SELF-CULTIVATION
OR EVALUATION OF OTHERS?
A FORM CRITICAL APPROACH TO ZENGZI LI SHI*

Matthias Richter, University of Hamburg

Most Early Chinese texts1 are not works of individual authors but compilations
drawing from different sources. Yet, while the heterogeneity of larger textual
units (i.e. the transmitted compilations which are commonly referred to as
“books”) is widely acknowledged, this does not seem to be the case with their
smaller units (usually called “chapters”). The latter are—if not explicitly treated
as homogeneous compositions—not yet sufficiently examined with regard to
their heterogeneous nature.2 This feature of these texts is, nevertheless, relevant
for their interpretation. If a transmitted text draws from different sources, its
constituent parts (be they words, individual statements or whole passages) have
already been invested with meaning in the source texts. As with quotations and
allusions in modern literature, the preconstructed meaning of quoted sources

1 I wish to thank Michael Friedrich (University of Hamburg) for his valuable suggestions in
repeated discussions about the topic of this article as well as for his reading of an earlier
draft version.
2 Prominent exceptions are compilations like Lunyu 論語 and Laosi 老子, in which the
heterogeneity of relatively independent and moreover very short textual units is quite
apparent. In the case of Lunyu, a recent example of the study of this problem is the attempt
of Bruce and Taeko Brooks (1998) to reconstruct the gradual growth of the text and to
rearrange its units in the presumed chronological order of their origin. It remains to be seen
if the neatness of the proposed arrangement can be maintained in the long run. (For a
critical discussion of this topic, see Siumon, 2000.) In the case of Laosi, matching passages
of bamboo manuscripts excavated in 1993 from tomb no. 1 of Guodian 郭店, Hubei,
confirm that the transmitted text as well as the Mawangdui 稼王堆 manuscript versions
(about one century younger than the Guodian manuscripts) are the result of a certain choice
from and rearrangement of pre-existing textual material. (For a discussion of this problem,
see Bolton, 1999.) Zhanzi 詩子 is another example of a compilation the heterogeneity of
which has been examined on the level of distinct textual units also within its individual
chapters (jian 篇). (Cf. A. C. Graham’s [1981] rearrangement of these units according to
their presumptive different sources.)
significantly influences the semantics of the resultant text. For Early Chinese literature, which largely consists of preconstructed material, this means that a certain word or statement may assume different meanings in different parts of the same text depending on the various sources those parts stem from. Thus, the interpretation of heterogeneous texts cannot rely on internal criteria alone but must also consider the nature of their source material. As these sources were probably in many cases utilitarian texts (e.g. civil or military instructions that had possibly been in practical use before they became part of transmitted literature), they probably contained specialised terminology that we are prone to misunderstand if we fail to recognise the life settings they stem from.

Particularly helpful approaches to heterogeneous texts are the methods of form criticism and redaction criticism which were developed in the first part of the past century in biblical studies and have since been applied also in other fields of scholarship concerned with transmitted texts. Form criticism is based on the assumption that a text consists of a number of relatively independent textual units, at least some of which are taken from earlier sources. Once one...
learn to check his temper and resist material and carnal temptations. — The text continues in the same fashion for about its first quarter. The first two units shall suffice to exemplify its general nature. 8

7 Cf. Zhang Xinche 1954: 618ff, Cao Ming 1993: 139, and Kong Guangsen’s preface to his edition Da Dai Li Ji boshu. “The following ten chapters are all taken from the writings of Zengzi. The section ‘Confessions’ (Rui jia 棄家) of the Han catalogue lists eighteen pián of Zengzi, eight of which are now lost” (Hu Jixun: s.n.). The Zengzi was recomposed about 1200 by Wang Zhao 正之 (1162–1237) and submitted to the imperial court in 1274 by his grandson Wang Mengdou 汪孟杜 in conjunction with a text ascribed to Zengzi’s disciple Zisi 子思 (483–402 B.C.; personal name Kong Ji 孔伋), hence called Zizi 子思子. Cf. Shiku quanshu zongmu 92: 783f.

8 The Da Dai Li Ji will be cited from the Shiku congkan 四部叢刊 reprint of the Han Yuanji 檢元吉 (1118–1167) edition (comp. Dai De 賀德 [c. B.C.], comm. Lu Bian 魯覔 [pl. 519–557]), which does not provide the “best text” but is a sound basis for a study focusing on the comparison of textual parallels. The numerous emendations, mostly of Qing scholars, are often based on just these parallels and thus gloss over their distinctive features. Nevertheless, critical editions have been taken into account in my translations. Emendations are indicated as follows: “[X]” means “character X deleted” and “[X]” means “character X inserted.” All translations are, if not otherwise indicated, my own. The line numbers on the left are given to indicate the position of the cited units in a text of about 300 of often, though not always, rhyming lines of varying length. Reconstructed pronunciations are those of Dong Tonghe, cited from Chou Fa-kuo 1979. The pronunciation of the last word of a line is given in square brackets [ ]; if the preceding word carries the rhyme, its pronunciation is given in braces {).
As these examples show, the regulations for the gentleman appear in units of a few verses each. Their reference to the gentleman is established by the prefixed term junzi only. It seems to me quite probable that Zengzi li shi to a large extent derives from didactic poetry, i.e. metrically regular, rhymed verses which were easy to memorise. In the case of the first two units of the text, the underlying pattern may have looked as follows:

- 攻其恶 [*qėk]*  Attack your faults.
- 求其过 [*kwā]* seek your mistakes.
- 求其过 [*gūk]* discard selfishness and desires.
- 從事學 [*mījia]* perform your office dutifully.
- 可謂學 [*yōk]* ——this may be called "learning".

- 爱日以學 [*yōk]* Be sparing of daytime in order to learn.
- 及時以行 [*yīng]* act when the time has come.
- 莽勇弗營 [*bījēg]* do not shirk hardship.
- 易勇弗從 [*dźjung]* do not pursue the easy way.
- 可謂學 [*kōg]* ——this may be called "perseverance".

Although these forms are speculative assumptions rather than actual reconstructions, the speculation is not entirely arbitrary. Both units suggest that an alternating rhyme and a regular metre had been employed in the respective source texts. I suspect that there were originally two pairs of verses expounding the meaning of the term xue 学 which is then named in a concluding verse (line 6). Line 3, which disturbs both metre and rhyme pattern, was presumably added as a commentary summing up the first of these pairs and later taken over into the main text. The commentary may, moreover, have been intended to point out that the passage should be understood in relation to a certain tradition: the words qiang qi suo bu meng 勳其所不能 are reminiscent of a recurring formula in texts concerned with the characteristic examination of people in view of their qualification for an office.

Mengzi says: "Therefore: Heaven, when it is about to assign a particular person to a high office, always first tests his resolution, exhausts his frame and makes him suffer starvation and hardship, frustrates his efforts so as to shake him from his mental lassitude, toughen his nature and make good his deficiencies [為其所不能]." The parallel texts Wen wang guan ren 文王官人 (Da Dai Lji 72) and Guan ren jie 官人解 (Yi Zhaozhu 逸周書 58), both concerned with the evaluation of candidates for an office and thus titled Guan ren 官人, use a similar formula several times. I will revert to this question later.

