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Rezension – Compte rendu – Review

Milburn, Olivia: *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan* (Sinica Leidensia 128). Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016, XXVI + 485 pp., ISBN 978-90-04-30937-1.

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A number of texts from ancient China are rarely explored by historians or specialists in intellectual history. Collections of anecdotal or otherwise difficult to classify materials such as *Shuoyuan* 說苑, *Xinxu* 新序, and *Han shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 have fared particularly badly, and with the exception of *Han shi waizhuan*, these works have not been considered worthy of being translated into Western languages so far. Up to now, the *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 (henceforth: YZCQ), a collection of dialogues and anecdotes exclusively about Yan Ying 晏嬰 of Qi 齊 (d. 500 BCE), used to be marooned among the ranks of neglected books, though a German study and translation covering all but the two final chapters appeared several decades ago.¹ With Olivia Milburn's complete translation into English, which includes a monograph-length analysis of the work, its textual history, protagonist, and historical context, and which contains rich notes clarifying textual problems, referencing parallel versions, and providing further historical context, students of ancient China will no longer have any excuse to shun this book which, though not considered a classic (p. XXV), offers a rich and rewarding view of the ancient political imaginary.

Some ancient works fell into disregard because of doubts about their authenticity. The reception of lesser known philosophical texts – e. g., *Heguan zi* 鶻冠子, *Guigu zi* 鬼谷子, *Kong congzi* 孔叢子, and *Shizi* 尸子 – has been negatively affected by such judgements. The same holds true for YZCQ. Milburn points the finger at Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (772–819) as the main culprit, for his classification of the work as Mohist had a “disastrous effect” and “pernicious influence”, stopping Yanzi scholarship in its tracks for about a millennium (p. 51). Renewed interest in neglected texts, however, ushered in a “Qing Rediscovery” (pp. 54–61), and eventually a moderate number of annotations and editions began to appear, most importantly the standard variorum edition by Wu Zeyu 吳則虞 in 1962.² By now, even a history of YCZQ studies is available.³

¹ Holzer 1983.

² Wu Zeyu 1962. A revised and enlarged edition was published in 2011 by Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, Beijing.

³ Liu Wenbin 2014.

Several archaeological text finds in the 1970s provided a further impetus to engage with the work. As Milburn explains in detail, sixteen tales with counterparts in *YZCQ* were excavated in a Yinqueshan 銀雀山 tomb dated to the reign of Emperor Wu 武 of the Han (141–87 BCE) (1972). A single strip was found in Juyan 居延 (1972–74). Two Yanzi stories are included in a collection of narratives excavated in a tomb dated to 55 BCE in Bajiaolang 八角郎 (Dingxian 定縣) (1973). The titles of three stories listed on wooden tablets recovered from Shuanggudui 雙古堆 (1977) seem to refer to tales with counterparts in *YZCQ*. Whether Yanzi was indeed mentioned in the versions referred to is not clear in two cases, but one title contains his name. Additionally, two brief Shuanggudui fragments refer to Yanzi. Lastly, two among the looted bamboo manuscripts purchased by the Museum of Shanghai in 1994 relate stories with counterparts in *YZCQ*, though one of the texts, *Lu bang da han* 魯邦大旱, presents Confucius rather than Yanzi as main protagonist (pp. 13–42).

Additional editions, modern Chinese translations, monographs, research articles, and academic dissertations have been produced in the wake of these discoveries, but none of the finds seems to have kindled more widespread enthusiasm to delve deeper into the work. Among the notable exceptions are an article by Hans Stumpfeldt — about which more below — and Andrew Meyer's extensive discussion of *YZCQ* as a work reflecting the views of scholars under the patronage of the Tian 田 / Chen 陳 family in Qi.⁴ From an examination of bibliographic reports on the compilation of *YZCQ* and from a study of notions of loyalty and ruler-minister relationships in *YZCQ* and other accounts of Yanzi, most of them found in *Zuozhuan* 左傳, Scott Cook has concluded that *YZCQ* should be taken seriously as a source of Warring States political thought.⁵ Yuri Pines, in contrast, has been mainly interested in recovering political thought of the Chunqiu period from accounts of Yanzi in the *Zuozhuan*, but without making much reference to parallels in *YZCQ*, which he, like Cook, considers to reflect preoccupations of the Warring States period.⁶ Chen Ruigeng's textual studies of *YZCQ* from 1980 did not take the excavated materials into account.⁷

