

Intertextuality Analysis of the Story “Confucius Trapped in Chen and Cai” in Pre-Qin and Han Dynasties

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Abstract

This study delves into the significant episode of Confucius' life, “Trapped in Chen and Cai”, widely documented in the pre-Qin and Han Dynasty literature. Utilizing the documentation method for data collection, it is evident that the material on “Trapped in Chen and Cai” in *The Family sayings of Confucius* has early origins and closely resembles the original events. Based on this foundation, the study categorizes the episode into three dialogue versions. By applying the document analysis method and utilizing the theory of intertextuality, this study infers the intertextuality of plots among detailed Confucian narratives. It elucidates the spirit of turning crisis into safety and overcoming adversity, embodied in Confucius' positive image of inspiring transcendence.

Keywords: Confucius, Besieged in Chen and Cai, Intertextuality, Survival Amidst Hardships

Introduction

Research Background

Throughout the annals of history, scholars have consistently delved into the portrayal of Confucius by recounting various anecdotes from his life. In the Western Han Dynasty, Sima Qian's *The Records of the Grand Historian: The Life of Confucius* chiefly cemented Confucius' revered status as the “Supreme Sage” by highlighting pivotal moments from his lifetime. Subsequent works, like Cui Shu's *Zhusi Kaoxin Lu*, An Inquiry into the Historical Confucius during the Qing Dynasty and Gu Jiegang's *Discrimination in Ancient History: Confucius in the Spring and Autumn Period and Confucius in the Han Dynasty* in modern times, have also meticulously analyzed numerous tales about Confucius through rigorous documentary research. These analyses have mainly focused on his teachings and deeds, such as his responses to the rebellions led by Gongshan Furao, who rebelled in Fei, and Bi Xi rebelled in Zhongmou, striving to uncover the true essence of Confucius' character. More recently, since the 1970s and 1980s, with the steady discovery of ancient bamboo and silk manuscripts,

researchers have adopted a methodology that integrates traditional written records with newly excavated documents. This approach has enriched the narrative of Confucius' life and posed challenges to conventional documentary accounts, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive depiction of Confucius' image.

Problem Statement

In contemporary academic research, the prevalent approach involves mutual corroboration between historical and literary sources, comprehensively examining all anecdotes and stories related to Confucius within a designated timeframe to construct his image. This research focuses on a significant event in Confucius' life, being besieged in Chen and Cai. Simultaneously, it is extensively cross-referenced in various pre-Qin and Han dynasties' classics such as *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Family sayings of Confucius*, *The Garden of Stories*, *Mencius*, *Annals of Yanzi*, *Xunzi*, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, *Kong Cong Zi*, *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* (the supplemental writings on *the Classic of Poetry* by Han Ying), *New Sayings*, *Records of the Grand Historian*, *Lun Heng*, *General Sense of Customs* and other documentary materials for detailed discussion. The image of Confucius can also be found in *Mozi* and *Zhuangzi* and unearthed documents. The research found that the source of the material of "Trapped in Chen and Cai" in *The Family Sayings of Confucius* was early and close to the original appearance of the matter. Based on this, it was divided into three versions, and the intertextual literature theory was used to explore the intertextuality of the plot of "Trapped in Chen and Cai", mainly showing Confucius' positive image of inspiring transcendence and his spirit of turning danger into safety and overcoming adversity. Nevertheless, in *Mozi*, Confucius's image is immoral, deceitful and false. In *Zhuangzi*, Confucius serves as the spokesperson for the Taoist image. This is a consensus in the academic community and will not be elaborated on.

Research Purpose

Mr. Ruan Zhisheng (2013) once remarked that the event "Trapped in Chen and Cai" "can best represent the spirit of Confucius" (p. 65). This research primarily falls within the realm of qualitative research. It employs the document method to gather data and utilizes the literature analysis method to analyze the collected data. The study comprehensively collates the pre-Qin and Han dynasties' Confucian literature related on "Trapped in Chen and Cai". By applying the literary theory of "intertextuality", it aims to discuss the intertextual story plots of this event within Confucian classics. Moreover, it examines the spirit of turning danger into safety and emerging from adversity, as manifested in Confucius' positive image of inspiration and transcendence. This study is not only conducive to showing the original appearance of the "Trapped in Chen and Cai" incident and the positive image and spirit of Confucius, but also conducive to the academic community to re-examine the status and role of Confucian documents such as *The Family Sayings of Confucius* in the history of academic thought.

Research Question & Research Hypothesis

This study tends to believe that the documents recording the "Trapped in Chen and Cai" during the pre-Qin and Han Dynasties share a common origin within the same school of thought despite the diverse modes of transmission among these documents. Ancient books often "fabricated stories" (Yu, 2013, p. 195) to "justify one's mistakes" (p. 197), employing techniques such as "expressing ideas through writing and shaping content according to the subject" (p. 196), "crafting stories to prove a point and using hypothetical questions and

answers to express oneself fully” (p. 200), and adhering to the principle that “if it contributes to the article, the truthfulness is not questioned” (p. 202). The incident of “Trapped in Chen and Cai” evolved from oral traditions in the pre-Qin period to individual narratives and more elaborate stories in the Han Dynasty. Although the original source document of “Trapped in Chen and Cai” is untraceable, the earliest verifiable documentary material is found in *The Analects of Confucius*. Both *The Family Sayings of Confucius* and *Kong Cong Zi*, which supplement it, derive their original materials “directly from” (Li, 2007, p. 299) and belong to the Confucian family’s academic tradition (Li, 1987). *The Family sayings of Confucius* closely the original event. Additionally, the materials on the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” in *The Records of the Grand Historian: The Life of Confucius* primarily reference *The Family sayings of Confucius* and *The Analects of Confucius*, indicating that the source of “Trapped in Chen and Cai” in *The Family sayings of Confucius* is earlier than that in *The Garden of Stories*.

Theoretical Framework

Bakhtine’s (1963) theory of polyphony is a pivotal point in the origins of intertextuality. This theory underscores the polyphonic nature of textual dialogicity, emphasizing the independence of characters’ self-consciousness. It highlights equal dialogic relationships not only within characters themselves but also between characters and between characters and the author. Building upon Bakhtin’s work, Kristeva (1969) in France further developed and expanded the concept of dialogic polyphony. Kristeva (1969) posited that all texts inherently possess a dialogic quality. From a horizontal perspective, this dialogicity manifests in multiple ways: between authors and characters, between characters, between authors and readers, and between the current text and its preceding texts. Furthermore, from a vertical perspective, Kristeva emphasized that texts transcend temporal and spatial boundaries. They are imbued with an ideological nature that connects them to broader social, historical, and cultural contexts.

