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# *Book Review*

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Yang Bo 楊博, *Zhanguo Chu zhushu shixue jiazhi tanyan* 戰國楚竹書史學價值探研 (*Studies on the Historiographic Value of the Warring States Period Bamboo Manuscripts from Chu*) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2019), 544 pp.

The paleographic revolution that started in China in the 1970s was initially disappointing for scholars of early Chinese historiography. Whereas a few texts, such as **Chunqiu shiyu* 春秋事語 (Affairs and speeches from the Springs-and-Autumns period)[1] from Tomb No. 3, Mawangdui 馬王堆, *Rong Cheng shi* 容成氏 from the Shanghai Museum collection, or manifold historical anecdotes could merit inclusion under the broadly understood category of "historical texts," in reality they stood at the nexus of history and political philosophy (or, in the case of **Chunqiu shiyu*, perhaps history and religion),[2] and were not very informative regarding the questions of "who, what, when, and where." This situation has changed dramatically in the past decade. The Tsinghua (Qinghua) University collection of looted Chu manuscripts yielded two historical texts – **Chu ju* 楚居 (Chu residences) and **Xinian* 繫年 (String of years, or Linked years). Another historical text from Chu was announced as part of another collection of looted manuscripts, this time in the possession of Anhui University. Yet another Chu historical or quasi-historical manuscript was unearthed in 2019 from the Longhui River 龍會河 cemetery.[3] These discoveries

1 Following the *Bamboo & Silk* convention, I mark with an asterisk titles of unearthed manuscripts given by modern editors.

2 For the interpretation of **Chunqiu shiyu* as a "guide to the netherworld," see Yuri Pines, "History as a Guide to the Netherworld: Rethinking the *Chunqiu shiyu*," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 31 (2003), 101–26.

3 For an introduction to the former, see Huang Dekuan 黃德寬, "Anhui daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian gaishu" 安徽大學藏戰國竹簡概述, *Wenwu* 2017.9, 54–59; for the latter, see Li Huibo 李慧博 and Wu Yaxiong 吳亞雄, "Hubei Jingzhou faxian zhengui Xi Han jiandu he Zhanguo Chu jian ji ju xueshu jiazhi" 湖北荆州發現珍貴西漢簡牘和戰國楚簡极具学術价值 (2019), at: http://culture.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2019/0507/c1013-31071897.html, and Ke Yaqin 柯亞琴, "Longhui He Beian di 324 hao mudi chutu Chujian yanjiu gongzuo



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thrilled researchers. Whereas the two latter texts still await publication, those that have been published already promise to have a no less lasting impact on our understanding of early Chinese historiography than the *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年) manuscript, which was looted from the tomb of King Xiang of Wei 魏襄王 (r. 318–296 BCE) around 280 CE.[4]

Encouraged by the newly available materials, more and more students and scholars have returned to early Chinese historiography. Of the recently published monographs, *Studies on the Historiographic Value of the Warring States-period Bamboo Manuscripts from Chu*, by Yang Bo, is by far the longest. The book is based on Yang's doctoral dissertation (completed in Peking University, 2015), and exemplifies all the strengths and weaknesses of a dissertation-based monograph. The strengths are the very broad range of materials covered, solid discussion of the evidence, and impressive utilization of secondary studies in Chinese (the bibliography comprises no fewer than one hundred pages!). The disadvantages will be discussed below; here, suffice it to say that the scope of the study is much above what should have been a reasonable dissertation workload. To succeed in his endeavor, Yang Bo had to master first the very difficult topic of early Chinese historiography as reflected in transmitted texts (a topic which is nowadays not studied intensively in China – be it on the mainland, in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Macao). Second, insofar as Yang Bo adopted a very inclusive definition of what "historical" texts are, he had to master dozens of manuscripts unearthed in recent decades. Each of these tasks alone may be too large to recommend it for a PhD dissertation. When a young scholar tries to do both simultaneously, flaws are inevitable.

Yang Bo's study comprises four chapters. The first introduces a great variety of unearthed manuscripts from the pre-imperial state of Chu 楚, which deal, even if only marginally, with historical topics. These comprise the vast majority of literary, philosophical, and historical texts unearthed in recent decades (well over one hundred titles!). The second chapter deals with the evolution of pre-Qin historiography as reflected in the newly unearthed texts; here the focus is narrower and much of the discussion revolves around **Xinian*, in addition to several anecdotes and a short text from the Tsinghua University collection, named **Liang chen* 良臣 (Good ministers). The third and

qude xin jinzhan" 龍會河北岸第 324 號墓地出土楚簡研究工作取得新進展 (2019), at: http://news.jznews.com.cn/system/2019/12/06/011976783.shtml (both accessed July 9, 2020).

