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## Tilting Vessels and Collapsing Walls—On the Rhetorical Function of Anecdotes in Early Chinese Texts

*Vases qui basculent, murs qui s'effondrent — De la fonction rhétorique des anecdotes en Chine ancienne*

欹器與壞城——論中國古代軼事文學的修辭功效

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**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/extremeorient/259>

DOI: 10.4000/extremeorient.259

ISSN: 2108-7105

**Publisher**

Presses universitaires de Vincennes

**Printed version**

Date of publication: 1 November 2012

Number of pages: 141-166

ISBN: 978-2-84292-352-5

ISSN: 0754-5010

**Electronic reference**

Paul van Els, « Tilting Vessels and Collapsing Walls—On the Rhetorical Function of Anecdotes in Early Chinese Texts », *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* [Online], 34 | 2012, Online since 01 November 2015, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/extremeorient/259> ; DOI : 10.4000/extremeorient.259

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## Tilting Vessels and Collapsing Walls—On the Rhetorical Function of Anecdotes in Early Chinese Texts<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Texts from early China (roughly: the first half a millennium BCE) are teeming with anecdotes. They tell us what happened to a foolish farmer, an adulterous spouse, or other unnamed people, but more often they relate events involving actual historical persons, mentioned by name. Take, for instance, this anecdote about Duke Huan of Qi (7th c. BCE) and his wise wheelwright, as recorded in the book *Master Zhuang* (*Zhuangzi*):

Duke Huan was reading a book in his hall when a wheelwright named Flat, who was chiseling a wheel in the courtyard below the hall, put aside his mallet and chisel, walked up to the duke and asked him: “That book you are reading, may I ask whose words it contains?” Duke Huan replied: “These are the words of sages.” “Are these sages still alive?” asked wheelwright Flat. The duke replied: “No, they passed away long ago.” Wheelwright Flat continued: “In that case the book you read contains nothing but the dregs of ancient men!” Duke Huan shouted: “How dare you, a mere workman, make light of the book I read? You had better come up with a satisfying explanation, or else I’ll have you executed!” Wheelwright Flat replied: “You know, I look at it from the perspective of my craft. When I chisel a wheel, if the blows of the mallet are too hard, the chisel bites in and won’t budge. But if they’re too gentle, it slides and won’t take hold. Neither too gentle nor too hard is a finesse that springs forth from my heart and resonates in my hands. There is a trick to it that cannot be

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1. This paper was written under the financial support of an Innovational Research Incentives Scheme grant from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), for which I hereby express my gratitude. I am also grateful to Romain Graziani, Rens Krijgsman, Burchard Mansvelt Beck, Yuri Pines, and the reviewers of *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* for their helpful questions and suggestions. The paper is interspersed with passages from Chinese texts in English translation. All translations are my own, but I owe a debt of gratitude to earlier translators of these texts (mentioned in the notes).

expressed in words. I cannot illustrate to my sons, as they cannot learn it from me. So I've gone along for seventy years and at my age I'm still chiseling wheels. And because the ancient men are long gone, along with the things they could not transmit, the book you read contains nothing but their dregs!"<sup>2</sup>

This is a typical example of an early Chinese historical anecdote. Following Gossman, I define historical anecdotes as short, freestanding accounts—"true" or invented—of events in Chinese history.<sup>3</sup> These accounts may be appreciated for their literary quality or enjoyed for their entertainment value, but often they also convey a moral or philosophical message. The wheelwright's elaboration on chiseling wheels, for instance, may serve as an argument for the limitations of language in transmitting one's innermost qualities. It is no surprise, then, that anecdotes are often found in argumentative writings, such as *Master Zhuang*, for they make it easier to understand, accept, and remember an argument.<sup>4</sup>

Some early Chinese argumentative writings found creative use for anecdotes, namely as illustrations of canonical quotations. These are quotations from authoritative sources such as the Odes (*shi*), which are age-old poems and songs, or the Old Master (Laozi), who is revered as the founding father of Daoism. Books that use anecdotes in this creative manner include *Master Han Fei* (*Han Feizi*), notably the chapter "Illustrating the Old Master" (Yu Lao); *Han's Illustrations of the Odes for Outsiders* (*Han shi wai zhuan*; also referred to as *Illustrations for Outsiders* for short); and *The Master of Huainan* (*Huainanzi*), notably the chapter "Responding in Accordance with the Way" (Dao ying). The latter books are particularly interesting. These two works date from the same period (mid-second century BCE) in the Western Han dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE); they were both created by people in the highest echelons of society, who were well-acquainted with the emperor; and they use the same technique of combining anecdotes with canonical quotations. There is, however, one crucial difference. Whereas *Han's Illustrations of the Odes for Outsiders*, as its title suggests, combines anecdotes with quotations from the Odes, *The Master of Huainan* combines them with sayings by the Old Master. In other words, two contemporaneous books apply the same technique, even using some of the same anecdotes, to different canonical sources. This merits an examination.

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2. Guo 2000: 278-279. Cf. Watson 1968: 152-153.

3. Gossman 2003: 143.

4. Writings ascribed to Master Zhuang and other thinkers are often labeled "philosophical." In view of the controversial issue as to whether or not Chinese philosophy exists, as described by Defoort (2001) and others, I prefer to call them argumentative writings instead.

To be clear, I am not the first to note the link between the two books. Modern Chinese editions of *The Master of Huainan* often mention textual parallels with *Illustrations for Outsiders* in footnotes, and *vice versa*. Also, in her paper on anecdotal narrative and philosophical argumentation in *The Master of Huainan*, Queen briefly discusses the link with *Illustrations for Outsiders*.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I build on Queen's analysis to further explore the intricate relationship between the two books. Based on select examples, I analyze how the anecdotes are made to work in their respective contexts. That is, how the anecdotes help in understanding the canonical quotations; how those quotations, conversely, determine the reader's understanding of the anecdotes; and how the combination of the two serves as a powerful rhetorical device to promote one's world-view in the competitive politico-philosophical arena of the Western Han dynasty.

## Two Western Han books

*Han's Illustrations of the Odes for Outsiders* is named after Han Ying (200?-120? BCE), the influential academician from the north-eastern state of Yan, who worked at the imperial court in Chang'an under Emperor Wen (r. 179-157 BCE). During the reign of Emperor Jing (r. 157-141 BCE), he served as the senior tutor to the emperor's youngest son. Later, in discussions with the famous scholar Dong Zhongshu (179?-104? BCE), held in the presence of Emperor Wu (r. 140-87 BCE), he proved to be the superior debater. Han Ying wrote commentaries on the Changes (*yì*), but he was primarily known as one of the leading Odes interpreters of his days. His name is associated with one of the distinct Odes traditions in Han times. The school headed by Han Ying produced several commentarial and exegetical works on the Odes, one of them being *Illustrations for Outsiders*.<sup>6</sup> It has been suggested that the word "outsiders" (*wai*) in the title

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5. Queen 2008: 207-208.