In international intertextuality research, there are two distinct approaches: broad and narrow intertextuality. Qin (2004), based on thorough research into French intertextuality studies spanning two to three decades, published the article *The Origin and Evolution of Intertextuality Theory*. In this work, he considers both aspects. He considers the broad and somewhat vague critical nature of broad intertextuality ideology, which is represented by scholars such as Kristeva (1941—) and Barthes (1915-1980). On the other hand, he also examines the specific and operational instrumentality of narrow intertextuality poetics and rhetoric, as represented by Genette (1930-2018) and Riffaterre (1924-2006). He tends to label the currently read text as the main text. The text that is summoned by the current text is referred to as the intertext. The dialogue relationship between a text and other texts, and even its dialogue relationship with social and historical texts, falls under the category of broad intertextuality. Conversely, using intertextual writing techniques such as citation, collage, adaptation, repetition, and parody within a text belongs to narrow intertextuality.

In his book *Intertextuality: A New Horizon in Literature Theory Research* (2014), Li (2014) acknowledges the powerful explanatory force and enduring vitality of intertextuality over the past fifty years. Building upon English language literature from abroad and domestic research, he adopts a methodology that integrates history and logic, drawing on the merits of both narrow and broad intertextuality. With an objective view of the reality of broad intertextuality

usage in academic circles both domestically and internationally, Li (2014) defines “intertextuality” from the perspective of the tension between the two:

“Intertextuality refers to the relationships and processes of interconnection and transformation between a text and other texts, as well as between a text and its identity, meaning, subjectivity, and socio-historical context” (p. 67).

The relationship between “a text and other texts” falls under narrow intertextuality, while “a text and its identity, meaning, subjectivity, and socio-historical context” pertains to broad intertextuality. The “relationships and processes of interconnection and transformation” between these two constitute the tension between narrow and broad intertextuality. Li (2014) argues that narrow intertextuality essentially involves the study of various forms of citation, encompassing the examination of citations related to texts, character images, plots, structures, genres, styles, archetypes, and motifs.

This study concurs with Li’s (2014) definition and further posits that citation, collage, adaptation, and repetition are the “techniques” of narrow intertextuality. By employing these “techniques”, this study explores the plot of “Trapped in Chen and Cai”, where Confucius’ image of inspiring transcendence embodies the spirit of turning danger into safety and finding hope amidst adversity.

Research Review

The Image of Confucius in Qin and Han Dynasty Literature

Zhu (2002), in the article *The Early Image of Confucius*, combs through stories of Confucius found in pre-Qin and early Han Dynasty philosophical and historical texts, exploring the authentic Confucius and acknowledging that his mystical aura is one of his many images. Chen (2011), in *The Image of Confucius in Ancient Texts from the pre-Qin Period to the Western Han Dynasty*, systematically examines the portrayal of Confucius in pre-Qin philosophical works, classics, histories, and miscellaneous treatises, and analyzes the reasons and significance behind the evolution of Confucius’ image. Lee (2014), in *The Image of Confucius in pre-Qin and Early Han Dynasty Literature*, comprehensively collates stories of Confucius from historical texts, philosophical works, and unearthed documents of the pre-Qin and early Han periods, categorizing the image of Confucius into that of a virtuous minister, a sage, and a pioneering teacher.

The Transmission Modes of Documents Related to the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” Event

Regarding the various documents concerning the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” event, Ning (2007) proposes, from the perspective of the chronological sequence of documents, that they were formed in a layered and cumulative manner, progressing from excavated documents to *The Garden of Stories* and then to *The Family sayings of Confucius*. On the other hand, Li (2001) arranges the sequence of appearance of the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” related documents as follows: *Qiongdā Yishi* (excavated documents) – *Zhuangzi Miscellaneous Chapters: Renouncing the Throne*– *Xunzi: Youzuo* – *The Annals of Lü Buwei: Filial Piety and Conduct: Caution in Choosing Men* – *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* Volume 7 – *The Garden of Stories: Za Yan* – *General Sense of Customs: Qiongtong* – *The Family sayings of Confucius: In Adversity*. However, Su (2013) contends that the transmission of the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” documents does not follow the “layered and cumulative theory” proposed by Ning (2007) or

the single-threaded transmission mode suggested by Li (2001), but rather a multi-threaded transmission. He agrees with the Ming dynasty scholar Lang's view: "At that time, the same principles and reasoning were shared, and news spread through mutual hearsay, with each account coming before or after another. The original books were not printed, so when statements were made, because the principles and reasoning were the same, they borrowed the goodness of others and considered it as their own. Sometimes they presented it to rulers or fathers, or compiled it into private books, not necessarily intending to disseminate it to everyone. Later generations each obtained and transmitted them, thus revealing their similarities" (Su, 2013, p. 116). He posits that the source document is the notes of the seventy-two disciples in *The Family sayings of Confucius* and based on the examination of "Trapped in Chen and Cai", argues that *The Records of the Grand Historian* is a compilation of *The Family sayings of Confucius*, *The Analects of Confucius* and other historical materials. *The Family sayings of Confucius* shares the same source material with *The Garden of Stories* and *Han Shi Wai Zhuan*, while *The Garden of Stories* and *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* are closely related. *The Annals of Lü Buwei* borrows from *Zhuangzi*, belonging to a systematic transmission.

Method

Documentary Analysis

Based on the research objectives, this study employs a comparative analysis of the documented records related to the "Trapped in Chen and Cai" incident, as compiled by Su (2013), and integrates relevant literature from pre-Qin and Han dynasties' Confucian texts. The materials are arranged in chronological order according to the level of detail in the narratives and the approximate time of their sources. This analysis reveals that the sources of the "Trapped in Chen and Cai" materials in *The Family sayings of Confucius* are early and close to the original events. Using this as a blueprint, the materials are further categorized into three versions: the dialogue between Confucius and Zilu in *The Family sayings of Confucius: The Family sayings of Confucius: In Adversity*, the dialogue between Confucius and Yan Hui in the same chapter, and the account of Confucius' survival amidst adversity in *The Family sayings of Confucius: Pledge in Distress*.