4 For the *Bamboo Annals* and the history of their discovery and reconstruction, see the indispensable Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 131–256; cf. Cheng Pingshan 程平山, *Zhushu jinian yu chutu wenxian yanjiu zhi yi: Zhushu jinian kao* 竹書紀年與出土文獻研究之一：竹書紀年考 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2013); David S. Nivison, *The Riddle of the Bamboo Annals* (Taipei: Airiti, 2009).

fourth chapters summarize new historical data presented in the unearthed manuscripts: Chapter Three covers the age from legendary heroes of antiquity down to the end of the Western Zhou 西周 period (ca. 1046–771 BCE), whereas Chapter Four focuses on the novel data about the history of the Springs-and-Autumns (Chunqiu 春秋, 770–453 BCE) and the Warring States (Zhanguo 戰國, 453–221 BCE) periods. The four chapters are followed by two appendixes (pp. 388–440) that summarize the data preserved in **Xinian* for each of the states covered in that text as well as parallels between **Xinian* and transmitted texts.

There are many laudable aspects in Yang Bo's opus magnum. His solid introductory discussion, accompanied by manifold tables, extensive footnotes, and the keen attempt to cover systematically a great number of texts will make the book a welcome addition for newcomers to the field. Many of the author's analyses are insightful and offer new angles of discussion of the unearthed texts. This said, overall the book is disappointing. It suffers from methodological naivety, simplification of complex historiographic issues, and inadequate usage of non-Chinese language secondary sources. In what follows I shall demonstrate some of these weaknesses in a hope that this review will benefit not just the author but other scholars interested in the recently unearthed historiographic texts.

## 1 Unearthed Manuscripts and Historiographic Genres

Yang Bo dedicates much of the first chapter to the classification of unearthed historical and quasi-historical texts according to their genres. This classification is indeed necessary given the large number of texts discussed. Rather than utilizing earlier classifications, such as that of Li Ling 李零 (which was designed prior to the discovery of the Tsinghua University corpus of bamboo manuscripts),[5] Yang proposes his own set of categories which are based on those put forward in transmitted texts from the Warring States period to the Han 漢 era (206/202 BCE–220 CE). In particular, he favors a speech from the *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu* 國語), attributed to the Chu statesman Shen Shushi 申叔時 (fl. 600–575 BCE), who outlined nine types of arts and texts essential for educating the crown prince.[6] This classification could be

5 Li Ling 李零, *Jianbo gushu yu xueshu yuanliu* 簡帛古書與學術源流 (Beijing: Sanlian, 2008 Rev. ed.).

6 These are *Springs-and-Autumns Annals* (*chunqiu* 春秋), *Generations* (or "genealogies," *shi* 世), *Poems* (*Shi* 詩), ritual, music, ordinances (*ling* 令), *Discourses* (*yu* 語), *Ancient Records* (*gu*

heuristically convenient should it be used just as a tool for introducing manifold texts. The problem is that Yang Bo is so eager to validate his classification that he turns it into a Procrustean bed into which each of the discussed manuscripts must somehow fit. The result is counterproductive. The designations of various genres in Shen Shushi's speech and elsewhere were intrinsically vague and could be applied to a great variety of dissimilar texts. Besides, some of the newly discovered manuscripts differ so much from previously known transmitted or unearthed texts that forcing earlier classifications on them becomes fairly misleading.

Take for instance Yang's discussion of **Xinian* (pp. 66–73). This text differs markedly from any of the previously known Zhou historical works. It is neither strictly chronological, as are the canonical *Springs and Autumns Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) and its commentaries, nor does it belong to an anecdotal genre (of which see below). Rather it curiously resembles the "topical arrangement" (*jishi benmo* 紀事本末) genre, which started to flourish only after the twelfth century CE.[7] How to classify **Xinian* became a source of intensive discussion among Chinese scholars (duly summarized by Yang Bo on p. 67). To find an appropriate category, Yang searches for parallels among previously known texts. This closest parallel in his eyes is the text *Subtleties of Mr. Duo* 鐸氏微, which, according to Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–90 BCE) testimony was composed by a tutor to a Chu king ca. 339 BCE, extracting stories from *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 that elucidate the reasons "for success and failure" 成敗.[8] Whereas Yang is careful to avoid direct identification of **Xinian* and *Subtleties of Mr. Duo*, as was proposed by a few colleagues (p. 67 n.3), he insists that the reason for the two texts' composition was similar, namely the exposition of the reasons for successes and failures of past political entities.

The problems with this kind of reasoning are twofold. First, comparing **Xinian* to a text that ceased circulation long ago and of which we know nothing beyond a few phrases by Sima Qian and Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE) is not very helpful. Second and more notable, **Xinian* is by no means a cautionary tale about the reasons for success and failure of states and aristocratic lineages. Actually, most **Xinian* sections (with the notable exception of section 1, which narrates the rise and crisis of Western Zhou) have a different focus: they

*zhi* 故志), and *Instructive Scriptures* (*xundian* 訓典). See Xu Yuangao 徐元誥 ann., Wang Shumin 王樹民 and Shen Changyun 沈長雲 eds., *Guoyu jijie* 國語集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2002), 17.1: 485–486 ("Chu yu shang" 楚語上). This list is often utilized in Chinese studies aimed to classify unearthed texts.

7 The earliest *jishi benmo* compilation was that of the Song historian Yuan Shu 袁樞 (1130–1205 CE), who prepared a topically arranged version of *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒.

