

Introduction

In the autumn of 1993, tomb robbers operating south of Mount Ji 紀, near Jingmen 荊門 City, in the southern Chinese province of Hubei, had just broken into the head compartment of the outer coffin of a tomb in the village of Guodian 郭店, when they were disturbed and abandoned their effort. The area where the robbers were digging is well known to archaeologists as a cemetery site of an ancient capital of the southern state of Chu 楚 during the middle Warring States period (375–278 BCE) (see Figure 1.1). The attempted robbery was reported to the authorities and archaeologists from Jingmen City Museum quickly organized a salvage excavation.¹

The local environmental conditions and the burial customs of the ancient state of Chu are unusually conducive to preservation. This region of Hubei is moist, with heavy, clay-laden soil. The coffins, which included compartmentalized outer coffins made of carefully selected timbers assembled with tenon-and-mortise joints and then lacquered, were placed in deep pits and the tombs were sealed with layers of fine clay.² Thus,

1. See Sarah Allan and Crispin Williams, eds., *The Guodian Laozi: Proceedings of the International Conference, Dartmouth College, May, 1998* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2000), 23–32, 117–19; Jingmenshi Bowuguan 荊門市博物館, “Jingmen Guodian yihao Chu mu 荊門郭店一號楚墓,” *Wenwu* 1997.7: 35–53.

2. Alain Thote, “Continuities and Discontinuities: Chu Burials during the Eastern Zhou Period,” in *Exploring China's Past: New Discoveries and Studies in Archaeology and Art*, ed. Roderick Whitfield and Wang Tao (London: Saffron Books, 1999), 189–204; Alain Thote, “Burial Practices as Seen in Rulers' Tombs of the Eastern Zhou Period: Patterns and Regional Traditions,” in *Chinese Religion and Society*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2004), vol. 1, 77–82.

archaeologists frequently uncover perishable materials, such as wood, lacquer, bamboo, and silk; and they had excavated thousands of Warring States tombs in the region with many remarkable finds when they opened the Guodian tomb. Nevertheless, on this occasion, they made one of the most spectacular discoveries in the history of Chinese archaeology—philosophical texts brush-written on some eight hundred slips of bamboo.

This find has been followed by two other major discoveries of similar materials, although these, unfortunately, were not archaeologically excavated. In 1994, freshly unearthed bamboo-slip manuscripts looted from a Warring States period tomb arrived in Hong Kong, where they were sold in the local antiquities market. They were acquired for the Shanghai Museum by its late director, Ma Chengyuan 馬承源 (1927–2004). This collection includes about 1,200 bamboo slips with writing in the same type of Chu script as that found on the Guodian manuscripts. There are philosophical texts among these manuscripts, but their contents are more varied than those from Guodian Tomb One. The provenance is uncertain, but Ma surmised that they came from a tomb of similar date, probably nearby.³ Then, in the summer of 2008, approximately 2,500 more bamboo slips with writing in Warring States period script were acquired by Tsinghua University.⁴ These are mainly historical texts, including some that are similar in style to, or versions of, documents found in the *Shang shu* 尚書 (“Ancient Documents”) and a chronicle of events beginning in the Western Zhou and continuing to the middle Warring States period.

The publication of these bamboo-slip manuscripts is on-going. In 1998, transcriptions in modern characters of the Guodian manuscripts, prepared under the auspices of the Jingmen City Museum, were published under the title *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡, together with annotations and high-quality black and white photographs of the original brush-written

3. Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed., *Shanghai Bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書, (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2001), vol. 1, 1–2. See also Ma Chengyuan, “Zhushu Kongzi shi lun jianji shi de youguan ziliao (tiyao)” 竹書《孔子詩論》兼及詩的有關資料(提要), in *Xin chu jianbo yanjiu: Xin chu jianbo guoji xueshu yantaohui wenji* 新出簡帛研究: 新出簡帛國際學術研討會文集 (English title: *Proceedings of the International Conference on Recently Excavated Manuscripts, Beijing University, August 19–22*) ed. Ai Lan 艾蘭 (Sarah Allan) and Xing Wen 邢文 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2004), 1.

