would only work if Duke Wen started preparing his masses for the Battle of Chengpu (632 BCE) at least three years prior to the Siege of Yuan (635 BCE).

14. For more on the *Guoyu*, see I-jen Chang, William G. Boltz, and Michael Loewe, “Kuo yü,” in *Early Chinese Texts*, 263–68.

15. *Guoyu*, Jinyu 4; *Guoyu* 國語, 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 376–77.

16. Yang Bojun (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 435–36) identifies Mengmen as a mountain pass in present-day Henan 河南 province. He adds that Mengmen indeed would have been a mere one-day march from Yuan but, oddly, not in a direction the Jin army would take to return home.

17. Kierman, “Phases and Modes of Combat in Early China,” 48.

18. For more on the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, see: Michael Carson and Michael Loewe, “Lü shih ch’un ch’iu,” in *Early Chinese Texts*, 324–30. For a complete annotated translation of the text, see: John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei: A Complete Translation and Study* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

19. I suspect that *mou* 謀 “to collaborate” is probably a slip of the brush, as other versions have the graphically similar but semantically superior word *die* 諜 “spy.” If this is the case, Lü Buwei and his team may have added the word *shi* 士 “officer” to create a noun phrase (“collaborating officer”), because *mou* on its own normally functions as a verb.

20. The *Lüshi Chunqiu* claims that Wei 衛 followed the example of Yuan in surrendering to Duke Wen. The *Zuozhuan* makes no mention of this, and claims instead that Wei continued to exist as an independent state. The *Zuozhuan* does, as we have seen, mention new governors for the cities of Yuan and Wen 濫, and the *Huainanzi* and the *Xinxu*, as we will see, also mention that Wen surrendered after the fall of Yuan. Hence, it seems that the *Lüshi Chunqiu* mixed up the geographical locations of Wei and Wen.

21. Cf. Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 499–500.

22. *Lüshi Chunqiu*, “Li su lan” 離俗覽, “Wei yu” 為欲. *Lüshi Chunqiu Zhubu* 呂氏春秋註疏, ed., Wang Liqi 王利器 (Chengdu: Ba-Shu shushe, 2002), 2383–85.

23. Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 473.

24. Relevant studies of the *Han Feizi* include: Hsiao-po Wang and Leo S. Chang, *The Philosophical Foundations of Han Fei's Political Theory* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986); Bertil Lundahl, *Han Fei Zi: The Man and the Work* (Stockholm: Institute of Oriental Languages, 1992); Michael Andrew Hall Reeve, "Demonstrating the World: Mind and Society in the Shuo Lin Chapters of the *Han Fei Zi*." (PhD Diss., Princeton University, 2003); and Paul R. Goldin, ed. *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013). Translations include: W. K. Liao, trans., *The Complete Works of Han Fei Tzu, Vol. I-II* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1939); Burton Watson, trans., *Han Fei Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964); and Jean Lévi, trans., *Han Fei-tse ou le Tao du prince: la stratégie de la domination absolue* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

25. *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解, ed. Wang Xianshen 王先慎, *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng* 新編諸子集成 edition (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), chap. 32, 285–86.

26. Michael J. Hunter, "Sayings of Confucius: Deselected" (PhD Diss., Princeton University, 2012), 50.

27. *Han Feizi jijie*, chap. 32, 265.

28. For more on the *Huainanzi*, see: Charles Le Blanc, "Huai nan tzu," in *Early Chinese Texts*, 189–95. For a translation, see: John S. Major, Sarah A. Queen, Andrew Seth Meyer, and Harold D. Roth, trans. and eds., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

29. Cf. Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 463.

30. *Huainanzi jishi* 淮南子集釋, ed. He Ning 何寧, *Xinbian zhuzi jicheng* 新編諸子集成 edition (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), chap. 12, 869.