8 See *Shi ji* 14: 510.

analyze shifts in the strategic situation of the state of Chu vis-à-vis its major rivals and allies, most notably Jin 晉. The text—as I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere – is more akin to a brief résumé of major geopolitical changes in the past, probably composed as auxiliary material for Chu diplomats, who had to possess a working knowledge of alliances and wars that shaped the interstate dynamics of the Zhou world.[9] All other issues common in Zhou historiography – stories of wise advisors and inept rulers, of plotting ministers and valiant generals, of malicious concubines and righteous spouses – are mentioned, if at all, only as background material. Being preoccupied with non-existent parallels between **Xinian* and *Subtleties of Mr. Duo*, Yang Bo has missed an excellent chance to evaluate the peculiarity of **Xinian* and its differences with other known texts.

A similar problem can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to Yang Bo's discussion of **Chu ju*, which he identifies as belonging to the "genealogies" (*shi* 世) genre. This is a highly misleading identification. Whereas it is true that **Chu ju* lists most if not all of Chu rulers from the semi-legendary progenitor of the Chu royal lineage Jilian 季連 down to King Dao 楚悼王 (r. ca. 400–381 BCE), as would be fitting for a genealogy-related text, the text's focus is clearly elsewhere. Such essential information for a genealogical text as the length of reign periods for each king and the kinship ties between the king and his heir is withheld. Instead, the focus of the text is on one type of information only, viz. the dwellings used by each of the Chu rulers throughout their reign. The reasons for this focus – which is partly paralleled only in a brief Qin text attached to the "Basic Annals of the First Emperor of Qin" 秦始皇本紀 in Sima Qian's *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記)[10] – are unclear. My own guess is that dwellings of formal rulers possessed a certain ritual or cultic importance that needed to be clarified to Chu officials (especially if the official was a newcomer to the state).[11] Whether or not my speculation is correct is of little importance here.

9 See Yuri Pines, "Zhou History and Historiography: Introducing the Bamboo *Xinian*," *T'oung Pao* 100.4–5 (2014), 287–324; for a similar view, see also Huang Ziyong 黃梓勇, "Lun Qinghua jian *Xinian* de xingzhi" 論清華簡《繫年》的性質, *Qinghua jian yanjiu* 清華簡研究 2 (2015), 248–249. Neither of these studies was consulted by Yang Bo.

10 *Shi ji* 6: 285–290. This parallel was noted in one of the best studies of *Chu ju*, that by Shou Bin 守彬, "Cong Qinghua jian *Chu ju* tan 'x Ying'" 從清華簡《楚居》談"×郢", *Chu wenhua yanjiu lunji* 楚文化研究論集 10 (2011), 94–100. Neither Shou's study nor the parallel study by Taniguchi Mitsuru 谷口滿, Chen Wei 陳偉 trans., "Shi lun Qinghua jian *Chu ju* duiyu Chuguo lishi dili yanjiu de yingxiang" 試論清華簡《楚居》對於楚國歷史地理研究的影響, *Chu wenhua yanjiu lunji* 楚文化研究論集 10 (2011), 23–30, was consulted by Yang Bo.

11 Yuri Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed: The Bamboo Manuscript Xinian and Early Chinese Historiography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 69–73. That *Chu ju* could

What matters is that by absorbing **Chu ju* into a genealogical genre, Yang Bo has missed an excellent opportunity to deal with this text on its own terms. Such examples can be multiplied.[12]

## 2 Unearthed and Transmitted Texts: Dealing with Hidden Tensions

The discovery of a broad array of historical and quasi-historical texts from the early Warring States period state of Chu has a potential to revolutionize our understanding of early Chinese historiography.[13] To fully realize this potential one should juxtapose the unearthed manuscripts with relevant transmitted texts. A systematic comparison between the accounts of the past in both types of texts can bring about many new insights concerning the reliability of each of the texts involved, their audience, their circulation, and their mode of production. Yang Bo addresses some of these topics in chapters 2–4 of his study, and provides a number of astute observations. On many points, though, the discussion should have been deepened.

On the immediate level of factual comparison, the juxtaposition of unearthed and transmitted texts can result in four scenarios. First, unearthed texts can expand our knowledge by providing information about events not covered in the transmitted texts. Second, they can corroborate the information narrated in the transmitted texts. Third, they can provide a similar account of the past but with some minor differences in specific details. These three cases are not controversial and are readily dealt with by scholars, including Yang Bo. Yet the fourth scenario is much more challenging. What happens when an unearthed text provides information that differs dramatically from that in the transmitted counterpart(s)? Should we prefer a newly discovered manuscript – often of unclear provenance – to a text, such as *Records of the Historian*, which has served for millennia as the foundation of our knowledge of China's early history? Or should we dismiss the new information? Or just gloss over its

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have been designed to serve newcomers to the state of Chu is indicated by its explanation of the country's name "Chu" (literally "Thorn," related to the thorns used by a shaman midwife to mend the body of the Chu ancestress whose last son, Liji 麗季 was split from her side), and of the origins of Chu's peculiar custom of night sacrifice called *xi* (柰=夕).

