饒宗頤國學院院刊　第四期
2017年5月
頁395–402

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

often amounted to rewriting of the originals, sometimes due to the necessity to interpret an unfamiliar graph, and at other times due to the integration of the originals into a larger body of text, which demanded literary and stylistic consistency.

The tendency to compile independently transmitted manuscripts into larger, multi-chapter texts is addressed in Chapter Three, "The Chu-script Bamboo-Slip Manuscripts." Allan argues that this tendency might correspond to the change in the physical materials used for writing. Whereas texts initially were recorded on wooden tablets or bamboo slips, which limited their scope and length, at a certain point during the Han, people began to use long silk rolls that could accommodate more writing and allow multiple texts to appear together. The use of silk was therefore a crucial step in establishing larger, multi-chapter texts. In my opinion, this hypothesis needs more support in order to be convincing. I will return to this issue later. The chapter continues with an edifying discussion of a variety of topics related to unearthed manuscripts from various collections like Guodian, and those housed in the Shanghai Museum and at Tsinghua University. In regard to the Shanghai Museum manuscripts, for instance, apart from the introduction of their contents, the reader will also learn much about the circumstances of their acquisition, the possible location of the tomb, and the identity of the tomb occupant; the Tsinghua collection is given the same meticulous treatment. Moreover, Allan provides a comprehensive account of the difficulties related to the publication of the excavated texts and describes the stages involved in the process of such a publication. She moves on to address doubts and questions concerning the authenticity of the Shanghai Museum and the Tsinghua University collections, as these manuscripts were not recovered through archaeological excavations but rather acquired from the antique market of Hong Kong. To alleviate such doubts Allan unequivocally answers, "it is impossible to imagine anyone with the range of knowledge of transmitted texts, paleographic skills, and creative imagination necessary to create them. Indeed, the most compelling reason for the acceptance of these manuscripts as authentic is perhaps the complexity of their interrelationships with a wide variety of early transmitted texts and inscribed materials, including bronze and oracle bone inscriptions, at all levels from the individual character to the development of thought" (p. 70).

Chapter Four, called "Advocating Abdication," deals with the manuscript "Tang Yu zhi dao" 唐虞之道 , which was discovered in a Chu tomb and dates to circa 300 BCE. It was published in the book *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 in 1998. This chapter also sets the framework and methodology for working with the other manuscripts she has chosen in this study. After

introducing the text, Allan provides a full English translation, and follows it with a close reading and an analysis of its main notions and themes, which include taking a position on the topic of abdication. At the end, a translation is given again, only this time together with a Chinese transcription of the text and a key that explains how to read it. The author attempts, in some places, to reconstruct the text's strip sequence based on her own interpretation, and offers readings for characters that differ from that of other scholars. In each such case, she explains the advantages of her interpretation. Importantly, she divides texts into thematic units while at the same time continuing to reference the original slip numbers. This makes cross-referencing with other publications quite convenient.

"Tang Yu zhi dao" has the literary form of a philosophical treatise. It advocates merit-based abdication as the culmination of sagacity (*sheng* 聖) and humanness (*ren* 仁). It is the best means for ensuring good rule for any historical era. This form of power transfer is regarded as the only means to reconcile the conflicting principles of "respecting worthies" (*zun xian* 尊賢) and "loving kin" (*ai qin* 愛親), and to transform the population of the state. Allan concludes that the argumentation of the "Tang Yu zhi dao," if not the text itself, was very influential in early China. The treatment of abdication found in the *Mengzi*, *Xunzi*, and even *Han Feizi* can be understood as a reaction to this particular point of view.

