

Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy

*Studies in the Composition and Thought of the
Shangshu (Classic of Documents)*

Edited by

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Introduction

Martin Kern and Dirk Meyer

The *Shangshu* 尚書, or *Classic of Documents* (also *Shujing* 書經), is the fountainhead of Chinese political philosophy and the representation of the Chinese imperial state. It lays out the fundamentals: the triangular relation of power, duty, and obedience between Heaven, the people, and the king; the necessity of penal law; the concept of dynastic rule and the role of the ancestral spirits within it; the importance of cosmic and ancestral sacrifices; the rituals of setting up a new capital; the harmonization of government with the cosmic clockwork; the concentric topography of power as mapped in tribute systems; the ruler-minister relationship; the legitimation and duty of rebellion, as commanded by Heaven; the morally correct way of treating the officers of a subdued dynasty; the question of hereditary versus meritocratic rule; and more. One of the *Five Classics* that in Han times (202 BCE–220 CE) were defined as the core of ancient Chinese learning, it exerted immeasurable influence on the later scholarly and political tradition, radiating from China into the larger East Asian realm.¹ A recent history of *Shangshu* scholarship in Chinese runs more than 1,600 pages—through the late thirteenth century only.² To put this further into perspective: not even a quarter of a total of 929 Chinese items from the Han dynasty through the early twentieth century that are traced in another bibliography belong to this relatively early time.³ No matter from which perspective we look at it, the *Shangshu* is one of the pillars of the Chinese textual, intellectual, and political tradition.

In 1770 the French translation of the *Shangshu* by Father Antoine Gaubil (1689–1759) appeared posthumously (edited by Joseph de Guignes [1721–1800]), the first into a European language.⁴ In 1846 it was followed by Rev. Walter Henry Medhurst's (1796–1857) first translation into English.⁵ While these pioneering works are barely known anymore and largely relegated to footnotes given to antiquarian interests, the breakthrough in the European recognition

1 On the *Five Classics*, see Nylan 2001.

2 Cheng Yuanmin 2013.

3 Xu Xianhui 2003. The bibliography also contains 9 items by Japanese and Korean scholars. Of the 929 Chinese items, a full 671 come from the last two imperial dynasties, the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912).

4 Gaubil 1770. Gaubil's work was reprinted, with minor corrections, by Guillaume Pauthier (1801–1873) in Pauthier 1840.

5 Medhurst 1846.

of the text came with James Legge's (1815–1897) monumental study and translation in 1865, which for the first time made the *Shangshu* available to a larger Western audience.⁶ In 1897 Séraphin Couvreur (1835–1919) followed with a new French translation.⁷ In 1904 the English astrologer Walter Gorn Old (aka Sepharial [1864–1929]) produced another—by now almost entirely forgotten—translation into English.⁸ In 1948–1949 Bernhard Karlgren (1889–1978) published his “Glosses on the *Book of Documents*” in two installments,⁹ followed, in 1950, by his translation of the modern-script (*jinwen* 今文) recension of the text, which excluded nearly half of the chapters of the ancient-script (*guwen* 古文) version translated by Legge, Couvreur, and Old.¹⁰ Finally, a new translation prepared by the late Father Paul L. M. Serruys (1912–1999), Michael Nylan, and David Schaberg is currently forthcoming.¹¹ Translations aside, in 1992 Michael Nylan published her concise monograph on the “Great Plan” (“Hongfan” 洪範) chapter of the *Shangshu*, the single book-length study of any part of the text in any European language.¹² Leaving aside a limited number of specialized journal articles, *this is it*: from 1770 until today, major Western works on the *Shangshu* can be counted on two hands, with fingers to spare. It is no exaggeration to say that few Western scholars outside Chinese studies, whether political scientists or humanists, have ever heard of the text. It is equally fair to note that only a limited number of Western students of Chinese civilization have ever read the text, or even a single chapter of it. In some kind of reverse—and bizarre—correlation, the *Shangshu* is as important to the Chinese political tradition as it is neglected in Western scholarship.