As to the second unit of Zengzi li shi, line 11 was probably a gloss summing up the rather unspecific statements of the preceding two lines and was, like line 3, later integrated into the main text. The independent nature of the

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11 Rhymes, though an important feature of early Chinese literature, can hardly be established with a satisfactory degree of certainty, as there does not yet exist any generally accepted system of reconstructing Old Chinese pronunciations. We use here the admittedly outdated system of Dong Tonghe simply for the reason of easy accessibility. The pronunciations given are merely meant to point out possible rhymes that are less apparent in modern or middle Chinese. However uncertain the pronunciations given here may be, it seems that adherence was often consciously used in ancient Chinese literature to create a rhyme-like effect. This especially applies to utilitarian texts, in which the choice of the correct expression and easy memorization ranked before poetic effect. Therefore, I do not apply Shijing rhyme groups as a standard but take ancient words as quasi-rhymes into consideration as well. The possibility of regional differences in pronunciation as a cause for deviations from what we would expect as rhymes in the strict sense has to be taken into account as well.

12 Similar forms are common in nomadic verses of various cultures. For a discussion of related questions in late medieval German literature, see Haug/Wachinger 1994 (esp. pp. 63ff).

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13 Zhu Xi's Chun shi (1130–1200) commentary (zhuc 集注) to Lunyu provides some examples that show the probability of this assumption. Lunyu 1.14 is reminiscent of the beginning of Zengzi li shi and is also concerned with "learning", though a different aspect of it: "The Master said, 'The gentleman seeks neither a full belly nor a comfortable home. He is quick in action but cautious in speech. He goes to men possessed of the Way to have himself put right. Such a man can be described as eager to learn.'” (Translation by C. D. Lau [1992.7].) Zhu Xi's commentary explains "致學" as "to exert oneself [in order to mend] one's deficiencies [為其所不能]." It may be speculated that, had Lunyu been a less generally known text, this commentary could have slipped into the main text as well. The assumption that this not very common phrasing "致學為其所不能" was typical of commentarial language is further supported by Zhu Xi's commentary to other parts of Lunyu (2.17 and 18.11) "致致其不至以知" resp. "致彼所聞而致其所未及也致其所不致, 致其所未止." (Cheng Shao 1990. 52–53, 111, and 129.)

14 The beginning of the passage mentions six exemplary rulers and politicians of the past who were raised to their positions from humble or even dishonourable circumstances. Although Mengzi, using the expression "為人", seems to refer to these persons, the tests of the prospective officials are intended to be understood as universally valid.

15 Mengzi 6B15 (曾 is to be read as 與; translation adapted from D. C. Lau 1970: 181). Both texts will in the following be cited from the Sibu congkan editions and will for convenience be called "Guan ren jie texts", Da Dai Lji 72 is abbreviated "DL", and Yi Zhaozhu 58 "YZ". "為其所不至" (DL 10: 51a / YZ 7: 40a), "致其所不至" (DL 10: 51b / YZ 7: 40b), "致其所未致其所不至" (DL 10: 51b vs. "致其所不致其所不至") (YZ 7: 40b), "為其所不至" (DL 10: 53a, 54a / YZ 7: 42a).
served to confirm the new interpretation of lines 7–10. The independent character of these interpolated verses is confirmed by their appearance in a different context in Da Dai Liji 55.

Whatever the actual models of its individual units may have been like, the apparent theme of Zengzi li shi is the self-cultivation of the gentleman, and it is just along these lines that the text has traditionally been interpreted—in net accordance with the professed authorship of Zengzi. Its title, however, does not fit as neatly and calls for an explanation. Richard Wilhelm’s literal translation “Aufnichtung von Werken” (The setting up/errection/establishment of deeds/work) appears detached from his translation of the text, whereas Benedykt Grynpas in his rather liberal translation offers three different renderings of the title which are not as close to the original and moreover inspecific to a degree that glosses over any possible inconsistencies in the relation of the text and its title.

The commentaries of Chinese scholars are more helpful and besides give a typical example of a common mode of traditional textual criticism. Gao Ming’s 高明 translation into Modern Chinese says about the title: “By using the two characters li shi as a title, affairs of establishing oneself and practising the Way (li shen xing dao 立身行道) are referred to.” He adopts this explanation—like many others—from an earlier commentator, in this case Wang Pinzheng 王聘珍 (1809–1940). The origin of Wang Pinzheng’s interpretation is quite evident—Zengzi is the professed author of the Xiaojing 孝經, and in one of its first sentences this canonical Confucian text says: “To establish oneself, practise the Way and make one’s name known to posterity in order to glorify one’s parents is the perfection of filial piety.” Wang Pinzheng apparently expected his

The parallel verses have likely not been cited by one text from the other but stem from a different source. I surmise that in an earlier core text a short set of verses defined the virtue of “perseverance” (shou 守) without any reference to a particular “work” or “task” (作). These verses were later reinterpreted in the sense of “persevering in one’s work” or “attending to one’s task” (shou ye 守業), when they were integrated into a larger, more elaborate composition in which they were followed by a passage that linked up the concepts of learning and tasks (线16 of Zengzi li shi: “in learning the gentleman must start from his task”). This reinterpretation must at still a later stage of the genesis of the textus receptus have caused the interpolation of verses from another source, which were actually concerned with “perseverance in one’s work/tasks” and

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20 Interpolated passage: *日旦就業/夕而自省/夕而自省/以成其身/可謂守業.

21 In Da Dai Liji 55, the redundancy and change of structure (two parallel verses are followed by a set of three verses, the first two of which show a less strict parallelism) lacks the literary quality we might expect if it were a whole the genuine composition of an individual author. The same is true for the corresponding passage of Zengzi li shi. It rather looks as if in both texts two apotélesms were combined because they fitted the same head, both being a praise of diligence or perseverance respectively.


23 “謂名用立身之道足是立身行道之實” (Gao Ming 1993: 159).

24 “若名用立身之道足是立身行道之實” (Da Dai Liji jingshu mal 2b).

25 “立身行道謹名位後世以顯父母孝之於終也” (Shisan jing zhushu 254b).
readers to recognise the allusion. He interprets Zengzi li shi as a text about self-cultivation with the aim of acquiring a social position in order to serve one’s ancestors. But none of this is indicated in the text itself. Besides, the title is neither li shen nor xing dao. Wang Pinzhen does not really explain the title but rather transcribes it according to a preconceived idea of the text, which is in turn inspired by the latter’s association with Zengzi.

This line of interpretation, however, has an even longer tradition. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) in his edition of the ten Zengzi-chapters deems only the title of this particular text to demand an explanation. He relates that Zengzi undertook daily self-inspections26 and points out that the text exclusively deals with self-cultivation (xiu shen 修身).27 He further mentions that already in late Song times Gao Siun 高似孫 (1160–1230) and Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223–1296) registered this text under the title Xiu shen. It should be added that parts of the text are cited under the same title in the political compendium Qunshu zhiyao群書治要 in the early 7th century.28

However, if we continue to read the text, it becomes clear that a considerable portion of it does not deal with self-cultivation at all. The focus gradually shifts from the gentleman himself to his fellow-beings. First there are regulations for the gentleman’s adequate behaviour towards others, which may, admittedly, still be understood as concerned with self-cultivation. But then—from about the middle of the text onwards—there follow descriptions of blameworthy personalities, concluded by the remark that the gentleman must not allow himself to join such people or be associated with them. I again cite only two units representative of a much larger portion of the text:

148 学而無行 [*yíng] He who learns extensively but does not put [what he has learnt] into practice.
149 (進)[進]紈而不讓 [*jìng] who is quick-witted and unyielding [in an argument].29