6. Ban Gu (1962: 1703, 1708, 3613-3614) mentions *Han's Persuasions* (*Han shuo*), *Han's Stories* (*Han gu*), *Han's Illustrations for Insiders* (*Han nei zhuan*), and *Han's Illustrations for Outsiders* (*Han wai zhuan*). The first two of these works are no longer extant. The last two works, scholars suspect, may have been combined into one, because the Han dynasty imperial library catalogue lists them as consisting of four and six "rolls of silk" (*juan*), respectively, and the received text of *Han's Illustrations of the Odes for Outsiders* counts ten chapters. Yang Shuda, James Hightower, and Bruce Brooks offer different explanations of *how* the two books were combined. For a discussion, see Brooks (1994: 4-11), who also suggests that *Han's Illustration for Insiders* was created for those within the palace, more specifically for the emperor's youngest son, and *Han's Illustrations for Outsiders* for a wider audience.

indicates that the book was intended for a general audience.<sup>7</sup> This is plausible, as long as we keep in mind that “general audience” does not mean “dummies.” *Illustrations for Outsiders* is no *Odes for Dummies*, because as we shall see further on in this paper, a solid understanding of the Odes is a prerequisite for appreciating Han Ying’s book. In its received form, the book presents over three hundred “anecdotes, moral disquisitions, prescriptive ethics and practical advice, each entry normally concluding with an appropriate quotation from the [Odes].”<sup>8</sup> As a collection of illustrative examples of the Odes put to use, the main purpose of *Illustrations for Outsiders* appears to be pedagogical rather than exegetical.<sup>9</sup> Hightower puts the composition of this “textbook” around 150 BCE, but Brooks maintains that it took over a decade, between 145 BCE to 130 BCE, for the book to be completed.<sup>10</sup> In my view, these years are helpful as global indicators, not as firm cutoffs, because the evidence is circumstantial at best. Han Ying is generally seen as the author of the work, if only because it is scarcely conceivable someone would forge this heterogeneous collection.<sup>11</sup> However, the received text is defective, and the degree in which it corresponds to the text created around 140 BCE (give or take a decade) is unclear.<sup>12</sup>

*The Master of Huainan* is written under the auspices of Liu An (179?-122 BCE), who headed the southern kingdom of Huainan. The king is known to have hosted at his court scholars who collected materials from older sources to compile this voluminous treatise. In 139 BCE, Liu An reportedly presented it to his teenage nephew, Emperor Wu, who had recently acceded to the imperial throne.<sup>13</sup> Throughout history, the treatise was often labeled “heterogeneous” (za) because it draws on a wide range of sources, covers many topics, and displays various literary styles. However, as Le Blanc notes, one also “senses an indisputable stylistic and conceptual consistency running throughout the work.”<sup>14</sup> Hence, recent decades witnessed a re-appraisal of *The Master of Huainan*. Without ignoring internal discrepancies, scholars nowadays emphasize the integral nature of Liu An’s work. While the text now comes in various different editions, evidence suggests continuous transmission from its completion in 139

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7. Brooks 1994: 4-11.

8. Hightower 1993: 125.

9. Hightower 1948: 243, 263; Brooks 1994: 7.

10. Hightower 1993: 126; Brooks 1994: 11.

11. Hightower 1993: 126.

12. For more on *Illustrations for Outsiders*, see Hightower’s works (listed in the Bibliography).

13. Ban Gu 1962: 2145.

14. Le Blanc 1993: 189.

BCE to the present.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the received text probably corresponds to a considerable degree with the work Liu An proudly bestowed upon the emperor.<sup>16</sup>

Both *Illustrations for Outsiders* and *The Master of Huainan* took shape in a climate marked by heated political debate. History books recount struggles between those labeled “Yellow-Old” (*huang-lao*), who took their inspiration from the Yellow Emperor and the Old Master, and those labeled “Classicists” (*ru*).<sup>17</sup> Their views differed widely, for instance on how to deal with foreign tribes, feudal kings, or rich merchant families and landowners.<sup>18</sup> Several politicians of that period were reportedly tried or thrown into a pen to fight with pigs for having the “wrong” opinion.<sup>19</sup> Even if overdramatized, such accounts signal fierce clashes between competitive views. It is scarcely believable that Han Ying and Liu An would have been unaware of the contemporary political climate. If they were aware, as I hold, their creative use of commonly shared anecdotes may be seen as a way for them to promote their worldview without coming across as offensive.

Both *Illustrations for Outsiders* and *The Master of Huainan* are replete with anecdotes. Few, if any, of these anecdotes are original, that is, created by Han Ying or Liu An. Rather, they are borrowed from a wide range of earlier sources. An important source for Han Ying was *Master Xun* (*Xunzi*). One in every six sections in his *Illustrations* seems to derive from that book. Liu An was more inclined to *Springs and Autumns of Mr. Lü* (*Lü shi chunqiu*), as many sections in *The Master of Huainan* have parallels in that book.

*Illustrations for Outsiders* consists in its entirety of short passages, each coupled with an epitomizing tag drawn from the Odes. *The Master of Huainan* contains one chapter that does the same. That chapter, titled “Responding in Accordance with the Way,” consists of fifty-six anecdotes coupled with sayings by the Old Master. The two texts combine anecdotes and quotations in a similar way, and even share seven anecdotes:

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15. Le Blanc 1985: 53-69; Roth 1992: 55-78.

16. For more on *The Master of Huainan*, see, for instance, the studies and translations by Ames, Le Blanc, Major, Roth, Vankeerberghen, and Wallacker (listed in the Bibliography).

17. Van Els 2003.

18. Van Ess 1993.

19. Sima Qian 1959: 1384, 3122-3123; Watson 1993: 24, 364.

<i>Illustrations for Outsiders</i>		<i>The Master of Huainan</i>
3.21	=	12.32
<b>3.30</b>	=	<b>12.55</b>
<b>5.6</b>	=	<b>12.18</b>
<b>6.25</b>	=	<b>12.24</b>
7.10	=	12.19
7.12	=	12.33
10.23	=	12.13

**Sections with similar anecdotes in *Illustrations for Outsiders*  
and chapter 12 of *The Master of Huainan***

Three shared anecdotes (marked in boldface) are selected for discussion in this paper. Their textual parallels display remarkable similarities and striking differences, as the following discussion shows.