4. Qinghua Daxue Chutu Wenxian Yanjiu yu Baohu Zhongxin 清華大學出土文獻研究與保護中心, “Qinghua Daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian *Bao xun* shiwen 清華大學藏戰國竹簡《保訓》釋文,” *Wenwu* 2009.6: 73–75.

bamboo slips.⁵ The Shanghai Museum slips began to be published in 2001. Thus far (March 2015), nine volumes have been published under the title *Shanghai Bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書.⁶ The Shanghai Museum volumes include color enlargements of the brush-written characters, as well as black and white photographs, annotations, and transcriptions. A team of scholars, working under the direction of Li Xueqin 李學勤, is preparing the Tsinghua University slips for publication. The first five volumes of the manuscripts have already been published under the title *Qinghua Daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡.⁷ A total of twelve volumes, divided into about sixty-five manuscripts, is projected.

These manuscripts are revolutionizing our understanding of the history of early Chinese thought. Historically, discoveries of ancient manuscripts were rare events to which great significance was attached. The most famous examples are the reputed discovery of manuscripts hidden in the walls of Confucius's house, which were edited by Kong Anguo 孔安國 (died ca. 100 BCE), and those recovered from a late Warring States tomb at Jizhong 汲冢 (in present-day Henan Province) in the third century CE, the most famous of which is the *Zhu shu jinian* 竹書紀年 ("Bamboo Annals"). With the advent of modern archaeology, discoveries of ancient manuscripts are no longer so rare. Since 1973, when the first major archaeological excavation of ancient manuscripts was made from a Han Dynasty tomb at Changsha Mawangdui 長沙馬王堆 in Hunan Province, Chinese archaeologists have excavated dozens of ancient tombs that contained ancient manuscripts written on silk, bamboo or wooden slips, and wooden tablets of great importance. Nevertheless, these three groups of Warring States period bamboo-slip manuscripts written in the Chu script have a special significance because they are different from but closely related to the core texts of the Chinese philosophical and historical tradition. Some are early versions of transmitted classical

5. Jingmenshi Bowuguan 荊門市博物館, ed., *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1998). The transcriptions and notes were prepared by Peng Hao 彭浩, Liu Zuxin 劉祖信, and Wang Chuanfu 王傳富. Additional annotations by Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 are included.

6. The transcriptions and annotations in *Shanghai Bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* were prepared by a group of scholars from the Shanghai Museum and other institutions, including the main editor Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, Pu Maozuo 濮茅左, Li Chaoyuan 李朝遠, Chen Peifen 陳佩芬, Li Ling 李零, Zhang Guangyu 張光裕, and Cao Jinyan 曹錦炎.

7. Li Xueqin, ed., *Qinghua Daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡 (Shanghai: Zhong Xi, 2010-15).

Chinese texts, but most of them were previously unknown. Moreover, since they were buried before the Qin conquest, unlike transmitted texts, they were not edited in the Han Dynasty.

I argued in *The Heir and the Sage*, published in 1981, long before the discovery of these texts, that transformation of historical legend is the primary means of expressing political theory in Warring States period texts and that the role of these legends in this period is to mediate the conflicting principles of rule by heredity and rule by virtue.⁸ In light of this earlier study, the four manuscripts that I have selected for analysis in this book are ones that include discussion of the legend that the pre-dynastic ruler, Yao 堯, abdicated to Shun 舜. They include: *Tang Yú zhi dao* 唐虞之道 (“The Way of Tang [Yao] and Yú [Shun]”) from Guodian Tomb One; *Zigao* 子羔 (“Zigao”) and *Rongchengshi* 容成氏 (“Rongchengshi”) in the Shanghai Museum collection; and the *Bao xun* 保訓 (“Cherished Instruction”) in the Tsinghua University collection.⁹ These manuscripts reveal a meritocratic challenge to the idea of hereditary succession that is absent in the transmitted texts, presumably because it was no longer possible to make this type of argument after China became unified under the Qin and Han dynasties. Once this challenge is recognized, however, we can see that it served as the background to many well-known arguments concerning dynastic legitimacy and the changing celestial mandate (*tian ming* 天命).