Verdicts of spuriousness — sometimes methodologically problematic, conceptually vague, and difficult to substantiate factually — have undoubtedly

⁴ Meyer 2010–11.

⁵ Cook 2015.

⁶ See Pines 2002: 52 on *YZCQ* and 81–84, 101–103 on Yan Ying's thought.

⁷ Chen Ruigeng 1980.

stalled the study of certain texts. Looking at a work like *YZCQ*, however, one wonders whether there is not more to the story of its neglect. A number of scholars agree that the *YZCQ* displays a ‘literary’ manner of narrating events and describing characters, and some see Yanzi tales rooted in ‘popular literature’.⁸ It is open to contestation what, precisely, these terms mean; to simply oppose the allegedly dry factual records of ‘history’ with ‘literature’s’ flights of fancy will not do. But scholars who stress the work’s literary nature express a justified sense that accounts in *YZCQ* are frequently characterised by the conspicuous presence of deliberate emplotment, embellishment, and cliché, by an emphasis on stunning actions, vivid characterisation, and memorable speeches — in short, by attempts to elicit a satisfying narrative experience.

Furthermore, it has been frequently observed that parallels to *YZCQ* stories abound, both within the work and outside. In fact, the relegation of internal thematic — though not verbal — parallels to the final two chapters is one of the editorial principles according to which Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) organised the compilation (pp. XXV–XXVI, 7).⁹ But systematic studies of this phenomenon are still rare.

Stumpfeldt discusses a nexus of eight related *YZCQ* passages connected in various ways to the three distinct parts which make up *YZCQ* 1.18, concluding that the narrative materials in question fall into four groups.¹⁰ In his analysis of tales about diplomatic missions to Wu 吳, Chu 楚, Lu 魯, and Jin 晉 respectively, Stumpfeldt likewise identifies four distinct groups reflecting similar themes and motifs. These appear in varying combinations, but only occasionally exhibit close verbal parallels, which suggests that there were four separate strands of tradition which derived, in some way, from a shared origin. In Stumpfeldt’s view there are, furthermore, stories which show formal traces of having been lifted from a more comprehensive narrative context, and Stumpfeldt concludes that

⁸ Wu Zeyu 1962: “Xu yan” 序言, 18 speaks of two potential kinds of sources from which *YZCQ* was compiled: “old writings” (*gu shu* 古書), by which he means annalistic records, and “stories circulating among the people”, the kind of narrative Sima Qian termed *yi shi* 軼事, which would change in the course of its oral transmission and thus be attested in various versions, like the historical narratives of the Three Kingdoms period. See Yan Juanqin 2001: 3 and Yang Yalei 2009. Liu Xinyu 2009: 5 in drawing comparisons to the chapter titles of *zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說 might be overstating the case.

⁹ For internal parallels, see the table in Wu Zeyu 1962: 658–667; reproduced in Chen Ruigeng 1980: 27–33. See furthermore Yan Juanqin 2001: 17–18 for a table of similar story types with brief annotations.