**The collapsing wall**

The Odes, the main focus of Han Ying’s *Illustrations for Outsiders*, are poems and songs composed in the first part of the Zhou dynasty (roughly: 10th-7th c. BCE). They were popular in elite circles for many centuries, perhaps in part because they were thought to have been collected by none other than Master Kong (Kongzi, 551-479 BCE), better known as Confucius. Not all Odes are easily understandable. One Ode, for instance, sings the praises of King Xuan of Zhou (r. 827-781 BCE), who launched a military campaign against the rebellious region of Xu. The final stanza of the Ode describes what happened when the king and his troops finally reached Xu:

The king’s intentions were true and sincere,  
and the region of Xu submitted at once.  
That the region of Xu at once complied,  
is an achievement of the Son of Heaven.  
All four quarters were at once brought to order,  
and the leaders of Xu appeared before the king.  
They would not again change their minds,  
and the king said: “Let us return.”<sup>20</sup>

The opening lines of this stanza suggest that the leaders of Xu instantly capitulated once they became aware of the king’s noble intentions. From a

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20. Ruan 1982: 577. Cf. Legge 1876: 559; Waley 1996: 283.

military-strategic viewpoint this is quite an achievement, as it normally takes more than being “true and sincere” (*yun se*) to force a surrender. Sure enough, the previous stanzas vividly describe how the king brought not only noble intentions but also a fearsome army, which may have played a role in Xu’s capitulation. This stanza, however, appears to attribute the surrender of Xu exclusively to the king’s moral disposition, not his military might.

Odes expert Han Ying may have received questions about this stanza, for he explains the opening lines in no less than three sections of *Illustrations for Outsiders*. In the first section (6.23), he argues that enlightened rulers practice “benevolence” (*ren*), establish “righteousness” (*yi*), offer sincere “instructions” (*jiao*), and deeply “care” (*ai*) for others, whereupon those others gladly serve them in return. In the next section (6.24), he suggests that all the people in the world readily associate themselves with rulers who attain the acme of “sincere virtue” (*cheng de*). In the third section (6.25), he illustrates the opening lines of the stanza as follows:

Long ago, when Zhao Jianzi had passed away, the city of Zhongmou revolted before he was even buried.<sup>21</sup> Five days after the funeral, his son Xiangzi raised an army to attack Zhongmou. Before the city was completely surrounded, a one-hundred-foot section of the city wall collapsed without apparent reason. Xiangzi then beat the gong to withdraw his troops. An officer disagreed: “When you were punishing the wrongdoings of Zhongmou, its city wall collapsed without apparent reason. This is a sign that Heaven supports your cause. Why, then, are you withdrawing your troops?” Xiangzi replied: “I have learned that Shuxiang once said this: ‘A superior man does not impose on those who are in luck, nor does he threaten those in distress.’<sup>22</sup> Have them repair their wall, after which we will attack them.” The people of Zhongmou realized how just he was and begged to surrender, exclaiming: “How excellent, these words of Xiangzi!” ♦ As the Ode says: “The king’s intentions were true and sincere, and the region of Xu submitted at once.”<sup>23</sup>

This section consists of two parts—anecdote and quotation—separated by a diamond sign in the English translation. Han Ying links the potentially troublesome lines in the Ode to an anecdote about a similar event, that is, an event he apparently deems similar. The anecdote describes how Zhao Xiangzi (5th c. BCE) offered his opponents in a fair chance when he attacked the rebellious city of Zhongmou. He thereby showed his noble character, which prompted the

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21. Zhao Jianzi is the posthumous name of a head of the ministerial Zhao lineage within the state of Jin. While formally a minister of Jin, he was the de-facto ruler of the autonomous Zhao polity. Zhao Xiangzi is the posthumous name of his son.
  22. Shuxiang was a worthy minister of the preceding generation.
  23. Xu 1980: 231-233. Cf. Hightower 1952: 217-218.



inhabitants of Zhongmou to voluntarily surrender. The anecdote here serves to corroborate the idea that people who were originally keen on leaving their ruler, are likely to renew their allegiance once they realize how noble he actually is. The Ode expresses this idea in an enigmatic way that is liable to raise questions. The anecdote describes it in a more detailed and plausible way. Plausible not necessarily from a historical perspective, but from a literary perspective. In other words, regardless of whether or not the event in Zhongmou took place as described, as a story it is quite believable. After all, one easily relates to the inhabitants of Zhongmou: who would not want to surrender to a noble person? Hence, by linking the story of the collapsing wall to the quotation, Han Ying borrows the credibility of the anecdote to augment that of the Ode. This section (6.25), in combination with the two aforementioned sections (6.23 and 6.24), suggest that the Ode is right in attributing the surrender of Xu to the king's moral disposition.

The Odes are easily rivaled in popularity and opacity by the Old Master. Sayings ascribed to this elusive (now generally considered mythical) figure were popular from the earliest times, as evidenced by recently excavated manuscripts. Through the ages, his sayings inspired numerous commentaries, because many sayings are abstruse. Take, for instance, this passage:

Curved, then preserved.  
Bent, then straightened.  
Hollow, then filled.  
Worn, then renewed.  
Few, then obtained.  
Plenty, then perplexed.  
That is why the sage by embracing the One remains a model for the world.  
He does not show off, and so he shines.  
He does not promote himself, and so he becomes illustrious.  
He does not boast of himself, so he achieves.  
He does not glorify himself, so he endures.  
He just does not strive, and so no one in the world can strive with him.  
When the ancients said: "curved, then preserved," were these empty words?!  
Indeed, fully preserved he identifies with them.<sup>24</sup>

This is just one of many possible translations, as the passage poses significant interpretative challenges. For instance, what does it mean that the sage "just does not strive"? In *The Master of Huainan* this is illustrated as follows:

When Zhao Jianzi had died, the city of Zhongmou shifted its allegiance to the state of Qi before he was even buried. Five days after his funeral, his son Xiangzi raised

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24. Zhu 2000: 91-94. Cf. Chan 1963: 139; Lau 1963: 27; La Fargue 1992: 10.

troops to attack Zhongmou. Before the city was completely encircled, a one-hundred-foot section of the city wall collapsed without apparent reason. Xiangzi then beat the gong to withdraw his troops. An officer disagreed: “When you were punishing the wrongdoings of Zhongmou, its city wall collapsed without apparent reason. This is a sign that Heaven supports us. Why, then, abandon the attack?” Xiangzi replied: “I have learned that Shuxiang once said: ‘A superior man does not impose on those who are in luck, nor does he pressure those in distress.’ Let them repair their walls. Once the walls have been repaired, we will attack them.” When the people of Zhongmou realized how just he was, they begged to surrender. ♦ As the Old Master says: “He just does not strive, and so no one in the world can strive with him.”<sup>25</sup>

By linking the enigmatic words of the Old Master to the anecdote of the collapsing wall, this section in *The Master of Huainan* presents Xiangzi as a sage who does not strive. If Xiangzi were in a striving mode and had eagerly taken advantage of the wall’s collapse, he may have won Zhongmou’s territory but not necessarily the sympathy of its inhabitants. Instead, by making it abundantly clear—in deed as well as in word—that he was in no hurry to seize Zhongmou, Zhongmou gratefully allowed itself to be seized by him. Without taking any purposive action, Xiangzi achieved what he had set out to achieve. With Zhongmou placated and a significant boost in his “approval ratings,” no one in the world could compete with him, or so this section suggests.

