

Political mythology and dynastic legitimacy in the *Rong Cheng shi* manuscript*

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Abstract

In this article I provide a complete translation and analysis of the recently unearthed bamboo manuscript, *Rong Cheng shi*, from the Shanghai Museum collection. This manuscript presents a previously unknown version of China's early history from the time of legendary rulers Yao, Shun, Yu and their predecessors to the establishment of the Zhou dynasty. The narrative is critical of both the dynastic principle of rule and "righteous rebellion", and advocates instead the ruler's abdication in favour of a worthier candidate as the best mode of rule; in addition, it hints at the unusually active role of "the people" in establishing the supreme ruler. Moreover, despite being associated with the southern state of Chu, the *Rong Cheng shi* presents a unitary view of the past, which rejects the multi-state world and promulgates the notion of the unified "All-under-Heaven" as singularly legitimate. The text has far-reaching significance in terms of both history of Chinese political thought and of early Chinese historiography.

The large number of recent discoveries of early manuscripts dating from the Warring States period (Zhanguo 戰國, 453–221 BCE)¹ and early imperial times has become the single most exciting development in the study of early Chinese history. These findings necessitate a reconsideration of manifold aspects of the political, administrative, legal and religious history of the "Chinese" world; and their impact is increasingly palpable even in the relatively conservative field of early Chinese intellectual history. The rediscovered manuscripts shed new light on the ideological dynamics of that period, highlight previously unobserved strands of thought and require a reassessment of popular assumptions about this formative age of the Chinese intellectual tradition. Scholars who continue to focus exclusively on the transmitted texts and reduce newly available sources to a mere footnote do so at their peril.

Among the recently published ideologically important Warring States manuscripts, the *Rong Cheng shi* 容成氏 from the Shanghai Museum collection appears to be one of the most interesting. The collection was purchased in 1994

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1 All the dates are Before Common Era unless otherwise indicated.

at the Hong Kong antiquity market – its exact provenance is therefore unknown; but most scholars believe that the manuscripts were looted from a tomb from the old heartland of the state of Chu 楚, and should be dated to the fourth, or, possibly, early third century BCE.² The *Rong Cheng shi* is one of the lengthiest and best preserved texts from the Shanghai Museum corpus, and, arguably, one of the most intellectually engaging. It is a rare example of a pre-imperial text that reconstructs in a surprisingly systematic way the early history of the Chinese world from mythological beginnings to the establishment of the Zhou dynasty (周, c. 1046–256); and many details in its narrative differ – at times considerably – from those in the transmitted texts. In particular, the text’s staunch insistence on the supremacy of power transfer through the ruler’s abdication in favour of a worthier successor rather than through the ubiquitously practised lineal succession, turns the *Rong Cheng shi* into one of the most politically “subversive” texts of its age.

From when it was first published the *Rong Cheng shi* drew the attention of the scholarly community, in China and elsewhere. Dozens of articles were published dealing with manifold aspects of this text – from the decipherment of individual characters and proposals to rearrange the sequence of its component bamboo slips, through discussions of its relationship to a variety of other recently unearthed or transmitted texts, to debates over its ideological affiliation. Surprisingly though, very few of these studies (most notably that of Asano Yūichi) have tried to deal comprehensively with this new text;³ most other scholars have focused on selected aspects of the *Rong Cheng shi* but have shunned

- 2 The identification of the Shanghai Museum texts is based on the similarity of their orthography to that of the texts from Guodian 郭店 Tomb No 1, which is tentatively dated to c. 300 BCE; radiocarbon tests confirm this assessment. The majority view holds that the date of Qin’s 秦 occupation of the ancient Chu heartland in 278 should serve as a *terminus ante quem* for the tombs in which the texts were found. Since it is highly unlikely that the texts were composed on the eve of their interment in the tomb, they can be plausibly dated to the fourth century BCE. As I discuss below in the text, it is highly probable that *Rong Cheng shi* was composed prior to the rise of anti-abdication views in the late fourth century BCE (see also Pines, “Disputers of abdication: Zhanguo egalitarianism and the sovereign’s power”, *T’oung Pao* 91/4–5, 2005, 243–300).
- 3 Asano Yūichi 淺野裕一, “*Rong Cheng shi* de shanrang yu fangfa” 《容成氏》的禪讓與放伐, in *Zhanguo Chujian yanjiu* 戰國楚簡研究, trans. Sato Masayuki 佐藤將之 (Taipei: Wanjuan lou, 2004), 85–112. Many studies have dealt with the views of abdication in *Rong Cheng shi*; see, e.g., Luo Xinhui 羅新慧, “*Rong Cheng shi*, *Tang Yu zhi Dao* yu Zhanguo shiqi shanrang xueshuo 《容成氏》、《唐虞之道》與戰國時期禪讓學說”, *Qilu xuekan* 齊魯學刊 6, 2003, 104–07; Wu Genyou 吳根友, “Shangbo jian *Rong Cheng shi* zhengzhi zhaxue sixiang tanxi 上博簡《容成氏》政治哲學思想探析” and Sun Weihua 孫衛華, “*Rong Cheng shi* ‘shang xian’ sixiang bianxi 《容成氏》‘尚賢’思想辨析”, *Chu di jianbo sixiang yanjiu* (2) 楚地簡帛思想研究 (二), ed Ding Sixin 丁四新 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), 8–18 and 19–30. Studies of the ideological content of the *Rong Cheng shi* overwhelmingly suffer from a preoccupation with its putative affiliation with one of the so-called “schools of thought” of the Warring States period; for a recent example of these, see, e.g., Wang Qing 王青, “Lun Shangbo jian *Rong Cheng shi* pian de xingzhi yu xuepai guishu wenti” 論上博簡《容成氏》篇的性質與學派歸屬問題, *Hebei xuekan* 河北學刊 3, 2007, 102–06. In the near future a new, comprehensive study of the text is due to be published by Sarah Allan in her forthcoming book, *Written on Bamboo: Advocating Abdication in Warring States Bamboo-Slip Manuscripts*.

broader discussion of its standing within the lore of Chinese historical and ideological writings. The present study aims to fill in this gap.⁴

The *Rong Cheng shi* comprises 53 (or, in an alternative count, 54) slips of which 37 are complete; their length ranges from 44 to 44.7 cm, and they contain from 39 to 46 characters each; the total length of the manuscript is slightly over 2,000 characters. The name of the text (*Rong Cheng shi*)⁵ appears on the back of slip 53, but it seems that the first and the last slips are missing, and so perhaps are one or more slips from the middle of the text. Generally, however, the loss from the missing slips is limited, as the text presents a coherent chronological narrative of ancient history with few if any observable lacunae. Chronology served a primary guideline for arranging the slips; yet this arrangement has become a source of considerable scholarly disagreement. The editorial efforts of Li Ling 李零, who worked for the Shanghai Museum team, were questioned immediately upon the publication of the text, and about a dozen alternatives were suggested. Of these, one of the earliest and by far the most convincing is by Chen Jian 陳劍, whose work may become the authoritative new edition.⁶ My translation relies heavily on Chen Jian's version both in terms of the arrangement of the slips and of deciphering the characters; whenever appropriate, I have consulted other studies, most notably those by Su Jianzhou 蘇建洲 and Qiu Dexiu 邱德修.⁷

- 4 In previous work I have focused on portions of *Rong Cheng shi* dedicated to both abdication and righteous rebellion. See Yuri Pines, "Disputers of abdication"; idem, "Subversion unearthed: criticism of hereditary succession in the newly discovered manuscripts", *Oriens Extremus* 45, 2005–2006, 159–78; and most recently "To rebel is justified? The image of Zhouxin and legitimacy of rebellion in Chinese political tradition", *Oriens Extremus* 47, 2008, 1–24.
- 5 The text is named after the first of the legendary rulers who might have been mentioned in the first missing slip, the content of which was tentatively reconstructed by Li Ling 李零 from parallels in the received texts. The title of the text is written on the verso of slip 53 as 訟成是, but there is a scholarly consensus that these characters stand for a legendary ancient ruler 容成氏. For a discussion of the text's naming see Bing Shangbai 邴尚白, "Rong Cheng shi de pianti ji xiangguan wenti" 《容成氏》的篇題及相關問題, in *Shangbo guan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu yanjiu xubian* 上海博物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, hereafter *Shangbo xubian*), 327–34.
- 6 For Li Ling's study, see *Rong Cheng shi* 容成氏, transcribed and annotated by Li Ling, in *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書, ed. Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, vol. 2 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), 247–92; Chen Jian's alternative rearrangement ("Shangbo jian Rong Cheng shi de zhujian pinhe yu pianlian wenti xiaoyi 上博簡《容成氏》的竹簡拼合與編連問題小議") was published on the internet (<http://www.jianbo.org/Wssf/2003/chenjian02.htm>) and later entered the *Shangbo xubian* volume (pp. 327–34); for a similar, albeit less comprehensive, effort to improve the arrangement of the slips, see also Chen Ligui 陳麗桂, "Tan Rong Cheng shi de liejian cuozhi wenti 談《容成氏》的列簡錯置問題", *Shangbo xubian*, 335–42. Later attempts to rearrange the text or portions thereof are critically summarized by Wang Yu 王瑜, "Rong Cheng shi de zhujian bianlian ji xiangguan wenti – jian yu Huang Ren'er deng shangque" 《容成氏》的竹簡編連及相關問題—兼與黃人二等商榷, *Shehui kexue pinglun* 社會科學評論 2, 2008, 41–7.
- 7 See Su Jianzhou 蘇建洲, "Rong Cheng shi yishi" 《容成氏》譯釋, in Ji Xusheng 季旭昇 (ed.), "Shanghai Bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu (er)" *du ben* 《上海博物館

My discussion in what follows comprises two parts. First, I translate the entire text, adding brief comments on the ideological content of the translated sections. In the second part, I analyse the place of the *Rong Cheng shi* in pre-imperial historiography and political thought, and some other clues it provides with regard to the intellectual dynamics of the Warring States period. For the sake of convenience I have divided the text into six sections, dealing with the pre-Yao 堯 golden age, and then the reigns of Yao, Shun 舜 and Yu 禹, and the power transfers from the Xia 夏 to the Shang 商 dynasty and later from the Shang to the Zhou.⁸

Section 1: The Golden Age

The *Rong Cheng shi* begins with the depiction of a lengthy line of legendary rulers of the past. Upon a list of names comes the conclusion:

...氏之有天下也，皆不授其子而授賢。其德酋清，而上愛[1]下，而一其志，而寢其兵，而官其材。於是乎喑聾執燭，矇瞽鼓瑟，跛躄守門，侏儒爲矢，張者荷宅，僂者坎（事？）數，癭[2]者煮鹽，疣[3]者漁澤，蚤棄不廢。凡民俾[4]者，教而誨之，飲而食之，思（使）役百官而月請之。故當是時也，無并[3]

... [as for when] all [these rulers]⁹ possessed All under Heaven, none of them handed [the throne] to their sons, but have always handed it to the worthies. Their virtue was clear and pure,¹⁰ superiors caring {1} for inferiors, unifying their will, putting arms to rest and assigning tasks according to talents. With this, the dumb and the deaf held torches, the blind played zithers, the lame guarded the gates, the dwarfs produced arrows, those with distended chests maintained the dwellings, those with hunchbacks kept accounts, those with tumours {2} boiled salt, those with warts fished in the marshes; and those

藏戰國楚竹書《容成氏》讀本 (Taipei: Wanjuan lou, 2003), 103–80 (hereafter “Yishi”); Qiu Dexiu 邱德修, *Shangbo Chu jian ‘Rong Cheng shi’ zhuyi kaozheng* 上博楚簡《容成氏》注譯考證 (Chutu sixiang wenwu yu wenxian yanjiu congshu 出土思想文物與文獻研究叢書 15, Taipei: Taiwan Guji, 2003, hereafter *Kaozheng*). Qiu Dexiu’s study is the most detailed, but as he unfortunately ignored Chen Jian’s rearrangement and relied heavily on Li Ling’s initial publication alone, much of his discussion appears to be significantly flawed.