31. My translation is a mere amalgamation of existing translations, including: Arthur Waley, trans., *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Tê Ching and its Place in Chinese Thought* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1934); Wing-tsit Chan, trans., *The Way of Lao Tzu (Tao-te ching)* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1963); D. C. Lau, trans., *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (London: Penguin Books, 1963); Ku-ying Ch'en, *Lao Tzu: Text, Notes, and Comments*, trans. Rhett Y. W. Young and Roger T. Ames (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1981); D. C. Lau, trans., *Tao Te Ching*, Chinese Classics edition (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1989); Michael LaFargue, trans., *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching: A Translation and Commentary* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992).

32. *Laozi* 21.

33. *Laozi* 62. This statement feels incomplete (the two sentences are not perfectly parallel), and many translators—based on the *Huainanzi* parallel—add an extra word "fine" (*mei* 美), creating the sentence "fine words can buy honor, fine deeds can add people." Other translations include: "There is a traffic in speakers of fine words; Persons of grave demeanour are accepted as gifts" (Waley, *The Way and Its Power*, 218); "Beautiful words when offered will win high rank in return. Beautiful deeds can raise a man above others" (Lau, *Lao Tzu*, 69); "Beautiful words

can be used for bartering; Honoured behaviour can put a man above others” (Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 229); “Fine words can buy honor, and fine deeds can gain respect from others” (Chan, *Lao Tzu*, 210); “The fine words [of the adept man] can win him respect, and the fine behavior can cause him to be admired by others” (Ch’en, *Lao Tzu*, 264); “Elegant words can buy and sell; fine conduct gets people promoted” (LaFargue, *Tao*, 104).

34. For more on this chapter in the *Huainanzi*, see: Sarah A. Queen, “The Creation and Domestication of the Techniques of Lao-Zhuang: Anecdotal Narrative and Philosophical Argumentation in *Huainanzi* 12,” *Asia Major* 21, no. 1 (2008): 201–47; Paul van Els, “Tilting Vessels and Collapsing Walls: On the Rhetorical Function of Anecdotes in Early Chinese Texts,” *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 34 (2012): 141–66.

35. *Xinxu jiaoshi* 新序校釋, ed. Shi Guangying 石光瑛, 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), chap. 4, 505–09.

36. Yuri Pines did; see his contribution to the present volume.

37. *Shujingzhu* 水經注, comp. Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 2001), *juan* 7, “Ji shui,” 54.

38. *Xinbian Liuzi xinlun* 新編劉子新論, ed. Jiang Jianjun 江建俊 (Taipei: Taiwan guji chubanshe, 2001), chap. 8, “Lüxin,” 101.

39. *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, 20 vols., ed. Sima Guang 司馬光 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, [1956] 1976), chap. 2, “Zhou ji, er,” 48–49.

40. *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, 4 vols., ed. Li Fang 李昉 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, [1960] 1995), vol. 2, chap. 430, “Xin,” 1981.

41. David Schaberg, “Chinese History and Philosophy,” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, Volume 1: Beginnings to AD 600*, eds. Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 398n.12.

42. In one passage (*Lunheng* 3), Wang Chong claims that people’s fate can be easily known by the structure of their bones, adding that “Chong’er, the Prince of Jin, became a hegemon over the regional lords because his ribs were grown together” (晉公子重耳舐脅，為諸侯霸). In another passage (*Lunheng* 20), he describes how Duke Wen, in exile and begging for food, angrily refused a piece of soil offered by a plowman, which was explained by his retainers as inappropriate behavior for a prince who may one day be presented with the land of Jin.

43. Translation by Alfred Forke, *Lun-Hêng, Part II: Miscellaneous Essays of Wang Ch’ung* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1911), 253–55.

44. *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, ed. Huang Hui 黃暉 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 16.190–91.

45. Dennis Schilling and Roderich Ptak, “The Ulcers of Duke Huan of Ch’i,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, no. 2 (1998): 223.

46. Schaberg, “Chinese History and Philosophy,” 398.