Chapters Five, "The 'Zigao' 子羔 and the Nature of Early Confucianism," and Six, "'Rongchengshi' 容成氏 : Abdication and Utopian Vision," analyze two eponymous works from the Shanghai Museum collection that were published in the second volume of *Shanghai Bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書 in 2002. Their *terminus ante quem* was determined to be 278 BCE. While the "Tang Yu zhi dao" was a philosophical treatise, the "Zigao" has a different literary form built upon a conversation between Confucius and his disciple, Zigao. However, the text distinguishes itself from other Ruist works through a number of features, namely with its depiction of the miraculous birth of the founders of the three dynasties Xia 夏, Shang 商 and Zhou 周. Allan shows that the central issue of the "Zigao" focuses on how the divine origin of the founders of these dynasties contrasts with the virtue (*de* 德) of the human sage, Shun 舜, which made him attain rule over all-under-heaven. Furthermore, there is an implicit association between Shun and Confucius in the text so that the latter's "assertion in the "Zigao" that the divine progenitors of the three dynasties would have served Shun if they had lived at the same time would have brought Confucius himself to mind as the modern sage who was most deserving of rule" (p. 167).

Accordingly, the "Zigao" provides evidence for Allan's thesis that Confucius was a strong inspiration for the development of legends of abdication.

The "Rongchengshi" is the longest Chu manuscript to have been discovered to date. It presents an argument on abdication as in yet another literary form: the narrative history. Somewhat similar to the depictions of prehistoric utopias and their subsequent destruction (precipitated by the creators of human civilization) found in the *Zhuangzi*, the "Rongchengshi" also depicts history as a process of steady decline from an initial utopian harmony, with one of its main features being the practice of abdication of power to the most meritorious candidate. The text is less concerned with the notion of "mandate of heaven" (*tian ming* 天命), and treats abdication as the expression of cosmic and social harmony. Allan's concludes that "the manuscript is textually and philosophically related in a variety of ways to all the major philosophers of the Warring States period known from the transmitted tradition, but its message cannot be reconciled with any of them" (p. 222).

Chapter Seven, "The 'Bao xun' 保訓 : Obtaining the Center to Become King," discusses a relatively short manuscript included in the first volume of the Tsinghua University Collection published in 2010. The manuscripts in this collection can be dated to 305 BCE with an error margin of 30 years. What this means is that all four manuscripts that Allan discusses in her book are basically from the same time. The literary form of the 'Bao xun' is "instructional", and claims the authority of an historically accurate account. The 'Bao xun' purports to contain the last words of the dying King Wen 文 of Zhou to his son Fa 發 , the future King Wu 武 . This text is perhaps best known for introducing the term *zhong* 中 "center" as a key concept related to abdication. Scholars have approached its meaning from philosophical, legal, and political perspectives,[1] but Allan suggests a new geographical interpretation by identifying this "center" as the region around the Mount Song 嵩山 in Henan Province. Her reading is thus a cosmological rationale for abdication, with the implication that power will be transferred to a person residing in this area. There are obviously several reasons to treat this claim with skepticism and reservation. While, Luoyang 洛陽 , situated at some thirty kilometers east from Mount Song according to the *Shiji* (4.133), was also regarded as the center of all-under-heaven, the political realities of the Warring States period were such that the possession of that particular geographic area, which was still under the sovereign of the decaying

1 For an overview of different standpoints on the notion of *zhong* in the "Bao xun," see Liu Guozhong, *Introduction to the Tsinghua Bamboo-Strip Manuscripts*, trans. Christopher J. Foster and William N. French (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2016), 139–44.

Zhou court, could hardly be associated with the idea of supremacy over the other ruling houses in China. In this matter, I tend to follow Liu Guangsheng 劉光勝 who argues that the text operated with several different notions of "center," including a philosophical one.[2]

In the concluding Chapter 8, "Afterthoughts," Allan first reviews her engagement with the topic of abdication in the contexts of twentieth century developments in the field of Chinese studies. She emphasizes the impact of French structuralists, such as Lévi-Strauss, on her approach. She then returns to the four manuscripts comprising the main body of the material used in this book and summarizes their commonalities and differences, and concludes by reiterating that Confucius' personality was an "important inspiration for the development of legends of abdication in the ideal state governed by Yao and Shun, even among those who were not his followers" (p. 327).