Although these four manuscripts are all strongly meritocratic, they do not form a coherent philosophical group. Indeed, they have no obvious relationship with one another other than their interest in the legend of Yao and Shun and a shared meritocratic bent. They also take different literary forms. *Tang Yú zhi dao* takes the form of philosophical discourse. Its primary theme is that the Way of Tang Yao and Yú Shun—that is, abdication to a man of virtue—is the ideal form of political succession. Some scholars have taken the manuscript as Confucian; others as belonging to or influenced by the followers of other groups or philosophers, such as the Horizontal and Vertical Strategists (*zongheng jia* 縱橫家), Mozi 墨子, Yang Zhu 楊朱, or some combination thereof. I will not attempt to

8. Sarah Allan, *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1981).

9. For *Tang Yú zhi dao*, see *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, 39–41, 157–59. I mark the tone of the lineage name Yú 虞 here and elsewhere in this book to distinguish this name from that of Yu 禹. For *Zigao* and *Rongchengshi*, see *Shanghai Bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu*, vol. 2, 31–47, 183–89 and 91–146, 247–93. For the *Bao xun*, see *Qinghua Daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian*, vol. 1, 8–9, 55–63.

place it within any philosophical school or to match it to any known text, but I will argue that the manuscript reflects ideas that were current in the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE. Moreover, in light of this manuscript, we can see that Mencius's theory of a changing mandate of heaven, demonstrated by the movement of the people from one ruler to the next, was articulated in response to contemporary arguments, if not necessarily to this specific text, in favor of political succession by abdication to the most meritorious.

The *Zigao* consists of a series of questions that the disciple, Zigao, addresses to Confucius together with Confucius's replies. Zigao is known from the *Analects* (*Lun yu* 論語), where he appears as one of Confucius's less accomplished disciples. In the bamboo-slip manuscript, Zigao inquires about the divine birth of the ancestors of the three dynasties: Yü 禹 of the Xia, Xie 契 of the Shang, and Hou Ji 后稷 of the Zhou. Confucius, in response, tells the stories of their miraculous births. In this discussion, Confucius uses the conventional term for a ruler, *tian zi* 天子, "son-of-heaven," literally—to mean someone of divine birth as opposed to an ordinary human. He concludes by stating that all of these sons-of-heaven, had they been alive in his time, would have served the sage, Shun. This manuscript is not only radically meritocratic, but it suggests that the followers of Confucius included people with ideas that would have been considered heterodox in later times.

Rongchengshi is a long narrative with a vision of high antiquity that is entirely absent from transmitted texts. It begins with an idyllic era, before the time of Yao, in which everyone served according to their ability and the rulers all abdicated to the most worthy person, rather than passing the rule to their own sons. Yao abdicated to Shun, but he himself achieved power by attracting the loyalty of the people through lenient government. The succession of Yü's son, Qi 啓, rather than the sage Yi 益, whom Yü had chosen to be his successor, and thus the foundation of the Xia Dynasty, is described as a matter of force. In this devolutionary scheme, the evil behavior of the last rulers of the Xia and Shang dynasties, Jie 桀 and Zhòu 紂, is described in graphic detail and the dynastic founders achieve power by attracting the loyalty of the people through their cunning use of good government. This manuscript is the only known text that states that there were rulers before Yao who abdicated and its particular vision of highest antiquity as a period in which all served according to their abilities is unique. It is also the earliest historical narrative that encompasses successive historical periods. However, I will argue that it is best read in the context of Warring States period philosophical texts, that is, as political theory, rather than as a historical record.