26 Cf. Luoyu 1.4: “Zengzi said: ‘I daily examine myself in three respects’” (曾子曰吾日三省吾身)
27 “此篇所言習身之事” (Huang Qing jingjie [Zengzi zhuan 曾子注解] Tian 111: 附録)
28 Qunshu zhiyao, compiled by Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643) et al. by imperial order and submitted to the throne in 631, had already been lost in Song times and was retrieved only in the 18th century from Japan; cf. Siku quanshu zongmu 4: 1582b–c.
29 Sun Yirang reads “進” as a graphic error for “進”, referring to the technical term 興進 (for 興進), which is repeatedly used in similar contexts. Cf. Da Dai Liji jiashu 201 and the passages Da Dai Liji 48 (博聞強志接而善對者謂之‘進’). Da Dai Liji jing 3.4b and Guanzi 18 (7.11a: “除卿聰明捷給司令為東園”) noted there. Unlike as this graphic error may seem in the modern standard type of the characters 興 and 进, their graphic similarity is apparent in some Clerical (cursive 草書) and Small Seal (cursive 小篆 小篆) forms, and even more so in the so-called Chu script (Chu ci 楚篆 楚文). Determinative 62 (進) is a combination of 近 with a “foot” (i.e. modern 步/足/之/之/之/之). In Chu script both parts are usually still unconnected: 近, which often strongly resembles the left part of 埂 (det. 64), being placed on the left side of the character and the “foot” element on the lower right, where 埂 has exactly the same element. This shows that in such types of script the difference between 近 and 近 is essentially that of 足 and the upper right part of 埂, both dominated by horizontal strokes crossed by one vertical stroke. A copyist could easily have mistaken 埂 for 近, which he probably expected because of the following 近, 近 being a common word combination. The error is thus one of a typical lexi felicit. (For the old forms of the characters and their elements, see Chen Jiangong 1991, Li Zhengguang 1998, He Lanyi 1998.) Like 近, 近 is here used in the specialised meaning of a technical term regarding a person’s performance in disputation which is typical of texts about the evaluation of character. (Cf. Richter 2002:566–66.

30 Lu Bian 論辨 (519–557), glosses 近 as 簡 and explains it as “to be exceedingly powerful and restrictive in one’s behaviour to inferiors” (簡賓客而臣下). Kong Guanren gives zhī as the pronunciation (“簡容色”). Cf. Da Dai Liji jiashu 4.4a. The interpretation of 近 and the emendation of 近 to 近 are based on an earlier passage in the same text (lines 110, 114–116): “The gentleman shall be […] generous and not overly thirsty, straightforward but not blunt—this may certainly be called wisdom [君子… 虽不任酒…]” In a different context, Liji 4 (252–3) labels a blunt expression of one’s feelings as a lack of refinement typical for the Rong and Di (“有負貴而尚行者必狄之之道也”).
31 The Siku zongkan print has “進”, an allograph of the standard “進”.

150 好直而不慶 [*kieng] who tends to be straightforward to the point of bluntness,
151 好順而務多 [*jamiento] who is overly thrifty and tends to be mean,
152 君子不貴也 [*jiaj] is a person with whom the gentleman shall not be associated.
153 多言無教 [*jiaj] He who is boastful and shameless,
154 張而無憲 [*yān] who is forceful and recklessly,
155 好勇而恥人者 [*jen] who tends to be daring and ruthless,
156 貧而不與也 [*jiaj] is a person with whom the gentleman shall not be associated.

These descriptions of despicable personalities are linked to the gentleman merely by the recurring formula “君臣不與也”. The text later proceeds from describing types of persons in a few sentences each to a new form in which each type is defined by one sentence only. First, each of these sentences indirectly names an essential quality that is required of the member of a certain age group.
A following catalogue then defines certain negative qualities of character without any reference to a certain social group. Again, a few examples shall suffice:

191 少稱不弟尊之也 (‘t‘ig)  A young person found to be irreverent — this is shame.
192 殊稱無德尊之也 (‘niguk) An adult person found to be without virtue — this is disgrace.
193 老稱無德尊之也 (‘dz‘awd) An old person found to be without propriety — this is guilt.
194 過而不能改悔也 (‘g‘jwan) To be incapable of correcting one’s mistakes — this is lassitude.
195 行而不能遂成也 (‘t‘ig) To be incapable of completing one’s actions — this is shame.
196 喜義人而不與尊之也 (‘niguk) To admire those who are good but not join them — this is disgrace.
197 失知而不問其過也 (‘k‘ig) Not to know something and fail to inquire about it — this is stubbornness.
198 說而未能事也 (‘g‘jong) To be incapable of expounding problems — this is to be out of one’s wits.32
199 喜怒異適也 (‘y=sk) To allow emotions (pleasure and anger) to lead one’s thoughts astray — this is confusion.
200 不於行言之諳也 (‘miwag) To speak about something which one is not really able to do — this is imposture.

Nothing indicates that these statements refer to the gentleman. The text obviously no longer deals with the self-cultivation of the gentleman but rather with the evaluation of people in general. This is confirmed by the following parts of the text, which expound the foundation and methods of character diagnosis.

218 目老心之也 (‘b‘ig) It is the eyes wherein the heart emerges.33

Therefore:

219 言者行之指也 (‘*k*ed) and it is words that indicate deeds.
220 作於中則揚於外也 (‘*ngwad) Whatever arises within makes itself known without.
221 以有處者 (‘y*yan) From the visible
222 以有處者 (‘*i*n) infer what is hidden.

Therefore it is said:

223 言其音也 (‘r*giin) It is by listening to his words
224 可以知其所行矣 (‘*k*ag) that you can recognise his inclinations,
225 見說之流 (‘*j*g) and by observing his fluency in expounding problems
226 可以知其所為矣 (‘*r*ig) you can recognise his skills.
227 久而復之 (‘*b*‘ok) By repeating [what he has said] after a long time
228 可以知其信矣 (‘*s*‘ien) you can recognise his trustworthiness.
229 見其所愛樂 (‘ts‘ien) and by observing how he cares for those near to him
230 可以知其人矣 (‘*s*‘ien) you can recognise his personality.

Zengzi li shi here evidently uses different gnomic verses or other preconstructed "small forms."34 The individual forms can easily be distinguished by changes in phrasing and by the even more obvious "故曰" explicitly marking the capture. The immediately following catalogue of instructions for the examination of certain qualities of a person, although not marked off by "故曰", can be

者之於人也，未審知而後能知之，觀言貌 (‘mog) 察氣志 (‘t‘ig) 定取舍 (‘i*ig) 而人情動 (‘p*gel) 感。Translation by Hightower (1952: 129). The section Xing shuo 行序 of the text Shila jing 十六經 in the Laozi B silk manuscript of Mawangdui has: "Therefore, words must be faithful representations of the heart, men is an [unreliable!] adornment of the heart, it is [a person's] pi wherein the heart emerges. Whenever there are words without the corresponding pi, this is called insincerity." (是故言者之心 (‘b‘ig) (in), 色者心之表 (‘ywag) 也，質者心之宅 (‘biwag) 也，有言無一，（言） (無) 言者之表 (‘miwag), Mawangdui Han ma boshu vol.1, 1980: 78 [136a-b]). Note that the last sentence corresponds to the preceding line 260 of Zengzi li shi. Guoyi II.1b relates the reasons why a man called Ying 凱 decides against joining Grand Tutor Yang Ying: "When I saw his appearance I wished [to follow him], but having heard him speak, I detested him. Now, a person's appearance is an adornment of his true condition, and his words are the decisive element of his appearance. The true condition of a person is formed within. Words are a refinement of the self. This refinement is brought forward in speech. So, if the words are congruous [with the person uttering them], they will be put into practice; if they are incongruous, there will be calamity." (律見言者之寓也，聞其言而惡之，形後者多也，言 amidst which,言文之文，言之文者，合而後行，離則無實）.