Data Analysis Method: Textual Analysis

In his article *Confucius' Trapped in Chen and Cai and Its Historical and Cultural Interpretation*, Su Gang primarily uncovers Confucius' political fate and ideological realm by exploring the origins and comparing the documentation of the "Trapped in Chen and Cai" incident. This study, however, focuses on analyzing and inferring the three versions of the "Trapped in Chen and Cai" story in *The Family sayings of Confucius* to delve into the detailed narratives of Confucianism found in texts such as *Analects of Confucius: Duke Ling of Wei*, *The Family sayings of Confucius*, *The Garden of Stories*, the Guodian Chu bamboo slips' *Qionгда Yishi*, *Xunzi*, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, *Kong Cong Zi: Jie Mo*, the Mawangdui silk manuscript *Miuhe*, *Han Shi Wai Zhuan*, *The Records of the Grand Historian*, *Lun Heng*, and *General Sense of Customs*. It also explores the intertextuality of these episodes and the spiritual embodiment of Confucius' image of inspiring transcendence. Other documents with brief narratives contain only a single sentence and do not discuss these aspects.

Classification of Documentary Materials on the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” from pre-Qin and Han Dynasties

Su (2013) identified 26 surviving documents related to the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” incident. Excluding *Tales of the Supernatural* from the Wei and Jin dynasties, *Chang Duan Jing* from the Tang dynasty, and *Yi Shi* from the Qing dynasty, there are 23 surviving documents from the pre-Qin and Han dynasties. Unearthed documents were discussed in the text but not included in the table. According to this study’s statistics, there are 28 documents related to the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” from the pre-Qin and Han dynasties, including both surviving and unearthed materials. Among them, there are 25 surviving documents and 3 unearthed documents. Therefore, this study’s count of surviving documents related to the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” from the pre-Qin and Han dynasties is two more than that of Su’s(2013). Specifically, they are one from *Kong Cong Zi: Jie Mo* and one from *Kong Cong Zi: Ju Wei*. In contrast, Su’s count of surviving documents related to the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” from *Kong Cong Zi* is only one, not three.

For the convenience of the study, the documentary materials related to the theme of “Trapped in Chen and Cai” from the pre-Qin and Han dynasties are categorized into two columns: one for detailed narratives and the other for brief narratives. They are arranged in approximate chronological order of the sources as follows:

Table 1

Documentary Materials Related to the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” theme from the pre-Qin and Han Dynasties

The detailed narrative literature	The concise narrative literature
A passage from <i>Analects of Confucius: Duke Ling of Wei</i> (Late Spring and Autumn Period)	A passage from <i>Analects of Confucius: Xian Jin</i> (Late Spring and Autumn Period): “Confucius said, ‘Those who followed me through the hardships in Chen and Cai are not hold official positions in Chen and Cai .’”
A passage from <i>Mozi</i> (Early Warring States Period)	A passage from <i>Mencius</i> (Mid-Warring States Period): “The reason why the noble person encountered difficulties in Chen and Cai, is that there was no one holding official positions in their interactions.”
Three passages from <i>The Family sayings of Confucius</i> (Early Warring States Period)	A passage from <i>Yanzi Chunqiu</i> (Mid-Warring States Period): “After a year’s stay, Confucius left Lu for Qi but was not received by the Duke of Jing. As a result, he was trapped between Chen and Cai.”
Two passages from <i>The Garden of Stories</i> (Early Warring States Period)	A passage from <i>Kong Cong Zi: Ju Wei</i> (Mid-Warring States Period): “Our ancestor, Confucius, was trapped in Chen and Cai and composed <i>the Spring and Autumn Annals</i> .”
A passage from <i>Qionгда Yishi</i> in Guodian Chu Bamboo Slips (Mid-Warring States Period)	A passage from <i>Kong Cong Zi: Jie Mo</i> (Qin and Han Dynasties):

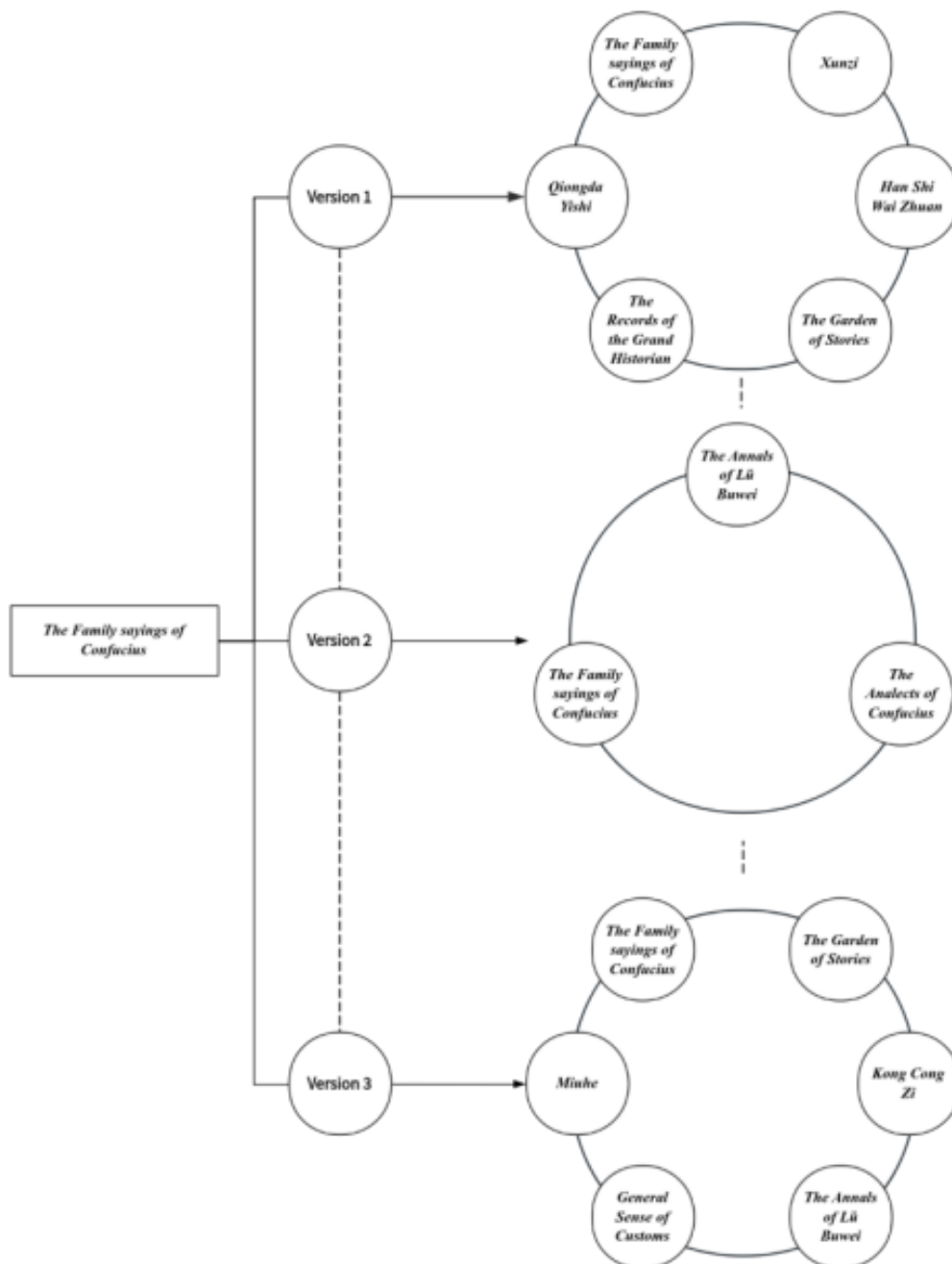
	“Cutting down trees, erasing footprints, and enduring hunger for seven days—how can this be considered straitened circumstances?”
Three passages from <i>Zhuangzi</i> (Mid-Warring States Period)	A passage from <i>Words of the Confucian Scholars</i> , Wood Slip No. 1 from the Han Dynasty bamboo slips of Fuyang Shuanggudui (Early Western Han Dynasty): “Zhong Ni from Chu to Cai.”
A passage from <i>Xunzi</i> (Late Warring States Period)	A passage from <i>New Sayings</i> (Early Western Han Dynasty): “During Confucius’ ordeal in Chen and Cai, even simple dishes like beans, rice, vegetables, and broth were insufficient to satisfy their hunger. His disciples, clad in ragged and worn-out robes, could not fend off the cold. They found themselves in extreme hardship and adversity, enduring immense difficulties.”
Two passages from <i>The Annals of Lü Buwei</i> (Late Warring States Period)	
A passage from <i>Kong Cong Zi: Jie Mo</i> (Qin and Han Dynasties)	
A passage from <i>Miuhe</i> in Mawangdui Silk Texts (Early Western Han Dynasty)	
A passage from <i>Han Shi Wai Zhuan</i> (Early Western Han Dynasty)	
Two passages from <i>The Records of the Grand Historian</i> (Mid-Western Han Dynasty)	
A passage from <i>Lun Heng</i> (Mid-Eastern Han Dynasty)	
A passage from <i>General Sense of Customs</i> (Late Eastern Han Dynasty)	

