

Review

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Reviews

Sarah Allan. *Buried Ideas: Legends of Abdication and Ideal Government in Early Chinese Bamboo-Slip Manuscripts*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015. 372pp. ISBN 978-1-4384-5777-2 (hardcover: US\$ 95,00); ISBN 978-1-4384-5778-9 (US\$ 29,95)

In 1981, at an early stage of her illustrious academic career, Sarah Allan published her seminal work *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China*. In that study Allan analyzed legends concerning hereditary versus non-hereditary power transfer in early China and classified these narratives according to their support or opposition to the ideas of abdication and righteous rebellion. The pioneering study was primarily based on fragments of early dynastic legends that survived in transmitted texts from the Warring States period (453–221 BCE). That these fragments represented just “a tip of the iceberg” of debates about non-hereditary succession was perceptively noticed by Angus C. Graham,¹ but without additional evidence one could not expect great advances in studies of this trope in pre-imperial texts.

This situation changed dramatically in the late 1990s with the publication of several newly unearthed texts. Three among these – *Tang Yu zhi Dao* 唐虞之道 (*The Way of Yao and Shun*) from Tomb 1, Guodian 郭店 (Hubei) and *Zigao* 子羔 and *Rongchengshi* 容成氏 from the collection of the Shanghai Museum – contain multiple references to abdication legends and to the idea of abdication in general. The three texts drew considerable attention in China and Japan, and, to a lesser extent, among Western Sinologists. Naturally, Sarah Allan was on the forefront of their exploration. Having published several articles about these texts, she had synthesized, expanded, and systematized her analyses presenting these in the new monograph, *Buried Ideas*. In addition to the three above texts, the monograph includes a chapter on the *Bao xun* 保訓 (*Cherished Instruction*) manuscript from the collection of Qinghua (Tsinghua) University. The four chapters that focus on the translation and analysis of these manuscripts form the core of Allan’s book.

The four core chapters of *Buried Ideas* are preceded by two introductory chapters focusing on the ideological and archeological setting of the unearthed manuscripts. These highly useful discussions excel not just in introducing much of the relevant archeological and paleographic information, but also in presenting Allan’s broader ideas about the nature of early

1 Angus C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle: Open Court, 1989), 293.

Chinese texts, their circulation, and the impact of the Qin biblioclasm of 213 BCE and of the Han editorial efforts on the shape of transmitted texts (see especially pp. 20–24). The reader will benefit a lot from Allan's intimate knowledge of the work involved in preparing unearthed manuscripts for publication and of difficulties faced by Chinese paleographers who have to deal both with archeologically retrieved texts and with those that had been looted from the Warring States-period tombs and subsequently acquired at the Hong Kong antiquities market. The introductory chapters of *Buried Ideas* will benefit every student involved in studies of unearthed manuscripts.

As is clear from Allan's introduction, the arrangement, decipherment, and analyzing of unearthed manuscripts is an arduous task. Individual characters are often illegible or only partly legible, and their identification is highly contested. Some slips are damaged and their fragments – or the whole slips – are missing, and the sequence of the slips often engenders further controversies. Allan should be lauded for her meticulous consultation of dozens of secondary studies conducted by Chinese and Japanese paleographers. Her work is transparent, and her textual notes explain why she chose the reconstructions she did. Most of her choices appear highly convincing, although I may disagree with her on certain issues. In what follows, I shall point out a few cases in which my disagreement with Allan's preferred interpretation has considerable consequences for the understanding of the manuscripts' content. Regarding one of the manuscripts – *The Way of Yao and Shun* – I accept Allan's reconstruction, which is superior to the one I have followed in my previous studies of this text.²

The first point in which I disagree with Allan is regarding the *Zigao* manuscript. The manuscript starts with the depiction of the miraculous births of the progenitors of the three dynasties – Yu 禹 of the Xia, Xie 契 of the Shang, and Houji 后稷 of the Zhou. The mother of each of these heroes was impregnated by a deity, supposedly by the Supreme Thearch (Shangdi 上帝). In the text the three progenitors are subsequently called “sons of Heaven,” which, as Allan convincingly shows, refers not to their position of authority (Xie and Houji were never enthroned), but to their divine birth (*Buried Ideas*, pp. 151–158). Yet the *Zigao* focuses not on the deeds of the “sons of Heaven” but on those of the “son of man,” Thearch Shun 舜, whose virtue is lauded from the second section of the manuscript onward.