32 蹴，像 218 彼其，基 g 29. A technical term referring to performance in disputations; cf. fn. 29.
33 亦 218 信之，信 29. The eyes are representative of the mind, and [ ] words are the indicators of action. Now knowledge of men is not to be had for the asking. By regarding a man's demeanor, investigating his motives, and determining his choice, you will get to the bottom of his nature [ ] (居身心之信，言行之指，夫知

34 I here adopt the term "Kleinformen" (resp. "Kleinsformen" or "einfache Formen") well established in the study of German literature. Cf. Jelles 1972 and Haug/Wachinger 1994.
clearly distinguished from the preceding passage by a different sentence structure and stricter parallelity.

231 非禮之而觀其不忌也 (*K*[jwaj] Terrify him and observe if he is not afraid.

222 納之而觀其不忌也 (*wæwæ) Infuriate him and observe if he does not lose his countenance.

233 納之而觀其不避也 (*mijwæ) Delight him and observe if he is not insincere.

234 近勝色而觀其不諂也 (*ðjwæ) Approach him with sensual pleasures and observe if he does not transgress.

235 植之而觀其有常也 (*ðjæ) Wine and dine him and observe if it is unserving.

236 時之而觀其謹謹也 (*ðjæ) Procure him benefits and observe if he can renounce them.

237 勵之而觀其誠也 (*ðjæ) When he is in mourning, observe his constancy.

238 植之而觀其不怒也 (*wijwæ) When he is in straits, observe if he is not dazzled.

239 勵之而觀其不怒人也 (*wijjæ) Let him exert himself and observe if he does not cause disturbance.

The passages presented above (lines 218–239) are all concerned with the correspondence of a person’s external and internal features and of his words and deeds. These correspondences are the essential foundation of character diagnosis. The method of diagnosis lies chiefly in observing a person’s deeds and other external (and thus visible) features and inferring from these his inner qualities, which are not accessible to direct perception (lines 218–230). The rhymed catalogue of actual tests (lines 231–239) may be seen as a refinement of this general method. In two of these nine tests (lines 237–238) the examinee is observed in a given situation with regard to a certain quality, whereas in the seven others a test situation is specially arranged to examine a required quality. In the remaining portion of the text, the topic of the gentleman’s self-cultivation is resumed.

2. Cognate form elements in texts other than Zengzi li shi

The parts of Zengzi li shi described above deserve special attention as they belong to a genre which is remarkably widespread in Early Chinese literature.

The most complete and systematic representatives of this genre, however, are the two parallel texts about the recruitment of officials (Guan ren in Da Dai Liji 72 and Yi Zhou shu 58) already mentioned above. They derive from a common ancestral text, which collected and systematised contemporary knowledge about human character.

In these texts—and in different degrees also in other texts concerned with character diagnosis and the recruitment of officials—three form elements can be clearly distinguished as typical of the genre. These elements are: firstly statements about the foundation and methods of character diagnosis (A), secondly descriptions or definitions of types of character (B), and thirdly instructions for the examination of particular qualities of a person (C). Of the latter there are two subtypes: the examination of a person in given circumstances of life and examinations in special test situations. A, B, and C neither necessarily appear in this order nor are always all of them present in a given text. I have here ordered these designations in what appears to be the logical progression from the more general to the more specific. The discussion of the individual form elements below will, however, begin with form element C, which is the most conspicuous indicator of the genre and has the closest parallels in other texts, and then proceed with A and B.

2.1 Form element C

All the above-mentioned form elements are represented in Zengzi li shi. The most obvious one is the catalogue of examinations in lines 231–139. All nine examinations have a counterpart in the Guan ren texts, where the corresponding catalogue is larger and more systematic. The Guan ren catalogue lists some thirty tests, the first sixteen of which refer to given circumstances of life and the rest to specially arranged test situations. The first four tests examine a person in

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35 Kong Guangzhen (Da Dai Liji biao shu 4.3b) points out that “動” was in the Song edition erroneously written for “勤”, which is found in the Yuan edition.

36 It is represented in texts as diverse as Zhuangzi 莊子 32, Liu ts’o 六 gord 6, 19 and 20, Xunzi 孫子 12, Heguangzi 嗕光子 4 and 9, Shui 蜀子 1, Yanzhi changer 島子曾昌 63, Li shih changfu 吕氏昌符 3.4, Hanfengzi 韓風子 48, Huainanzi 淮南子 13, Wensu 文子 11, Han- shi wazhuan 襄詩外傳 5.6, Shuo gao 庶氏高 2.5, Shih 夏父 44, Han shu 漢書 60, and traces of it can be found in many others. This tradition culminated and was further systematised and refined in Liu Shao's 劉邵 (f 196–248) Renwu zhi 人物志 (c. 240–250).
poverty or wealth and in favoured or straitened circumstances, the latter of which—"as to someone in straitened circumstances, observe if he is not despondent and fearful [隱者見其不擲悶]"—bears some resemblance to line 238 of Zengzi li shi. The following tests—reminiscent of lines 191–193 in Zengzi li shi—concern people of different age groups:

**Da Dai Li Ji 72 (DL)**  
示之難以觀其勇  
頌之以觀其治  
誾之以利以觀其不貪  
肆之以事以觀其達

**Yi Zhou Shu 58 (YZ)**  
示之難以觀其勇  
頌之以觀其治  
誾之以利以觀其不貪  
肆之以事以觀其達

**DL.** As to young people, observe if they are courtly and respectful, fond of learning and able to be revered. As to adults, observe if they are immaculate and honest, are zealous in their actions and overcome their selfishness. As to the aged, observe if they are prudent in thinking [thus compensating for their deficiencies] and do not transgress.

The next four tests regard the relations between father and son, elder and younger brothers, lord and subject, and those of people with a common (family of regional) background. They are followed by another set concerning persons in their everyday life, in a situation of bereavement, and in their social intercourse. The second of these tests—"examine him when he suffers bereavement, and observe his constancy and goodness [省其喪服觀其賢良]"—has a counterpart in line 237 of Zengzi li shi. The Guan ren tests then move on to a catalogue of examinations for which special test situations are arranged. I will in the following cite only its central portion which has counterparts in Zengzi li shi:

**Da Dai Li Ji 72 (DL)**  
示之難以觀其勇  
頌之以觀其治  
誾之以利以觀其不貪  
肆之以事以觀其達

**Yi Zhou Shu 58 (YZ)**  
示之難以觀其勇  
頌之以觀其治  
誾之以利以觀其不貪  
肆之以事以觀其達

**DL.** Confront him with hardship to observe his courage. Burden him [with duties] to observe if he can manage [his tasks].

**YZ.** Confront him with hardship to observe his courage. Burden him with duties to observe if he can manage his tasks.

Especially in DL, another conceivable interpretation would be: "Annoy him to observe his self-control." The corresponding line 239 of Zengzi li shi ("勤勞之而觀其不攘人也"), though, suggests yet another reading: "Burdan him [with duties] to observe his orderliness.