¹⁰ Stumpfeldt 2002: 195.

extended story cycles existed, only parts of which entered the *YZCQ* as separate episodes.¹¹ Like Wu Zeyu, Stumpfeldt tentatively surmises that such cycles originated from oral storytelling, and he refers to what he considers comparable phenomena elsewhere, for instance, narratives about Zigong's 子貢 diplomatic missions, and the dialogues with kings Hui 惠 of Liang 梁 (r. 369–319 BCE) and Xuan 宣 of Qi (319–301 BCE) in the first chapters of *Mengzi* 孟子.¹² Related observations have been noted by Chen Ruigeng, whose goal was to demonstrate that much of the Yanzi lore was of dubious historical value but who, in the course of his discussions, also explored the filiation of narrative traditions.¹³

What turns the work into a problematic source for any sort of historical enquiry is perhaps the nature of *YZCQ* as a Han-era compilation of materials from diverse strands of transmission which has ample parallels both internally and in other writings. More than any fixation on issues of authenticity strictly speaking, the main obstacle to more sustained and systematic investigations into the work might well be its amorphous nature as regards its tone and genre affiliations. Even the material not attested in manuscripts is, after all, ancient in that it predates Liu Xiang's time, unless one posits substantial later corruption resulting, for instance, from homogenising editorial interventions (p. 55).

Milburn cites a scholarly consensus according to which it is “virtually agreed” that *YZCQ* contains a pre-unification core from Qi (p. 11). Following several Chinese scholars, she also conjectures that such a core might consist in a “family tradition” of the “Yan household”, which emerged during the political upheavals after Yan’s death, when his descendants were forced to leave Qi and “would have a considerable interest in defending the legacy of their most distinguished ancestor.” Milburn adds that “a family connection would explain the presence of stories within this text which are concerned with Master Yan’s private life” but concedes that this “can only be speculative.” (pp. 12–13)

A similar conception of later textual layers gradually accreting around an authentic core has been propounded to explain the genesis of the *Lunyu* 論語. But in this case, as in that of *YZCQ*, there is a dearth of clear-cut criteria for how to define and delimit such a core.¹⁴ It is sensible to postulate a long-lasting process of gradual textual accumulation for *YZCQ*,¹⁵ potentially within separate

¹¹ Stumpfeldt 2002: 197–205.

¹² Stumpfeldt 2002: 206–207.

¹³ Chen Ruigeng 1980: 61–126; see, for example, Chen Ruigeng 1980: 83–87 on stories in which Yanzi is criticized for serving multiple rulers, a motif also analysed by Stumpfeldt 2002: 180–192.

¹⁴ Brooks and Brooks 1998. For well-founded methodological criticism of the Brookses’ approach see Slingerland 2000.

¹⁵ Wu Zeyu 1962: “Xu yan”, 18.

lines of tradition, which reached closure with Liu Xiang's synthesising compilation of *YZCQ* largely as it exists today. The crux of the matter is to move on from such generalities to concrete textual analysis. It is on this front that many philological investigations into dates and authenticity – not only of *YZCQ* – which do not benefit from the presence of references to chronologically relevant historical events in the text under investigation have floundered so far.¹⁶

This is not purely a cautionary tale about the limitations of philology, though. Being undecided about the reliability of a narrative is one thing; identifying and appreciating the mode – and mood – in which it is offered is quite another. For instance, one may follow Milburn and read accounts about Yanzi's private life as efforts to convey a truthful and pertinent impression of Yanzi the man.¹⁷ For various reasons, one could conclude that these accounts are distorted or utterly wrong, as the case may be, yet still believe that they were motivated by a sincere desire to be truthful. This would be a communicative intent – and imply a communicative context – very different from that behind a story purely spawned by the imagination, fuelled by a desire to exaggerate, entertain, or lampoon. Whether we should trust narratives to agree with historical facts is one question; what we imagine the communicative intention behind them to be, is another. The difference can be one between finding oneself, upon finishing an episode, ruminating or moving on to the next with a chuckle.