The two sections in *Illustrations for Outsiders* and *The Master of Huainan* are deceptively simple in their setup. One anecdote. One quotation. That is all. Yet beneath this simple setup hides a complex web of assumptions, interpretations, and manipulations.

One major assumption in both texts is that the anecdote is “true.” That is, neither text questions the historicity of the event. This is particularly interesting in Han Ying’s account, which contains an obvious anachronism. When the inhabitants of Zhongmou rejoice about Xiangzi’s speech, they refer to this man—who was very much alive at the time!—by his posthumous name. Historicity may have mattered to the users of anecdotes, Schaberg notes, “but as a complement to rhetorical aims rather than as a goal in its own right. The details of events often drifted and changed as an anecdote was retold over the centuries, and there is little to suggest that discrepancies of this kind troubled Warring States and early Han writers.”<sup>26</sup> The way in which the anecdote of the collapsing wall is presented here, without any introduction or explanation, indeed suggests that its historicity was accepted in the milieu of Han Ying and Liu An. They

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25. Gao 1996: 197-198. Cf. Major *et al.* 2010: 457. The quotation is from chapter 22 in *The Old Master*.

26. Schaberg 2011: 398.

seem to expect that their readers accept, or would readily accept, the anecdote as true. In a way, Han Ying and Liu An even helped to increase the perceived historicity of the anecdote. When people of high status (Han Ying, Liu An) combine the anecdote with a canonical source (Odes, Old Master) and place the resulting combination in a book with numerous similar examples, the anecdote automatically becomes part of a large web of assumed truths.

The simple collocation of an anecdote and a quotation through mutual influence results in a specific reading of both. For starters, the anecdote illustrates the quotation in a way that may differ from other interpretations.

Liu An illustrates the Old Master's saying "He just does not strive" with an anecdote showing what "not striving" means in a military-strategic context. The person who goes by the name of Gentleman of the Riverside (Heshang gong) takes a different approach. In his commentary on *The Old Master*, he merely points out that not one person, whatever their status, is a match for someone who does not strive. Wang Bi (226-249), another famous commentator of the Old Master's sayings, does not comment on the sentence at all. Hence, Liu An may not offer a spectacular new interpretation of the Old Master's saying, but the anecdote does force upon it a unique reading.

Han Ying's interpretation of "the king's intentions were true and sincere, and the region of Xu submitted at once" echoes a reading found in *Master Xun*. That text, however, embeds the quotation of the Odes in a passage on trustworthiness (*xin*). It argues that tallies (*fujie*) or contracts (*qiquan*), as means of guaranteeing trust and good faith, are abstract and not heart-felt. Rulers had better implement ritual and propriety, promote the worthy and employ the capable, and have no heart set on profit. They will then be trusted by the people, who submit to them without having to be subjugated first.<sup>27</sup> Han Ying's version essentially claims the same, but without the tallies or contracts and without the specific advice on what the ruler ought to do.

Whereas the anecdote creates a unique reading of the quotation, the quotation conversely forces a specific interpretation onto the anecdote. Different quotations yield different interpretations of the anecdote. Those who follow Han Ying see the anecdote as an example of the importance of being true and sincere. Those who follow Liu An, on the importance of non-striving.

Han Ying and Liu An present the anecdote, the quotation, and their combination as unquestionably true. Still, the combination only works because both authors covertly manipulate the reader. Han Ying uses the anecdote to show that people yield to moral supremacy, not military might, but he conveniently ignores the fact that the ruler in the anecdote also brought an army. Liu An

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27. Knoblock 1990: 176-178.

emphasizes the importance of non-striving, but glosses over the fact that the ruler in the anecdote did strive to quell Zhongmou. Hence, the anecdote and the quotation work only when certain details are overlooked. Let us now have a look at other examples to see how Han Ying and Liu An manipulated anecdotes and quotations to get their message across.

### The wise wheelwright

This paper started with an anecdote from *Master Zhuang* about a ruler and his wheelwright. The story also occurs in *Illustrations for Outsiders*:

King Cheng of Chu was reading a book in the main hall of his palace, when a wheelwright named Flat, who was in the courtyard below, stepped up into the hall and asked him: "I'd like to know whose writings Your Majesty is reading." King Cheng replied: "The writings of ancient sages." Wheelwright Flat continued: "These are really nothing but the dregs of the ancient sage-kings! They are not the best of what they had to offer." "What makes you say this?" asked King Cheng. Wheelwright Flat said: "Let me clarify it through my work as a wheelwright. Look, to make circles with a compass or squares with a carpenter's square, now those are skills I can hand down to my sons and grandsons. But when it comes to joining three pieces of wood into one, this kind of artistry resonates from my heart and moves my limbs. It is something that cannot be successfully transmitted. That is to say that all that *is* transmitted, is really nothing but dregs." ♦ Hence, the models of sage-kings Yao and Shun can be successfully examined, but we cannot attain the way in which they illuminated the hearts of their fellow human beings. ♦ As the Ode says: "The doings of High Heaven have neither sound nor smell." ♦ So who can attain them?<sup>28</sup>

This section consists of four parts: anecdote, argument connective, quotation, argument connective, respectively. The anecdote is somewhat different from the one in *Master Zhuang*. In that book, the wheelwright converses with Duke Huan of Qi and their discussion is both lengthier and fierier. For instance, in *Master Zhuang* the ruler understandably flies into a rage after the wheelwright's insulting remark about the dregs of the ancients, but in *Illustrations for Outsiders* he merely impassively asks "What makes you say this?" Given that people of lowly status often voice profound wisdom in *Master Zhuang*, the wheelwright anecdote probably originates in that book and Han Ying then borrowed it to illustrate a line from the Odes. If this scenario aptly describes the direction of borrowing, it remains unclear why Han Ying changed the ruler to King Cheng of Chu (7th c. BCE) or even why he chose this particular anecdote, as the link with the Ode is far from evident. After all, the anecdote does not mention High

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28. Xu 1980: 174-175. Cf. Hightower 1952: 166-167.

Heaven, let alone that it has no sound or smell. To understand the link, we may have to take a closer look at the Ode. The Ode referred to here describes how the founder of the Zhou dynasty, King Wen (11th c. BCE), through his splendid virtue acquired the Mandate of Heaven (*tian ming*), or the right to rule the world. The Ode also warns King Wen's successors to emulate his example, for otherwise they may end up losing the Mandate. The closing stanza of the Ode reads:

The Mandate is no easy accomplishment,  
so make sure it does not end with you!  
Let your good name shine all around,  
and verify it in the light of Heaven.  
The doings of High Heaven,  
have neither sound nor smell.  
Emulate King Wen,  
this will make the myriad regions have confidence in you.<sup>29</sup>

The Ode, supposedly written shortly after King Wen had passed away, explains that the Mandate of Heaven is not permanent. The rulers of the preceding era, the Shang dynasty, eventually lost the right to rule, and the descendants of King Wen may likewise at some point be out of Heaven's favor. Only if they cultivate their virtue and emulate their exemplary ancestor, this stanza warns, will they be able to preserve the Mandate of Heaven.