40 More literally, "inundate / flood / shower him with pleasures", however, here is clearly used in the well attested sense "seduce / entice" (濫, which does not make sense in this context, obviously being a graphic error for 肆). The graphic error 異 for 肆 becomes conceivable if one considers the alliograft 肆 of the former. The latter emendation is not merely based on the Y2 parallel but, more importantly, on the fact that 肆 was in ancient Chinese literature conventionally used in conjunction with sensual pleasures. Cf. *Shuangfu 8* (11': 13f) "Those who excessively indulge in sensual pleasures within the court and excessively indulge in hunting [when outside the court], who enjoy wine and music [...] have never escaped perdition. (內作邪樂外作禽荒甘酒嗜音 [~] 未見不亡)". *Guosu 21* (3a–b) "When I was young and had not yet attained constancy, I excessively indulged in hunting when leaving [the court] and excessively indulged in sensual pleasures when returning to [the court]. I [was] almost a predator from the hunter down to the hunter". and the recurring formula "樂而荒 (to enjoy pleasures without going to excess)" in *Zhaohua Xiang* 27 (294/25f and 393/13) as well as "荒而爾荒" in Li Ji 32 (33.11:149/27).

41 **Da Dai Li Ji 72 (DL)**  
示之難以觀其勇  
頌之以觀其治  
誾之以利以觀其不貪  
肆之以事以觀其達

42 The emendation is justified chiefly by the text-internal parallelism. As in the end of the sentence has the antonym 但 as its counterpart in the preceding line, 也 may justly be expected at the beginning of the sentence as the conventional antonym of 但 in the preceding
Although the catalogues of examinations in Zengzi li shi and the Guan ren texts are markedly different in scope and to some degree also in content and phrasing, there is still enough similarity to realise that they follow a common pattern and almost exactly the same way of testing a character's worth. Candidates are tested in mourning and hardship; furthermore, they are tested by exposure to fear and strain, by provoking their skills, or by provoking their fury or pleasure or by material or carnal temptation. In the conspectus below, I have rearranged the order of examinations in Zengzi li shi so that they are on the same line with their counterparts in the Guan ren texts.43 This does not imply that this represents the original order of examinations in a possible archetype of this catalogue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zengzi li shi</th>
<th>Guan ren</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Da Dai Lji 49</td>
<td>Da Dai Lji 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>237</td>
<td>經約而觀其不悖也</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>238</td>
<td>預貞而觀其貞也</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>239</td>
<td>勅勞而觀其不紊也</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>240</td>
<td>力而觀其動也</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>241</td>
<td>歡而觀其不律也</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>242</td>
<td>怒而觀其不忠也</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>243</td>
<td>飲食之而觀其有常也</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>244</td>
<td>近詩書而觀其不論也</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Form element A

Another form element (A), i.e. statements about the foundation and methods of character diagnosis, has already been mentioned as evidently present in Zengzi li shi. Again, a conspectus below shows parallels in the Guan ren texts, the more obvious of which are marked by bold print (in all three cases I present only part of a longer passage):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zengzi li shi</th>
<th>Guan ren</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Da Dai Lji 49</td>
<td>Da Dai Lji 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>觀其一</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>見其二</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>見其小</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>見其大</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>218</td>
<td>故曰善心之報也</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>219</td>
<td>言者行之指也</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220</td>
<td>作於中則播於外</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I will in the following only give a translation of the parts that have not yet been presented above:

Zengzi li shi (lines 97–100): On beholding one [thing], hope for (look out for? note?) another. On beholding the small, hope for (look out for? note?) the great. DL: If something is really present within, it will become visible without.43 From the visible infer what is hidden; from the minute infer the great. By his voice you may judge his qi (character?), f... there follow catalogues which relate the sound of voice of persons to their characters ...I hear his voice to judge his qi (character?). Examine his deeds, observe

43 Yi Zhuo shu 58 (7: 40a).
44 Here and below, the arrangement of passages from Zengzi li shi and other texts in a conspectus does not claim to present textual parallels in the strict sense but rather structural parallels, i.e. similar patterns which suggest that the respective texts are modelled upon common sources.
45 Cf. the similar statement in Mengzi 6B6: “有諸內必形諸外”
whence he proceeds, find out wherein he finds contentment (and calm). From what is in front infer what is behind; from the visible infer what is hidden; from the small infer the great. Whatever is really present within will inevitably become visible without. By his voice you may judge his genuine self: [...] there follow catalogues which relate the sound of voice of persons to their characters [...]. Hear his voice to judge his qi (character). Examine his deeds and observe whence he proceeds. From what is in front observe what is behind; from the visible observe what is hidden; from the small infer the great.

The three texts, despite their differences, make essentially the same statements about the diagnosis of character: inner conditions become visible on the outside, therefore it is possible to infer what is inside from what we see outside. Another representation of form element A is to be found in Du Dai Liji 72 towards the end of the text. It is a rhyming catalogue in which King Wen 文王 prescribes for his Grand Master (taishi 太師) the principles to be applied in the selection of persons eligible for certain offices:

The inclusion in this catalogue of the temporal aspect (“past words—coming actions”) shows the element of prognostication that is to some degree inherent, at least potentially, in diagnosis of any kind. In Wuzi 吳子 (36.3–4), Wu Qi 吳起 says to Marquis Wei of Wei 魏文侯: "From the visible I infer what is hidden, and from the past I find out about the future." [臣以見治陸以往觀來]'. It is not surprising that these maxims should play a role in military texts like Wuzi. A similar passage occurs, though with a less obvious prognostic element, in the military manual Lü Tao 六韬 13 (11.21–22): "You must see his bright sides as well as his dark sides and you will recognize his heart; you must see his outer as well as his inner aspects, and you will recognize what he has in mind; you must see from what he stays away and what he keeps close to, and you will recognize his true condition." [必見其陽又見其陰乃知其心必見其外又見其內乃知其意必見其端又見其側乃知其情].

Character diagnosis is, of course, dependent on a context of social hierarchy. It is conceived of as conducted downwards from the superior to his subjects. The superior, on the other hand, has to make sure that he remains impenetrable to his subjects. This is expressed in language that appears just like a reversal of form element A. In Liu Tao 9 (7–8), Taigong 太公—again in the context of selecting officials—advises King Wen of Zhou to that effect: "As to the way of the ruler, he must be like the dragon’s head—dwelling in the heights and watching out afar, looking deep into things and listen closely; he must show his outer form and hide his true (inner) condition. Like the height of the skier he cannot be reached, like the depth of abysses he cannot be fathomed [天王之道*kn1g*如龐之]又*ts3t*命居
2.3 Form element B

Whereas the form elements A and C as represented in the Guan ren texts have close textual parallels in Zengzi li shi, the presence in the latter of form element B (i.e., descriptions of types of personality) is not as obvious as that of the other two. Nevertheless, there are significant similarities between some passages in Zengzi li shi and form element B in the Guan ren texts, where extensive catalogues list descriptions of positive and negative types of personalities. These descriptions come in textual units of varying length. They usually consist of four to five short sentences (or verses) describing some traits of character and are concluded by a summary definition in one sentence. The excerpt below is to show that the textual units in the first part of Zengzi li shi follow a similar pattern. Again, the translation of Zengzi li shi that has already been given above is not repeated.