The mere fact that a text is ignored and badly understudied in the Euro-American academy may seem an academic embarrassment of sorts but provides, in itself, rarely cause to finally take up the task. Often, there are good reasons why books, even ones considered important in their culture of origin, remain left aside by scholars who *could* study them, if they only decided to do so. The *Shangshu* is different. It is not a text ignored but one that seems to have induced some collective sigh of resignation: its combination of archaic and pseudoarchaic language, further marred by unknown layers of damage and editorial intervention over time, has resulted in an exceedingly difficult and

6 Legge 1865; since then reprinted in numerous editions by publishers in Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, and Taiwan.

7 Couvreur 1897.

8 Old 1904. Throughout, Old's translation draws liberally on Medhurst's earlier work.

9 Karlgren 1948, 1949; reprinted in Karlgren 1970.

10 Karlgren 1950a; and separately as Karlgren 1950b.

11 From the University of Washington Press.

12 Nylan 1992.

often ambiguous text. Furthermore, whatever little that can be said about its original composition and early evolution has long been said, while so much more one would like to know remains shrouded in the impenetrable haze of ancient history. The few elliptic, obscure, and contradictory remarks about the origin and early development of the text, which are scattered across a small number of ancient sources and which have inspired thousands of Chinese studies over the past two millennia, are still as elliptic, obscure, and contradictory to us today. As one of our reviewers has noted, “few people who have read it look forward to returning to it. ... I belong to the vast majority who have avoided extended study of the text to the degree possible.” The present volume, the first of its kind in any language, is motivated by our collective ambition to overcome this weariness and to examine various chapters of the *Shangshu* from new perspectives.

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There is no point in rehearsing in detail, in this introduction, the common view on the composition and early history of the *Shangshu*, which has been conveniently summarized elsewhere (and will not go unchallenged in the present volume).¹³ Suffice it to say, for the nonspecialist reader, that over the course of the first millennium BCE, a number of royal speeches and in addition a body of expositions on early political thought circulated individually and in various constellations, and probably in both written and oral forms. The received *Shangshu* is an anthology of such texts, organized according to the projected chronological sequence of their subjects and purported time of composition. The earliest speeches are attributed to the culture heroes of high antiquity, followed by those listed under the (mythological?) Xia 夏 dynasty, the Shang 商 dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE), and, finally, the Zhou 周 dynasty (1046–256 BCE). The texts listed for the Western (1046–771 BCE) and Eastern (770–256 BCE) Zhou periods comprise about half of the anthology. It is generally held that the nominally pre-Zhou texts (or, at a minimum, the nominally pre-Shang texts) were fabricated only over the centuries of the Eastern Zhou period (if not, in some cases, in early imperial times, that is, after the Qin 秦 unification of 221 BCE). In short, the nominally earliest parts of the collection are, in fact, among its very latest, while the speeches attributed to the early kings of the Zhou dynasty—the last of the so-called “Three Eras” (*san dai*

13 Shaughnessy 1993b; Nylan 2001: 120–167.

三代)—are granted some measure of authenticity relative to their historical period.¹⁴

This picture of reverse chronology of composition is further complicated by the fact that we have not only one but two received versions of the *Shangshu*: the so-called modern-script and ancient-script recensions. The first consists of only twenty-eight (or twenty-nine) chapters and is believed to come from the early Western Han 西漢 dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE); the second has fifty-eight chapters (including those of the modern-script text), claimed to have been originally written in “ancient” (i.e., pre-imperial) Chinese characters; this ancient-script version, however, is generally taken to be a third- or fourth-century CE “forgery” concocted from a mix of fragments of early *Shangshu* quotations and newly invented passages. In addition, it is clear from both received texts and newly discovered manuscripts that many other writings similar to those in the *Shangshu* circulated in late Zhou and possibly early imperial times, including those that are collected in the received *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書 (*Remnant Zhou Documents*) discussed by Yegor Grebnev in chapter 7 of the present volume.¹⁵ Finally, it is worth pointing out that to some extent, affinities in language and content exist between the Zhou chapters of the *Shangshu* and the large corpus of inscriptions on Zhou bronze vessels, bells, and weapons; these inscriptions, invoked in various chapters by our contributors, number well beyond ten thousand.