The *Bao xun* takes the form of a *shu* 書, “document.” It has a short preface, followed by the words of a *xun* 訓, “instruction,” left by King Wen 文 of Zhou for his son, Fa 發. In this instruction, King Wen cites two historical models: Shun and the Shang ancestor, Wei 微, who had “obtained the center.” Transmitted texts frequently equate the founding of the Zhou with a breach of hereditary right when Yao gave the rule to Shun, but there are no records in the transmitted tradition that King Wen or other Zhou rulers cited the precedent of Shun to justify the overthrow of the Shang. Moreover, whereas, in other texts, King Wen cites the founding of the Shang, and the evil of their last king, to justify his overthrow, here he discusses the founder of the Shang lineage as a potential model and “obtaining the center” is taken as the means by which rule may be achieved. This, rather than a dynastic cycle, serves as the historical paradigm for obtaining rule, and the legends of Shun and Wei function in this context. The meaning of the center is unclear, but I shall argue that it refers here to the geographical and cosmological center of the world and that this concept was the origin of the later philosophical idea of the “center.”

This book has two purposes. One is philosophical—to explore the implications of these recently discovered manuscripts for understanding the development of political philosophy, especially the idea of kingship and the theory of political succession, in early China. To this end, my earlier study, *The Heir and the Sage*, will serve as a foundation for my analysis, although my concerns herein are not limited to those of that work and I have no over-arching theoretical purpose. The other is textual—to introduce readers, including those without specialist knowledge of excavated texts, to these Chu-script bamboo-slip manuscripts and the problems involved in deciphering them. Thus, I provide a close reading of each manuscript in its entirety, including translation, analysis, and explication, as well as a discussion of historical and philosophical context. Because these bamboo-slip manuscripts are closely related, but not strictly equivalent, to received texts, I also explore the possible implications of these discoveries for the early development of the literature that has been transmitted to us since the Han Dynasty.

The following chapter, “The Historical Setting,” discusses the historical background in which the legends of abdication in the predynastic period arose, most importantly the breakdown of the power of the aristocratic lineages. It also discusses the function of ancient historical materials as a means of expressing political theory in pre-Qin transmitted Chinese texts. Finally, this chapter also discusses the significance of the Qin dynasty as a watershed in Chinese textual history.

Chapter 3, "The Chu-script Bamboo-slip Manuscripts," provides a general introduction to the three groups of Chu-script bamboo-slip manuscripts, which include the four manuscripts to be discussed in the following chapters. This includes a new hypothesis concerning the circulation of early Chinese manuscripts and the influence of the physical forms of such manuscripts on the development of later literature. It also includes a review of the archaeological information about the occupant of Guodian Tomb One and of the possibility that a woman's tomb in a nearby village might be the source of the Shanghai Museum collection. Finally, it discusses the process of transcribing the manuscripts for publication and explains the apparatus to my editions of the manuscripts found at the end of each of the following chapters.

Chapters 4 through 7 are each devoted to one of the four manuscripts mentioned above. They include an English translation, explication, discussion, and a scholarly edition with the original graphs and citations to different readings at the end of the chapter. Because the manuscripts are different in both literary genre and ideological implication, the issues that they raise are somewhat different and the questions explored in each chapter are consequently somewhat diverse. Thus, in chapter 4, which focuses on *Tang Yú zhi dao*, I discuss the manner in which historical legend is used to express political philosophy in the Warring States period and explore the relationship of the argument for abdication found in this manuscript to the philosophical positions taken in related transmitted texts, as well as the historical evidence for an actual abdication in the state of Yan. In chapter 5, which focuses on the *Zigao*, I discuss the nature of early Confucianism, the historical paradigm implicit in taking the rulers of the three dynasties as descendants of women who were supernaturally impregnated, and the possible relationship between the rise of abdication legends and Confucius's personal reputation. In chapter 6, on *Rongchengshi*, I focus on its utopian vision of ideal government in high antiquity and the concept of the sage ruler as a cosmic power, who brings harmony to both the natural and human world. *Bao xun*, discussed in chapter 7, purports to be a "document" and so this chapter discusses the origin and nature of the *Shang shu* as well as the center as a political, geographic, and cosmological concept. In chapter 8, "Afterthoughts," I reflect upon the implications of these bamboo-slip manuscripts for the debates over the last century concerning history and textual authenticity, the implications of the paradigm of the cosmic centrality of the ruler, and the relationship between the rise of legends of rule by sage-kings in high antiquity and the reputation of Confucius.