Zengzi li shi 曾子立事
Da Dai Li Ji 49          Guan ren 官人          Yi Zhou Shu 58

1. 君子安其位 其貌直而不（偽）[偽] 其貌直（□□□）[□□□□]而不止
2. 近其進 其言正而不私 其言正而不私
3. 獨其所未不 獨其所未不 獨其所未不
4. 去其欲 其意直而不 獨其所未不
5. 彈其所道 不於其道 不於其道
6. 其可謂學矣 其可謂學矣 其可謂學矣
7. 君子遇日以學 其貌直而不（偽）[偽] 其貌直（□□□）[□□□□]而不止
8. 其言正而不私 其言正而不私
9. 來其勇 其意直而不 獨其所未不
10. 無其欲 其意直而不 獨其所未不
11. 白而就其所與 其貌直而不（偽）[偽] 其貌直（□□□）[□□□□]而不止
12. 無其欲 其意直而不 獨其所未不
13. 及其去 其貌直而不（偽）[偽] 其貌直（□□□）[□□□□]而不止
14. 不其勇 其意直而不 獨其所未不
15. 亦可謂學業矣 亦可謂學術矣 亦可謂學業矣

DL: Someone whose manner is straightforward and not light-minded, whose words are correct and not selfish, who does not exhibit his merits, who does not hide his faults and does not cover up his mistakes, is a person who has substance. Someone who is self-complacent, whose words are clever and artful, who exhibits his visible things [appearance/wealth?], who devotes his attention to sophistry and resorts to deceits to excuse his own faults is a person who lacks substance. Someone who simply impresses others with words, who approaches a subject but does not carry it through, who cannot adequately answer questions, who [then] seems not being out of his wits but [instead] takes on airs of abundance [with regard to his wisdom], who has a way [of arguing] and follows only his own line of argumentation which he applies to the problem, who, if at a loss what to say, pretends profundity—a person like this is someone who hides behind refinement and skills.

12. Someone whose manner is straightforward and not reticent, whose words are correct and not selfish, who does not exhibit his merits, who does not hide his faults and does not cover up his mistakes, is a person who has substance. Someone who is submissive and fawning, whose words are clever and artful, who exhibits his visible things [appearance/wealth?], who strives for testimonies [of his goodness?] and resorts to deceit to excuse his own faults is a person who lacks substance.
The verses in Zengzi li shi, exhorting the gentleman to do this and that and not to associate with such and such a person, may originally have been statements defining certain types of character. The length of these textual units is roughly the same as that in the Guan ren texts. The individual lines frequently take the form "X while Y", and there is some similarity in content and terminology. As to the positive types (examples 1 and 2 of Zengzi li shi, i.e. lines 1-15), the different phrasing of the conclusive sentences as compared to the Guan ren texts is a secondary stylistic feature. They also vary in the Guan ren texts ("X while Y"), "X while Y", "X while Y"), elsewhere also "X while Y", "X while Y", "X while Y", and "X while Y"). Semantically, "while X while Y" in Zengzi li shi amounts to the same. It is quite probable that the prefixed "君子" was added to the source material in the redaction of Zengzi li shi and served to transform descriptive statements into prescriptive ones, i.e. to transform definitions of types of personality into instructions for the gentleman's self-cultivation. In the case of the third and fourth examples (lines 148-156), the concluding sentence could in an earlier source have been something like "(Y) while X while Y" or "(Y) while X while Y" or "(Y) while X while Y" respectively. The phrase "君子 while Y", albeit in a different sense which shall be discussed presently, would then have functioned as the title of a catalogue of several such descriptions of undesirable characters. In a later redaction of the text, the words "君子" and "while Y" would have been dropped from the conclusive sentences of the individual descriptions, and "君子 while Y" would, instead of concluding the whole catalogue of descriptions, have been appended to each unit separately, in order to shift the focus from the described person to the junzi.

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61 "..." indicates that this part of the text cannot even tentatively be reconstructed.
62 Yi Zhousha 58 (7: 41b).
63 Titles or "headlines" of textual units of different length were in early Chinese texts commonly placed at the end. As to shorter textual units, this position is very common in gnomic or didactic verses not only of China (cf. note 1). In the case of written documents, placing the title at the end was certainly useful if they were stored with the beginning of the text in the centre of the scroll.

If this assumption be correct, "君子 while Y" must originally have meant something other than "with such people the gentleman must not be associated", as it is traditionally interpreted. If Zengzi li shi once was a text not about the self-cultivation of the gentleman but about character diagnosis or, more specifically, about the evaluation of people for the recruitment of officials, then "君子 while Y" must be interpreted as "this is a person to whom the gentleman does not assign an office", as the character "君子" not only writes the word "to be connected with/join/be associated with" but also the word "to give".

3. The original life setting of the form elements

The recruitment of officials is the life setting which the above-mentioned form elements of texts about character diagnosis stem from. It is easily conceivable that it was not the knowledge of human character as such that generated so
intense an interest; character diagnosis figures so prominently in Early Chinese literature rather because it was applied in the process of recruiting officials. As to the Guan ren texts, this is evident not only in the title and narrative frame of both texts but also in a passage at the end of Da Dai Li Ji 72 which has no counterpart in Yi Zhuosu 58. First, nine types of persons fit to be employed in certain spheres are listed in a numbered catalogue called “jiu yong 九用”. In a subsequent catalogue, called “appointment to offices according to ability” (or “appointing the able to offices”), these types of persons are then related to the spheres in which they are to be employed. These two interrelated catalogues appear to be a further refinement of form element B. Only parts of the catalogues will be cited below to give an idea of their structure:

66 This form also frequently occurs in literary texts, where it is integrated in historical narratives so that it is almost indiscernible. To cite just one example that has already been mentioned above (cf. note 29), in Guanzi 15 (7.1a–b) Guan Zhong 謙仲 advises Duke Huan of Qi 謙公 to appoint certain people to certain tasks on account of their particular qualities: “Xi Peng is perceptive and quick-witted in argument. He can be ordered to manage the states to the east. Bin Xiwu is firm, strong and good. With him the lands to the west can be managed. [因明聰明捷給，可令為東官；霆霄堅強以，可以為西土]”, and so forth. In fact, large parts of this Guanzi chapter appear to be transformations of form element B into a historical narrative. Towards the end of the chapter (7.1a–15b) there are other interrelated catalogues evaluating people of different social groups in order to confer upon them appropriate rewards and punishments. Catalogues listing persons to be rewar ded take the following form: “[Duke Huan] ordered Bau Shu to bring forth the great officers who had, in executing the state, achieved success without [causing] later regrets. These were placed first. Those who had a well-ordered administration, who made fields out of wastelands and further had few uprisings and were not arrogant in handling complaints, were placed next. Those who, in executing the state, had achieved success but caused later regrets, who had a well-ordered administration yet were not able to make fields out of wastelands, and further had numerous uprisings and were arrogant in handling complaints, were placed last. [勤國家得之成而不侮，為善舉；從政治（為次），無理人，又（又）不] [不多]起，遂不穀，次之；勤國家得之成而不侮，從政不足以足以，又多發起，遂敗。丹於（行此三者）曰「下」] , and so forth. Later, catalogues list those to be punished, e.g.: “Those who have been guilty of the following three—in executing the state have not achieved success but caused later regrets, have not had a well-ordered administration and were unable to make fields out of wastelands, and furthermore had many uprisings and were arrogant in handling complaints—have committed a crime and should not be pardoned. [勤國家得之成而不侮，從政治，不能無人，又多發起，遂敗。凡三者有罪無赦] , and so forth. Translations are adapted from Rickett 1983 (303, 309, 310). For the emendations, see Rickett’s well-founded commentaries.