12 For instance, Yang Bo insists that the text **Liang chen* 良臣 (Good ministers) also belongs to the genealogical genre despite the obvious oddity of this supposition; see more below in my review.

13 Since both *Xinian* and *Chu ju* end with the reign of King Dao of Chu (381 BCE), it is likely that they were composed shortly thereafter. According to the preliminary publications concerning the other Chu historical texts mentioned in note 1 above, it seems that they were composed slightly earlier, perhaps around 400 BCE.

implications on the understanding of the transmitted texts' reliability? These questions have bewildered Chinese scholars ever since the discovery of the *Bamboo Annals* over seventeen centuries ago.[14] They have become ever more acute with the spate of new discoveries.

Yang Bo laudably avoids the pitfall of a priori prioritizing the information in either transmitted or unearthed texts. He is duly cautious in evaluating the relative reliability of each type of text and pays due attention to their sources (see, e.g., p. 153). Yet this caution becomes counterproductive when it causes him to avoid discussion of what may be the revolutionary implications of the new discoveries. I shall demonstrate this with a single point: the narrative of the final years of the Western Zhou in *Records of the Historian* vis-à-vis **Xinian*.

The crisis of the Western Zhou starting with the reign of King Li 周厲王 (r. ca. 877–842 BCE) is narrated in the "Basic Annals of Zhou" 周本紀 chapter with additional information scattered in a few other chapters of *Records of the Historian*. The narrative borrows extensively from the Zhou and Zheng 鄭 sections of *Discourses of the States*, as well as some later anecdotes. Its sketchiness and inaccuracy has long been noticed, prompting many efforts to reconstruct the narrative on the basis of newly available paleographic materials.[15] Putting aside minor details, there are two substantial questions that challenge the fundamental accuracy of Sima Qian's account. First, who replaced King Li after he was ousted by the uprising of "capital dwellers" (*guo ren* 國人) in 842 BCE? And second, what happened to the Zhou dynasty after the disastrous fall of the Western Zhou in 771 BCE?

With regard to the first of these questions, Sima Qian's answer is clear: King Li was replaced by a joint regency of the Duke of Zhou 周公 and Duke of Shao 召公 (the descendants of two chief power-holders from the early years of the Zhou dynasty). These two, according to Sima Qian, reigned under the name of

14 Du Yu 杜預 (222–285), who reviewed the *Bamboo Annals* shortly after its discovery, was the first to notice that this text demonstrates the incorrectness of Sima Qian's chronology of the Wei 魏 ruling house (Du Yu 杜預 and Kong Yingda 孔穎達 ann., *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, in Ruan Yuan 阮元 ed., *Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokanji* 十三經注疏附校勘記, (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1991[1815], 60.2187–2188). Chronological discrepancies aside (for which see Yang Kuan 楊寬, *Zhanguo shi* 戰國史 [Rev. ed. Shanghai: Renmin, 1998], 14–16), the *Bamboo Annals* challenged Sima Qian's account on a variety of more substantial issues (see more below in the text). For the impact of the *Bamboo Annals* on the emerging spirit of historical criticism, see Qiu Feng 邱鋒, "*Zhushu jinian* yu Jin Tang jian de shixue" 《竹書紀年》與晉唐間的史學, *Shixue shi yanjiu* 史學史研究 1 (2013), 24–32.

15 For the most systematic attempt to revise Sima Qian's narrative, accomplished prior to the discovery of **Xinian*, see Li Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China: The Crisis and Fall of the Western Zhou 1045–771 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

"Joint Harmony" (*gonghe* 共和, 841–828 BCE). However, the discovery of the *Bamboo Annals* called this assertion into question. The earliest editors of the *Bamboo Annals* noted: "When King You [should be King Li, YP] had lost [his power], there was Gong Bo He who acted as the replacer of the Son of Heaven; it is not that two chancellors [i.e., the Duke of Zhou and the Duke of Shao, YP] were 'jointly harmonious.'"[16] Sima Qian got the story wrong. The words *gong he* 共和 do not mean "joint harmony" but rather refer to a personal name, Gong He, or, more precisely, Gong Bo He 共伯和. Putting aside the thorny question of Gong Bo He's identity,[17] the implications are clear: Sima Qian misunderstood a fundamental aspect of Western Zhou history: who wielded power after King Li's expulsion.

The contradiction between the *Bamboo Annals* and the "Basic Annals of Zhou" generated centuries of heated controversy.[18] The discovery of **Xinian* put an end to these debates. The text (in section 1) is unequivocal: after the expulsion of King Li, "Gong Bo He was established [as the king's replacer] for fourteen years" (共伯和立十又四年). Gong Bo He, who replaced the king, is a person. There is no mention of the ministerial joint regency. The similarity to the *Bamboo Annals* is unmistakable. And the fact that two unrelated unearthed texts present a uniform version of the event makes it undoubtedly the correct version. However, this understanding brings a problematic implication: how should we now read Sima Qian's story of the joint regency? One can easily conclude that Sima Qian simply invented the joint regency story on the basis of the name *gong he*, which sounds like the reign era names of his own time. Plausible as this may be, it would have negative implications for the reliability of *Records of the Historian* as a whole. This explains why many scholars adopt a somewhat equivocal stance about the implications of the **Xinian* 1 story.[19] Unfortunately, in his discussion of King Li's reign as depicted in the unearthed sources vis-à-vis Sima Qian's narrative, Yang ends with the optimistic observation that there are no discrepancies between them (p. 254). He does this by simply glossing over the problem of the *gonghe* reign. For me this avoidance of controversy is inexplicable.