In this light, what are we to make of reports such as the following? Yanzi arrives for an unscheduled audience and finds Lord Jing 景 (r. 547–490 BCE) drenched in sweat from catching a baby sparrow (5.9). On another occasion, he chases down a criminal (2.3). Repeatedly, Yanzi expresses his disagreement through discordant behaviour. He sits down on the ground rather than on his

¹⁶ Among the few exceptions is Yuri Pines's (2016, 2017: 25–58) textual analysis of *Shang jun shu* 商君書, which makes use of explicit and implicit historical references. Anachronisms are also found in *YZCQ*, e. g., in 8.18, where Lord Jing is shown reminiscing about the late Yanzi at a time when Jing himself was already dead (p. 417n.74). Chen Ruigeng 1980: 86–87 furthermore points out references to episodes in Confucius's life (8.4, 8.6) which, according to the chronology of Confucius's biography, would postdate Yanzi's death, but the very historicity of these episodes may be contested. Such factual mistakes seem fairly inconsequential for an overall assessment of *YZCQ*. *YZCQ* repeatedly predicts the ascendancy of the Tian family in Qi (3.8, 7.10, 7.15), but this refers to a drawn-out process lasting from roughly 485 BCE to 386 BCE (see Lewis 1999: 598), so this observation likewise fails to make for a useful criterion to date the work.

¹⁷ See, e. g., the remarks on two stories, 6.24 and 8.10, in which Yanzi makes a moral case against abandoning his old and physically unattractive wife, as suggested by two different interlocutors (pp. 445–447). Though Milburn hints at the stories' wider implications as regards social and political values, she seems more inclined to read them as reflections of Yanzi's individual sense of morality than, for instance, as political parables.

mat during an audience (5.1). He laughs out loud to puncture the solemn tone among Lord Jing and his coterie and to express his disapproval (1.17). He sings and cries in front of the lord to halt a building project (2.5) and, in a scene somewhat reminiscent of this, dances in protest against another building project after a few rounds of drinks (7.12). These interventions are noticeably similar to the gestural repertoire of Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (145?–86? BCE) "jesters" (*guji* 滑稽).¹⁸

Once, Lord Jing calls at the mansions of high-ranking courtiers, among them Yanzi, looking for companions to while away the night with. On cue, each man reacts in characteristic fashion.

Master Yan put on his court costume and stood by the gate. He said: "Has something happened to one of the feudal lords? Has something happened to the country?" [...] [Marshal] Rangju put on his armour and grabbed a spear and stood by the gate. He said: "Has one of the feudal lords mobilized his army?" [...] Liangqiu Ju held a lute in his left hand and pan-pipes in his right hand. He came out playing music. (5.12: p. 319)

Recalling how some scholars have sought the roots of *YZCQ* narratives in oral storytelling, it may be noted that such tripartite plot structures have been regarded as characteristic of popular tales.¹⁹ Whatever one makes of such identifications, it hardly needs pointing out that the appearance of the three men seems conspicuously staged.

Yanzi dissuades Lord Jing from holding an expensive funeral for his favourite dog, a motif which, in itself, resonates with tales about the human-like treatment of animals by tyrannical rulers. Having learnt his lesson, the lord rushes to arrange a more appropriate destiny for the deceased canine: "He hurried to the kitchens to fix the dog and then it was eaten at a meeting of the ministers." (2.23: p. 233)²⁰

¹⁸ See Chunyu Kun 淳于髡, who "looked up to heaven and laughed loudly" (*yang tian da xiao* 仰天大笑) (*Shiji* 126.3198, 3203), and Entertainer Meng 優孟 who "looked up to heaven and wailed loudly" (*yang tian da ku* 仰天大哭) (*Shiji* 126.3200; see below, n. 20, for this episode).

¹⁹ Olrik 1992: 44–45, §§61–2.