The question of the “forged” *Shangshu* in ancient script deserves further comment, and here—both in this introduction and in the chapters that follow—we go significantly beyond the standard accounts summarized so far. While scholars generally agree that the received ancient-script text is not trustworthy, enthusiastic readers of early legend continue to tell the story of how in Western Han times, nearly four hundred years after Confucius, an original, ancient-script version of the text was discovered in the walls of Confucius’s former residence, when the miraculous sounds of zithers, bells, and chime-stones arose out of nowhere to scare away a local ruler who attempted to destroy the building. Such fine stories about an earlier, ancient-script text¹⁶ remain largely unaffected by the single greatest triumph of Qing dynasty evi-

14 See, e.g., Chen Mengjia 1985; Jiang Shanguo 1988.

15 For a summary account of the *Yi Zhoushu*, see Shaughnessy 1993a. For a recent study of parts of the *Yi Zhoushu*, see McNeal 2012. For an attempt to define the nature of early *Shangshu*-type texts beyond the *Shangshu*, see Allan 2012. Allan’s approach and conclusions differ from ours (and from those of most of our contributors) and are hence a welcome addition to the scholarship.

16 It remains indeed uncertain what an ancient-script version of the *Shangshu* would have been in Han times; see Nylan 1995.

dential scholarship (*kaozhengxue* 考證學), namely, the seventeenth-century discovery¹⁷ that the received ancient-script *Shangshu*—the text imperially canonized since the seventh-century *Correct Meaning of the Five Classics* (*Wujing zhengyi* 五經正義)—is a much later concoction and that, therefore, only the chapters in early imperial modern script, dating back to the early second or late third century BCE, are trustworthy. Resulting from these philological feats was, finally, Sun Xingyan's 孫星衍 (1753–1818) monumental critical edition *Shangshu jinguwen zhushu* 尚書今古文注疏 (1815), which still today serves as the basis of any serious engagement with the text. In the West, after Gaubil, Medhurst, Legge, Couvreur, and Old had still found it difficult to let go of the received faith in the ancient-script version, Karlgren bothered with the study and translation of only the modern-script one. Likewise, those who use the *Shangshu* as a source of historical information usually express their faith in the latter while rejecting the former as a “forgery.”

It is, however, by no means clear what “forgery” means in this context. For one, whoever compiled the ancient-script chapters drew on significant amounts of older material found in other sources.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the Western Han modern-script chapters—or what has been transmitted as such—post-date their purported events and speakers by centuries and millennia as well. Nevertheless, there is a strongly held belief that a core of twelve chapters of royal speeches that are nominally placed into the eleventh century BCE—the early decades of the Western Zhou dynasty—are “authentic” and “reliable” in the sense of indeed dating from that period, if not in fact having been composed by their purported early Zhou speakers.¹⁹

In reality, there is precious little evidence to support this article of faith, and we should once again ask what “authentic” or “reliable” really means. *Shangshu* quotations in received early texts, together with quotations in the ever-increasing number of newly discovered (though often unprovenanced) manuscripts, show how extremely variable the wording of the text really was, to say the least, and that no transmitted chapter of the *Shangshu* can possibly reflect its actual appearance during the Western Zhou—if it ever existed at such an early time. But the argument also cuts the other way: traditional scholars have rejected the authenticity of the purportedly early Western Zhou “Harangue at Mu” (“Mu

17 Most importantly by Yan Ruoju 閻若璩 (1636–1704) in his *Guwen Shangshu shuzheng* 古文尚書疏證 and Hui Dong 惠棟 (1697–1758) in his *Guwen Shangshu kao* 古文尚書考.

18 In Michael Nylan's (2001: 131) words, they present “deutero-canonical” knowledge in that they contain “genuinely old material” that was then “spliced with newer bridging passages of later date to form coherent narratives.”

19 See Shaughnessy 1993b.

shi” 牧誓) on the basis of a single anachronistic graph in the text—when it is perfectly clear that *every Shangshu* chapter underwent numerous changes throughout the first millennium BCE. In short, no matter how invested some scholars may remain in these arguments over “authenticity”—and how unshakable their faith in the continuous, stable *written* transmission of the Western Zhou chapters might be—such arguments are fundamentally bound to fail.