A somewhat similar picture comes from Yang Bo's treatment of another challenge to Sima Qian's account: the fall of Western Zhou. The **Xinian* story (section 2) presents an entirely new picture of the Zhou downfall. According

16 幽王既亡，有共伯和者摄行天子事，非二相共和也。*Jin shu* 晉書 51: 1432.

17 Regarding this point, see the comprehensive discussion by Satō Shinya 佐藤信弥, "Rekishi hyōka to shite no Kyōhakuwa" 歴史評価としての共伯和, *Chūgoku kodaishi ronsō* 中國古代史論叢 9 (2017), 1–30.

18 Summarized in Pines, *Zhou History*, 98–99.

19 Summarized in Pines, *Zhou History*, 100.

to this story, the fall of King You 周幽王 in 771 BCE was not followed by the establishment of his erstwhile crown prince posthumously known as King Ping 平王, but by a lengthy period of turmoil, which included 21 years during which the kingship belonged to King Ping's uncle, King Hui from Xie 攜惠王, whose killing by Marquis Wen of Jin 晉文侯 (r. 780–746 or 770–736 BCE) was followed by even greater turmoil: "For nine years Zhou was without a king, and the rulers of the states and regional lords then for the first time ceased attending the Zhou court" (周亡王九年，邦君諸侯焉始不朝于周). Only in 741 BCE did Marquis Wen establish King Ping, and only three years thereafter was the capital relocated to Luoyang 洛陽, meaning that the Eastern Zhou period *sensu stricto* started in 738 BCE and not in 770 BCE. This narrative, which differs dramatically from *Records of the Historian*, has already caused much discussion, including manifold attempts to interpret **Xinian* in a way that would not directly contradict Sima Qian.[20] Yang Bo laudably rejects these skewed interpretations (pp. 259–263), but once again refrains from any discussion of the implications the **Xinian* story may have regarding the reliability of *Records of the Historian*.

Yang Bo's unwillingness to engage the problems of *Records of the Historian*'s reliability is fully understandable: many scholars feel uncomfortable facing the need to revise our attitude toward the single most influential source for China's early history. Yet recognizing inaccuracies and lacunae in Sima Qian's narrative does not mean disparaging this great historian. As any of us, Sima Qian could not go beyond his sources, and it is clear that for him these sources for the ninth-eighth centuries BCE were incomplete and at times inaccurate.[21] Acknowledging this does not amount to rejecting *Records of the Historian*'s importance for Zhou history; actually, the text's reliability on many points is corroborated rather than refuted by **Xinian* and other sources. What is needed is simply a more nuanced approach, not only toward Sima Qian's opus but also any other historical source, transmitted or unearthed. Yang Bo's study with its focus on the historiographic value of Chu manuscripts could have been an excellent place to engage this complexity. It is a pity that this chance was missed.

20 For details, see Chen Minzhen 陳民鎮 and Yuri Pines, "Where is King Ping? The History and Historiography of the Zhou Dynasty's Eastward Relocation," *Asia Major* (Third Series) 31.1 (2018), 1–27.

21 A possible, even if speculative, explanation for the dearth of sources about late Western Zhou history would be that relevant chronicles were among the Zhou "canonical documents" smuggled by the fugitive Prince Zhao 王子朝 from Zhou to Chu in 516 BCE (*Zuo zhuan*, Zhao 26.9).

## 3 "Progress" of Historiography?

Chapter Two, "Advance of the Warring States-period historiography as reflected in Chu bamboo manuscripts" is singularly important in the book; it is in this chapter that Yang Bo puts many of his observations about the nature of Chu manuscripts, their narrative peculiarities, their historical outlook, their sources, and the goals of their composition. The overarching topic of the chapter is reflected in its title: it speaks of "advance" (*fazhan* 發展) and even "progress" (*jinbu* 進步, e.g. on p. 166) of Warring States-period historiography. This progress is demonstrated, according to Yang Bo, by the richness of Chu historiography, the new narrative form of topical arrangement as represented by **Xinian*, the integration of didactic messages with discussion of historical facts, forthrightness of historical accounts (*zhi bi* 直筆), the appearance of meta-narratives not restricted to a single event or chain of events, and the like (see esp. pp. 165–167). Overall, the picture is straightforward: Warring States-period historians inherited and further developed norms and practices of their Western Zhou and Springs-and-Autumns period predecessors and laid the foundation for the further advancement of historical writing in the Han dynasty.