²⁰ For a very similar episode, see *Shiji* 126.320: King Zhuang 莊 of Chu's 楚 (r. 613–591 BCE) beloved horse dies of obesity (*fei si* 肥死), and the king wants to bury it according to the mourning rites appropriate for a grandee, prohibiting any remonstrances on pain of death. Entertainer Meng tells him to use the rites for a ruler of state instead to ensure that everyone understands how much the king "disdains men and cherishes horses" (*jian ren er gui ma* 賤人而貴馬). When the king recognises his fault, You Meng recommends to "use an oven for an outer coffin [...] clothe [the horse] in the glow of flames and bury it in people's bellies and intestines" (以壘竈為櫥 [...] 衣以火光, 葬之於人腹腸). See also Sanft 2016: 53 on Lord Yi 懿 of Wei's 衛 (r. 668–661 BCE) love of birds. In a twist on this motif, *Zhuangzi* 18, "Zhi le" 至樂, 652–53 (tr. in Watson 2013: 142–43), embeds in a Confucius dialogue a political parable on a wild bird which

Equally colourful are stories about Yanzi leaving audiences in a huff, only to have the lord rush after him, or send someone to persuade him to return (1.5, 1.8, 5.27). Hearing of Yanzi's death, Lord Jing, again in somewhat undignified haste, was in such a hurry to reach Yanzi's residence that he repeatedly got on and off his chariot, depending on how he, at the time, believed he would arrive most swiftly (8.16). That this tale is secreted away in the final chapter of the compilation indicates Liu Xiang's own sense of disquiet about it. And if this story is fishy, how much more so is the following one? A courtier who, after Yanzi's death, cautions Lord Jing against listening to flatterers, is awarded fifty cart-loads of fish by his appreciative ruler. But on his way home, observing how the roads of Linzi are clogged by the carts carrying his precious cargo, the courtier decides to honour Yanzi's legacy and refuse the reward (8.18).

Even a cursory reading of the narratives assembled in *YZCQ* reveals them to be shot through with histrionics and exaggeration, imbued with the playfulness of storytelling for storytelling's sake, but also with an imaginative — and arguably demotic — view of what the interactions between a stereotypically inept ruler and a paradigmatically sage statesman would look like: on the one hand the bumbling tyrant, on the other the quick-witted, indefatigable stalwart of the people.²¹

The single most important constant across the *YZCQ* tales seems, in fact, to be the clichéd representation of its main protagonists, and one wonders why, of all the important figures of preimperial times, Yanzi would generate this extraordinary amount of interest and admiration — unless, that is, one considers it an artefact of the vagaries of transmission, in the course of which similar bodies of tales about other personalities simply disappeared from view, or were never gathered into a single work.

This is not to say, though, that there may not be less glowing characterisations hidden in some of the tales. Milburn aptly characterises the famous story in which Yanzi tricks three disrespectful officers into killing themselves over a

is treated by the lord of Lu with all the festive pomp worthy of a visiting dignitary and dies after three days (Milburn quotes this on a lexical issue under 5.15: p. 322n.59). Mencius's famous tirade in *Mengzi* 1A.4, “Liang Hui wang shang” 梁惠王上, 62, posits a causal link between the lavish treatment of animals and the neglect of commoners: The “well-fed horses in your [i. e., King Hui of Liang's] stables” are one reason for the fact that “the people look hungry and in the outskirts of cities men drop dead from starvation”, hence “[t]his is to show animals the way to devour men” (tr. Lau 2003: 11).

²¹ Citing similar examples, He Xinwen 1990: 40 in his discussion of humour in *YZCQ* speaks of “exaggerated and almost cartoonish narratives” (*kuazhang er jin yu manhuahua de miaoxu* 誇張而近於漫畫化的描敘). He (1990: 42) also points out that traditional commentators already called Yanzi's rhetorical performances “humorous” (*huixie* 譏諧) and compared him to jesters (*guji*).

peach (2.24) as an example of Yanzi's "Machiavellian cunning" (p. 64). Milburn surmises it was in light of the precarious situation of Qi and his own position that Lord Jing became "prepared to follow Master Yan's advice and get rid of" the three men (p. 63), and that the story was so frequently adapted in Han murals because it was emblematic of "the duties of a loyal minister" (pp. 65–66). But perhaps the story is not all that complimentary after all, as Milburn's own reference to Yanzi's ruthless scheming suggests.