67 For the technical term “接給”, see note 29.

68 Du Dai Li Ji 72 (10: 54b–55a).

The tradition of categorising people and cataloguing types of character, and finally the tradition of character diagnosis are quite probably related to the rise of a new policy, i.e. the recruitment of officials according to ability, a principle that was to substitute earlier modes of assigning offices which had to consider kinship relations or even a system of hereditary ranks. In other words, this textual tradition reflects the decline of Zhou feudal structures and the rise of meritocratic bureaucracy during the Warring States period.

The appearance of such traces of utilitarian texts that may have been in actual practical use is, of course, a literary phenomenon which cannot be treated as reliable historical information. However, if the form elements in question repeatedly occur in similar contexts in entirely different texts that are not otherwise related to each other, this accumulation of evidence may nevertheless reflect actual historical conditions. It is conspicuous that the form elements typical of texts concerned with character diagnosis and the recruitment of officials are frequently related to military traditions, and that, if they appear in
narrative literature, they are set in historical contexts that feature administrative
reforms.

In Da Dai Liji 72 it is Taigong 太公, the legendary patron of the military,
who is responsible for the recruitment of officials. The form elements in ques-
tion—although represented most systematically and extensively in the Guan ren
texts—occur nowhere as often as in the military manual Liao tao, possibly a
work of Taigong. 69 The association with Taigong is of course, clearly fictitious
and merely of an emblematic value. I will revert to this point later.

But the form elements also occur in narrative texts that provide a much
more probable historical background for the development of meritocratic
principles in the recruitment of officials. It is just the best preserved 66 version
of form element C (catalogues of examinations of character qualities) that is
in several texts set in the same historical situation: In Shiji 44 (1840), Hanshi
waitzhuan 3.6 (16/29–17/14), and Shuofyuan 2.5 (13/7–22) it is used by Li Ke 李
克 as an argument for suggesting to Marquis Wen of Wei (reg. 445–395) a
certain person as chancellor. 71 A variation of this catalogue occurs in Shizi 戰士 1
(1.1b–2a) as a quotation of Qishou Fu 戲侯附, another advisor to Marquis
Wen of Wei. The important point is not that the textual tradition under dis-

69 Catalogues of examinations (form element C) occur in chapters 6 (5/22–30) and 20 (19/24–
20/1). An example of form element A from Liao tao 13 has been cited above. Catalogues of

types of persons (form element B) occur several times, especially in chapters 19–20 (18/1–
19/17), "The assessment of commanders" (Lun qiong fang) and "The selection of comman-
ders" (Xuan qiong shu): a catalogue of five talents (wu ca zhe 五行者) and one of ten
faulty ones (shi yu zhe 十搏者), and further one of fifteen types of character whose out-
ward appearance does not accord with their true inner condition (zhuang bu yu zhong qing
xing ying zhe shi 材外貌不協中情相應者十五). A catalogue of nine grades of talent to
act as a commander is only preserved in the Liao tao fragments in Qianshu zhuan (3.1b–b).

The grades rank from one who is only able to command his own household, one who can
command ten people, a hundred, a thousand and so forth up to, as the ninth rank, the
ruler of the world. To cite just one example: "One who is worthy and quibbling, who does not
make use of admonitions but rashly resorts to punishments, not exempting his own kin, is
fit (only) to be the commander of a hundred men [一切獲罪不用諫言無刑罰不避親
此百人之將也]."

The catalogue occurs in similar, if not identical form in a number of texts: Shiji 史記 44,
Hanshi waiting 3.6, Shuofyuan 2.5, Shihua悬挂 4.3, Wenzhi 文字 11, Liangshizi 樊子卷 3.4, Yishi changzi 嬴氏春秋 6, Hanshi 前漢 60, Heguzhi 恆卦 6.

71 The catalogue is first recited by Li Ke in his talk to the Marquis directly. Afterwards he re-
peats his conversation word by word in answer to an enquiry by one of the candidates. This
word by word repetition serves to emphasize the special importance attached to the meri-
ocratic ideas expressed by Li Ke.

cussion should have originated with the court of Marquis Wen or with Li Ke or
any other particular person. But its persistent association in literature with this
context may well reflect the actual historical circumstances under which the
tradition developed.

Weii was the first of the feudal states that launched economic and adminis-
trative reforms. The example was followed not much later by the states of Zhao
趙, Chu 楚, Han 韓, Qin 秦, and Qi 齊. 72 There is some historical evidence
that suggests that the development of meritocratic principles for the recruit-
ment of officials first developed in the military. 73 As regards Zhao, it is expressly
stated that the person in charge of the recruitment of officials was an officer in
the rank of a zhongwei 中尉, 74 Li Ke and Wu Qi, 75 the leading figures in the
reforms in Wei and Chu, were both involved in the conquest of new areas for
Weii. 76 Li Ke governed Zhongshan 中山, and Wu Qi conquered areas west of
the Yellow River for Marquis Wen of Wei and later played an important role in
the expansion of Chu.

For obvious reasons the conquest of new territory demanded the establish-
ment of a new administration by the conqueror. In these areas, traditional
family-structures were less likely to get in the way of meritocratic principles
for the appointment of officials. As the governor of such a territory could not—or at
least did not have to—build upon old-established families in the distribution of
power, he could—or even needed to—apply criteria for the selection of suitable
personnel independent of kinship relations. New methods for the appointment of
officials must not only have become necessary in the peripheral areas of the
reform states but also in their heartland, especially when changes in the power
structure occurred: The feudal states became increasingly independent of the
royal house of Zhou (in the case of Han, Wei, and Zhao also from Jin 晉), and

72 Reforms were initiated in Zhao by Gongzhong Liang 公孫鞅 under Marquis Zhao 尹 (reg.
408–388), in Chu by Wu Qi under King Dao 道 (reg. 401–380), in Han by Shen Buhui 尉
不書 under Marquis Zhao Xiao (reg. 362–332), in Qin by Shang Yang 商鞅 under Duke Xiao
孝 (reg. 361–337), and in Qi by Zou Ji 鄒忌 under King Wei 武 (reg. 356–319). Cf. Yang

73 Robin D. Yates (1988: 224) gives additional reasons for this when he observes, referring to
the same period, "that the actual practice of war had become much more complex [...] and
the correct choice of generals and officers had become of paramount importance."