- 8 In what follows, the characters are written in their modern form according to the editors’ or later scholars’ suggestions; I leave images only of a few characters, the deciphering of which has caused significant disagreements. The numbers in bold square brackets in the Chinese text and in scrolled brackets in the English translation indicate the slip number according to the sequence proposed by Li Ling. ☐ stands for a broken slip; □ for an illegible character. The division into sections is purely for heuristic purposes, as there are no signs of internal divisions in the manuscript.
- 9 Li Ling postulated that the first extant slip is preceded by another, which begins with 昔者，容成氏... (“In the past, Rong Cheng shi...”) and then adds the names of legendary rulers of remote antiquity. Efforts were made to reconstruct the list of those rulers and to decipher the names of the eight rulers enlisted on slip 1 before 之有天下也; since these reconstructions are all conjectures based on the lists of ancient rulers in received texts, I do not deal with them here. See, e.g., Qiu Dexiu, *Kaozheng*, 133–49.
- 10 Reading 酋 as 瀏 (Su Jianzhou, “Yishi”, 108 n. 9).

who were abandoned [early] were not discarded. In general, the unfit and incapable¹¹ people were instructed and educated, were provided drink and food; were subordinated to officials and worked for them every month. Hence at that time there were no annexations. . . {3}

The opening lines set the tone for the subsequent discussion. In antiquity, abdication was the only means of legitimate succession, and those days were Golden Age. The ideal society in which social harmony prevails, weapons are set aside and even the weakest members are employed and cared for is a recurrent topic in the Warring States period texts, and in the *Rong Cheng shi* social utopia occupies a prominent place among similar depictions of social idyll in contemporaneous writings.¹² Its detailed depiction is particularly meaningful when considered in tandem with the depictions of the later ages, which, as we shall see, witnessed a gradual deterioration both in living conditions and political *mores*. However, as long as abdication remained the primary means of power transfer, prosperity continued. After a lacuna caused by a missing part of a slip, the *Rong Cheng shi* depicts once more the ideal life under a later sovereign, whose identity remains unknown:¹³

□□氏之有天下，厚愛而薄斂焉，身力以勞百姓[35B] □□於是乎不賞不罰，不刑不殺，邦無飢人，道路無殤[4]死者。上下貴賤，各得其世。四海之外賓，四海之內貞。禽獸朝，魚鼈獻，有無通。匡天下之政十有九年而王天下，三十有七[5]年而歿（？）終。[6]

When . . . ruled All under Heaven, he placed greater value on caring and less on taxation, and personally toiled [to benefit] the Hundred Clans. . . {35B} Then there were neither rewards nor punishments, neither mutilations nor executions; nobody starved in the country; nobody died prematurely {4} at the roadside. Superiors and inferiors, noble and mean – each attained their [predestined] years. [The people] from beyond the four seas arrived as guests, and those from within the four seas were corrected.¹⁴ Birds and beasts came to court; fish and turtles submitted [tribute]; there was [smooth] communication between [localities with] abundant and

- 11 In translating 俾載 as “unfit and incapable” I follow Bai Yulan 白於蘭, “Shanghai bowuguan cang zhujian *Rong Cheng shi* ‘fan min bibi zhe’ kao 上海博物館藏竹簡《容成氏》“凡民俾載者”考”, *Wenwu* 11, 2005, 88–90, 96.
- 12 For a detailed discussion of ancient Chinese social utopia, see, e.g., Jiang Jianshe 姜建設, *Zhou Qin shidai lixiang guo tansuo* 周秦時代理想國探索 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1998); cf. Aleksandr S. Martynov, “Konfutsianskaia Utopiia v Drevnosti i Srednevekov’e”, in L. P. Deliusin and L. N. Borokh (eds), *Kitajskie Sotsial’nye Utopii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), 10–57.
- 13 Li Ling (*Rong Cheng shi*, 254–5) identified this monarch as Thearch Ku 帝嚳. Alternatively, Guo Yongbing 郭永秉 proposes that the pre-Yao monarch is Youyu Tong 有虞迥 (see his *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). While Guo’s discussion contains many insights, his rearrangement and interpretation is based on too many problematic conjectures to be followed.
- 14 Following Su Jianzhou (“Yishi”, 120 n. 38), I read 貞 as 正.

deficient [resources]. After he exercised his rule in All under Heaven for nineteen years, he became the king over All under Heaven; after [another] thirty-seven {5} years he died. {6}

The last sentence is not entirely clear; it seems that for nineteen years the pre-Yao monarch performed government tasks from a position which was inferior to that of a king, and only after the initial success did he become the full monarch. The riddle probably cannot be resolved without the missing part of slip 35B which should have contained the monarch's identity; and in any case the mechanism of his elevation to the royal position is obscure.¹⁵ Yet importantly, the idea of a probation period for the would-be monarch recurs in the *Rong Cheng shi* narrative of subsequent paragon rulers, as is exemplified in the section dedicated to Yao.

Section 2: Yao

In the *Rong Cheng shi*, Yao is the first of the monarchs mentioned whose historical identity is easily verifiable. His activities are depicted in much greater detail than those of his predecessors:

昔堯處於丹府與藿陵之間，堯賤馳而時時，賞不勸而民力，不刑殺而無盜賊，甚緩而民服。於是乎方[6]百里之中，率天下之人，就奉而立之，以爲天子。於是乎方圓千里<之中>，於是乎持板正立，四向[和]，懷以來天下之民。[7]其政治而不賞，官而不爵，無勵於民，而治亂不□（倦）。故曰：賢及□[43]

Yao resided between Danfu and Guanling. Yao despised amassing [riches] and acted at every season according to the season. He did not encourage the people with rewards, but they exerted their efforts; he did not employ punishments and executions, but there were no thieves and bandits; he was extremely lenient, but the people were submissive. Thus in the territory of {6} one hundred *li* squared he led the people from All under Heaven, and they arrived, respectfully establishing him, regarding him as Son of Heaven. Thus, <in> the territory of one thousand *li* squared, everybody stood in attendance holding their official tablets; the four directions were harmonized; through kindness he attracted the people from All under Heaven. {7} His rule was ordered having no rewards; officials [performed their] tasks having no ranks; he did not stimulate the people, but tirelessly¹⁶ ordered chaos. Hence, it is said: when the worthy...{43}

Early stages of Yao's career are generally obscure, and the narrative in the *Rong Cheng shi* is exceptionally detailed in comparison to other early texts.¹⁷

15 Guo Yongbing (see note 13) suggests that “Youyu Tong” also assumed the throne in the wake of his predecessor's abdication.

16 In reading the character after 不 as 倦, I follow He Linyi 何琳儀, “Di er pi Hu jian xuan shi 第二批滬簡選釋”, *Shangbo xubian*, 444.

17 See the discussion in Guo Yongbing, *Di xi xin yan*, 62–5 for other versions of Yao's early life.

Like his anonymous predecessor, Yao proves his political abilities from a position of a local leader before assuming the title of the Son of Heaven. Yet most interestingly, Yao's enthronement was not a result of his predecessor's abdication, but rather that of the people's action: it is due to Yao's remarkable performance that the people from "All under Heaven" established him, which supposes a kind of void of legitimate rule in the period preceding Yao's accession. This appears to be a daring departure: the popular will is presented as the crucial factor behind the establishment of the Son of Heaven.¹⁸ Although this topic does not recur in the *Rong Cheng shi*, the "heretical" (in A.C. Graham's words)¹⁹ nature of this section of the text cannot be ignored. After the lacuna caused by a damaged slip, the *Rong Cheng shi* continues:

是以視賢：”履地戴天，篤義與信，會在天地之間，而包在四海之內。畢能其事，而立為天子。”堯乃為之教曰：“自[9]內（納？）焉，余穴窺焉，以求賢者而讓焉。”堯以天下讓於賢者，天下之賢者莫之能受也。萬邦之君皆以其邦讓於賢[10]□ <讓天下> 賢者，而賢者莫之能受也。於是乎天下之人，以[11]堯為善興賢，而卒立之。[13]

[Yao] then inspected the worthies: "Among those who tread on Earth and are covered by Heaven, those who are sincere, righteous and trustworthy should assemble between Heaven and Earth and be embraced within the four seas. He who is truly able to bring to completion [government] tasks, I shall establish him as Son of Heaven". Yao taught them saying: "When {9} you enter, I shall scrutinize you, to seek the worthy among you and to yield [the throne] to him". Yao yielded All under Heaven to the worthies, but among the worthies from All under Heaven none was able to accept it. The heads of the myriad states all yielded their states to the worthies {10}... <yielded to the> worthies <from All under Heaven >;²⁰ but the worthies were unable to accept it. Thus, all the people under Heaven considered {11} Yao as being good at raising the worthies, and finally established him. {13}

Certain details of this narrative require further discussion, but the basic outline is clear enough: immediately after being established as Son of Heaven, Yao begins searching for worthies to whom the empire may be delivered. Initially the

18 A vague reference to the idea of possible "popular election" of a ruler may be contained in the "Elevating uniformity" (or "Identifying with superiors", *Shang tong* 尚同) chapters of the *Mozi* (e.g. Wu Yujiang (annot.), *Mozi jiaozhu* 墨子校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), "Shang tong shang" 尚同上, III.11: 109). For another important reference to the pivotal role of "public opinion" in fixing the ruler on the throne, see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Mengzi yizhu* 孟子譯注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), "Wan Zhang shang" 萬章上 9.5: 219. See more on "the people's" role as kingmakers in early Chinese thought in Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 191–210.