It should be noted that the dates listed in this table refer to the time of the sources of the documentary materials, rather than the time when they were compiled into books. Not only are *The Family sayings of Confucius* and *Kong Cong Zi* part of the Confucian family’s scholarly tradition, but also “*The Garden of Stories*’ Confucian documents are quoted from the ancient version of *The Family sayings of Confucius*” (Yao, 2009, p. 71), which also belongs to the Confucian family’s scholarly tradition and is supplementary to *Analects*. The materials in *Analects of Confucius’ Family* and *The Garden of Stories* originate from the notes of Confucius’ descendants and his seventy-two disciples. At the same time, the chapter *Ju Wei* in *Kong Cong Zi* records materials about Zisi, mainly derived from Zisi (Huang, 1987), which was indeed written by Zisi (Guo, 2001). The materials in the chapter *Jie Mo* in *Kong Cong Zi* come from Kong Fu of the Qin and Han dynasties (Sun, 2011). Our research primarily focuses on the detailed narratives of Confucian documentary materials related to the “Trapped in Chen and Cai”, including *Analects: Duke Ling of Wei*, *The Family sayings of Confucius*, *The Garden of Stories*, the Guodian Chu bamboo slips’ *Qionгда Yishi*, *Xunzi*, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, *Kong Cong Zi: Jie Mo*, the Mawangdui silk manuscript *Miuhe*, *Han Shi Wai Zhuan*, *The Records of*

the Grand Historian, Lun Heng, and General Sense of Customs, and conducts specific discussions on them.

Detailed Analysis of Confucian Literature Materials on the Theme of “Trapped in Chen and Cai” During the pre-Qin and Han Dynasties

Figure 1: The Relationship among Confucian Literature Materials detailed Narratives on the Theme of “Trapped in Chen and Cai” the pre-Qin and Han Dynasties.¹



¹ Solid lines are used to represent strong intertextual relationships, while dashed lines indicate weaker intertextual connections. The source material of “Trapped in Chen and Cai” in *The Family sayings of Confucius* is early and close to the original event. Based on this blueprint, it can be divided into three versions: Version One is the dialogue between Confucius and Zilu in *The Family sayings of Confucius: In Adversity*; Version Two is the dialogue between Confucius and Yan Hui in the same chapter; and Version Three is the account of Confucius’ survival amidst adversity in *The Family sayings of Confucius: Pledge in Distress*.

In *The Analects: Duke Ling of Wei*, it is recorded: “When they were in Chen and had no food, their followers were so weak with hunger that none of them could stand up. Zilu, with a discontented look, said, ‘Does a superior man also have to endure such hardships?’ Confucius replied, ‘A superior man may indeed endure hardships, but a small man, when he is in hardship, becomes unrestrained and desperate’ ”(Cheng, 2018, p. 1353). This passage captures a vivid dialogue between Confucius and Zilu, revealing the initial glimpse of Confucius’ image as one who inspires transcendence by his teaching that a superior man remains steadfast in adversity.

The Family sayings of Confucius preserve relatively intact materials from the Confucian family’s scholarly tradition, complementing the narrative of the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” story in *The Analects*. Using this as our blueprint, we can identify three versions of the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” materials: Version One is the dialogue between Confucius and Zilu in *The Family sayings of Confucius: In Adversity*. Version Two is the dialogue between Confucius and Yan Hui in *The Family sayings of Confucius: In Adversity*. And Version Three is the account of Confucius overcoming adversity in *The Family sayings of Confucius: Pledge in Distress*.

Version One: *The Family sayings of Confucius: In Adversity*, it first narrates the background and reasons for the incident of being trapped in Chen and Cai. Secondly, it details the dialogue between Confucius and Zilu. Lastly, it briefly recounts the dialogues between Confucius, Zigong, and Yan Hui. The narrative is complete and rich, portraying a vivid image of Confucius inspiring transcendence:

“King Zhao of Chu invited Confucius, and Confucius went to pay his respects. On the way, he passed through Chen and Cai. The officials of Chen and Cai conspired together and said, ‘Confucius is a sage and a worthy man. His criticisms all hit the mark regarding the faults of the vassal states. If Chu employs him, then Chen and Cai will be in danger.’ So, they sent soldiers to block Confucius’ path. Confucius could not proceed and was without food for seven days. There was no way to communicate with the outside world; even the wild vegetable soup was insufficient. His followers all fell ill, yet Confucius spoke with even greater passion, and his music and singing did not diminish. So, he summoned Zilu and asked him... Zilu went out and summoned Zigong, telling him the same thing he had told Zilu... Zigong went out, and Yan Hui came in, asking the same question.” (Wang, 1990, p. 55-56).