One of the officers shames the other two into killing themselves. But then he cuts his own throat as well, claiming that to survive the other men would be "not humane" (*bu ren* 不仁), "without a sense for what is right" (*bu yi* 不義), and reprehensibly fall short of the other two officers' sense of "restraint" (*jie* 節). The first claim in particular comes as a surprise from someone who is supposed to represent "brawn" in the "confrontation between brains and brawn" (p. 64). Here we have a warrior who invokes humaneness, a decidedly civil kind of virtue, and chooses to die for it. Furthermore, the lord has all three officers buried with full honours. So these are men worthy of respect after all. At least one of them, far from being an unruly brute, is capable of noble sentiments and moral judgement. Yanzi, on the other hand, comes across as harsh and vindictive, more Machiavellian perhaps than a true admirer would have wanted him to look.

The same holds true for tales in which Yanzi actively harms Confucius.²² In one case, Yanzi thwarts Confucius's enfeoffment in Qi, denouncing, in a way which might explain later accusations of Mohist leanings, the Ru-scholars' florid rhetoric and their obsession with music and rites (8.1). He also hatches a plot to weaken Lu, where Confucius serves as Prime Minister, by luring Confucius to Qi under the pretense that he will receive an appointment, only to withdraw the offer at the last minute. As a result, Confucius ends up in trouble between Chen and Cai (8.6). Other stories highlight Yanzi's superiority over his rival from Lu, showing how he corrects Confucius's incomplete understanding of ritual and morality in politics (5.21, 5.30, 7.27, 8.4), but it is only in the former two stories that Yanzi deliberately deceives and undermines Confucius to the great detriment of the latter.²³ It remains to be seen whether a more detailed investigation will turn up other narratives which do not fall into the usual panegyrical pattern.

Whether readers opt for a stance closer to Milburn's trust in an historical core, closer to Wu Zeyu's and Stumpfeldt's belief in the text's largely fictional

22 I owe this suggestion to Paul R. Goldin.

23 A comparison between portrayals of Confucius and Yanzi might well turn out to yield valuable insights into rival conceptions of charismatic personalities and political wisdom. For a useful collection of materials comparing depictions of Confucius and Yanzi with regard to the two men's respective family background, height, and courage, see Liu Wenqiang 2010.

nature, or for a view somewhere in between, the choice has far-reaching consequences for interpretation. Historically-minded readers would probably agree that any narrative about Yanzi can tell us *something* potentially of interest, but what it is of interest *for*, what problems it speaks to, will differ substantially, depending on whether we believe we are encountering narrative fare peddled by storytellers on the market square, or whether we think we are dealing with accounts promoted by Yanzi's family in order to uphold their ancestor's reputation. The problem with a book like *YZCQ* is, then, not only whether it is true to the historical facts (which it sometimes demonstrably isn't), but also whether we can recognise the key it is written in and attune our readerly expectations accordingly.

How we attune ourselves to such a work is, in turn, predicated on whether we explore its intertextuality, for in many instances the specific inflections of individual narrative versions only become apparent through contrastive juxtaposition with various intertexts. For ancient audiences, steeped in a living narrative tradition palpably embodied in talk, writing, and visual representations, barriers to a full appreciation of diverging retellings of similar plots and motifs will have been low. But for a modern readership there are no short-cuts to laboriously exploring the wider textual landscape. This is what makes works such as *Han shi waizhuan*, *Shuoyuan*, and *Xinxu* so awkward to handle, and *YZCQ* falls squarely into the same category. In the light of its numerous internal resonances, *YZCQ* might even pose more difficult problems of interpretation. The compilation gathers heterogeneous materials from which Liu Xiang, by his own account, sifted out verbatim parallels and which he arranged according to his own sense of orthodoxy and understanding of relevant textual and narrative characteristics. But he did not remove thematically related materials which he considered important in their own right; nor did he attempt to unify them internally.