75 The appearance of form element A as a citation of Wu Qi has already been mentioned above
(ef. p. 890).

and 617ff.
new concepts of rule in these states were also manifested in the act of their 
rulers’ assuming the title of kings.\textsuperscript{77}

If the aforementioned association of the meritocratic tradition with Tai-
gong is of emblematic value, what does Taigong, then, stand for? As a historical 
figure he was instrumental in the conquest of Shang by King Wen of Zhou 周文 
王—thus his association with the military sphere. He was appointed to the post 
of Grand Master (taishi 太師) and was—besides Zhougong 周公 and Shao-
gong 召公—one of the san gong 三公, which were the highest positions next 
to the king himself. As a member of the Jiang 姜 clan he was connected to the 
Zhou royal house by marriage alliance.\textsuperscript{78} But what determines the 
emblematic meaning of Taigong as a motif in Warring States and Han literature is not so 
much his kinship relation to the royal house, but rather his being depicted as a 
person of obscure origin and humble circumstances who had a special gift for 
recognising talents and was himself, despite his low social position, recognised 
by King Wen and raised to his superior position.\textsuperscript{79}

As a reward for his merits in the conquest of Shang, Taigong was en-
feoffed with Yingqi 聶丘, the core of the later state Qi. All this shows that as 
a literary figure Taigong stands for the tradition of Qi and the Jiang clan and on 
the other hand for the principle of appointing officials according to ability 
regardless of kinship relations. As meritocratic ideas were propagated especially 
frequently in texts related to the state of Qi, I presume that this ideological 
tradition was in Qi connected with the usurpation of power by the Tian 天 
clan. Tian He 天和 (reg. 404–385), the first ruler of his family to be recognised by 
the Zhou king (in 386), was styled Taigong, and his next but one successor Tian 
Wu 天午 (reg. 374–357) was named Duke Huan (Huanggong 桓公) after Duke 
Huan of the Lü 魯 clan (685–643), who had raised Qi to the position of a hege-
nominal power. The seventh century Duke Huan and his minister Guan Zhong 謝 
are—just like King Wen of Zhou and Taigong—regularly associated with the 
idea of recognising talents and raising them to high positions.\textsuperscript{80} The new ruling 
clan’s adopting the names of the two most famous rulers in the history of Qi 
was a very clever, if audacious, way of legitimising their usurpation of power. 
Conceivably, their propaganda strove to make sure that these names carried not 
only authority in general but also stood for the principle of meritocracy as 
paralleled to succession in office according to kinship relations. Many if not most 
of the texts exalting meritocratic principles are in some way related to the state 
of Qi, in particular to the legendary Jixia 禹下 academy said to have been 
founded under Duke Huan (Tian Wu) and—after a temporary decline probably 
due to increased military activity of Qi—flourished under King Xuan 宣 
(reg. 319–301).\textsuperscript{81} The emphasis laid in the characterological texts on adroitness 
in rhetorics and disputations may be further evidence for the connection of 
the tradition with the academy.

4. Conclusion

As shown, Zengzi li shi provides all of the three form elements that are typical 
of texts dealing with characterology as applied in the recruitment of officials. 
These form elements constitute, moreover, the greater part of the whole text. 
Thus, we can infer that a text devoted to just this subject was the core out of 
which the transmitted Zengzi li shi grew. This assumption is also confirmed by a 
number of textual parallels and terminological similarities that Zengzi li shi 
shares with the Guan ren texts and other texts dealing with the same subject. 
This core text was presumably composed out of textual material that catalogued 
meritocratic criteria for the choice of officials. It was probably the military of 
feudal states which established these criteria as they sought to fulfill the need to 
install an administration in newly conquered areas, where old family structures 
did not stand in the way of a modern form of government. The composition of

\textsuperscript{77} In Wei and Han the immediate successors of the rulers who had initiated the reforms 
assumed the title of kings (Wei Huwang 惠王, reg. 369–335; Han Xuanhuwang 惠文王, 
reg. 332–312), in Qi, which was the latest of the states to begin with the reforms, the ruler 
under whom the reforms were implemented, was the first to call himself a king. In Zhao 
the title was assumed only by the third successor to the reformer Marquis Lie, King Wuling 武 
(Reg. 325–299). Qin under Duke Xiao pursued a unique policy, it "strived hard to fulfill 
the role of royal protector and [...] balanced radical internal reforms with a conservatism in 
interstate relations, the outward preservation of the formal status quo." (Sage 1992:100) 
Yet, the successor of Duke Xiao also assumed the title of a king (Huiwen 惠文, reg. 338– 
325).

\textsuperscript{78} The grandfather of King Wen was married to a member of the Jiang clan, and King Cheng 
(who married a daughter of Taigong.

\textsuperscript{79} The stress laid on the humble origin of Taigong lends additional force to the ideal of meritoc-

\textsuperscript{80} Two examples of this have accidentally been mentioned above: Guanzi 18 (cf. notes 29 and 
66) and Hanshi wuzhuan 4.5 (cf. note 33).

\textsuperscript{81} For an introduction to sources about the Jixia academy, see Zhang Bingnan 1991.
such a text under the title Zengzi li shi presumably served the purpose of claiming the respective ideas for a Zengzi school or tradition.

Taking all this into account, the title "Li shi" is no longer puzzling. It means other than "the appointment of officials" or—more literally—"the establishment of offices". This meaning of li shi is well attested in the Li zhi chapter of Shangshu, where the phrase li zhi li shi 立政 立事 is used repeatedly and has been explained by several commentators as "the establishment of higher and lower offices". So the original title of Zengzi li shi seems to be Li shi rather than Xiu shen. At a later time, when the text became increasingly detached from its original life setting (i.e. the appointment of officials), possibly at some time in the Early Han period, it was reinterpreted by erudites (quite probably ru 儒) to express a certain image of themselves. The criteria for the selection of officials were redefined as normative standards of membership of their social group. In this process of reinterpretation the text was transformed and added upon by new material that was unrelated to the recruitment of officials, but described the standard qualities of an erudite. We cannot reconstruct the actual redactional changes the text underwent in the process of its reinterpretation and transmission, but we may assume that the further the text was removed from its original practical purpose, the more abstract became its ideas and the stronger its moralising tendency. This may have led to the attachment of the alternative title Xiu shen, e.g. in the compilation Quanshu zhiyao.

It may be asked why one should have taken the trouble to reinterpret a text about the appointment of officials and turn it into a treatise about the self-cultivation of the gentleman rather than simply composing an entirely new text. The answer is that only this type of literature offered the most detailed and explicit descriptions of human character, and ideas about this subject were invariably linked to the texts in which they had been developed, just as most ideas of Western morality are ultimately linked to the Jewish/Christian tradition and biblical vocabulary. Moreover, adapting popular forms of literature has the advantage that they lend authority and argumentative force to the new text, even if it contradicts the adapted model. To change a popular saying in order to say something new is an act of appropriation that usually goes along with an implicit claim of correcting it. Moreover, the texts about the appointment of officials formulated very high standards; they described an ideal type of official rather than real people. Reinterpreting these high standards as their defining characteristics was an act of propaganda on the part of the erudites that allowed them to claim these qualities for themselves and thus to underpin their claim that they deserve to be entrusted with the administration of the empire. Therefore, the observations made above about the text Zengzi li shi have relevance beyond the study of this text alone. They show that many of the Early Chinese ideas about human character, the evaluation of persons and ultimately about self-cultivation have emerged against the historical background of a rising meritocratic bureaucracy.

I believe, moreover, that the specific mode of form criticism presented above is applicable to quite a number of other texts as well. Early Chinese literature abounds with such small forms that occur in variations in a number of different texts. Only very seldom will one be able to reconstruct the actual forms of texts that were disseminated for practical use as utilitarian texts before being integrated into larger literary texts—and quite probably there never existed one particular "orthodox" version of the respective text from which all the transmitted variants stem. Still, I consider it worthwhile to devote attention to these textual parallels as indicators of common sources shared by texts that are otherwise unrelated. Even if this method cannot reconstruct in detail the redactional history of a particular text, form critical reading enhances the depth of focus in its interpretation, and thus makes its perusal aesthetically more rewarding as well.

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