The incident of Trapped in Chen and Cai was the most challenging event in Confucius’ life. Faced with adversity, his students all responded differently. Zilu showed discontent, unable to comprehend why, despite Confucius’ virtuous deeds and righteousness, he still found himself in such dire straits. When Confucius met with difficulties again, he cited the examples of Bo Yi and Shu Qi, Prince Bigan, Guan Longpang, and Wu Zixu, asking rhetorical questions to elucidate further that a superior man should cultivate his virtue and cultivate his moral character, remaining steadfast and not altering his principles despite hardships. He also used the examples of Prince Chong’er of Jin and King Goujian of Yue to illustrate the importance of setting lofty aspirations. When confronted with adversity, Zigong hoped that Confucius would lower his standards to be accepted by the world. However, Confucius “repeatedly” singled out Zigong for criticism twice, stating that seeking acceptance by

compromising one's principles was a sign of having unambitious aspirations. Only Yan Hui's response truly resonated with Confucius. He believed that a superior man becomes apparent only when the world does not accept him. The more one is not accepted by society; the more one should live to live up to the teachings, embodying Confucius' spirit of upholding principles and living up to the teachings even in adversity.

In the account of being trapped in Chen and Cai in *Xunzi: Youzuo*, the dialogue between Confucius and Zilu is the main focus, supplemented by historical examples of Prince Bigan, Guan Longpang, Wu Zixu, Prince Chong'er of Jin, King Goujian of Yue, and Xiaobai (Duke Huan of Qi). When Confucius was trapped in Chen and Cai and seeking to break through the predicament, he emphasized the need to accumulate virtue, cultivate righteousness, and embrace beauty. Through subsequent learning, one should strive for erudition, deep thinking, self-cultivation, and upright behaviour to in order to transform the innate evil in human nature.

Han Ying's *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* has a strong political purpose and intends to guide governance through literature. The theme of "Trapped in Chen and Cai" appears in Chapter 6 of Volume 7 of *Han Shi Wai Zhuan*, which contains a detailed dialogue between Confucius and Zilu, and intertextual with the historical examples narrated in *Xunzi: Youzuo*. In *Xunzi: Youzuo*, Confucius emphasizes the importance of accumulating virtue, cultivating righteousness, and embracing beauty. However, Han Ying replaces "righteousness" with "benevolence", emphasizing "accumulating virtue and benevolence". He focuses on the concept of "benevolence" in Confucius' thought, clarifying and specifying it through reasoning. The portrayal of Confucius in *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* is that of a sage who accumulates virtue and benevolence despite not encountering favorable times, intertextual with the image of Confucius as depicted in *Xunzi: Youzuo* through Xunzi's lens as one who accumulates virtue, cultivates righteousness, and embraces beauty.

There are also two pieces of literature on the theme of "Trapped in Chen and Cai" in *The Garden of Stories: Za Yan*, with the second piece extensively intertextual with the literature in *Han Shi Wai Zhuan*. Additionally, "the bamboo slips from Guodian are all earlier than the works of Mencius" (Li, 2001, p. 105). The opening of Qiongdā Yishi states, "There is Heaven and there are men; Heaven and men have their respective roles" (Jingmen City Museum, 1998, p. 145). The middle section enumerates historical examples to illustrate the distinction between Heaven and men and the concept of success and failure being determined by timing. The phrase "success and failure being determined by timing" is "repeated" twice at the end. The compilers of the bamboo slips from the Chu tomb in Guodian (1998) believe that this bears similarities to the discussions on historical examples, the distinction between Heaven and men, and the concept of success and failure being determined by timing found in *Xunzi: Youzuo*, *Han Shi Wai Zhuan*, *The Family sayings of Confucius: In Adversity*, and *The Garden of Stories: Za Yan*.

Regarding the theme of "Trapped in Chen and Cai", *The Records of the Grand Historian* contains two pieces of documentary evidence. One is the dialogue takes place while Confucius is stranded between Chen and Cai. *The Records of the Grand Historian: Biographies of the Disciples of Confucius* states: "On another occasion when he was with them and trapped between Chen and Cai, they asked about conduct. Confucius said, 'Speak with loyalty and honesty; act with sincerity and reverence; even among the barbarians, such behavior would

suffice. Without loyalty and honesty in speech' ” (Sima, 1955, p. 3373). Another instance appears in *The Records of the Grand Historian: The Life of Confucius*. A similar passage is “repeated” in both *The Analects: Duke Ling of Wei* and *The Records of the Grand Historian: The Life of Confucius*: “Zilu spoke angrily and said, ‘Can a gentleman also be at an impasse?’ Confucius replied, ‘A gentleman remains steadfast in adversity, whereas a small person, when faced with hardship, becomes reckless.’” *The Records of the Grand Historian : Biographies of the Disciples of Confucius* explicitly mentions “Trapped in Chen and Cai”, indicating that being trapped and being at an impasse are synonymous. Furthermore, *The Analects: Yaoyue* links being trapped and at an impasse: “All over the world, there is hardship and difficulty” (Cheng, 2018, p. 1731). *Guangya: Shi Gu Four* defines: “To be trapped means to be at an impasse.” *The Book of Changes: Appendix to the Commentary on the Lower Canon* concerning the “Kun” hexagram says, “In times of hardship and difficulty, one can still achieve success” (Ruan, 1980, p. 89). The commentary explains, “In the ‘Kun’ hexagram, during times of hardship and difficulty, one maintains integrity, enabling the Way to prevail without compromise” (p. 89). *The Book of Changes·Appendix to the Commentary on the Lower Canon* also says, “Hardship is a test of virtue” (p. 89). The commentary adds, “When faced with hardship, if one remains steadfast in their principles, their virtue becomes clear” (p. 89). Moreover, *The Book of Changes: Appendix to the Commentary on the Lower Canon* states, “Hardship reduces grievances” (p. 89). The commentary clarifies, “Enduring hardship without resentment towards Heaven or blame towards others means having few grievances with the world” (p. 89).

Sima (1955) places Confucius as the seventeenth figure among the thirty *The Records of the Grand Historian* biographies, pivotal role in bridging past and future narratives. Significant events from Confucius’ life are scattered throughout various sections of *The Records of the Grand Historian*. Among these, the episode of being “Trapped in Chen and Cai” stands out as a defining moment in Confucius’ life. Sima (1955) infuses his strong sentiments into this account, bringing the inspirational and transcendent image of Confucius to full maturity.