The crux of my disagreement with Allan is her placement and interpretation of slip 7. Allan places this slip in the second section of the manuscript, which makes little sense. Allan frankly acknowledges: “My transcription and translation of this line are very problematic”

2 I have analyzed *The Way of Yao and Shun* and two other abdication-related manuscripts in Yuri Pines, “Disputers of Abdication: Zhanguo Egalitarianism and the Sovereign's Power,” *T'oung Pao* 91.4–5 (2005): 243–300, and “Subversion Unearthed: Criticism of Hereditary Succession in the Newly Discovered Manuscripts,” *Oriens Extremus* 45 (2005–2006): 159–178.

(p.147n28). I think the solution should be to discard Li Xueqin's rearrangement of the slips adopted by Allen and to place the disputed slip in the last section of the manuscript, as proposed by Qiu Xigui.³ Then the last exchange between Confucius's disciple, Zigao, and his Master will read as follows (slip numbers are given in curly brackets):

子羔曰：如舜在今之世則何若？孔子曰：{8}亦已先王之由道，不逢明王，則亦不大使。孔子曰：舜其可謂受命之民。舜，人子也，{7}而參天子事之。{14}

Zi Gao asked: "Were Shun in our generation, how would that be?"

Kongzi said: "As following the Way of the former kings has been discarded, he would not meet an enlightened king and hence would not be employed in a great [position]."

Kongzi said: "Shun may be described as a commoner who received the Mandate [of Heaven]. Shun was a son of man, but all three sons of Heaven served him."

Aside from placing the disputed slip in the last section, I follow different interpretations of the second and the sixth characters on this slip, reading them as *yi* 已 (abrogation) and *you* 由 (following) rather than as *ji* 紀 (records) and *you* 游 in the meaning of *you* 攸 (distant) as accepted by Allan (p. 173). The advantages of this reading and arrangement proposed by Qiu Xigui are clear. Confucius ends the discussion of Shun's merits with two powerful statements. First, he asserts that under the current, regrettable circumstances a worthy minister such as Shun would fail even to find a proper employer, not to speak of a ruler who would abdicate in his favor. This dismal state of affairs is contrasted with what should be the norm, which is buttressed in Confucius' final statement. There, the Master reasserts the superiority of the "son of man," Shun, over the three divine offspring, Yu, Xie, and Houji, each of whom reportedly served under Shun.⁴ The implications are clear: pedigree should be secondary to merit in determining one's position. The arrangement suggested here results in an incomparably more fitting finale than in that proposed in *Buried Ideas*.

A second instance in which I disagree with Allan concerns parts of the *Rongchengshi*. The text narrates the legendary and semi-legendary history of the Chinese realm from the age of primeval thearchs, through the more famous trio of Yao 堯, Shun, and Yu, and into the beginnings of the Shang and Zhou dynasties. The major problem with the text is the place-

3 Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, "Tan tan Shangbo jian Zigao pian de jian xu" 談談上博簡《子羔》篇的簡序, in *Shangbo guan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu yanjiu xubian* 上博館藏戰國楚竹書研究續編, ed. Shanghai daxue gudai wenming yanjiu zhongxin 上海大學古代文明研究中心 and Qinghua daxue sixiang wenhua yanjiu suo 清華大學思想文化研究所 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2004), 1–11

4 Yu, Xie, and Houji were all reportedly employed either during Yao's reign (when Shun acted as a chief minister), or directly under Shun.

ment of several damaged slips. Any rearrangement may alter the content of the narrative considerably. For instance, the original placement of slips 36–37 conforms to the traditional view of the last Xia ruler, Jie 桀 as a highly negative personage, whose malfunctioning is contrasted with the virtue of the man who replaced him, King Tang 湯 of the Shang. An alternative arrangement would place these slips after slip 41, implying that the rule of Tang started with multiple negative phenomena, which were mended only after Tang employed the worthy minister Yi Yin 伊尹. Both arrangements (the first of which is adopted by Allan, the second by myself) are plausible from a paleographic point of view, yet each of them bring about a radical revision of the text's message.⁵