19 See Angus C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle: Open Court, 1989), 292.

20 The beginning of the slip is missing; the three characters 讓天下 before the word 賢 (i.e. yielded to worthies from All under Heaven) are tentatively reconstructed on the basis of Qiu's glosses (*Kaozheng*, 257).

search is futile, but it encourages other leaders to do the same, creating a kind of abdication-based meritocratic system at the top of the government apparatus. Significantly, Yao's relentless efforts to promote the worthy are rewarded – again by “all the people under Heaven” – who “finally establish” Yao (perhaps prolonging his tenure as the Son of Heaven?). Yao is not satisfied, however, and he continues to search for a worthy candidate until he finally finds Shun.

昔舜耕於歷丘，陶於河濱，漁於雷澤，孝養父母，以善其親，乃及邦子。堯聞之[13]而美其行。堯於是乎爲車十又五乘，以三從舜於畎畝之中。舜於是乎始免刈耨鍤，謁（？）而坐之。子堯南面，舜北面，舜[14]於是乎始語堯天地人民之道。與之言政，悅簡以行；與之言樂，悅和以長；與之言禮，悅泊而不逆。堯乃悅。堯[8]

Shun was tilling the soil at Li Hills, was making pottery on the banks of the [Yellow] River, was fishing in the Lei marshes. He filially ministered to his parents and thereby was good to his relatives, extending this to all sons of his country.²¹ Yao heard about it {13} and considered his behaviour beautiful. Thus Yao had fifteen chariots arranged, following Shun thrice to the fields. Then Shun put aside the scythe and the sickle, the hoe and the ploughshare, made the presentation (?) and let Yao sit. Master Yao faced south; Shun faced north. Shun {14} then began talking to Yao about the Way of the people, and of Heaven-and-Earth. He spoke to him about governmental affairs, encouraging him to behave simply; he spoke to him about music, encouraging him to ensure harmony in order to prolong (his reign?). He spoke to him about ritual, encouraging him to be plain and not intransigent. Yao then was glad. Yao {8}...

Most texts of the Warring States period present Shun as initially a humble person without an official position: his depiction as a tiller, pottery-maker and a fisher can be traced to the *Mozi* 墨子, arguably the earliest text to focus on Shun's promotion from erstwhile obscurity to the position of Son of Heaven.²² The *Rong Cheng shi* authors reiterate this tradition and seem anxious to emphasize further the huge social gap between Yao and Shun: when the former visits the latter, Shun first puts aside his agricultural tools and only then begins to speak to the ruler. The text hails Yao's exemplar behaviour as a true sage-seeker: he thrice visits Shun in the latter's remote location, listens to his advice, and then apparently decides to appoint him to a government position (damage to the slip here prevents us from fully reconstructing the narrative).²³

21 Cf. Mengzi: “Treat my elders as elders, extending this to the others' elders; treat my young as young, extending this to the others' young” 老吾老，以及人之老；幼吾幼，以及人之幼 (*Mengzi*, “Liang Hui Wang shang” 梁惠王上 1.7: 16).

22 See *Mozi*, “Shang xian zhong” 尚賢中 9: 77; for the possibility that the *Mozi* is the earliest text which depicts Yao's yielding the throne to Shun, see Pines, “Disputers of abdication”, 248–52.

23 This version of Shun's elevation is referred to in the *Zhanguo ce*: “Yao met Shun among the reeds; they spread a mat on the embankment in the shadow of the sheltering mulberry tree. Before the shadow had moved, he delivered [to Shun] All under Heaven” (昔者堯見舜於草茅之中，席隴畝而廕庇桑，陰移而授天下傳. He Jianzhang 何建章 (annot.),

☐ < 堯乃老，視不明，> 聽不聰。堯有子九人，不以其子為後，見舜之賢也，而欲以為後。 [12]

<Yao then became aged, his sight was no longer clear>,²⁴ his hearing no longer sharp. Yao had nine sons; but he did not make his son successor. He observed Shun's worthiness and wanted to make him his successor. {12}

Yao's abdication in Shun's favour is the first case of abdication in *Rong Cheng shi* that is narrated in sufficient detail. It appears as an illustration of the general principle of retirement discussed in another recently unearthed text, *Tang Yu zhi Dao* 唐虞之道 from Guodian 郭店. The latter text explicitly proclaims that a sage ruler must retire at the age of seventy because of the inevitable physical deterioration;²⁵ this reason appears to influence Yao's retirement as well. Yet as the aged Yao approaches the end of his tenure he displays remarkable clarity of mind despite his physical unfitness, and he continues to behave selflessly. The *Rong Cheng shi* specifies that Yao had nine sons, but nonetheless chose Shun as his heir. Importantly, there are no hints of Yao's sons' ineptitude, an argument which was often employed elsewhere as a justification of Yao's transfer of power to Shun.²⁶ According to the *Rong Cheng shi*, Yao appointed Shun as his heir in direct continuation of earlier tradition, when "nobody transmitted [the rule] to his son, but transmitted it to the worthies".

Section 3: Shun

At the beginning of Shun's reign the situation appears less favourable than during preceding reigns, but Shun promptly deals with the challenges, bringing to the scene the third major hero of the narrative, Yu.

舜聽政三年，山陵不疏，水潦不泄（？），乃立禹以為司工。禹既已[23]受命，乃卉[草]服箬箬帽，芟☐☐足☐☐[15]☐面乾粗，脛不生之毛，☐漑[開塞]潛流。 [24]

Zhanguo ce zhushi 戰國策注釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), "Zhao ce 趙策 4" 21.12: 790–91). Liu Lexian 劉樂賢 has proposed that Yao's elevation of Shun was more gradual and that the details of the process appear on the missing slip(s) (see Liu Lexian, "Du Shangbo jian *Rong Cheng shi* xiao zha 讀上博簡《容成氏》小劄", *Shangbo xubian*, 353–4).

24 These six characters out of the twenty or so from the missing part of the slip were proposed by Chen Jian as a parallel to the subsequent narrative related to Shun.

25 "In antiquity, the sages were capped at the age of twenty; at thirty they married, at fifty – ordered All under Heaven; and at seventy they handed over the rule. As their four limbs were exhausted, sharpness of hearing and clarity of sight weakened, they abdicated All under Heaven and delivered it to a worthy, retiring to nurture their lives." 古者聖人二十而{25}冒，三十而有家，五十而治天下，七十而致政，四肢倦惰，耳目聰明衰，禪天下而{26}授賢，退而養其生。{27} (Jingmenshi Bowuguan 荆門市博物館 (ed.), *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1998), "Tang Yu zhi Dao", 157–8). For studies of *Tang Yu zhi Dao*, see note 63.

26 See e.g. See Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (annot.), "*Shang shu*" zhengyi 尚書正義; repr. *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), "Yao dian" 堯典 2: 122a. For the importance of this *topos*, see Sarah Allan, *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1981), 33–4.

Shun performed government tasks for three years, [during which] mountain ranges could not be passed through, and water streams did not flow. Then he established Yu as Minister of Public Works. After Yu {23} received the appointment, he wore a coat made of grass, a bamboo hat and boots made of ???.²⁷ {15} His face became dry and coarse, no hair left on his shin; he opened the blocked [ways] and drained the water. {24}

The inauspicious beginning to Shun's reign shows that Heaven's support is not given unconditionally even to a worthy ruler, until the latter proves his governing capacities. Shun's reaction to the crisis is paradigmatic: he appoints the worthiest person – Yu – to be Minister of Public Works. Yu, in his famously devoted manner,²⁸ begins to deal with the natural calamities, first by draining the flooding rivers, and then proceeding towards a major terrestrial rearrangement:

禹親執畚（？）耜，以陂明都之澤，決九河[24]之阻，於是乎夾州、涂州始可處。禹通淮與沂，東注之海，於是乎競州、莒州始可處也。禹乃通蕞與易，東注之[25]海，於是乎蕞州始可處也。禹乃通三江五湖，東注之海，於是乎荊州、揚州始可處也。禹乃通伊、洛，并灋、澗，東[26]注之河，於是乎豫州始可處也。禹乃通涇與渭，北注之河，於是乎盧州始可處也。禹乃從漢以南爲名谷五百，從[27]漢以北爲名谷五百。[28]

Yu personally held the plough handle and the ploughshare in order to dike the Mingdu Marsh [and] clear out the blockage of the Nine-fold He [River] {24}; thereupon Jia 夾 and Tu (涂 or Xu 徐) “provinces” (regions, *zhou* 州) first became habitable. Yu linked up the Huai and the Yi 沂 Rivers; made them pour east into the Sea; thereupon Jing 競 and Ju 莒 provinces first became habitable. Yu then linked up the Lou and the Yi 易 Rivers; made them pour east into the {25} Sea; thereupon Luo (蕞 or Ou 藕) province first became habitable. Yu then linked up the Three-fold Jiang River and the Five-fold Lakes; made them pour east into the Sea; thereupon Jing 荊 and Yang 揚 provinces first became habitable. Yu then linked up the Yi 伊 [and] the Luo 洛, [attached to them] the Chan [and] the Jian Rivers; made them pour east into the {26} [Yellow] River; thereupon Xu (叙 or Yu 豫) province first became habitable. Yu then linked up the Jing and the Wei Rivers; made them pour north into the [Yellow] River; thereupon Ju 盧 (?) province first became habitable. Yu then created five-hundred famous valleys to the south of the Han 漢 river and five-hundred famous valleys to the north of the {27} Han river {28}.

27 The last characters of the slip are barely legible, and the reconstruction is based on conjectures of Su Jianzhou, “Yishi”, p. 136, notes 28–9.

28 For Yu's self-sacrifice for the multitudes of “All-under-Heaven”, see e.g. Chen Guying 陳鼓應 (annot.), *Zhuangzi jinzhū jinyi* 莊子今注今譯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), “Tianxia” 天下 33, 863.