I believe that this straightforward narrative grossly simplifies the matter and even inadvertently conceals what may be a much more interesting phenomenon: the decline of what I have termed elsewhere "informative historiography" in the Warring States period.[22] I shall not quibble here with several regrettable inaccuracies in Yang Bo's presentation of **Xinian*; suffice it to mention that the notion of its "forthrightness" and lack of concealment is demonstrably wrong.[23] Nevertheless, rather than engaging with **Xinian* anew, I want to focus on two other examples used by Yang Bo: **Yue gong qi shi* 越公其事 (Affairs of the lord of Yue), a lengthy anecdotal text from the Tsinghua University collection discussed on pp. 123–129, and **Liang chen*, discussed on pp. 160–163. I believe that in both cases the search for "advancement" in Warring States period historiography has caused Yang Bo to misunderstand both texts and miss many interesting points about them.

22 I develop my ideas about informative versus interpretative strands in early Chinese historiography in Pines, *Zhou History*, 11–36.

23 Yang Bo is right to notice that **Xinian* does not conceal the scope of defeat of Chu armies. What escaped his attention, though, is the text's consistent concealment of domestic troubles, such as the coups that first catapulted King Ling 楚靈王 (r. 540–529 BCE) into power and then caused his fall. **Xinian*'s concealment of domestic troubles is reminiscent of the canonical *Spring and Autumn Annals* of Lu.

*Yue gong qi shi* focuses on one of the most famous episodes in the preimperial history of China: the elimination of the state of Wu 吳 by its arch-rival Yue 越 in 473 BCE. The story is outlined in *Zuo zhuan*. In 494 BCE, King Fuchai of Wu 吳王夫差 (r. 495–473 BCE) inflicted a crushing defeat on King Goujian of Yue 越王句踐 (r. 496–464 BCE), avenging therewith Yue's defeat of Wu two years earlier. Fuchai did not heed the loyal advice of his major aide Wu Zixu 伍子胥 (d. 484 BCE) to eliminate Yue. Thereafter, Wu became absorbed in expansion northward, allowing Yue to recuperate and eventually to assault Wu from behind. After a series of attacks, Yue defeated Wu in 473 BCE, Goujian refusing to spare Fuchai. This story, full of twists and turns, became one of the most celebrated pieces of didactic literature from the Warring States period on. Three versions of events are preserved in three chapters of *Discourses of the States* ("Discourse of Wu" 吳語, "Discourses of Yue A" 越語上, and "Discourses of Yue B" 越語下), and more continued to be created well into the Latter Han dynasty.[24]

*Yue gong qi shi* resembles in its size and structure the three chapters of *Discourses of the States*. Similarities and differences are duly summarized by Yang Bo. He correctly notes the manuscript's major peculiarity: its relatively detailed discussion of Goujian's policies aimed at restoring Yue's power. Yang considers this discussion proof that the manuscript's authors were adept at integrating didactic messages with historical facts (p. 128). Yang implies therewith that the narration of Goujian's policies in the *Yue gong qi shi* has a factual basis. I cannot disagree more. First, even a cursory look at Goujian's alleged policies (encouraging agriculture, attracting immigrants, imbuing the population with martial spirit, and overawing it with punishments) unmistakably shows their origin in the intellectual milieu of the Warring States period, when an agromanagerial economy and mass armies became the rule.[25] Second, I strongly doubt that any historical records from the state of Yue detailing its domestic policies ever existed or were known to any Warring States-period author (and certainly by the time of Sima Qian very few if any Yue-related

24 See Olivia Milburn, trans., *The Glory of Yue: An Annotated Translation of the* Yuejue shu (Leiden: Brill, 2010) and He Jianjun, trans., *Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue: An Annotated Translation of Wu Yue Chunqiu* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021) for the major Han treatment of the Wu-Yue history.

25 It is fascinating to read Goujian's policies as narrated in the *Yue gong qi shi* manuscript in dialogue not just with other versions of Yue's victory over Wu but with other texts, such as the *Book of Lord Shang* 商君書. See more in Yuri Pines, "Didactic Narrative and the Art of Self-Strengthening: Reading the Bamboo Manuscript *Yue gong qi shi* 越公其事," *Early China* (forthcoming).

sources survived).[26] Third, each of the multiple versions of the stories about the Wu-Yue conflict of which am aware is invariably focused on didactic or entertaining qualities and not on "historical facts" as such.

**Yue gong qi shi* belongs to the broad genre of quasi-historical works which Yang Bo identifies as "discourses" (*yu* 語), whereas David Schaberg names "anecdotes."[27] That discourses or anecdotes were mostly rooted in history is undeniable; surely none would present Wu as defeating Yue rather than vice versa. But the concern of the composers of the anecdotes was not who did what, when, and where, but rather why they did so. What are the reasons for failure and success? Which lessons should be gleaned from the past events? And how could these lessons be used to serve one's own ideological stance? The story of Wu and Yue presented an excellent chance to create numerous fanciful tales of prudence and folly, loyalty and treachery, remonstrance and self-defeating hubris, model ministers and skillful diplomats. Perhaps the absence of detailed historical texts from either Wu or Yue turned these states into an ideal experimental lab for historical imagination. Within the basic framework of their conflict, any details fitting an author's ideological agenda could be added. In contrast, the histories of Jin, Chu, or Qin 秦 were too well known and full of "inconvenient details"[28] rendering them less appropriate for didactic stories.