From the received *YZCQ* it is evident that Liu Xiang aimed for a topical arrangement, at least within sections of chapters. For instance, episodes on sacrifices are found in close proximity (1.12, 1.14, 1.15), and so are tales on portents (1.18, 1.21, 1.22), mythical themes (8.13, 8.14), death (1.16–18), illness (6.6, 6.7), sexuality (8.10–12), diplomatic missions (6.8–11), heirs to the throne (1.10–11), large-scale building work and the resulting exhaustion of the people (2.5–6, 2.14–15, 2.18 [with the same tower reappearing in 2.19–20]) as well as drinking and serving alcohol (1.2–5, 5.13–16). The examples could be multiplied. There are stretches of episodes which clearly belong together, such as the long series of conversations with the Jin grandee Shuxiang 叔向 (4.17–27), though important distinctions may be identified between the tone,

content, and possible origins of the first item in this sequence and the remaining ones.²⁴

Sometimes recurring motifs are more dispersed. Repeatedly, Lord Jing, Yanzi's most frequent interlocutor, threatens to execute subjects for negligible transgressions, only to be held back by Yanzi's rhetorical interventions (1.24, 1.25, 2.2–4, 7.1, 7.9, 7.13). The motif of capricious punishments appears in a different guise in a story about five men executed for poaching by Lord Jing's predecessor, Lord Ling 灵 (r. 581–554 BCE). Assuming a more benign role than in other tales centred on this motif, Lord Jing reinters the men's remains and is admired by his subjects for his caring attitude, though the concluding third-person remarks take a critical, if not cynical stance: "It is easy for the ruler to do good deeds." (6.3: p. 341) Similarities sometimes encompass the rhetorical devices employed by Yanzi, and such correspondences may cut across distinct plot types. When a man supposed to care for Lord Jing's birds allows them to die and the lord wants him killed, Yanzi makes a point of "enumerating his crimes for him" (*shu zhi yi qi zui* 數之以其罪). These, it turns out, come down to driving the lord to actions which, damagingly, expose his contemptible disrespect for human life (7.13).²⁵ Elsewhere, in a philippic against luxury, Yanzi uses the same rhetorical device to accuse a shoemaker of crafting finely wrought footwear of jade and gold on behalf of the lord, though Yanzi does not demand the man's execution (2.13). The fierce irony which delivers a commoner from the gratuitous violence of a tyrant in one tale turns into a blunt tool of didacticism in another. The same holds for a different story employing a rhetoric which appears like an inversion of the enumeration of crimes.

Two entries narrate how Yanzi expels a retainer, Gao Jiu 高糾, for his failure to offer frank criticism of Yanzi's behaviour. In one version (5.29), Gao Jiu himself enquires why he is being dismissed. In the other (7.23), his fellow

²⁴ Chen Ruigeng 1980: 76–82 points out that 4.17, a conversation with a *Zuozhuan* parallel, is very much grounded in concrete historical circumstances, while all the following passages are abstract and could be applied to almost any contemporaneous state. Perhaps even more important is his observation that, "ridiculously", to him, Yanzi seems to dominate the conversation in 4.18–27 like a master dispensing wisdom to his disciples, in fact, very much like Confucius. Chen concludes from this, tentatively, that most likely someone elaborated on 4.17 by making up a vaguely similar sequence of conversations between Yanzi and Shuxiang, though he shies away from calling these dialogues inauthentic because, as he concedes, he does not have any concrete evidence (Chen Ruigeng 1980: 82). These interesting observations accord with Stumpfeldt's insights into the likely existence of larger narrative cycles, though in the present case an origin in storytelling seems out of the question.