Yu's creation of the "Nine Provinces" – i.e. a complete terrestrial reorganization of China – is a much discussed topic, which was recently studied comprehensively by Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann (whose translation I have largely incorporated above); consequently, I shall not address it in detail here.²⁹ Suffice it to say that the list of the "Nine Provinces" in the *Rong Cheng shi* may be one of the earliest of this kind, and that it differs in both the names and the sequence of the provinces from those of the "Yu gong" (禹貢 "Yu's [System] of Tribute") chapter of the *Shu jing* (書經, "Book of Documents"), the "You shi lan" 有始覽 chapter of the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, the "Zhi fang shi" 職方氏 section of the *Zhouli* 周禮, and other early sources. Another interesting feature of the *Rong Cheng shi* list is the provinces' location: although the text itself was probably plundered from a Chu tomb, it presents a "northern" picture of the habitable world covering much of the northern territory of "China" and having no identifiable "southern" orientation.³⁰ I shall return to this point in the second half of this article.

While Yu completes the terrestrial reorganization of the habitable world, Shun continues to establish other worthy aides in charge of the remaining fields of ritual and administrative activity:

天下之民居奠[定]，乃食，乃立后稷以爲[經]。后稷既已受命，乃食於野，宿於野，復穀黍[換]土，五年乃[28]穰。民有餘食，無求不得，民乃賽，驕態始作，乃立臯陶以爲李。臯陶既已受命，乃辨陰陽之氣，而聽其訟獄，三[29]年而天下之人無訟獄者，天下大和均。舜乃欲會天地之氣而聽用之，乃立夔以爲樂正。夔既受命，作爲六律六[30] 卍（呂），辨爲五音，以定男女之聲。[16]

As the dwelling place of the people under Heaven stabilized, they began ploughing (?) and eating. [Shun] then established Hou Ji to act as overseer of agriculture. After Hou Ji received the appointment, he remained in the fields eating and sleeping there. He rotated the crops and renewed the soil, so that after five years [harvests] finally became {28} plentiful. The people had extra food and got anything they could desire, so they began behaving haughtily; [Shun] then established Gao Yao to become a judge.³¹ After Gao Yao received the appointment, he distinguished the *qi* of *yin* and *yang*, and began attending to litigations; in {29} three years there were no litigations under Heaven, and All under Heaven lived in harmony and equality. Shun then wanted to collect all the *qi* of Heaven-and-Earth and to listen to them; hence he established Zhi as an overseer of music. After Zhi received the appointment, he created the six pitches and six

29 See Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, "Ritual practices for constructing terrestrial space (Warring States–early Han)", in John Lagerwey and Mark Kalinowski (eds), *Early Chinese Religion: Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), Volume 1, 595–644, on pp. 629–36; idem, "The *Rong Cheng shi* version of the 'Nine Provinces': some parallels with transmitted texts", *East Asian Science, Technology and Medicine* (forthcoming).

30 For a tentative reconstruction of the location of the provinces on the modern map of Qin-period China, see Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, "Ritual practices", 634.

31 Reading 李 as 理.

{30} notes, distinguishing them into five tones to stabilize male and female voices. {16}

Each of Shun's appointees proves to be a remarkably capable leader, able to cope with his tasks; this repeated promotion of worthy aides is promptly rewarded by Heaven:

當是時也，癘疫不至，妖祥不行，禍災去亡，禽獸肥大，草木晉長。昔者天地之佐舜而[16]佑善，如是狀也。舜乃老，視不明，聽不聰。舜有子七人，不以其子爲後，見禹之賢也，而欲以爲後。禹乃五讓以天下之賢[17]者，不得已，然後敢受之。[18]

At that time there were no epidemics, no evil portents. Disasters and calamities were eradicated, beasts and birds were fat, grass and trees tall. In antiquity, such was Heaven-and-Earth's support for Shun and {16} blessing to the good! Then Shun became aged, his sight was no longer clear, his hearing no longer sharp. Shun had seven sons; but he did not make his son successor. He observed Yu's worthiness and wanted to make him his successor. Yu then yielded five times to the worthiest in All under Heaven {17}, but had no choice, and finally dared to receive [the throne]. {18}

The final years of Shun's reign are the last age of limitless prosperity, the last unequivocal manifestation of the support of Heaven-and-Earth for the virtuous ruler, one who was both chosen for his worthiness and able to yield to the worthy. Shun emulates Yao's selflessness, abdicating in favour of the most meritorious of his ministers, Yu. Yu displays the necessary modesty by looking for a worthy to whom he can yield the throne, and accepts the rule only when he has no other choice. His ascendance becomes the last instance of meritocratic appointment of the supreme ruler.

Section 4: Yu

Yu's reign begins with a further era of peace and tranquility:

禹聽政三年，不製革，不刃金，不略矢，田無蔡，宅不空，關市無賦。禹乃因山陵平隰之可邦邑[18]者而繁實之，乃因途以知遠，去苛而行簡，因民之欲，會天地之利，夫是以近者悅治，而遠者自至。四海之內及，[19]四海之外皆請貢。[20]

Yu performed government tasks for three years, [during which] no armour was produced, no metal was turned into blades, no arrowheads prepared. There were neither poisonous weeds in the fields, nor empty houses; levies were not collected at border passes and markets. Then Yu chose locations in mountains and lowlands suitable for the establishment of countries and settlements {18} and filled them [with the people]. He understood the distant from [inspecting] the near, eradicated quibbling and pursued simplicity; he relied on the people's desires, brought together the beneficent [matters of] Heaven and Earth, so that the near rejoiced in the orderly

rule while the distant came on their own initiative. {19} Everybody within and outside the four seas requested to submit tribute. {20}

Yu's reign is still the era of well-being, but this prosperity somewhat pales in comparison with earlier ages. In the pre-Shun era, universal good fortune was an intrinsic feature of the reign of sage rulers; during Shun's time the first signs of potential disorder appeared, but because of Shun's appropriate appointments, universal affluence was restored – with the explicit support of Heaven-and-Earth. Yu's situation appears to be more challenging, and his age of prosperity is entirely self-made. Accordingly, his rule is marked by political achievements (peace and tranquility at the borders and beyond), but lacks the aura of universal prosperity which characterized earlier reigns. Was it an indication of his son's future violation of the norms of abdication? Such an interpretation certainly appears plausible in the light of future events; but before going to these events, the text depicts Yu's ritual innovations:

禹然後始爲之號旗，以辨其左右，思民毋惑。東方之旗以日，西方之旗以月，南方之旗以蛇，[20]中正之旗以熊，北方之旗以鳥。禹然後始行以儉：衣不鮮美，食不重味，朝不車逆，春不穀米，饗（？）不折骨。製[21]表皮尊。禹乃建鼓於廷，以爲民之有謫告者鼓（？）焉。撞鼓，禹必速出，冬不敢以寒辭，夏不敢以暑辭。身言[22]孝辰（慈？），方爲三佻，救聲之紀：東方爲三佻，西方爲三佻，南方爲三佻，北方爲三佻，以靈（越）於溪谷，濟於廣川，高山陞，藜林[31]

Yu then, for the first time, made banners with insignia to distinguish between those around him, with the intention of preventing the people doubting. He marked the eastern banner with the sun, the western banner with the moon, the southern banner with a snake {20}, the central – correcting – banner with a bear, and the northern banner with a bird.³² Yu then began behaving frugally: his garments were not excessively colourful, his food not of double tastes, at court he did not employ chariots [for the guests]; he neither ground the rice in the mortar, nor separated meat from bones at the sacrifice, and he wore self-woven {21} garments and coarse underwear.³³ Yu then established a drum in the court, to allow each of the people who had anything to report to strike it. Whenever the drum was beaten, Yu always came out in a hurry: in the winter he did not excuse himself because of cold, in the summer he did not excuse himself because

32 There are no parallels in the received texts to those emblems, especially to the centrality of the bear. Ding Sixin 丁四新 in “Chu jian Rong Cheng shi ‘shanrang’ guannian lunxi” 楚簡《容成氏》“禪讓”觀念論析 (http://www.bsm.org.cn/show_article.php?id=54) suggests that the bear may be a Chu totem; but I find this supposition too far-fetched. The story may be related to a legend in which Yu turns into a bear (and beats the drum, as appears later in the text); see the translation in Paul R. Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 15. I am grateful to Paul Goldin for highlighting this connection.

33 In translating the last sentence I rely heavily on Qiu Dexiu's glosses (*Kaosheng*, 381–4).

of heat. He personally bespoke {22} filiality and paternal love (?).³⁴ At every direction he performed *gao* ceremonies (?)³⁵ to obtain the essentials of the sounds (?): three *gao* to the east, three *gao* to the west, three *gao* to the south, three *gao* to the north: thereby he traversed³⁶ creeks and gorges, crossed broad rivers, ascended high mountains, □ dense forests. {31}

This section suffers the most from damaged and possibly missing slips, which prevent us from reconstructing the narrative coherently, but its general outline is still clear enough: Yu performs a series of ritual innovations, introduces frugal policies and increases his care for the people. A story of a “complaint drum”, to the sounds of which Yu hurries to attend court in both winter and summer suggests a kind of primordial polity in which a ruler directly responds to summons from his subjects. Should such a direct connection with the people be read as a veiled criticism of the over-bureaucratized polities of the Warring States period? Even if the answer is affirmative, it is worth noting that it was under Yu that further steps were made in the direction of increasing sociopolitical sophistication:

入焉，以行政。於是乎治爵而行祿，以襄（讓）於來（？），亦＝
迴＝，曰德速衰（衰）□[32]

He entered there to perform administrative tasks. Then he ordered the ranks and implemented [the system of] emoluments and thereby yielded the throne to XXX; XXX said: “Virtue is going to decline soon” {32}

There are no unequivocal indications that slip 32 belongs to this section of the text and that it deals with Yu at all; and it is all but impossible to identify to whom Yu intended to yield the throne.³⁷ There are good reasons, though, to include this slip (which was probably preceded and/or followed by missing slips) in the Yu section: first, because introduction of ranks and the system of emoluments fits well into the overall pattern of Yu’s activities; second, because adding another attempted abdication by Yu would justify the overall positive treatment of this personage, who is named “Sage” on slip 33 (see below);

34 It is not at all clear whether or not slips 31 and 32 should come here, and even whether or not their topic is Yu; moreover, the word after “filiality” is unclear, and in choosing “paternal love” I follow the suggestion of Yan Changgui 晏昌貴, “*Rong Cheng shi zhong de ‘Yu zheng’* 《容成氏》中的“禹政”, *Shangbo xubian*, 358–66 on p. 363.