Yang Bo is fully aware of the didacticism of most of the texts he analyzes. What he seems to ignore, though, is that in many texts this didacticism

26 Neither Sima Qian nor authors of other accounts about Yue history possessed any knowledge of post-Goujian rulers of Yue (see a brief summary in Milburn, *The Glory of Yue*, 4–23). Only thanks to accounts from the *Bamboo Annals* incorporated into the *Suoyin* 索引 glosses on *Records of the Historian*, and now **Xinian* can some details of post-Goujian Yue history be tentatively reconstructed (Chen Minzhen 陳民鎮, "Qinghua jian *Xinian* suo jian 'Shandong shiqi' Yue guo de junshi yu waijiao" 清華簡《繫年》所見"山東時期"越國的軍事與外交, in *Qinghua jian yu Rujia jingdian: guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 清華簡與儒家經典國際學術研討會論文集, ed. Jiang Linchang 江林昌 and Sun Jin 孫進 [Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2017], 205–213; Pines, *Zhou History*, 113–116). I doubt that Yue court scribes composed local history at all, and if they did, these histories perished early in the Warring States period. The same understanding is applicable *mutatis mutandis* to Yue's victim, the state of Wu.

27 For an excellent introduction to the anecdote genre, see David Schaberg, "Chinese History and Philosophy," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 1: *Beginnings to AD 600*, ed. Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 394–414. See more in Paul van Els and Sarah Queen, eds., *Between Philosophy and History: Rhetorical Uses of Anecdotes in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017).

28 I borrow the term "inconvenient details" from Wai-yee Li, "Inconvenient and Unnecessary Details in *Zuozhuan*," in *Early Chinese Historiography: Zuozhuan in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Yuri Pines, Martin Kern, and Nino Luraghi (forthcoming).

outweighs any concern with historical reliability. Contrarily to his narrative of the "progress" or "advance" of history writing, what happened in the Warring States period was the disappearance of informative histories and a brazen lack of interest in stories' factual background. Blatant anachronisms, the invention of personalities from the remote or not so remote past, the invention of reforms that allegedly propelled the state of Yue under Goujian, or, earlier, the state of Qi 齊 run by Guan Zhong 管仲 (d. 645 BCE) to their glory – all these are inseparable features of the age when history became primarily a tool of political debate.[29] Perhaps nothing demonstrates better this neglect of historical accuracy than the text **Liang chen*, which is discussed by Yang Bo as one of the examples of the "advance" in history writing.

Yang Bo considers **Liang chen* as belonging to the genealogical genre (p. 50). In my eyes this is fundamentally wrong. This short text, which lists famous rulers and their model ministers from the Yellow Thearch 黃帝, Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 down to Lord Ai of Lu 魯哀公 (r. 494–468 BCE), provides neither a narrative nor even a short explanation of the reasons for its choice of the characters. I concur with Han Yujiao 韓宇嬌 that this text was in all likelihood used as training material for travelling persuaders who required a brief and easily memorized list of model ministers of the past.[30] What makes this dull text interesting is its inconceivable number of historical mistakes. The text at times conflates two personalities into one, and at times misunderstands early naming patterns and treats the same person as if it were two or even three individuals. Two blatant examples are that a Lord Shi 君奭 and the Duke of Shao 召公 are both listed among the model ministers of King Wu of Zhou 周武王 (d. ca. 1042 BCE) even though they were actually the same person, while Hu Yan 狐偃, the famous minister of Lord Wen of Jin 晉文公 (r. 636–628), is enumerated as both Zifan 子犯 and also Jiufan 咎犯.[31] There are more instances of similar inaccuracies,[32] but even these two examples show that the **Liang*

29 I discuss this loss of interest in historical accuracy in the Warring States period in Pines, *Zhou History*, 34–36 and 88–94. For appeals to history in Warring States-period ideological debates, see Paul R. Goldin, "Appeals to History in Early Chinese Philosophy and Rhetoric," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35.1 (2008), 79–96. For the fallacy of "Guan Zhong's reforms," see Sydney Rosen, "In Search of the Historical Kuan Chung," *Journal of Asian Studies* 35.3 (1976): 431–440.

30 Han Yujiao 韓宇嬌, "Qinghua jian *Liang chen* de xingzhi yu shidai bianxi" 清華簡《良臣》的性質與時代辨析, *Zhongguo gaoxiao shehui kexue* 中國高校社會科學 3 (2013), 90–93. Han provides traces of similar lists in received texts (pp. 91–92).

31 Jiu 咎 in Jiufan stands for *jiu* 舅 ("maternal uncle"). Hu Yan was a maternal uncle of Lord Wen of Jin.

32 See Kuroda Hidenori 黑田秀教, "Seika kan *Ryōshin* hatsu tan" 清華簡『良臣』初探, *Chūgoku kenkyū shūkan* 中國研究集刊 56 (2013), 83–105, and Pines, *Zhou History*, 90–91.