²⁵ Wu Zeyu 1962: 464.

retainers ask the question.²⁶ In 5.29, Yanzi enumerates “three customs” to be adhered to in his household (*Ying zhi jia su you san* 婴之家俗有三) which Gao Jiu has disregarded, whereas 7.23 cites the formulaic label of “four guidelines” (*si wei* 四維) which Gao failed to follow. What these guidelines consist in is left unstated; they may match the principles enumerated under the same heading in *Guanzi*.²⁷ More fundamentally, in 7.23, Yanzi blames Gao Jiu for not living up to a certain standard of excellence, whereas in 5.29, the attack on him is more serious. Yanzi accuses Gao of misbehaving: Gao “is arrogant towards knights” and “treats the wise with courtesy”, and he is foremost interested in material gain, as his initial complaint reveals: “I have served you, sir, for three years and obtained nothing.” (p. 337) Furthermore, 7.23 reflects a more self-critical attitude on Yanzi’s part, for he stresses his own fallibility, whence his reliance on others for correcting influences. By contrast, 5.29 adopts a more openly accusatory tone, which is further amplified by the resonances with the motif of enumerating crimes.

These differences are subtle but meaningful. Is the shorter, more self-reflective 7.23 with its use of an undecoded label for a fixed set of concepts more deeply embedded in a ‘philosophical’ discourse with well-rehearsed moral precepts? Does 5.29, with its echoes of the rhetorical enumeration of crimes, arise from a more self-consciously ‘literary’ impulse, strengthened further, perhaps, by an image of Yanzi as outspoken, confrontational character of the kind who also faces down his ruler on many occasions? It is surely significant too that 5.29 has Gao Jiu himself demand an explanation for his dismissal, as his temerity provides a narrative motivation, and normative justification, for the dressing-down he is in for. Lastly, one should probably allow for a reading in which Yanzi functions as a stand-in for the ruler of state, who should surround himself with outspoken ministers to make up for his shortcomings. Do the divergent characterisations of Yanzi, then, also hint at different ideals of rulership more generally?

On the face of it, not much seems to hinge on such distinctions. They do not impinge on questions of authenticity or spuriousness, which have long dominated debates about *YZCQ* as well as those about other ancient texts. But a work of narrative and rhetoric such as *YZCQ* is arguably not that interesting for the facts and events historians might try to deduce from it, or for what it may be taken to reveal about an historical figure as part of his, or her, contemporaneous context. It is, rather,

26 Wu Zeyu 1962: 366, 484.

27 *Guanzi*, ch. 1: “Mu min” 牧民, 11, lists *li* 禮, *yi* 義, *lian* 廉, and *chi* 恥 as the four guidelines. Milburn, p. 397, translates accordingly. Jia Yi 賈誼 (201–169 BCE) quotes *Guanzi* (or Master Guan), giving the same list, with the exception that the semantically similar *chou* 醜 replaces *chi* (*Xinshu* 新書, *juan* 3, “*Su ji*” 俗激, 91).

the subtle distinctions, the varying shades of meaning and interpretation which arise from different representations that make the work worth reading. The question of how the narratives are made — or made up — and what that might reveal about the collective imagination of the late pre-Qin and early imperial period promises to offer greater insight than any attempt to plumb Yanzi's subjectivity or, for instance, to determine whether he propounded a well-defined set of political teachings. Despite the fact that the entire *YZCQ* centres around a single protagonist, and even though it is dominated by a certain set of plot types, motifs, characterisations, and values, it is a polyvocal compilation, and the diversity in points of detail hidden underneath the obvious commonalities merits close attention in its own right.

With her extensively contextualised and carefully annotated translation of this unjustly neglected work, Olivia Milburn has opened up a path to further explorations of a range of topics, for example, the variety of early narrative traditions; the collective imaginary on issues such as wise politicians, rulership, the treatment of the people, but also court oratory and the private lives of high-ranking personalities; the histrionics of remonstration; the morphology of the early Chinese story; and the editorial processes which formed imperial-era compilations out of preimperial materials. The *YZCQ* may not be a classic work, but it is of the greatest interest as testimony to a number of issues intellectual and literary historians as well as philologists might be interested in. We all have reason to feel profoundly grateful to Olivia Milburn for her tremendous achievement in explaining and making this book available in English.

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