35 No-one has thus far provided a satisfactory explanation of the term 佻; some scholars read it as 調 or 宮 and connect it (and the entire slip) with musical innovations initiated under Yu’s rule; see the most systematic attempt to do so in Wang Zhiping 王志平, “*Rong Cheng shi zhong zhiyue zhujian de xin chanshi*” 《容成氏》中製樂諸簡的新闡釋, in *Shangbo xubian*, 397–412. In my view, this interpretation is unfeasible, first, because slip 31 does not appear to be connected to earlier discussions of music, and second, because the rest of the slip does not appear to deal with music at all. Su Jianzhou’s proposal (“Yishi”, 157 n. 19) to read 佻 as related to 誥 or 告 (religious announcements) appears more convincing.

36 In reading 甕 as 越 I follow Sun Feiyan 孫飛燕, “Du *Rong Cheng shi zhaji er ze*” 讀《容成氏》札記二則 (http://www.gwz.fudan.edu.cn/Show.asp?Src_ID=666).

37 Guo Yongbing (n. 13 above) proposes an alternative reading of slips 31, 32 and 5, which he treats as a coherent unit that deals with the pre-Yao monarch, Youyu Tong 有虞迴.

and, finally, because the prediction about failing virtue is indicative of the coming end of the age of virtuous abdications. This age will end indeed immediately upon Yu's death:

☐☐泉（？）. 所曰聖人，其生賜（易）養也，其死賜（易）葬，去苛慝，是以爲名。禹有子五人，不以其子爲後，見[33]皐陶之賢也，而欲以爲後。皐陶乃五讓以天下之賢者，遂稱疾不出而死。禹於是乎讓益，啓於是乎攻益自取。[34]☐[啓]王天下十又六年〈世〉而桀作。[35A]

... springs (?). This is what is called “a sage”: in life he is easily nourished, in death – easily buried; he eradicates the troublesome and the evil: he thereby gains renown.³⁸ Yu had five sons, but he did not make his son his successor. He observed {33} Gao Yao's worthiness and wanted to make him successor. Gao Yao then yielded five times to the worthiest in All under Heaven, and afterwards pleaded ill, and died without leaving [his home]. Yu then yielded to Yi, but then [Yu's son] Qi attacked Yi and seized power for himself. {34} ... [His heirs] ruled All under Heaven for sixteen years [should be: generations], and then Jie appeared. {35A}

The story of selfless transmission of power to the worthies ends almost incidentally, due to Gao Yao's early death and to the decisive action taken by Yu's son, Qi 啓, the eventual founder of the Xia dynasty. The dynastic rule begins with violence, and as we shall see below violence will remain one of its major characteristics. Therefore, the *topos* of prosperity and orderly rule, which figures so prominently in the earlier parts of the *Rong Cheng shi*, strikingly disappears from the narrative about the Xia period. On the contrary, the story mentions no remarkable deeds of the dynastic founder, Qi, and moves instead directly to depict the transgressions of the infamous last Xia ruler, Jie 桀, under whose reign the world plummeted into deep turmoil.

Section 5: From Xia to Shang

The fifth section of the *Rong Cheng shi* begins with an exposition of the misdeeds of the Xia tyrant, Jie:

桀不述其先王之道，自爲堯為...☐[35A]不量其力之不足，起師以伐岷山氏，取其兩女琰、琬，☐北去其邦，☐爲桐（傾）宮，築爲璿室，飾爲瑤台，立爲玉門。其驕[38]泰如是狀。[39]

38 The first part of slip 33 is missing. In its reconstruction I relied heavily on a convincing explanation by Guo Yongbing according to which the slip narrates the details of Yu's death and frugal burial (then the character “springs” may refer to a shallow burial chamber which did not disturb underground springs; see “Cong *Rong Cheng shi* 33 hao jian kan *Rong Cheng shi* de xuepai guishu” 從《容成氏》33號簡看《容成氏》的學派歸屬, http://www.bsm.org.cn/show_article.php?id=455). I think that Guo's supposition that Yu's death is narrated *before* the story of his unsuccessful attempt to abdicate is logically sound, because otherwise we should suppose that Qi's violent seizure of power, narrated in slip 34, took place before Yu's death.

Jie did not follow the Way of the former kings, behaving muddled-headedly³⁹. . . {35A} He did not estimate that his power is insufficient; he raised the army to attack the Minshan lineage, taking two of their daughters, Tan and Wan. □ went northwards to their country, □ established the Qing Palace, erected precious chamber, decorating it with nephrite terrace, and placing jade gates. Such was his arrogance {38} and self-aggrandizement! {39}

Jie is one of the paradigmatic “evil rulers” in Chinese historiography, and he was singled out as a vicious tyrant in the Western Zhou period, when his name was connected for the first time with the later and historically verifiable figure of the last Shang king, Zhouxin 紂辛 (of whom see below). That the *Rong Cheng shi* authors skip the lengthy history of the Xia dynasty and jump directly from the first to the last of its kings is suggestive of their ideological choice: the entire narrative deals with ancient history exclusively from the perspective of dynastic founders and last rulers. Yet it may be significant that the list of Jie’s crimes appears relatively mild: it is comprised “only” of the abandonment of the previous rulers’ legacy, excessiveness and aggressiveness, but does not contain the manifold picturesque atrocities that became associated with the criminal last ruler of the Shang dynasty, Zhouxin.⁴⁰ Thus, Jie’s badness may not be so dramatic as to justify assault on him by the founder of the Shang dynasty, Tang 湯:

湯聞之，於是乎慎戒微賢，德惠而不 賈(恃)， 積三十仁(年)而能(耐)之。如是而不可，然後從而攻之，陞自戎遂，入自北[39]門，立於中□。桀乃逃之鬲山氏，湯又從而攻之，降自鳴條之遂，以伐高神之門。桀乃逃之南巢氏，湯又從而攻之，[40]遂逃去，之蒼梧之野。湯於是乎徵九州之師，以 雲(伐?)四海之內，於是乎天下之兵大起，於是乎亡宗戮族殘群焉服。[41]

When Tang heard about this, he behaved cautiously and gathered the worthies; he took kindness as virtue, and was not arrogant;⁴¹ he persisted for thirty years and tolerated [Jie].⁴² Then, as [Tang] was no longer able [to

39 Following Liu Jian 劉劍 (“*Rong cheng shi shi du yi ze*” 《容成氏》釋讀一則, *Shangbo xubian*, 351–2), I read the disputed character 芑 as 芸, which is a loan for 昏.

40 For demonization of the “evil rulers” of the Xia and the Shang since the early Warring States period, see Pines, “To rebel is justified”. Interestingly, in the earliest detailed account of the atrocities of Jie and Zhouxin, in the *Mozi*, the former also is depicted in much milder terms than the latter (see *Mozi*, “Fei gong xia” 非攻下 V.19: 220; “Ming gui xia” 明鬼下 VIII.31: 342).

41 For reading 賈 as 恃 and interpreting it as “arrogance,” see Su Jianzhou, “Yishi”, 167–8 n. 30. Qiu Dexiu, *Kaozheng* (pp. 559–60) proposes reading the disputed character as 側 (his virtue was kind and not partial).

42 Three of the characters in this sentence are hotly disputed. The first, 積, is read by Su Jianzhou (“Yishi”, 168 n. 31) as 積; Qiu Dexiu (*Kaozheng*, 561) proposes 務; the fourth character is often read as 仁, but Su Jianzhou convincingly argues for reading it as 年, which makes sense in terms of the lengthy period of Tang’s accommodation under Jie’s rule, much like King Wen’s toleration of Zhouxin (see below in the text). The last character is usually read as 能, but Qiu Dexiu proposes to read it as 耐 (“to endure”) and the

endure], he followed Jie and attacked him. He ascended from the Rong Pass and entered from the Northern {39} gate, taking the position in the middle of □. Jie then fled to the Lishan lineage; Tang again followed him and attacked him; he descended from the Mingtiao pass, and assaulted [Jie] near the Gate of the High Deity. Jie then escaped to the Nanchao lineage; Tang again followed him and attacked him {40}; then Jie escaped and went to the Cangwu fields.⁴³ Tang then gathered the army of the Nine Provinces to attack⁴⁴ [Jie] everywhere amidst the Four Seas. Then the soldiers from All-under-Heaven rose up; they destroyed [Jie's] clan, exterminated his family, and [Jie's] surviving multitudes then submitted.⁴⁵ {41}

Tang begins as a cautious and accommodating leader, who tries to endure under Jie's self-indulgent rule; only after thirty years (if this is indeed a correct reading) does he decide to attack the malfunctioning leader. Yet the military campaign becomes increasingly violent; not only does Tang repeatedly attack Jie whenever the latter tries to escape, but he also mobilizes the military forces of all “the Nine Provinces”, i.e. from the whole habitable world. This concentration of the military brings about frightening carnage, which is clearly directed not only against Jie personally but also against his kin, and possibly against his multitudes of supporters, who are finally forced into submission. The authors clearly dislike Tang's violence, as is indicated also from their depiction of the extremely inauspicious beginning of his rule:

當是時，𠄎(強)溺(弱)不治湯，眾寡不聖(聽)訟，天地四時之事不修。湯乃專(博)爲征籍，以征關市。民乃宜怨，虐疾始生，於是[36]乎有暗、聾、跛、□、癭、□、僂始起。湯乃謀戒求賢，乃立伊尹以爲佐。伊尹既已受命，乃執(戢?)兵欽(禁)暴，羨(佯or永)得於民，遂迷而[37] 𠄎賊盜，夫是以得眾而王天下。[42]

At that time, [Tang] did not rein in mutual incriminations between the powerful and the weak, did not hear litigations between the many and the few;⁴⁶ did not attend to the affairs⁴⁷ of Heaven and Earth and the

combination of Su and Qiu proposals makes the sentence sufficiently legible. Alternatively, it can be read as “[Tang] committed himself to thirty benevolent and able persons”; but in this case I do not understand the meaning of 之 after 能.

43 For possible identification of these locations, see Wu Rui 吳銳, “Cong Rong Cheng shi suo ji Jie taowang luxian kan Xia wenhua yu Xibu de guanxi” 從《容成氏》所記桀逃亡路線看夏文化與西部的關係, *Renwen zazhi* 人文雜誌 2, 2007, 159–64.

44 Following Qiu Dexiu (*Kaozheng*, 578–9), I read 𠄎 as 化, which is a loan for 伐.

45 The last part of the sentence allows even more violent reading: “[Tang's armies] devastated the multitudes, and [only] then those submitted”.