While generally finding the present monograph very enlightening, I regard some of the arguments put forth by Allan as problematic. The first concerns her, admittedly tentative, hypothesis regarding the role of silk as a writing material in the emergence of the multi-chaptered texts as we know today. To begin with, silk was used as a writing material long before the unification of China under the Qin.[3] Therefore, the emergence of stable, multi-chapter texts is likely to go back to factors other than the mere availability of silk. While I certainly agree with Allan that the bureaucratization of scholarship under the Han was among such factors, I think that there is little evidence to her claim that the standardized texts were recorded on silk before being deposited in the imperial library, for we see that most of the texts contained in the Han imperial library almost two centuries after the foundation of the Han were still written on bamboo.[4] Moreover, even the event that is principally associated with the creation of the transmitted versions of the early Chinese texts, namely, the text editing by imperial librarians Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) and Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23CE) did not involve the transcription of texts to silk rolls instead of bamboo slips. Allan's "silk hypothesis" shows its particular weakness when applied to the three bamboo-slip fragments of the *Laozi* from the Guodian Tomb One and the silk versions of the Mawangdui *Laozi*. Accordingly, the Mawangdui *Laozi*, which is almost identical with the transmitted version

2 Liu Guozhong, *Introduction*, 144.

3 As seen already in the *Mozi* 墨子 . For more, see Liu Guozhong, *Introduction*, 6.

4 Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 2; Matthias L. Richter, *The Embodied Text: Establishing Textual Identity in Early Chinese Manuscripts* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2013), 5.

in terms of content, represents the latter stage in the development of the text, whereas the Guodian fragments, which contain only one third of the *textus receptus*, can be related to the earlier period in the formation of the text. The underlying assumption is that the *Laozi* was created in the process of accumulating content-related textual materials until the "final" version emerged, and culminated in the form of silk rolls. This view is problematic for several reasons.

First of all, there is a bamboo version of the *Laozi* from the Peking University Collection which, is the most complete excavated edition of the text so far, postdating the Mawangdui manuscripts only by a few decades.[5] Second and more importantly, this view implies a scenario that a specific compilation from Guodian was incorporated verbatim into the "five-thousand-character" lineage of editions established decades later. While being aware of other proposed solutions, I still agree with Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 and Scott Cook that such a scenario seems "unfathomable and far too coincidental to be plausible."[6] The picture does not change even if we take into consideration that the manuscript "Taiyi sheng shui" 太一生水 comes after the Guodian *Laozi* C and whose appearance Allan takes as "further evidence for the independent circulation of the units" (p. 48). It seems to me that, at the present state of research, there is only scant, if any at all, evidence that suggests the practice of committing texts to silk might have contributed to the emergence of the multi-chapter, transmitted versions of early Chinese texts.

A second argument of the book that may prove to be problematic is the assertion of the inspirational role of Confucius in the formulation of the abdication ideal, "even among those who were not his followers." As we can see in the "Zigao," the connection between Confucius and one of the paragons of abdication, Shun, is only implicit, after all the name of Confucius is mentioned once only in the text. As for other manuscripts, some of them, like the "Rongchengshi," contain only a few (if any) references to the Confucian-specific values, such as "humanness." Thus, it seems that we can ascertain such an inspirational role of Confucius only in texts that mention his name or his cherished virtues, whereas, in other cases, the given hypothesis seems rather speculative.

5 Zhu Fenghan 朱鳳翰 et al., "Beijing daxue can Xi Han zhushu gaishuo" 北京大學藏西漢竹書概說 , *Wenwu* 文物 2011.6: 55.

6 For both views see Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study & Complete Translation* (Ithaca: East Asia Program Cornell University, 2012), 204–5.

To sum up, while mainly addressing the topic of non-hereditary power transfer, *Buried Ideas* also provides a wealth of information on a wide range of topics related to the study of unearthed manuscripts. There is no doubt that this work will be highly beneficial for any student of the early Chinese thought. In addition to the manuscripts Allan presents to us, other excavated manuscripts such as the "Zhou xun" 周訓 (Instructions of the Zhou) in the collection of Peking University (*Beijing daxue cang Xi Han zhushu* 北京大學藏西漢竹書) promise to shed further light on the discussion of abdication in the Western Han. The uncovering of these "buried" ideas continues to date, and the *Buried Ideas* shall prove to be a milestone in this fascinating journey.