Given this highly contestable nature of parts of the *Rongchengshi* narrative, we should be doubly cautious about some of our choices and interpretations. Normally Allan avoids speculative hypotheses, except for one case: the identification of a thearch who preceded Yao. The badly damaged slips in this section of the text bewilder researchers. Allan adopts the solution put forward by Guo Yongbin, who proposed a series of rearrangements and reinterpretations of a few barely legible characters, identifying the pre-Yao thearch as Youyu Tong 有虞迥 (or Tong 通).⁶ This is a very bold solution, but in my eyes it is based on too many problematic conjectures to be plausible. The very fact that not a single transmitted or unearthed text hints at the existence of such a personage annuls in my eyes the plausibility of Guo's interpretation. I think the readers of *Buried Ideas* should have been reminded of the weakness of Guo's interpretation or at least of its highly hypothetical nature. Without these strong reservations in mind, the translation of the relevant section of the *Rongchengshi* is potentially misleading.

My final note of caution is related to Allan's treatment of the *Cherished Instruction* manuscript from the Qinghua collection. This short manuscript presents the instructions allegedly bequeathed by the ailing Zhou founder, King Wen, to his heir, King Wu. The most interesting part of this short manuscript is two historical narratives, one about Thearch Shun, and another about the progenitor of the Shang royal lineage, Shangjia Wei 上甲微. Both are said to have succeeded at attaining "a center" (*zhong* 中), which was crucial for their (or their descendants') success. Yet the nature of this "center" is unclear. In the case of Shun the manuscript just states that he "reverently sought the center" 恭求中, which permits a reading of the "center" as a philosophical concept of equilibrium, akin to that found in *Centrality and Commonality* (*Zhongyong* 中庸). In distinction, Wei is said to have "borrowed the center

5 For my treatment of the *Rongchengshi*, see Pines, "Political Mythology and Dynastic Legitimacy in the *Rong Cheng shi* manuscript," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and Asian Studies*, 73.3 (2010), 503–529.

6 Guo Yongbing 郭永秉, *Di xi xin yan: Chu di chutu Zhanguo wenxian zhong de chuanshuo shidai gu diwang xitong yanjiu* 帝係新研：楚地出土戰國文獻中的傳說時代古帝王系統研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 2008), 43–79.

from the [Yellow] River” 假中于河, and later “returned it to the River” 歸中于河. Clearly, “the center” mentioned here cannot be an abstract philosophical object, but must be something more material. What is it?

In discussing various possible interpretations of “the center”, Allan opts for an innovative solution, identifying “the center” as the geographic center of the Zhou realm, near Mt. Song 嵩山 in modern day Henan. This is an interesting hypothesis, but its weakness is also apparent. First, evidence from neither transmitted nor received texts supports the idea of Mt. Song’s centrality in the political or philosophical discourse of the Warring States (or earlier) periods. Second, should the state of Chu have been committed to the conquest of the Mt. Song area, as Allan implies (pp. 299–303), this would be observable in its military policies during the Warring States Period, which is, however, not the case. And finally, how could Mt. Song be “borrowed” from and “returned” to the River? These questions remain unanswered.

Yet at this point it should be mentioned here that nobody else has, to my knowledge, come up with a more convincing solution to the riddle of the *Cherished Instruction* manuscript to date. Frustratingly, many of the unearthed manuscripts leave a number of questions unanswerable, at least at the current stage of our knowledge. My quibbles aside, Allan deserves the utmost praise for systematically introducing some of the most interesting unearthed texts to a broad scholarly and student audience. That her efforts encourage a continuing discussion of the contents of these texts is one of the most welcome outcomes of this publication.

Yuri Pines

Rong Xinjiang, trans. by Imre Galambos. *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*. Brill’s Humanities Library, 5. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013. 576 pages. ISBN 978-90-04-25042-0 (€ 180,00 / US\$ 233,00)

Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang is the English translation of Rong Xinjiang’s 榮新江 Chinese book *Dunhuang xue shiba jiang* 敦煌學十八講 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001). Rong Xinjiang is a professor at the Department of History and the Director of the Center for the Study of Ancient Chinese History at Beijing University. Since the late 1970s, he has been involved in Dunhuang studies, searching for Dunhuang materials around the world. He has been teaching on this subject for many years and his book was created by amending and improving his lectures, producing a kind of distillation of his long academic experience.

Rong’s book provides an accessible overview of Dunhuang studies, an academic field that emerged following the discovery of a medieval monastic library at the Mogao caves near Dunhuang. The manuscripts were hidden in a cave at the beginning of the 11th century and remained unnoticed until 1900 when a Daoist monk accidentally found them. The availabil-