46 In translating this sentence I relied heavily on the discussion of Lin Wenhua 林文華, “Rong Cheng shi ‘qiang ruo bu zhi yang, zhong gua bu ting song’ xin jie” 《容成氏》“強弱不治湯，眾寡不聽訟”新解 (http://www.bsm.org.cn/show_article.php?id=805). Lin suggests – correctly in my view – that the ruler (whom he identifies as Jie, but who I think more likely to be Tang) was not able to put an end to the oppression of the weak by the powerful and of the few by the many.

47 Here *shi* 事 probably refers to proper sacrificial activities.

four seasons. Tang then imposed extensive taxes and levies on passes and markets. The people were rightfully resentful; protracted illnesses appeared for the first time;⁴⁸ then {36} for the first time dumb, deaf, lame, □, goitres, □ and humpbacks arose. Tang then became contemplative and cautious and sought the worthies; hence he established Yi Yin as his aide. When Yi Yin received the Decree, he stored up the arms and exterminated the violent, lastingly attaining the people's [support];⁴⁹ then he deceitfully {37}... criminals. Thus he [Tang] attained the multitudes and became [the true] monarch of All-under-Heaven. {42}

The correct placement of slips 36–37 is hotly disputed. Li Ling regarded them as referring to Jie's atrocities; his view is supported by most scholars, including Qiu Dexiu, Su Jianzhou, Lin Wenhua 林文華 and others. There are two major reasons for their choice. First, the Chinese historiographic tradition strongly inclines towards blackening Jie and extolling Tang; attributing the decline in social mores to the beginning of Tang's reign rather than to the last years of an evil tyrant such as Jie is inconceivable for many. Second, the last words on slip 37 which depict Yi Yin's activities, including his pretensions (羨, which is often interpreted as 佯) and deceit (迷), refer, as many scholars assume, to a famous story according to which Yi Yin acted as Tang's spy in Jie's court. Hence, these scholars assert that an explicit accusation that Tang was an exploiter of the populace on slip 36 is a mistake, and "Tang" stands for "Jie", or that Tang performed these bad deeds on Jie's behalf.⁵⁰

In my opinion none of these explanations appear convincing. To begin with a minor point, there are no direct indications in the text of Yi Yin's clandestine activities in Jie's court, and the connection between his role in the *Rong Cheng shi* and a later story about his spying for Tang appears to be purely conjectural. More substantially, the negative picture of the early years of Tang's rule fits well with the *Rong Cheng shi*'s implicit criticism of his excessively violent overthrow of Jie. Furthermore, the negative beginning marked even the rule of Shun, and it was only after Shun established worthy ministers in leading positions that Heaven-and-Earth displayed their support.⁵¹ If so, then Tang's case appears more akin to that of Shun: a wise leader who learns that the proper way of dealing with Heaven's dissatisfaction is to raise worthy aides. This is

48 For reading 虐 as a substitute for 疴 (chronic illness), I rely on Scott Cook, "A case of graphic misrepresentation: new possibilities for classical readings suggested by the Shanghai-Museum text 'Lord Jing suffered a chronic illness'", paper presented at the 2009 AAS conference, March 2009.

49 In translating this sentence I relied on the analysis of Sun Feiyan 孙飞燕, *Rong Cheng shi* 'zhi bing qin bao, yang de yu min "shi jie" 《容成氏》"執兵欽癘，羨于民"試解，<http://www.confucius2000.com/admin/list.asp?id=3256>.

50 See Qiu Dexiu, *Kaozheng*, 517–43; Su Jianzhou, "Yishi", 163–4 n. 12; Lin Wenhua, "*Rong Cheng shi*"; Ding Kai, 丁凱, "Shang bo Chu jian *Rong Cheng shi* shuzha jiu ze" 上博楚簡《容成氏》疏劄九則, *Shangbo xubian*, 385.

51 It is worth mentioning an interesting internal contradiction in the text: its assertion that it was only under Tang's rule that "for the first time dumb, deaf, lame, □, goitres, □ and humpbacks arose" directly contradicts the statement on slips 2–3, according to which the impaired persons existed already under the blessed rule of the early kings, when they were properly treated and employed.

indeed what Tang does, and he thereby attains the blessing of Heaven and the people. Yet his success, just like Qi's rule beforehand, is of minor interest to the authors, and they move directly to the most infamous of Tang's offspring, Zhouxin.

Section 6: From Shang to Zhou

The story of the overthrow of the Xia does not lend itself easily to the narrative of righteous rebellion: the “wicked tyrant”, Jie, does not appear sufficiently depraved, and his contender, Tang, not sufficiently righteous after all. This equivocal attitude disappears, however, as the narrative moves from the beginning to the end of the Shang dynasty. Its last monarch, Zhouxin, is depicted, as is usual in most other pre-imperial texts, as a monster:

湯王天下三十又一世而紂作。紂不述其先王之道，自爲芑（昏）爲，於[42]是乎作爲九成之臺，置孟炭其下，加圓木於其上，思（使）民道之，能遂者遂，不能遂者，內（墜）而死，不從命者，從而桎梏之。於是[44]乎作爲金桎三千。既爲金桎，又爲酒池，厚樂於酒，溥夜以爲淫，不聽其邦之政。[45]

Tang's [descendants] ruled All-under-Heaven for thirty-one generations, and then Zhou[xin] appeared. Zhou[xin] did not follow the Way of the former kings, behaving muddled-headedly. {42} Thus, he made a nine-layered terrace, placing beneath it a *yu* vessel full of charcoal.⁵² Above it he placed a round wooden [beam], forcing the people to walk on it; those who were able to pass, passed; those who failed fell down and died; those who refused his orders were fettered in shackles. Then {44} he created three-thousand metal fetters; also he built ponds of liquor, extensively delighting himself in liquor, extending the night hours for his debauchery, and refusing to attend governmental affairs. {45}

Many of the details of Zhouxin's rule as they appear here belong to a lengthy set of common accusations against this king as formed during the Warring States period.⁵³ Clearly, Zhouxin breached every acceptable norm, lost his legitimacy and deserved to be overthrown. However, the *Rong Cheng shi* authors do not whole-heartedly endorse the idea of uprising – even against a vicious ruler like Zhouxin:

於是乎九邦叛之：豐、鎬、舟、□（石邑？）、于、鹿、[45]耆、崇、密須氏。文王聞之，曰：“雖君無道，臣敢勿事乎？雖父無道，子敢勿事乎？孰天子而可反？”紂聞之，乃出文王於[46]夏臺之下而問

52 Maria Khayutina (personal communication) suggested that the oddity of the shape of the Shang period *yu* vessels might have fuelled the imagination of the Warring States observers causing them to suspect that the vessels represented something strange and evil.

53 See Pines, “To rebel is justified”; see also Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, “Zhou e qishi shi de fa-sheng cidi” 紂惡七十事的發生次第, reprinted in *Gu Jiegang gushi lunwenji* 顧頡剛古史論文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), Vol. 2, 211–21.

焉，曰：“九邦者其可來乎？”文王曰：“可。”文王於是乎素端褰裳以行九邦，七邦來服，豐、鎬不服。文王乃起師以嚮[47]豐、鎬，三鼓而進之，三鼓而退之，曰：“吾所知多矜，一人爲無道，百姓其何罪？”豐、鎬之民聞之，乃降文王。文王持故時而教民[48]時，高下肥瘠之利盡知之，知天之道，知地之利，思民不疾。昔者文王之佐紂也，如是狀（莊）也。[49]

Then nine domains rebelled: Feng, Hao, Zhou 舟, Shiyi (??), Yu, Lu 鹿, {45} Li, Chong and the Mixu lineage.⁵⁴ Hearing about this, King Wen said: “Even if a ruler lacks the Way, how dare the subject not serve him? Even if a father lacks the way, how dare the son not serve him? Who is the Son of Heaven against whom one can rebel?” Hearing about this, Zhou[xin] released⁵⁵ King Wen {46} from beneath the Xia Terrace, and asked him: “Can the nine countries be forced to come [and submit]?” King Wen answered: “They can.” Then King Wen wearing plain [mourning] clothes and girding his loins travelled through the nine countries. Seven countries submitted, while Feng and Hao – did not. King Wen then raised an army to move on{47} Feng and Hao; he drummed thrice and approached; drummed thrice and retreated, saying: “I know of many distressful matters,⁵⁶ but if one person lacks the Way, what is the guilt of the hundred clans?” When the people of Feng and Hao heard this, they submitted to King Wen. King Wen then, being attached to the times of old, taught the people [proper] {48} seasonal [activities], introducing them comprehensively to the advantages of high and low, of fertile and non-fertile [terrain]; introduced [them] to the Way of Heaven and advantages of Earth, and concerned himself with [freeing] the people [of their] maladies. Such was then King Wen’s support of Zhou[xin]! {49}

King Wen (文王), the paragon of morality of the dynastic age, appears in the *Rong Cheng shi* as a staunch supporter of the ruler-centred political order; hence he explicitly denies the legitimacy of any rebellion against the acting monarch. Thus, instead of joining and leading the rebels, he quells their activities, threatening the more stubborn of them with military action. King Wen’s activities in Zhouxin’s service and their blessed impact on the populace may well indicate that even under a vicious ruler a good minister can attain certain achievements,⁵⁷ and they suggest that the authors accept only one legitimate way of dynastic replacement – namely abdication, and not rebellion. This understanding was

54 For a tentative identification of these localities, see Qiu Dexiu, *Kaozheng*, 612–9.

55 Following a well-known legend of King Wen’s imprisonment by Zhouxin I translate here *chu* 出 as “to release”, although nowhere does the text indicate that King Wen was initially imprisoned by Zhouxin.