The link between anecdote and Ode appears to be that both speak of younger generations learning from those who came before them, be they exemplary statesmen or masterful craftsmen. The link seems somewhat forced, given that the Ode encourages King Wen's offspring to emulate his splendid example to preserve the dynasty, whereas the anecdote maintains that sage-kings and gifted artisans are inimitable. Later generations may read the writings of the sages or learn the techniques of a master carpenter, but the unique ways in which the gifted forebears put these writings and techniques into practice cannot be reproduced.

Han Ying must have been aware of the friction between anecdote and Ode, for he added what I would call "argument connectives." Much like discourse connectives (such as "therefore," "moreover," or "however"), that link parts of a discourse and show their relationship, argument connectives link parts of an argument and show their relationship. The first connective is the sentence "Hence, the models... human beings." This sentence agrees with the Ode that the models of sage-kings can be studied, but it also acknowledges the anecdote's insight that ordinary human beings cannot attain the way in which they inspired

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29. Ruan 1982: 505. Cf. Legge 1876: 431; Waley 1996: 228.

others. In other words, Han Ying bridges the two by saying that someone's words and deeds can be copied, but not the effect they have on other people. Even if two people say or do exactly the same, the effect will still be different. The second connective, in the last line of the section, uses the verb "to attain" (*jī*). It connects the line from the Ode to the previous connective, which uses the same verb, and hence to the anecdote, thereby creating a structurally consistent textual unit. As a whole, the section appears to say that people ought to emulate successful examples, but whether or not they attain the same successes cannot be predicted, for this is determined by High Heaven, whose workings are shrouded in mystery. The section may be structurally consistent, but it took Han Ying two argument connectives to achieve this. It seems that the number of argument connectives is inversely proportional to the clarity of the link between anecdote and Ode. The clearer the link, the fewer argument connectives are needed to make the section consistent.

Liu An also uses the wheelwright anecdote. In his version, which is analogous to the account in *Master Zhuang*, the story takes place at the court of Duke Huan:

Duke Huan was reading a book in his hall when a wheelwright, who was chiseling a wheel in the courtyard below the hall, put aside his mallet and chisel, and asked him: "That book you are reading, who wrote it?" Duke Huan replied: "These are the writings of sages." "Are these men still alive?" asked wheelwright Flat. The duke replied: "No, they are already dead." Wheelwright Flat continued: "Then these are nothing but the dregs of the sages!" Red with anger, Duke Huan shouted: "How dare you, a mere workman, make light of the book that I read? You had better come up with a satisfying explanation, or else I'll have you executed!" Wheelwright Flat replied: "Fine, I have an explanation. Let me try to explain it through my work of chiseling wheels. When I chisel a wheel, if the blows of the mallet are too hard, the chisel bites in and won't budge. But if they're too gentle, it slides and won't take hold. Neither too gentle nor too hard is a finesse that springs forth from my heart and resonates in my hands. This kind of finesse I cannot teach to my sons, as they cannot learn it from me. So I've gone along for sixty years and at my age I'm still chiseling wheels. Now, as for what the sages said, they too kept what really mattered close to their hearts, leaving behind only dregs when in the end they died." ♦ As the Old Master says: "Ways, if they can be used as a way, are not the constant Way. Names, if they can be used as a name, are not the constant Name."<sup>30</sup>

This passage consists of two parts, anecdote and quotation. There are no argument connectives between the two, perhaps because the link is more clear. The Old Master distinguishes between the constant Way (*chang dao*) and ordinary ways

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30. Gao 1996: 196. Cf. Major *et al.* 2010: 453. The quotation is from chapter 1 in *The Old Master*.

(*dao*). By parallel, the wheelwright anecdote distinguishes between the finesse of wheel-making and the teachable aspects of workmanship. Much like the constant Way is too profound to be used as an ordinary way or method, the finesse of wheel-making is too personal to be taught. Liu An's interpretation appears to be consistent with readings of early commentators. For example, the Gentleman of the Riverside explains that "ways of canonical techniques and political instructions" are not "the Way of spontaneity and longevity."

In *Master Zhuang* the wheelwright anecdote occurs amidst other short stories, which apparently have an intrinsic value both individually and as a whole. In *Illustrations for Outsiders* and *The Master of Huainan* it is additionally combined with a quotation from a canonical source. Han Ying and Liu An also agree on the basic message that the anecdote expresses: certain things are too profound to be known by ordinary humans. However, there is a clear difference between the two. Liu An is fortunate that language, particularly written language, is frowned upon as a transmitter of profound knowledge in both *Master Zhuang* (the probable source of the anecdote) and *The Old Master* (the source of the quotation). All Liu An had to do, was to find a combinable anecdote and quotation. Han Ying's task was more complex, as he tries to combine an anecdote that dismisses the writings of ancient sages as dregs, with an Ode that encourages people to emulate a sage-king. Using argument connectives for clarity, he creates the message that while the genius of High Heaven and the ancient sage-kings may be inaccessible for mere mortals, they can (and should!) learn the models set by those sages. In sum, this example shows how one anecdote can be used to promote widely differing ideas.

## The tilting vessel

One final example involves the so-called "tilting vessel" (*yi qi*), a curious object that leans at an angle when empty and turns over when filled with liquids. It finds its origins in agriculture, where "the use of the vessel in irrigation was driven by its ability to deliver a constant, low-flow stream of water, without the attention of the farmer."<sup>31</sup> Intrigued elites adopted the irrigation device for its symbolic meaning. Placed at the side of the ruler's mat, it warned him against excess. The tilting vessel is therefore also known as "vessel on the right of the seat" (*you zuo zhi qi*) or "warning goblet" (*you zhi*).