We believe that *The Records of the Grand Historian: The Life of Confucius* compiles material from *The Analects: Duke Ling of Wei* and *The Family sayings of Confucius: In Adversity*, reconstructing the narrative of the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” incident into a cohesive account. It first describes the context in which the officials of Chen and Cai feared that Confucius might be employed by Chu, leading to his entrapment in Chen and Cai. Then, amidst three “repetitions” of questioning the reasons for their predicament of living up to the teachings, Zigong and Yan Hui twice “repeat”, “Confucius’s doctrine is too profound; thus, the whole world cannot accommodate Confucius” (Sima, 1955, p. 2904-2905). More significantly, Yan Hui emphatically “repeats”, “What harm is there in not being accepted? It is precisely in not being accepted that the true gentleman is revealed!” (p. 2905). This repetition underscores four key points: the profundity of Confucius's teaching, his dedication to spreading it, the shame of neglecting cultivation, and the disgrace of a state that fails to utilize such wisdom. Yan Hui is recognized as the one who truly understands Confucius. In *The Family sayings of Confucius: In Adversity*, Confucius is described as “exhaling joyfully”, whereas in *The Records of the Grand Historian: The Life of Confucius*, he is depicted as “smiling joyfully”. This shift transforms the significance and aesthetic impact of the “Trapped in Chen and Cai” narrative, moving it from a sense of heaviness to one of lightness.

Version Two: The theme of “Trapped in Chen and Cai” in *The Family sayings of Confucius: In Adversity* includes another passage featuring a dialogue between Confucius and Yan Hui. Confucius consistently and firmly believes in Yan Hui, trusting that his disciples have practiced benevolence for a long time and have remained steadfast even in adversity, stating, “Confucius said, ‘I am certain that Yan Hui has been practicing benevolence for a long time. Even if you say otherwise, I do not doubt him. There must be a reason. Stop now; I will ask him’” (Wang, 1990, p. 57). When facing situations, one should first ascertain the reasons, not rushing to conclusions, a principle that the disciples genuinely accept. However, in *The Annals of Lü Buwei: Shen Fen Lan: Ren Shu*, Confucius does not initially fully trust Yan Hui and instead questions him cautiously regarding an incident involving Yan Hui taking food. Confucius pretends not to have witnessed the event, “Confucius pretended not to see it” (Xu, 2018, p. 447). Only after a process of suspicion and testing does he come to trust Yan Hui, concluding that one cannot entirely rely on one’s senses and intuition. He hopes his disciples remember that “understanding people is indeed not easy” (p. 448), emphasizing that comprehending others is challenging, even for sages, aligning with the chapter’s theme of “Ren Shu”. Tao Hongqing argues that the phrase “Confucius’s” is superfluous, as it follows Confucius’s statement “understanding people is indeed not easy”, further elaborating that “understanding itself is not difficult, but understanding people is”. If the focus were solely on Confucius’s words, it would deviate from the main point of the chapter (Xu, 2018). The core message of the chapter is “Ren Shu”, emphasizing the cultivation of methods (“Ren Shu”) and noting that “relying on the senses and cleverness alone is insufficient” (Lv, 2006, p. 248).

To criticize the theory of “Chenwei” (divinatory and mystical interpretations of classical texts), Wang Chong, in his *Lun Heng: Zhi Shi*, drew upon the “repeated sayings” of Confucius in the context of “Trapped in Chen and Cai” to enhance his argument’s persuasiveness. The main thrust of his critique is to condemn falsehood and illusion, illustrating with a few concise words that even a sage like Confucius cannot possess foreknowledge: “When Yan Yuan was cooking rice and dust fell into the steamer, he was faced with a dilemma: if he left it, the rice would be unclean; if he threw it away, the rice would be wasted. So he picked it up and ate it. Confucius, seeing this from a distance, mistakenly thought Yan Yuan was stealing food. This incident demonstrates that even a sage cannot possess foreknowledge; this is the third example” (Huang, 2018, p. 1263). This portrayal of Confucius aligns with the image presented in *The Annals of Lü Buwei: Shen Fen Lan: Ren Shu*.

In Version Three, Confucius experiences adversity but ultimately survives and thrives. As recorded in *The Family sayings of Confucius: Pledge in Distress* “Between Chen and Cai, it was a fortunate experience for me, Confucius. And those of you who followed me were also fortunate.” Similarly, *The Garden of Stories: Za Yan* states, “Between Chen and Cai, it was a fortunate experience for me, Confucius. And those who accompanied me were fortunate individuals.” *The Annals of Lü Buwei: Filial Piety and Conduct: Caution in Choosing Men* also notes, “The distress between Chen and Cai was, for Confucius, a blessing in disguise!” Likewise, *General Sense of Customs: Qiong Tong* echoes, “The adversity between Chen and Cai was, for Confucius, a fortunate turn!” The intertextuality of these accounts of Confucius’ trials and tribulations, along with his survival and eventual triumph, portrays him as an inspiring figure who transcends adversity, embodying the spirit of turning danger into safety and emerging from hardship more vital.

In Version Three: *The Family sayings of Confucius: Pledge in Distress*, Confucius, amidst adversity, emerges stronger, and his image as an inspiring figure who transcends hardships is becoming more fully developed.

When Confucius and his disciples were trapped and starving between Chen and Cai for seven days, his disciples grew weary and sick. Yet Confucius continued to play the lute and sing... This delighted Zilu, who picked up a staff and danced. After three songs, he left. The next day, they were freed from their predicament. As Zigong took the reins, he said, "We, the disciples, have followed our Confucius and endured this hardship; we shall never forget it!" Confucius replied, "What is good or bad? The distress between Chen and Cai was a blessing for me, Confucius. And those of you who have followed me, you are all fortunate. I have heard that a ruler cannot become great without facing difficulties, and a virtuous person's deeds are not manifested without hardships. Who knows if this was not the beginning of inspiring anger and fortifying our resolve?" (Wang, 1990, p. 60-61).

When Confucius, "Trapped in Chen and Cai", played the lute and sang, Zilu, delighted, danced three times before departing, piercing through the darkness before dawn. The heavy atmosphere of the "Trapped in Chen and Cai" theme dissipated, giving a sense of emerging from difficulties to find a new path. The next day, they were freed from their predicament. Zilu saw the hardship as a hardship, merely something not to be forgotten. However, Confucius viewed the "hardship" as a "blessing". The opposition and unity of "adversity" and "fortune" allowed Confucius to transform the adversity into fortune within the predicament. The feeling of adversity was converted into a sense of fortune, inspiring Confucius with a passion for perseverance and self-improvement, embodying the spirit of striving ceaselessly. Here, not only did Confucius transform adversity into fortune, but Zilu and Zigong, who followed him and were also besieged between Chen and Cai, were fortunate as well. They all turned danger into safety and emerged from adversity to find new life.