The present volume is therefore not defined by preconceived ideas about “authenticity,” the stability of the ancient written tradition, or the primacy of writing—the very practice indicated in the Chinese word *shu* 書 (documents)—in the culture of early China altogether. We realize that in certain contexts, these concepts and assumptions matter a great deal, especially where the *Shangshu* is used as a source of historical information. They are not, however, directly relevant to the studies offered in the present volume, except where they are confronted head on. In one way or another, almost all our studies speak to questions of dating and textual transmission, but not in traditional terms. Instead, through detailed textual analysis as well as comparison with other early works, the conclusions offered in this volume are strikingly more complex. The certainty that the eminent philologist Bernhard Karlgren still felt, in the mid-twentieth century, when deciding on the interpretation of individual Chinese characters and words, is long gone: a wealth of new data from unearthed ancient manuscripts, together with more sophisticated conceptual approaches that are informed by neighboring disciplines and cross-cultural comparisons, especially the study of ancient Mediterranean texts, has made us far less sure of ourselves in evaluating the “right” choice for this or that Chinese character. Newly discovered manuscripts show a far greater range of graphic variation in the early writing system than any of our received sources—the material Karlgren and his Qing dynasty predecessors were working from—would have made possible to imagine.

Moreover, as many of our studies here reveal, a *Shangshu* chapter that we read today, or that scholars read as early as in Han times, was often not the result of a singular act of composition but had evolved over time, which turns the entire dating question into something else: not of composition but of recomposition, compilation, and editorship, and of the dynamic processes of textual development over the course of the first millennium BCE.²⁰ This may not be true for every chapter of the text but, as demonstrated over the course of the present volume, is too frequent a phenomenon—indeed, the rule rather

20 As noted by Jiang Shanguo 1988: 133, one of the most relevant questions for each chapter is when it was edited.

than the exception—to allow us to accept traditional beliefs about single authorship, the pristine integrity and stability of a chapter purportedly first composed in the Western Zhou, or the primacy of writing over all other forms of textual transmission (mnemonic, performative, etc.) in early China. Before and even still during the early empire, it appears that most chapters of the *Shangshu* were not so much fixed entities but dynamic cultural products that played their role within, and also shaped, the political discourses of their time. Meanwhile, those chapters that appear most coherent and may very well have resulted from acts of singular composition invariably appear to belong to the latest strata of the entire text.

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Why is it important to reflect on the *Shangshu* from these perspectives? Who needs a collection of essays focused on the text itself, as opposed to the well-established historical scholarship that continues to mine the *Shangshu* for information? Interestingly, among the three works considered to be the early core of the *Five Classics*, the *Shangshu* is the only one that Western scholars generally do not study on its own: the other two, the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經) and the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經 or *Zhou Yi* 周易), have both received monographic studies (the *Changes* many more than the *Poetry*); only the *Shangshu*, presumably because of its reputation as a mere repository of historical information, has been mostly *used* but not *studied*. But how can one use a text one has not truly studied? One cannot, of course; and many of the flawed ways in which the *Shangshu* is scoured for information are precisely the result of a lack of understanding of the nature, structure, transmission, and rhetoric of the text. Traditional assumptions about all these aspects still guide the seemingly innocuous use of the text as historically reliable for the era it seemingly speaks of—at least with regard to the chapters concerned with the Western Zhou.

But what if the text is not of that era? What if it dates centuries later or is not at all a unified artifact but a compilation of disparate sources from different times? This is not merely a text-critical or text-historical question (important as these are); to trace the early Chinese development of political and legal philosophy, it matters greatly whether our text is informed by, and thus to some extent reflects, the practices and ideas of 1000 BCE as opposed to those of 300 BCE. This is obvious wherever a later text misconstrues an earlier reality; here, correctly dating the text is a crucial step toward getting to the facts of history. More complex, and more interesting, is a different scenario, one that seems to fit at least parts of the *Shangshu*: a very late text may well contain substantial