One anecdote about the curious object occurs in several early Chinese texts, including *Master Xun*, *Garden of Persuasions* (*Shui yuan*), *School Sayings*

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31. Fried 2007: 163. Fried's paper offers an insightful discussion of the vessel's various uses, with illustrations of the object.

of *Confucius (Kongzi jiayu)*, *Master Wen (Wenzi)*, as well as in the two texts under discussion in this paper. It tells how Confucius once spotted the vessel in a temple, demonstrated its workings to his disciples, and explained the wise lesson that can be drawn from the vessel. Here is how the anecdote occurs in *Illustrations for Outsiders*:

Confucius once paid a visit to the ancestral temple of the Zhou, where they had a vessel that leaned at an angle. Confucius questioned the temple caretaker about it: "What is that vessel called?" The caretaker replied: "This, I believe, is the vessel that sat on the right." Confucius said: "I have learned about the vessel on the right. If full, it turns over. If empty, it leans at an angle. If half full, it stands upright. Is this true?" "Indeed," replied the caretaker. Confucius then had his disciple Zilu bring water to try it out. Full, it turned over. Half full, it stood upright. Empty, it leaned at an angle. Confucius heaved a sigh and said: "Ah, does it ever happen that complete fullness does not lead to overturning?" Zilu said: "May I ask if there is a way to maintain complete fullness?" Confucius said: "The way to control fullness is to repress and diminish it." Zilu said: "Is there a way to diminish it?" Confucius said: "If your influence is broad and deep, you should preserve it with reverence. If your territory spreads far and wide, you should preserve it with frugality. If your earnings are ample and your rank high, you should preserve them with servility. If your people are many and your weapons strong, you should preserve them with timidity. If your perception is sharp and your knowledge deep, you should preserve them with stupidity. If your learning is broad and your memory strong, you should preserve them with austerity. Now this is what I mean by repressing and diminishing." ♦ As the Ode says: "Tang was born at the right moment, and his sagely reverence daily advanced."<sup>32</sup>

Readers in our day and age may be surprised to learn that Confucius was apparently allowed to enter the royal ancestral temple and even toy with a funerary object. Probably this did not bother readers two-thousand years ago, because the anecdote occurs in several texts without any disclaimer regarding its historicity. In other words, we may safely assume that people at the time believed that Confucius' temple visit had taken place as described.

What is even more perplexing about this version of the anecdote is the line from the Odes following it. The anecdote does not mention Tang, his birth, or the daily advancement of his sagely reverence, so the link with the Ode is unclear. Why, then, did Han Ying combine this particular anecdote with this particular line in the Odes? The Ode in question portrays the beginning of the Shang dynasty. One stanza describes how the Divine Being (*di*) appointed Tang (17th c. BCE) to be the dynasty's founder. The stanza reads:

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32. Xu 1980: 114-115. Cf. Hightower 1952: 111-113; Knoblock 1994: 244.



The Divine Being's mandate they never disobeyed,  
and by the time of Tang they were on a par with it.  
Tang was born at the right moment,  
and his sagely reverence daily advanced.  
Brilliant was the influence of his character for long.  
The Highest Being was what he respected,  
and the Divine Being appointed him to be a model to the nine regions.<sup>33</sup>

This stanza presents numerous interpretative difficulties.<sup>34</sup> The most difficult line appears to be the one about Tang's birth, at least judging by *Illustrations for Outsiders*, which features this line in no less than seven sections.<sup>35</sup> One of these sections we have just read. Here are two more sections:

Long ago, Tian Zifang went out and saw an old horse on the road. Sighing compassionately, he was so touched by it that he asked his driver: "What horse is this?" His driver replied: "That horse was bred by the ducal house. Now it is worn out and no longer used. That is why they let it go." Tian Zifang said: "To use up an animal's strength when it is young and then discard it when it is old, that is what no humane person would do." With a bolt of silk he bought the horse. When poor gentlemen heard about this, they all knew to whom their hearts should turn. ♦ As the Ode says: "Tang was born at the right moment, and his sagely reverence daily advanced."<sup>36</sup>

When Duke Zhuang of Qi went out hunting, there was a mantis that raised its legs and was about to strike the wheel of the ducal chariot. The duke asked his driver: "What insect is this?" The driver replied: "Now this is a mantis, an insect that typically knows only to advance, not to retreat. Without assessing its strength, it runs in scorn towards its opponents." Duke Zhuang said: "If it were human, it would be one of the world's bravest warriors!" At this he turned the chariot to avoid it and the bravest warriors rallied to him. ♦ As the Ode says: "Tang was born at the right moment."<sup>37</sup>

The two anecdotes portray men whose empathy extends even to such lowly creatures as a pertinacious mantis or a worn-out horse. Recognizing the value of these animals, they let them live.<sup>38</sup> When people became aware of the extent

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33. Ruan 1982: 626. Cf. Legge 1876: 640; Waley 1996: 321.

34. See, for instance, Legge 1876: 640, footnotes.

35. The seven sections are: 3.30, 3.31, 3.32, 8.30, 8.31, 8.32, and 8.33.

36. Xu 1980: 303. Cf. Hightower 1952: 287.

37. Xu 1980: 303-304. Cf. Hightower 1952: 288.

38. Early Chinese texts contain similar stories about Tang. For instance, one anecdote tells how Tang prevented a hunter from using a prayer that would make him catch all birds and instead taught him a prayer that would make him catch only the birds he needed, leaving other birds to live free. When it became known that Tang's kindness extends even to the wildfowl, people changed over their loyalty to him. The anecdote of Tang

of their humility and empathy, they rallied to the two men. In *Illustrations for Outsiders* their stories are linked to the puzzling line in the Odes about Tang's birth. The link implicitly suggests that Tang possessed those very same qualities. While the two anecdotes have nothing to do with Tang, through a mere collocation with the line in the Odes they can be used to explain why Tang was the right man to attract the crowds necessary to found a new dynasty. It seems to me that the tilting vessel anecdote serves the same purpose. It suggests that Tang possessed the qualities mentioned by Confucius (reverence, frugality, servility, and so on) and thereby was able to "maintain complete fullness," that is, maintaining control over his fledgling dynasty while preventing his power from flowing away like water from the vessel. In sum, when taken out of context, the statement about Tang's timely birth may not be entirely unclear, and even the tilting vessel anecdote alone is not all that helpful. Only after reading several relevant sections in *Illustrations for Outsiders* does it become clear that Han Ying is trying to portray Tang as an example of unsurpassed modesty, humility, kindness, and other qualities, which drew crowds of followers and justifies his founding of the Shang dynasty.

The tilting vessel anecdote also occurs in *The Master of Huainan*. Liu An is fortunate that the Old Master has a saying about "fullness" (*ying*), which makes for an apposite link with the anecdote. The anecdote itself, however, does pose somewhat of a problem to Liu An, as we shall now see:

Confucius once paid a visit to the ancestral temple of Duke Huan, where there was a vessel called the Warning Goblet. "How wonderful to have a chance to see this vessel!" he exclaimed. Turning his head, he called out: "Disciples, go fetch some water!" When the water came, Confucius poured it into the vessel. When the vessel was half full, it remained upright, but when filled completely, it turned over. Confucius' expression instantly changed, and he exclaimed: "How wonderful, this object that illustrates the meaning of holding on to fullness!" Zigong, standing at his master's side, asked: "May I ask what 'holding on to fullness' means?" Confucius replied: "What increases will decrease." Zigong asked: "What does that mean?" Confucius replied: "Once things prosper, they decline. Once joy reaches a climax, it turns into sorrow. Once the sun reaches its zenith, it starts to set. Once the moon reaches its fullness, it starts to wane. That is why perspicacity and wisdom should be