56 In translating 矜 as “distressful matters”, I follow Su Jianzhou, “Yishi”, 176 n. 19.

57 A similar notion of King Wen’s support of Zhouxin is mentioned in the *Lüshi chungiu*, (See Chen Qiyu 陳奇猷, annot., *Lüshi chungiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋 (Shanghai: Xuelin, 1990), “Xing lun” 行論 20.6: 1389–1390), where, however, it is interpreted as sophisticated propaganda aimed at gaining popularity rather than genuine support of the ruler’s unequivocal legitimacy.

perhaps shared not just by King Wen, as depicted in the text, but even by his heir, King Wu (武王):

文王崩，武王即位。武王[49]曰：“成德者，吾效而代之。其次，吾伐而代之。今紂爲無道，昏（泯）者（拾）百姓，至（制）約諸侯，天將誅焉。吾勳天威之。”武王於[50]是乎作爲革車千乘，帶甲萬人，戊午之日，涉於孟津，至於共、滕之間，三軍大範。武王乃出革車五百乘，帶甲三千，[51]以小會諸侯之師於牧之野。紂不知其未有成政，而得失信於民之辰（朕？）也，或亦起師以逆之。武王於是乎素冠冕，以告[52]闕于天，曰：“紂爲無道，昏者百姓，至約諸侯，絕種侮姓，土玉水酒，天將誅焉，吾勳天威之。”武王素甲以陳於殷郊，而殷[53 recto]

When King Wen died, King Wu {49} assumed the position [of the Zhou king]. King Wu said: “The completely virtuous matter is that I convince him [Zhouxin] to be replaced; second to it, I shall invade and replace him. Now, Zhou[xin] lacks the Way, destroys and discards⁵⁸ the hundred clans, constrains the regional lords; Heaven is going to punish him. I shall support Heaven, overawing him”. Then King Wu {50} prepared a thousand leather-covered war chariots and ten-thousand armoured soldiers. On the *wuwu* day⁵⁹ he crossed [the Yellow River] at Meng Ford, arriving at a location between Gong and Teng. The three armies were greatly ordered. King Wu then dispatched five-hundred war chariots and three-thousand armoured [soldiers] {51} to make a minor assembly with the army of the regional lords at Muye. Zhou[xin] was unaware of the failures of his government and of his loss of trust by the people; hence he raised army to oppose [King Wu]. Thus King Wu, wearing plain clothes and hat, declared {52} to Heaven saying: “Zhou[xin] lacks the Way, destroys and discards the hundred clans, constrains the regional lords; exterminates his kin and destroys his clan; he [treats] jade as earth, and liquor as water. Heaven is going to punish him. I shall support Heaven, overawing him”. Wearing white armour, King Wu arranged his troops at the outskirts of [Zhouxin’s capital,] Yin, but Yin... {53}

This part of the *Rong Cheng shi* narrative differs from the well-known versions of the Zhou victory over the Shang. Unfortunately the last slip(s) of the text is missing,⁶⁰ which prevents us from reconstructing the narrative in its entirety, but it is clear that it gives only partial support to the notion of righteous rebellion. King Wu twice declares his intention to support Heaven in overawing

58 For reading 昏者 as loans for 泯拾, meaning “discard and destroy”, see Su Jianzhou, “Yishi”, 178–9 n. 4.

59 The mention of the *ganzhi* 干支 date (*wuwu*) without a month or a year may suggest that this section of the text was reproduced from an earlier and more detailed source. This usage resembles the style of some of the *Shang shu* 尚書 documents, which may also be derivative of earlier records.

60 Since the name of the text, *Rong cheng shi*, appears on the verso of the last extant slip (#53), it is unlikely that more than a few slips of the entire text are missing.

(*wei* 威) rather than punishing Zhouxin, and he appears cautious with regard to military action, sending only a small part of his army to Muye. Eventually, no military encounter between the opposing sides is recorded, supporting Asano Yūichi's conjecture that King Wu's goal was to display military might in order to convince Zhouxin to yield the throne rather than to overthrow him directly.⁶¹ The overthrow of the Shang may thus be a kind of misunderstanding rather than a case of justified rebellion.

History and ideology in the *Rong Cheng shi*

It is time now to summarize the political credo of the *Rong Cheng shi* authors and to assess the place of this manuscript in Chinese pre-imperial historiography and political thought. First, the single most significant feature of the text is its unequivocal support of abdication as the most proper, if not the only proper way of establishing the supreme ruler. Abdication is first presented as a normative way of power transfer in the remote past; second, it is the only way to ensure the full support of Heaven-and-Earth; third, it is strongly associated with the ruler's exemplar morality. Those who failed to abdicate or at least to make a gesture of abdication – like Tang, the founder of the Shang – are presented in a much less flattering way than their predecessors who knew to yield the throne to the worthiest.

In the abdication-based meritocratic system of rulership, the would-be monarch should prove his abilities; hence the authors invariably depict every pre-dynastic monarch undergoing a probation period, either as a local potentate (Yao and his predecessor) or as a high minister (Shun and Yu). This strongly emphasized part of the narrative may serve as another indirect criticism of the principle of dynastic rule, which inevitably allowed physically or mentally immature rulers to ascend the throne – often with grave consequences for their polity. The idea of the ruler's maturity as a precondition for his success echoes a similar sentiment in the roughly contemporaneous *Tang Yu zhi Dao* (see note 25), and may constitute yet another, rarely noticed, strand in the criticism of lineal succession.

The laudation of the ruler's abdication in *Rong Cheng shi* is firmly embedded in the text's overall commitment to the principles of meritocracy. As stories of Shun and Tang indicate, whenever a ruler meets misfortune, he should react by appointing worthy aides, which would immediately bring about rewards from Heaven-and-Earth and from the populace below. As such, abdication of the ruler appears as part of a broader pattern of meritocratic appointments: insofar as any position of power should be occupied by the most suitable person, it is only logical that this norm be applied to the ruler's position as well. As such the *Rong Cheng shi* appears as one of the most radical meritocracy-oriented texts of the Warring States period.⁶²

61 Asano, "*Rong Cheng shi*", 97–100.

62 This radical meritocratic approach supports the observation of those who argue for intellectual links between the *Rong Cheng shi* and the *Mozi*, which was the earliest text to advocate unequivocally "promoting the worthy" and dispelling with hereditary principles of rule.

The idea that the ruler should be the fittest person on earth was popular among the thinkers of the Warring States era, although only very few texts, most notably the recently unearthed *Tang Yu zhi Dao* from Guodian and *Zi Gao* 子羔 from the Shanghai Museum corpus parallel the radical support of abdication as expressed in the *Rong Cheng shi*.⁶³ Yet the insistence on the ruler's quality as a precondition for orderly rule could lead to a potentially subversive question: what should be done to the ruler who falls short of these high moral standards? In this regard, the *Rong Cheng shi* authors appear well aware of the dangers that their meritocratic ideas pose to the very foundations of the sociopolitical hierarchy, and they are careful to avoid subversive tones in their narrative. On the contrary, they insist that the ruler's power is sacrosanct, and even the tyrant's position seems to be inviolable: a good minister should do his best to aid the tyrant to improve his ways, but not to rebel. The explicitly negative treatment of Tang's rebellion against the Xia, and the equivocal presentation of King Wu's rebellion against the Shang all serve the goal of distinguishing the *Rong Cheng shi* from other roughly contemporaneous texts, such as the *Mengzi*, which voice much greater support to the idea of righteous insurrection.⁶⁴

Finally, in terms of political thought we note another interesting feature of the *Rong Cheng shi*, namely its insistence on the political role of the "people" (here supposedly referring to commoners). First, it was "the people" who twice "established" Yao as the Son of Heaven – a claim which is peculiar to *Rong Cheng shi* and which does not recur in other pre-imperial texts. Second, one of the positive features of Yu's reign was his attentiveness to and direct contact with "the people". Third, Shun's markedly inferior position prior to his appointment by Yao suggests that real talent can exist even among the humblest commoners. Although this *topos* is not developed further in the text, these examples suffice to add the *Rong Cheng shi* to the broad current of the "people-oriented" texts of the Warring States period.⁶⁵

Moving from the realm of political thought to that of historiography, we should note once again the distinctiveness of the *Rong Cheng shi*. Most historical writings of the Warring States period were eliminated in the infamous Qin biblioclasm of 213 BCE; but judging from the surviving texts, the single most popular historical genre of that age was a didactic anecdote centred around a

63 See discussion in Pines, "Disputers of abdication" and "Subversion unearthed"; see also Carine Defoort, "Mohist and Yangist blood in Confucian flesh: the middle position of the Guodian text 'Tang Yu zhi Dao'", *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 76, 2004; Sarah Allan, "The way of Tang Yao and Yu Shun: appointment by merit as a theory of succession in a Warring States bamboo slip text", in Xing Wen (ed.), *Rethinking Confucianism: Selected Papers from the Third International Conference on Excavated Chinese Manuscripts, Mount Holyoke College, April 2004, Special Issue of International Research on Bamboo and Silk Documents: Newsletter*, 5/2, 2006, 22–46; idem, "Not the *Lun yu*: The Chu script bamboo slip manuscript, *Zigao*, and the nature of early Confucianism", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 72/1, 2009, 115–51; see also studies cited in note 3 above.

64 See Pines, "To rebel is justified".

65 For "people-oriented" thought of the Warring States period, see Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 187–218.

speech by a wise minister or a travelling persuader; these anecdotes, exemplified by such collections as *Guoyu* 國語 or *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, usually pay little attention to the factual setting of a speech. More detailed are other historical sub-genres, such as chronicles from individual states, like the canonical *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) from the state of Lu 魯, or narrative histories, akin to those collected in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳; both of these sub-genres are only minimally present in the surviving samples of the historical writings from the Warring States period.⁶⁶ What unites all these sub-genres is their limited scope in terms of time and space: none of them pretends to discuss the history of the “Chinese” world in its entirety. Hints of historical comprehensiveness may be discerned only in two known texts: the early collection of the would-be canonical *Venerated Documents* (*Shang shu* 尚書), which assembled programmatic pronouncements attributed to dynastic founders and other great leaders from the remote past, and the *Chunqiu*-like compilation, the *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年), which pretended to present major events from the the history of the Chinese world from its earliest known stages in such a way as to buttress the legitimacy of the ruling house of the state of Wei 魏 as a leader of “All-under-Heaven”.⁶⁷ The *Rong Cheng shi* resembles the former in its focus

66 Currently, there is no systematic English-language study of pre-imperial historiography in its entirety, but many useful observations are scattered in three recent monographs that focus primarily on the *Zuo zhuan* and related texts: see David C. 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-ye, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007). While the dating of the *Zuo zhuan* and the nature of its component sources remains disputable, it is noteworthy that we have no evidence for any similar narrative histories produced during the Warring States period. An example of a detailed chronicle from that age is the Qin records (*Qin ji* 秦紀) – the only surviving “state history” from the Warring States period, which was incorporated in Sima Qian’s (司馬遷, c. 145–90 BCE) “Basic annals of Qin”, chapter 5 of the *Shiji* 史記 (see Fujita Katsuhisa 藤田勝久, *Shiki Sengoku shiryō no kenkyū* 史記戰國史料の研究 (Tōkyō: Tōkyō University Press, 1997), 227–78). For more about the peculiarities of the historical tradition of the Warring States period, see Jens Østergård Petersen, “Which books did the first emperor of Ch’in burn? On the meaning of *Pai Chia* in early Chinese sources”, *Monumenta Serica* 43, 1995, 1–52; Yuri Pines, “Speeches and the question of authenticity in ancient Chinese historical records”, in Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, Achim Mittag, and Jörn Rüsen (eds), *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism and Ideology: Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a New Comparative Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 195–224; Paul R. Goldin, “Appeals to history in early Chinese philosophy and rhetoric”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35/1, 2008, 79–96.