In the first account of "Trapped in Chen and Cai" in *The Garden of Stories: Za Yan*, Confucius' image as an inspiring figure who transcends adversity is fully realized:

When Confucius and his disciples were stranded in the midst of Chen and Cai, they faced starvation. The disciples all wore hungry expressions, yet Confucius sang between the two pillars... Zilu, displeased, picked up a staff and danced, completing three songs before leaving... The next day, they were freed from their predicament. As Zigong took the reins, he said, "We, the disciples, have followed our Confucius and encountered this difficulty; it must not be forgotten". Confucius replied, "Oh, what words are these! Does not the saying go, 'A good doctor is made through three broken arms'? The distress between Chen and Cai was a blessing for me, Confucius. And those of you who have followed me, you are all fortunate individuals. I have heard that a ruler cannot become a king without facing difficulties, and a virtuous person cannot display their virtues without hardships. In the past, Tang was trapped in state of lv... *The Book of Changes* says, 'In adversity, there is progress; in perseverance, there is good fortune for the great man, and no blame. If there are words, they will not be believed.' It is difficult for a sage to convince others with words, but they are true" (Liu, 1987, p. 420-421).

Liu Xiang purposefully collected materials, organized and arranged them with clear themes, and constructed the texts by weaving them through various themes. The event of “Trapped in Chen and Cai” is categorized under “*In Adversity*” and “*Pledges in Distress*” in *The Family sayings of Confucius*, while in *The Garden of Stories*, it is listed under *Za Yan*. Although *Za Yan* is a compilation of various materials, it is rich in moral principles. *The Garden of Stories* explicitly quotes from *The Book of Changes*: “Adversity brings success. It is favorable for the superior man to be firm and correct; there will be no error. If one speaks, he will not be believed” (Ruan, 1980, p. 59). “Adversity brings success” (p. 59), the commentary explains: “Adversity refers to a state of extreme hardship and exhaustion, where one’s resources and strength are depleted and one cannot save oneself. Hence, it is named ‘Adversity brings success’. This hexagram represents the virtue of overcoming adversity. The inferior man, when faced with adversity, will resort to desperation, while the superior man will remain steadfast in his principles. The superior man, even in adversity, does not lose his way to self-improvement, hence it is said, ‘Adversity brings success’” (p. 59). “ ‘It is favorable for the superior man to be firm and correct; there will be no error’ ”(p. 59), the commentary explains: “One who can overcome adversity and find his own way out is surely a person of upright character and greatness. Only by overcoming adversity can one attain good fortune and avoid calamity. Hence, it is said, ‘It is favorable for the superior man to be firm and correct; there will be no error’” (p. 59). “ ‘If one speaks, he will not be believed’ ” (p. 59), the commentary explains: “To seek relief from adversity lies in cultivating one’s moral character and rectifying oneself. If one resorts to clever words and persuasive speeches but is not trusted by others, his path will become even more difficult. Therefore, sincerity is crucial, hence ‘if one speaks, he will not be believed’” (p. 59). *The Tuanzhuàn* explains: “Adversity is when the strong are restrained. In danger, one should remain cheerful and optimistic. In adversity, one should not lose his way to success. This is the way of the superior man. ‘It is favorable for the superior man to be firm and correct’ because he possesses the quality of being strong and upright. ‘If one speaks, he will not be believed’ indicates that reliance on words alone leads to exhaustion” (p. 59). *The Xiangzhuàn* explains: “When there is no water in the marsh, it is a sign of adversity. The superior man faces adversity with resignation and achieves his aspirations” (p. 59). *The Garden of Stories* uses the hexagram of “Adversity” from *The Book of Changes* to illustrate the moral principles of “Trapped in Chen and Cai”. Confucius sacrificed his own interests for righteousness, faced adversity calmly, sought self-reflection, persisted in following the right path, and sought ways to improve the situation, understanding fate and pursuing the truth. Confucius saw light in adversity, and his heart was filled with joy. He hoped that his disciples, Zilu and Zigong, could also complete the transformation from “adversity” to “good fortune”. Not only was Confucius fortunate, but Zilu and Zigong, who followed him and were trapped in Chen and Cai, were also fortunate. In adversity, Confucius affirmed his commitment to social order. The more he was rejected by the world, the more he sought to cultivate his moral principles. Confucius possessed the spirit of knowing what was impossible yet still striving for it. In adversity, Confucius inspired an image of transcendence that was perfect, embodying his spirit of self-transcendence and overcoming adversity to find new life. He understood fate and pursued the truth in his time. The spirit of Confucius is eternal and passed down through generations.

It should be noted that in *The Garden of Stories: Za Yan*, it is stated that “Zilu was displeased, grabbed a spear and danced, and left after completing the dance three times” (Liu, 1987, p. 421). Here, Zilu is described as “displeased”. However, in *The Family sayings of*

Confucius: Pledges in Distress, it is written that “Zilu was pleased, grabbed a halberd and danced, and left after completing the dance three times” (Wang, 1990, p. 61). Here, Zilu is described as “pleased”. These are respective accounts of the same event.

Kong Cong Zi: Jie Mo chapter challenges the image of Confucius portrayed by Mozi from the perspective of the Confucian family tradition, upholding Confucius’ inspiring and transcendent image. In response to Mozi’s account of Confucius’ predicament in Chen and Cai, *Kong Cong Zi: Jie Mo* refutes it as follows:

Firstly, the conditions for being in distress, as described, do not hold. “The so-called distress refers to a situation where one cannot find a place to sell or buy, where one has no grain for porridge, and where one is starving for seven days. If one can cook pork and drink wine, how can one claim to be in distress?” (Kong, 1990, p. 56). If one can buy wine and meat during adversity, how can one be considered in distress? This is not reasonable.

Secondly, it contradicts the character of Zilu, who is brave and righteous. Zilu would not take what is unjust. Why would Confucius need to ask where the wine and meat came from? Furthermore, compared to buying meat and wine, wouldn’t it be more convenient to fiercely seize meat and wine?

Meanwhile, another passage in *Kong Cong Zi: Jie Mo* addresses Mozi’s statement: “Although he was reduced to poverty in Chen and Cai, he did not consider himself to be in straitened circumstances” (p. 57). Kong Fu refutes this by saying: “If one does not cultivate virtue, it is one’s own fault. If one is unfortunately subdued by others, it is one’s fate. Cutting down trees, erasing footprints, and enduring hunger for seven days—how can this be considered straitened circumstances?” (p. 57). Kong Fu upholds the inspiring and transcendent living up to the teachings image of Confucius in the Confucian family tradition. How can one speak of distress? Zisi also maintenance the image of Confucius. In *Kong Cong Zi: Ju Wei* chapter, Zisi mentions: “Our ancestor, while enduring hardships in Chen and Cai, composed *The Spring and Autumn Annals*” (p. 23). Confucius, “Trapped in Chen and Cai”, demonstrated remarkable resilience. He overcame adversity and, in his later years, wrote books to await the rise of future kings who would living up to the teachings, thereby unifying the world.