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and the birds occurs in *Springs and Autumns of Mr. Lü* (10/5.2) and *The Master of Huainan* (18). The latter mentions the three anecdotes of Tian Zifang, Duke Zhuang of Qi, and Tang together in one passage! That the first two anecdotes occur in the same succession in *Illustrations for Outsiders* leads Hightower (1952: 288, note 1) to suggest that Han Ying made use of *The Master of Huainan*. If that is the case, one wonders why Han Ying did not use the anecdote of Tang and the birds, which would be ideal to illustrate the line "Tang was born at the right moment" from the Ode.

preserved with stupidity; erudition and eloquence should be preserved with restraint; military strength and courage should be preserved with timidity; expansive wealth and high standing should be preserved with frugality; and influence that stretches throughout the world should be preserved with courtesy. These five qualities are the means by which the former kings held sway over the world without losing it. Whoever goes against these five qualities, will always be in danger.” ♦ As the Old Master says: “If you submit to this Way, you do not want fullness. You just don’t aim to be full, and so you endure all wear with no need for renewal.”<sup>39</sup>

Similar to other versions of the anecdote (except Han Ying’s), the action takes place in the ancestral temple of Duke Huan, the ruler of Confucius’ home state of Lu. Unlike other versions, however, Liu An mentions only two stages of the vessel: half full and full. Logically speaking, filling a vessel involves three stages: empty, full, and anything in between. One would therefore reasonably expect the story to include the empty-stage. Other versions indeed mention the empty vessel, so why is it absent in *The Master of Huainan*? One could argue, as always, that the text is corrupt, but there may be more at play. In *The Master of Huainan*, emptiness (*xu*) is a philosophical concept with highly positive connotations. As Meyer explains, *The Master of Huainan* values empty spaces because “they embody the state of the cosmos at its origin and so retain the potential power and dynamism of that seminal moment” and it prizes an empty mind because it “affords an experience of the Way that forms the original baseline of consciousness.”<sup>40</sup> In my view, a text that sets great store by emptiness would never claim that emptiness means clinging to one side, as does the tilting vessel. It thus appears that the empty-stage is absent for a reason.<sup>41</sup>

When two versions of a story distinctly differ from one another (three-stage vs two-stage vessel), questions regarding the direction of borrowing naturally arise. Lau, who studied all known versions of the anecdote, sees the “Daoist” version (e.g. *The Master of Huainan*) as the original anecdote, which

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39. Gao 1996: 209-210. Cf. Major *et al.* 2010: 480-481. The quotation is from chapter 15 in *The Old Master*.

40. Meyer 2010: 906-907.

41. There is a way to read the text as including the empty-stage. The sentence that I translate as “half full, it remained upright” is rendered by Lau (1966: 24) as “when it was empty it was in position.” Based on parallels in other texts, Lau sees *zhong* “middle, half full” as a loan for *chong* “empty” and he translates *zheng* as “in position.” The latter is a clever way of masking the fact that the empty vessel tilted. In other words, whether the vessel was upright when half full (my interpretation) or in position when empty (Lau’s interpretation), Liu An clearly cannot bear to mention that the vessel clung to one side when empty. This characteristic feature of the vessel is obviously incongruent with Liu An’s worldview.

was borrowed into “Confucian” writings (e.g. *Illustrations for Outsiders*) and transformed to suit their purposes.<sup>42</sup> Lau’s main argument is that Confucian versions promote techniques of maintaining complete fullness, whereas the vessel’s overflowing serves to illustrate that fullness cannot be maintained. Lau sees this as an important inconsistency in the Confucian version. I see it differently. In *Illustrations for Outsiders*, Confucius suggests that complete fullness leads to overturning, whereupon his disciple asks if there might be a way to maintain complete fullness. Confucius answers affirmatively and explains *how* complete fullness can be maintained. To me this is consistent. If anything, I would argue that the version of *The Master of Huainan* is inconsistent, by praising the extraordinary object but failing to mention its essential characteristic, namely that it leans to a side when empty. I therefore find it more likely that the story circulated in a “Confucian” context and was later adopted by Liu An and modified to suit his purposes.

Irrespective of the actual direction of borrowing, the tilting vessel anecdote is an insightful example of how “a story which belonged originally to a particular school can come to be adopted, with modifications, by another,” as Lau wisely concludes.<sup>43</sup> Han Ying uses the story of the three-stage tilting vessel to show how one can “maintain complete fullness,” with sage-king Tang as a shining example of someone who achieved this. Liu An uses the two-stage tilting vessel to illustrate how things reverse once they reach their climax, which he then couples with the Old Master’s warning not to strive for fullness. Amusingly, by linking the story of Confucius’ temple visit to a saying by the Old Master, Liu An has the Confucian sage illustrating the Daoist principle of submitting to the Way. Master Zhuang would have been delighted to read this.

## Conclusion

Han Ying and Liu An exert themselves to create substantial bodies of meaningful combinations of anecdotes and quotations. Han Ying furnishes quotations with one or several anecdotes and adds argument connectives to clarify the link between the two. Liu An creatively adjusts anecdotes to suit his needs, as we have seen in the case of the tilting vessel. Why would they put in all this work to make the combinations of anecdotes and quotations work?

I would argue that the combinations, if done properly, serve as a powerful rhetorical device, to persuade audiences of the superiority of one’s worldview.

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42. Lau 1966.

43. Lau 1966: 31.

While deceptively simple, the combinations work in several directions and on several levels.

In one direction, anecdotes illustrate quotations from authoritative sources. When an Ode declares that the region of Xu surrendered after realizing the noble intentions of their opponent, Han Ying illustrates this with the account of a similar historical event to show that this kind of surrender is indeed possible. When the Old Master claims that one should not strive for fullness, Liu An illustrates this with the story of a peculiar vessel that empties out when filled to the brim. *Illustrations for Outsiders* and *The Master of Huainan* may not be commentaries in the strict sense, but their illustrations of canonical quotations do result in unique readings of the Odes and the Old Master, readings that differ from those of other interpreters. With these specific readings, Han Ying and Liu An implicitly suggest that they are the ones to be consulted by those who wish to learn about the Odes or the Old Master.

In the reverse direction, the quotations serve as the moral that can be drawn from historical anecdotes. Those who take advice from Han Ying are told that the events following the collapsed wall epitomize the importance of being true and sincere. Those who follow Liu An, however, learn that those very same events illustrate the principle of not striving. Similarly, to Han Ying the wheelwright anecdote shows that the workings of High Heaven are shrouded in mystery and that people ought to emulate their successful forebears, whereas to Liu An it shows that the ways people follow are not the constant Way. The anecdotes, as Hightower and other scholars have observed, were probably part of the public domain and could be used in compilations of widely divergent aims and purposes.<sup>44</sup> In finding the most fitting quotation, Han Ying and Liu An implicitly suggest that the Odes or the Old Master, respectively, are most fitting to understand the historical setting described in the anecdote. In other words, they appropriate the anecdotes for the canonical source of their preference.