*chen* authors were either ignorant of many aspects of both remote and recent history or indifferent toward factual accuracy. That Yang Bo has opted to gloss over these blatant mistakes and treat **Liang chen* as a fine product of Warring States-period historiography is inexplicable to me.

Needless to say, my interpretation of Warring States period historiography as witnessing a decline rather than advance may be wrong; possibly future discoveries will cause me to rethink my arguments. Yang Bo's analysis of new departures in the Warring States period historical writing surely deserves attention and I have personally benefitted from his ideas. Yet it is pity that in his eagerness to demonstrate "advance" and "progress," Yang Bo has not considered evidence contradicting his presumptions. Had he addressed the proliferation of imagined history in texts such as **Yue gong qi shi* and blatantly inaccurate history in texts such as **Liang chen*, his discussion would have become much more nuanced and engaging.

## 4 The Problem of Monolingual Research

My final comments on Yang Bo's work will be almost purely negative: these concern his inadequate usage of non-Chinese secondary studies. Although his lengthy list of references contains a few publications in English and Japanese, I failed to distinguish their impact in the body of Yang's discussion or in the footnotes. This neglect becomes doubly inexcusable in a study that deals with historiography – one of the topics on which Chinese scholars can benefit immensely from non-Chinese research.

The field of early Chinese historiography has witnessed a curious change in terms of the dominant loci of research. A quarter of a century ago, when I was working on my PhD dissertation that dealt with *Zuo zhuan,* I was amazed by the qualitative and quantitative gap of knowledge about this text in Sino-Japanese research on the one hand and Western research on the other. At that time, only a few articles in European languages addressed *Zuo zhuan*'s complexity, its dates of composition, textual history, its sources, and the like. In distinction, in China and Japan these issues were discussed repeatedly in monographs and lengthy articles. Recently, however, things have changed. In China, the proliferation of the idea of "Leaving the 'Doubting Antiquity' age" (走出疑古時代) has caused – perhaps inadvertently – cessation of the once fierce debates about the nature, dating, and reliability of early historical texts. In the West, on the other hand, studies have moved in a different direction. Just in terms of *Zuo zhuan*, the twenty-first century has already yielded three monographs

(by David Schaberg, Li Wai-yee, and myself) and an extensive translation cum study of the text by Stephen Durrant, Li, and Schaberg.[33] To these one should add studies by half a dozen of Anglophone scholars who have addressed historiographic issues in both transmitted and unearthed texts. These studies would have benefitted Yang Bo immensely. The same is true for Japanese publications concerning many of the unearthed materials discussed in his monograph.[34] If Yang Bo had engaged these studies – even just to refute or criticize them – his research could have avoided some of the pitfalls outlined above.

In a recent article, Martin Kern lamented the monolingual quality of many studies in China (both mainland and Taiwan).[35] I want to join his voice. This situation is no longer excusable. True, for the generation of our teachers in China, mastering foreign languages was extremely challenging, as was getting access to relevant publications by Western and Japanese scholars. Nowadays all of this has changed. Many Western scholars visit China regularly, and many Chinese students and young scholars have the opportunity to enroll for a semester or two in a foreign university of their choice. Most relevant publications in English and Japanese are easily accessible in China despite the Great Firewall. What is more, the language barrier is no longer as high as it was decades ago. For Yang Bo at least, it is clear from his references that he knows English and Japanese well enough to read secondary studies. That he has opted to ignore most foreign publications may be just due to following the routines of the past. But the results are disappointing.

As most colleagues know, no Sinological dissertation can be produced in a good Western university or even an article published in a leading journal if it ignores secondary studies in a major Sinological language (at the very least,

33 David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001); Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722–453 B.C.E.* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002); Li Wai-yee, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007); Stephen Durrant, Li Wai-yee, and David Schaberg, trans., *Zuo Tradition / Zuozhuan Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals"* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016). Schaberg's and Li's monographs are mentioned in Yang's reference list but I discern no impact on his research.

34 Again, some of these studies (e.g., Yoshimoto Michimasa 吉本道雅, "Seika kan keinen kō" 清華簡繫年考, *Kyōto daigaku bungakubu kenkyū kiyō* 京都大學文學部研究紀要 52 (2013), 1–94) are listed in Yang's reference list but do not seem to have influenced his research.

35 Ke Mading 柯馬丁 (Martin Kern), "Chaoyue bentuzhuyi: zaoqi Zhongguo yanjiu de fangfa yu lunli" 超越本土主義：早期中國研究的方法與倫理, *Xueshu yuekan* 學術月刊 49.12 (2017), 112–121.

Chinese, English, and Japanese). Perhaps it is time to apply similar criteria in China as well. To be sure, there are subfields in which monolingual research is possible, but even these subfields are rapidly disappearing. We need mutual engagement, reading each other's studies and criticizing – if need be – what deserves criticism even if it was not published in our mother tongue. I hope that Yang accepts my critical comments not as an assault on his research – many points of which I deeply respect – but as an invitation to engage other studies and engage in cross-fertilization with colleagues who publish in other languages. The result would benefit all of us and our field in general.

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