
***Buried Ideas: Legends of Abdication and Ideal Government in Early Chinese Bamboo-Slip Manuscripts.* By Sarah ALLAN. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015. Pp. 372.**

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Sarah Allan's monograph engages in the study of the four recently excavated bamboo-slip manuscripts: "Tang Yu zhi dao" 唐虞之道 (The Way of Tang [Yao] and Yu [Shun]) from Guodian Tomb One, "Zigao" 子羔 and "Rongchengshi" 容成氏 from the Shanghai Museum collection, and the "Bao xun" 保訓 (Cherished Instruction) from the Tsinghua [Qinghua] University collection. The choice of these four manuscripts amongst a now abundant corpus of Warring States period excavated texts is grounded in a common feature, namely that they all discuss non-hereditary succession as a legitimate means of power transfer. Professor Allan's interest in the topic of power transfer in Early China and the two basic forms it took, hereditary and meritocratic, is not new, as her first major work, *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China* (1981), already dealt with it in great detail. However, while her early work focuses on the treatment of power transfer in the transmitted literature, the current study delves into this issue based on newly unearthed Pre-Qin texts with no received counterparts. Allan shows that, in the transmitted literature, instances of power abdication tend to support the idea of hereditary dynasties, whereas in the excavated manuscripts they serve as the only real challenge to it. Allan contends that this challenge to the hereditary succession of rule disappeared after the unification of China under the Qin and later Han due to the ideological restrictions imposed by the centralized government, which saw in them a potential threat. By studying the manuscripts in question, we can reconstruct an important part of the vivid intellectual discourse of the pre-Qin on the legitimacy of power.

Buried Ideas is divided into eight chapters. In Chapter One, "Introduction," Allan gives a short overview of the four manuscripts cited above and puts forth the two aims of the book. The first one is philosophical and consists in exploring how the recent textual discoveries affect our understanding of the

development of political philosophy in Early China. The second goal is textual, in that it seeks to familiarize readers with these types of manuscripts and introduces them to various problems involved in deciphering and publishing them. In order to reach these two goals, the author, in subsequent chapters, provides a translation of each manuscript and discusses them in their respective historical and philosophical contexts.

Chapter Two, “History and Historical Legend,” offers Allan’s theoretical position on the issue of power transfer in Ancient China. In her view what makes the Chinese tradition stand out from all other civilizations is the idea of the dynastic cycle, which can be traced back to the beginnings of the Zhou dynasty. Accordingly, each dynasty is founded by a man of virtue and, after several generations of hereditary succession, comes to an end at the hands of a depraved descendant. The depravity exhibited by the final monarch justifies the heaven to transfer its mandate to rule to a virtuous man from another family — the founder of a new hereditary dynasty, which, in turn, will continue and end just as the previous one did. In this way, the idea of a dynastic cycle embodies two conflicting values: rule by virtue and rule by heredity, or, alternatively, loyalty to state and loyalty to kin. However, the gradual political decline of the Zhou dynasty, reflected in a number of former vassals who boldly assumed the title of “king” (*wang* 王) in their localities, made this unique idea of a dynastic cycle lose much of its explanatory power, for the overthrow of the weakened ruling house of Zhou would no longer lead to the establishment of a new dynasty. According to the author, this problem lies at the heart of the most productive and exciting period of Chinese philosophy.

It was under these circumstances that the idea of abdication of power to the most meritorious appeared for the first time. Allan attributes this idea to the then emerging class of “literati” (*shi* 士), who traced their descent to noble lineages of the past but were not primary heirs and had little land, if any at all. This educated class was a fertile ground for philosophers and stressed meritocracy as a means of accessing power. The author contests Gu Jiegang’s 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) view that abdication legends were created by the followers of Mozi, instead linking them to the figure of Confucius whose rising popularity made him the most prominent philosopher of the age, and one who came to be regarded as more meritorious than any king. She believes the four manuscripts surveyed likely fell victim to the First Emperor’s burning of the books, since they fit the description of his edict. Allan goes on to discuss another major event in the history of the literary heritage of early China — Han reconstructions of lost pre-Qin manuscripts in a newly standardized script — and analyzes the criteria and the work involved. This reconstruction