The combination of anecdote and quotation also works on a higher level, due to the sheer volume of combinations. The preceding sections discussed a mere three examples, which may not be all that impressive, but *Illustrations for Outsiders* and *The Master of Huainan* contain dozens and dozens of similar examples. The profusion of anecdotes presents a range of historical events so extensive that they cover a large part of human experience. In other words, for many events in the lives of humans, there exists a somewhat related anecdote. By linking the anecdotes to quotations from canonical sources, Han Ying and Liu An suggest that the Odes or the Old Master may serve as a guide for any possible situation. That is, they suggest that the Odes and the Old Master contain

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44. Hightower 1948: 242.

all the wisdom to face any type of situation. Liu An makes this explicit in the final chapter of *The Master of Huainan*, which describes the reason behind each chapter. For chapter 12, it says:

“Responding in Accordance with the Way”  
selects from what remains of bygone events,  
and surveys what lasts from ancient times.  
It examines reversals of fortune and misfortune  
and verifies consistency with the methods of the Old Master and Master Zhuang,  
so as to combine these into strategic advantage in matters of gain and loss.<sup>45</sup>

According to this “mission statement,” Liu An and his team made a careful selection of historical events, examined their outcome, and verified them according to the methods of the Old Master and Master Zhuang.<sup>46</sup> For example, in the case of the collapsing wall the outcome was fortunate for Xiangzi, who won Zhongmou without a fight. This, according to Liu An, is consistent with the Old Master’s theory that no one can strive with those who themselves do not strive. The ultimate goal of the chapter, according to the mission statement, is to create strategic advantage in matters of gain and loss. The term “strategic advantage” (*shi*), as Ames translates it, is often used in military-strategic writings.<sup>47</sup> This complex term involves the idea that reality is an intricate system of circumstances that constantly shift between two extremes (hot-cold, high-low, win-lose, and so on). Those who grasp the underlying principles are able to predict future circumstances and position themselves accordingly, thus having strategic advantage over adversaries. In Liu An’s usage, the historical anecdotes are the circumstances and the methods of the Old Master and Master Zhuang are the underlying principles required to predict and influence future circumstances. *Illustrations for Outsiders* may not include a similar mission statement, but it does use similar mechanisms. We may therefore assume that Han Ying’s purpose was similar to that of Liu An, except for his choice of canonical source.

On a final level, the combination of anecdotes and quotations shows not only the aptness of the respective canonical sources, but also of those who aptly made the combinations. In *Illustrations for Outsiders* and *The Master of Huainan*, Han Ying and Liu An display their erudite knowledge of history and literature, and their craftsmanship in combining the two. To put it differently, they present themselves as beacons of wisdom. We can take *The Master of Huainan* as an

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45. Gao 1996: 371. Cf. Major *et al.* 2010: 854.

46. Mainly the Old Master, as only one anecdote in the chapter ends with a quotation from *Master Zhuang*.

47. Ames (1983) offers a detailed explanation of the term’s usage in *The Art of Warfare*.

example, because the creation of this book is best known. Kern describes *The Master of Huainan* as

the first “big book” of Han times, and its overall composition for, and presentation at, the imperial court of Emperor Wu must be seen as a forceful intervention into the politics and culture at the imperial court. Its textual unification of wide-ranging, diverse, and in fact mutually unrelated essays was the most magnificent summa of sagely advice for a young and ambitious emperor who found himself ruling over an only recently unified, and still highly precarious, empire.<sup>48</sup>

If *The Master of Huainan* was intended to be the most magnificent summa of sagely advice, then the person responsible for this work, Liu An, is the ultimate sagely advisor. As Kern writes, Liu An created *The Master of Huainan* to impress the young and ambitious Emperor Wu. His mastery of anecdotes and quotations displays his knowledge of historical events and canonical texts, and he uses these combinations to persuade his malleable nephew that he, Liu An, is to be consulted by those who wish to attain strategic advantage in matters of gain and loss. Mentioning the audience (in this case Emperor Wu) is important, because the masterful combination of anecdotes and quotations not only shows the superiority of the text in which they appear or the person who created this text, but also of the reader who recognizes and appreciates these connections. Hence, the combination of anecdotes and quotations brings together history and literature and results in a shared experience that involves texts, creators, and readers.

To conclude, many early Chinese historical anecdotes occur in more than one text, which suggests that they were part of the public domain in a literate culture that set much store by these brief accounts of historical events. In and of themselves, the anecdotes were apparently considered true and uncontroversial, which makes them useful for widely divergent aims and purposes, especially in times when voicing the “wrong” opinion could mean one’s life. Those who masterfully combine anecdotes with apposite quotations from canonical sources, turn these innocuous historical accounts into a powerful rhetorical device that helps to persuade others of the superiority of their worldview.

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48. Kern 2008.

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GLOSSARY

*ai* 愛

Ban Gu 班固

Chang'an 長安

*chang dao* 常道

*cheng de* 誠德

*chong* 冲

*dao* 道

*dao ying* 道應

*di* 帝

Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒

Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公

Emperor Jing of the Han dynasty 漢景帝

Emperor Wen of the Han dynasty 漢文帝

Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty 漢武帝

*fujie* 符節

*Han Feizi* 韓非子

*Han gu* 韓故

*Han nei zhuan* 韓內傳

*Han shi wai zhuan* 韓詩外傳

*Han shu* 漢書

*Han shuo* 韓說

*Han wai zhuan* 韓外傳

Han Ying 韓嬰

Heshang gong 河上公

Huainan 淮南

*Huainanzi* 淮南子

*huang-lao* 黃老

*ji* 及

*jiao* 教

Jin 晉

*juan* 卷

King Cheng of Chu 楚成王

King Wen of the Zhou dynasty 周文王

King Xuan of the Zhou dynasty 周宣王

Kongzi 孔子

*Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語

Laozi 老子

Liu An 劉安

*Lü shi chungiu* 呂氏春秋

*qiquan* 契券

*ren* 仁

*ru* 儒

Shang dynasty 商

*shi* 詩

*shi* 勢

Shui yuan 說苑

Tang 湯

*tian ming* 天命

*wai* 外

Wang Bi 王弼

*Wenzi* 文子

*xin* 信

Xu 徐

*xu* 虛

*Xunzi* 荀子

Yan 燕

Yang Shuda 楊樹達

*yi* 易

*yi* 義

*ying* 盈

*yi qi* 欹器

*you zhi* 宥卮

*you zuo zhi qi* 宥座之器

*Yu Lao* 喻老

*yun se* 允塞

*za* 雜

Zhao 趙

Zhao Jianzi 趙簡子

Zhao Xiangzi 趙襄子

*zheng* 正

*zhong* 中

Zhongmou 中牟

Zhou dynasty 周

*Zhuangzi* 莊子