Furthermore, *The Annals of Lü Buwei* was compiled under a specific plan with political and cultural purposes. It incorporates various philosophical schools, including Confucianism and Mohism, and provides a comprehensive and fair evaluation of Confucius. *The Annals of Lü Buwei* includes the theme of “Trapped in Chen and Cai” under the chapter titled *Filial Piety and Conduct: Caution in Choosing Men in the Filial Piety and Conduc section*. It expands on Confucius’ concept of “adversity and success” to highlight his inspiring and transcendent image. As the text states, “When the great cold comes and the frost and snow descend, it is then that we know the flourishing of the pine and cypress” (Xu, 2018, p. 339). This is followed by a vivid description of Confucius returning to his zither and playing it with vigor.

The event of “Trapped in Chen and Cai” is included in the chapter titled “Qiong Tong” (Adversity and Success) in Ying Shao’s *General Sense of Customs*. As stated, “Therefore, a virtuous person remains steadfast in adversity without being distressed, endures hardships

and humiliation without compromising, accepts fate with contentment, and harbours no complaints or resentment. Hence, this chapter records stories of twelve individuals, including Confucius, who experienced initial adversity followed by good fortune, serving as a means of moral instruction" (Wang, 1981, p. 314). The text intertextuality with *The Annals of Lü Buwei: Filial Piety and Conduct: Caution in Choosing Men* and aligns with the image of Confucius in *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, where he inspires transcendence, saying, "When the severe cold arrives, and the frost and snow descend, it is then that we know the flourishing of the pine and cypress" (Xu, 2018, p. 339). Confucius' spirit, as exemplified by his statement, "Only in the harshest winter can we truly appreciate the resilience of the pine and cypress that do not wither", stands firmly in the world.

In his later years, Confucius composed *The Book of Changes*, where the concept of "adversity" in the Changes is transformed into "good fortune". *The Miuhe* from the Mawangdui Silk Texts provides an explanation on this:

Miuhe asked Confucius, "...In the *Zhouyi* it is said, 'Adversity, but success will come; if one remains steadfast, there will be good fortune for the noble person, and no blame; yet, it is also said, Distrustful words.' May I humbly ask how the noble person attains good fortune in such a situation?" Confucius replied, "This is what the sages emphasized when they said, 'Distrustful words.' The way of heaven consists of yin and yang, short and long, darkness and light. The way of human life is no different." (Explanation by Liao, 1995, p. 3045-3046).

The Book of Changes is the source of the Five Classics (Ban, 1962). In the *Book of Changes*, it is said, "The ninth and fifth lines, the dragon flies in the sky, and it is favorable to see a great person." The commentary on "The ninth and fifth lines bring about the favorable appearance of a great person" states, 'It means that the yang energy of the ninth and fifth lines is so abundant that it reaches the sky, hence the phrase 'the dragon flies in the sky.' This natural image symbolizes that a sage possesses the virtue of a dragon, soaring and occupying the throne. His virtue is so perfect that it is admired by all creatures in the world, bringing benefits to all, thus symbolizing a great person who occupies the throne" (Ruan, 1980, p. 14). Commenting on "The dragon's virtue in the sky", it is said, "When the dragon's virtue is in the sky, the path of the great person is open. It means that if a sage possesses the virtue of a dragon and occupies the throne, the path of the great person will be smooth. For example, when King Wen was confined in Youli, the path of the great person was not open. A throne is established by virtue; it means that a throne is occupied by a person of sage virtue, who can then display his sage virtue. If someone like Confucius possesses sage virtue but does not hold a throne, his virtue cannot be manifested through the throne" (p. 14). "A great person is one whose virtue harmonizes with heaven and earth, whose brightness harmonizes with the sun and moon, whose order harmonizes with the four seasons, and whose good and bad fortune harmonize with spirits and gods. He precedes heaven, and heaven does not oppose him; he follows heaven, and conforms to its timing. Heaven does not oppose him; how much less then will people or spirits and gods oppose him?" (p. 17). "The virtue of a great person brings benefits to all under heaven, which is also a sign of great prominence" (Xiong, 1945, p. 940). "When it is favourable to see a great person, everyone becomes a great person, mutually benefiting and recognizing each other" (p. 941).

Confucius portrayed King Wen as a king of cultural virtue, but in reality, he was a “virtual king” with virtue but without a throne. He possessed a spirit of perseverance in the pursuit of establishing an ideal social order based on public interest, even though he knew it was a difficult task. The more he encountered adversity, the more he persisted in his pursuit. In *the Miuhe*, Confucius cited stories of adversity faced by King Tang, King Wen, Duke Mu of Qin, Duke Huan of Qi, Goujian, and Duke Wen of Jin, revealing a sense of openness and magnanimity amidst his determination.

Conclusion

“Trapped in Chen and Cai” can be considered one of the most important stories in Confucius’ life. The variations in the literature on this story stem from different narrations of the shared theme “Trapped in Chen and Cai” during the pre-Qin and Han dynasties, reflecting diverse accounts based on different sources and hearsay. Despite the differences in the narrations among Confucian texts, they all refer back to the three versions recorded in *The Family sayings of Confucius*. Confucius’ teachings are profound, viewing the world as one family. Despite being trapped in Chen and Cai, he persisted in his moral principles, refined his conduct, and demonstrated a transcendent spirit of turning danger into safety and overcoming adversity.

Confucian texts such as *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Family sayings of Confucius*, *The Garden of Stories*, *Xunzi*, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, *Kong Cong Zi*, *Han Shi Wai Zhuan*, *The Records of the Grand Historian*, *Lun Heng*, *General Sense of Customs*, the Guodian Chu bamboo slips *Qiongdā Yishi*, and the Mawangdui silk text *Miuhe* preserve the original materials recording this event, inheriting the spirit of Confucius. This spirit not only deeply influenced Confucius’ descendants and the seventy disciples, but also figures such as Xunzi, Sima Qian, Han Ying, Liu Xiang, Wang Chong, Ying Shao, and others. Even someone like Mozi, who tried to reject Confucius’ spirit, was entangled by it all the more.²

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² The terms “entanglement” or “enwrapping” originate from the book *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* by Jacques Derrida (1999), translated by He Yi, published by China Renmin University Press, Beijing.

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