67 The *Shang shu* in its current form is the result of early imperial editorial efforts; we cannot ascertain whether or not the documents contained therein, which start with those attributed to Yao and end with an oath by Lord Mu of Qin (秦穆公, r. 659–621) circulated independently or were assembled in a chronological framework already in the Warring States period. For the complexity of the *Bamboo Annals* and their reconstruction, see an excellent study by Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts* (Albany: State University New York Press, 2006), 185–256; see also the recent publication by David S. Nivison, *The Riddle of the Bamboo Annals* (Taipei: Airiti Inc. Academic Publishing, 2009).

on the rulers and, to a certain extent, the latter in its systematic chronological structure – but its form as a historical narrative differs markedly from both.

Somewhat surprisingly, the closest parallel to the *Rong Cheng shi* narrative is not found among pre-imperial texts, but rather in early imperial historiography. In its attempt to discuss comprehensively the mythical and semi-legendary past of the Chinese world, the *Rong Cheng shi* appears as a precursor to the “Basic Annals” (*ben ji* 本紀) of the *Shiji* 史記, the invention of which is usually attributed to Sima Qian (司馬遷, c. 145–90). It is useful therefore to recall an influential assessment of Sima Qian’s enterprise made by Mark E. Lewis:

[Sima Qian] reads the unified empire created by Qin back into the beginning of history and assumes that this undivided “sovereignty” passed from king to king or dynasty to dynasty without break . . . The single ruler advocated in late Warring States polemics as the ground of intellectual unity. . . here reappears as the unifying principle of history.⁶⁸

It is not difficult to note that the same “imperial” outlook that Lewis attributes to Sima Qian appears now in an undeniably pre-imperial text. This suggests in turn that the notion of the unity of the “Chinese” world was not only a political construction aimed at future unification, but was simultaneously reworked into the past by anonymous scholars of the Warring States period. The strict sequence of “universal” rulers presented in the *Rong Cheng shi* is aimed at educating a reader that the politically unified realm is the only legitimate mode of existence. After many centuries of political fragmentation, the anonymous authors of a manuscript produced in the state of Chu staunchly refused to accept the multi-state world as a *fait accompli*, and rejected its legitimacy outright.⁶⁹

This observation brings me to another consideration: a curious lack of any Chu-related trait in the *Rong Cheng shi*. We cannot ascertain where the original *Rong Cheng shi* was composed; but the current manuscript was undeniably produced by a Chu scribe using Chu orthography and was in all likelihood interred in a tomb of a Chu elite member. Nonetheless, nothing in the content of the manuscript relates it to Chu. Not a single identifiable primordial ancestor of the Mi 芈 clan (the ruling clan of the state of Chu), nor any early Chu deity or divinized historical personage appears in the text. The southern origins of the *Rong Cheng shi* may be postulated only through *argumentum ex silentio*: insofar as the text does not assign a notable political role to the Yellow Thearch (黃帝), it might have been composed outside the area (usually associated with the state of Qi 齊) where the Yellow Thearch first attained his

68 Mark E. Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 310.

69 For the notion of political unity of “All-under-Heaven” as a unifying thread in thought of the Warring States period, see Yuri Pines, “‘The One that pervades All’ in ancient Chinese political thought: origins of ‘The Great Unity’ paradigm”, *T’oung Pao* 86/4–5, 2000, 280–324; for the relationship between the quest for unity and early Chinese historiography, see Pines, “Imagining the empire? Concepts of ‘primeval unity’ in pre-imperial historiographic tradition”, in Fritz-Heiner Mutschler and Achim Mittag (eds), *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome compared* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67–90.

paramount position as the earliest supreme sovereign.⁷⁰ Yet this is mere conjecture, and it does not suffice to determine the place of origin of the *Rong Cheng shi*: it may be alternatively assessed that the absence of the Yellow Emperor or of other divinized legendary rulers, such as Shen Nong 神農 or Fu Xi 伏羲, may simply result from the fact that legends about these personalities did not contain any reference to their abdication.⁷¹

The absence of Chu flavour can also be observed in a spatial vision of the *Rong Cheng shi* authors. As noted above, the map of the Nine Provinces as presented in the text is shifted to the north of what appears in many other early sources; as such it clearly does not reflect a Chu perspective. The only possible Chu connection in the Nine Provinces section in the *Rong Cheng shi* is that it ends with the phrase “Yu then created five-hundred famous valleys to the south of the Han river and five-hundred famous valleys to the north of the Han river”. This hints at the Han 漢 River being of central importance for the authors, which would fit nicely with a Chu location. Yet once again, the association with Chu remains very meagre.

The lack of “Chu flavour” in the single most important historical text discovered at the land of Chu is suggestive of the unwavering “universalism” of the members of the educated elite of the Warring States period. It is worth noting that most of the “ideological” texts from the Shanghai corpus (or, earlier, from Guodian tomb M1, which also belonged to a Chu noble) are devoid of any “localism”: their historical examples are drawn from throughout the Zhou world and lack any specific attachment to Chu culture.⁷² This distinguishes them markedly from religious texts from the Chu tombs, where Chu deities clearly predominate.⁷³ This observation deserves further study, but currently it

70 For a discussion of the Yellow Thearch in the Chu and non-Chu manuscripts, see Guo Yongbing, *Di xi xin yan*, 150–63.

71 It should be mentioned that these legendary rulers might have appeared in a lengthy list of other primordial monarchs in the first slip, but they are not assigned with any specific world-ordering task as is common in many other texts from the Warring States period. See also Guo Yongbing, *Di xi xin yan*, for further details.

72 This peculiarity is mentioned by Chen Wei 陳偉, “Zhao Wang hui shi’ deng san pian zhushu de guobie yu ticai” 《昭王毀室》等三篇竹書的國別與體裁, in *Chu di jianbo sixiang yanjiu* (3) 楚地簡帛思想研究 (三) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 201–11, on pp. 201–202. It is worth mentioning that a similar trend is visible in the published samples from other collections of ideologically important Chu manuscripts, such as those discovered in Tomb No. 36, Shibancun 石板村village, Cili 慈利county, Hunan (see Zhang Chunlong 張春龍, “Cili Chu jian gaishu” 慈利楚簡概述, in *Xin chu jianbo yanjiu* 新出簡帛研究 (Proceedings of International Conference on Recently Discovered Chinese Manuscripts, August 2000, Beijing), edited by Sarah Allan [Ailan 艾蘭] and Xing Wen 邢文 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2004), 4–11), or another bundle of looted manuscripts purchased by Qinghua university (for which see 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 Baoxun shiwen” 清華大學藏戰國竹簡《保訓》釋文, and Li Xueqin 李學勤, “Lun Qinghua jian Baoxun de ji ge wenti” 論清華簡《保訓》的幾個問題, *Wenwu* 6, 2009, 73–5 and 76–8)). Yet it should be noted that while the majority of the known Qinghua slips deal with the affairs of the Zhou dynasty, at least one text (*Chu ju* 楚居) focuses on Chu history (see http://www.bsm.org.cn/show_news.php?id=244).

73 See for instance Chu slips from Xincai Geling tomb, where Chu deities and ancestors of the ruling clan predominate (Jia Lianmin 賈連敏 (ed.), “Xincai Geling Chu mu chutu

appears as if local identities remained more pronounced either among members of the hereditary aristocratic elite, such as those buried in the Xincai Geling 新蔡葛陵 and Baoshan 包山 tombs and, possibly, among the lower strata, but not among the authors and consumers of “ideological” texts, members of the *shi* 士 educated elite, who traversed the entire Zhou (“Chinese”) world in search of appointment, and who adopted a distinctively “universal” outlook.⁷⁴

Finally, we should ask for the reasons for what appears to be the relatively swift disappearance of the *Rong Cheng shi*. Its highly peculiar narrative of early history has few parallels in the received texts, and some of its stories, e.g. Yao’s early career, some of Yu’s ritual innovations and, most importantly, the narrative about pre-Yao monarchs, are entirely novel for the modern reader. It seems that the disappearance of the text was swift enough to prevent even echoes of its version of history from being incorporated into the *Shiji* or in other historical and quasi-historical texts from the late Warring States and early imperial period. What are the reasons for this rapid demise?

Almost instinctively, one would refer to the Qin biblioclasm of 213 BCE as the primary reason for the disappearance of a potentially subversive text, which questioned the legitimacy of hereditary rule; and it is worth remembering here that Han Feizi (韓非子, d. 233) had already suggested that prohibiting talks of abdication was potentially subversive.⁷⁵ However, lack of references to the *Rong Cheng shi* version of history in other pre-imperial works suggests that the disappearance of this text might have been even more rapid. In all likelihood, with the rise of the new anti-abdication intellectual tide in the late Warring States period, the text which presented a lengthy historical narrative primarily as a means of validating abdication as a desirable solution to problems of rulership, lost its appeal.⁷⁶ New versions of the story of early monarchs proliferated, while the “subversive” narrative of *Rong Cheng shi* ceased circulating, surviving only in the depth of an old tomb, from where it resurfaced two millennia later.

zhujian shiwen” 新蔡葛陵楚墓出土竹簡釋文, in Henan Sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 河南省文物考古研究所, ed., *Xincai Geling Chu mu* 新蔡葛陵楚墓 (Zhengzhou: Da xiang chubanshe, 2003), 186–231); see more in Guo Yongbing, *Di xi xin yan*, 173–80.

74 I explore this topic briefly in Yuri Pines, “The question of interpretation: Qin history in light of new epigraphic sources”, *Early China* 29, 2004, 1–44 on pp. 35–44; see also Pines, “Serving All-under-Heaven: cosmopolitan intellectuals of the Warring States as creators of the Chinese empire (fifth–third centuries B.C.E.),” unpublished paper presented at the conference “Cosmopolitanism Past & Present”, Dundee University, 6–8 June, 2007.

75 See Wang Xianshen 王先慎 (comp.), *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), “Zhong xiao” 忠孝 XX.52: 465–6. For Qin “biblioclasm”, see Petersen, “Which books”.

76 As I discuss elsewhere, in the aftermath of the disastrous attempt of King Kuai of Yan (燕王噲, r. 320–314) to yield the throne to his minister, Zizhi 子之 in 314 BCE, and the resultant domestic turmoil in Yan, the popularity of abdication doctrine had markedly decreased. See Pines, “Disputers of abdication”, 268–71 ff.