strata of much earlier knowledge and may accurately, if only partially, capture the realities of a much earlier time; as such, even a belated composition may be *more* historically precise than other, older ones. But there is yet another reality at play, and this is the reality of the text itself. A chapter that is a contemporaneous witness to the events it describes has a fundamentally different purpose and meaning compared with one that describes the same events from a retrospective perspective centuries later. The latter, regardless of its accuracy, is an artifact of memory and as such plays an important political and cultural role not for the time it signifies but for its own time of signification. But its function and nature as an artifact of memory do not invalidate its claims for fidelity any more than the function and nature of a contemporaneous witness do. Both are purposefully composed and hence also compromised in their own but different ways. It is one of the major scholarly fallacies at the core of traditional Chinese philology that “early” gets equated with “reliable” (which too often then inspires an ardent desire to “prove” that something is early) and that, in turn, the demonstrable accuracy of a text is taken to prove its status not only as “true” but also as a “truly early,” if not contemporaneous, witness. Likewise, the recently published bamboo manuscripts in the Qinghua University collection (if authentic, presumably from around 300 BCE)²¹ that show substantial parallels with certain parts of the *Shangshu* have led some scholars to view them as traces of the “original” *Shangshu*, or at least as closer to the original, once again “proving” certain assumptions about the antiquity of the materials included there.

We are fundamentally uninterested in such “proof” because it leads only to oversimplification and reductionism. Instead, our collection of essays pursues critical issues in early Chinese intellectual history alongside a new understanding of the history of the *Shangshu* as a text. We believe that the two sides of this inquiry are mutually illuminating; and we further think that the textual archeology of the *Shangshu* is a *sine qua non* toward any understanding of the dynamic processes of early Chinese political and legal thought as they developed over the course of the first millennium BCE.

In this endeavor, we have been happy to trade false certainty for more interesting and productive questions and possibilities. Ours is a collection of essays that rigorously probes the linguistic structures of individual *Shangshu*

21 Li Xueqin, ed. 2010–. To our knowledge, no scientific testing of these unprovenanced bamboo slips and/or the ink on them has been performed outside the control of Qinghua University. We remain agnostic on the question of authenticity, and several contributors to the present volume, including Meyer, make use of the Qinghua University and other unprovenanced manuscripts in their essays.

chapters, explores the rhetorical patterns of cultural memory, and examines specific political ideas against a multiplicity of possible historical contexts, from the founding days of the Western Zhou through, nearly a thousand years later, the early empire. Our conclusions are often unexpected to the point of overturning the accumulated wisdom of two millennia; in many cases, they produce radically new and, we believe, decidedly superior readings of individual *Shangshu* chapters together with surprising analyses of their respective ideological positions and historical background. Our results reveal a canonical text that appears far more diverse, fragmented, and historically interesting than the normalized and normative reading of the learned tradition. We offer new insights into the political agendas of individual *Shangshu* chapters together with new hypotheses about the circumstances, dates, and procedures of their original composition and early textual history. In this context, we consider matters not only of writing but also of oral transmission and performance; in fact, as noted above, we do not ascribe particular value or cultural prestige to writing as such. In some cases, our conclusions even call the established modern- versus ancient-script divide into question. Anyone familiar with the field of early China studies—in China as much as in the West—will realize that such irreverent, uncompromising questioning is not for the faint of heart.

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In the process, our efforts have been just as much committed to the very text, and texture, of the *Shangshu* as to the ideas expressed in it. To the authors of the present collection of essays, language—which in the *Shangshu* usually means very difficult language—is not a mere obstacle to overcome or to ignore in order to get to historical meaning; to the contrary, its analysis is an integral part, and sometimes even the center, of our inquiry. The ideas given voice in the *Shangshu* are formulated in an idiom that, while often extremely challenging, matters a very great deal, if one wants to get to the “meaning.” We are equally interested in the history of ideas and in the history of texts and the social aspects of textual practices, from the ways in which parts of the *Shangshu* were composed to those in which they are incorporated in other texts. While it has been our collaborative effort to produce a collection of highly readable essays that hopefully will find their way to readers beyond a narrowly specialized audience, every one of our essays is grounded in the thorough philological and historical analysis of the original text and is informed by a wealth of traditional and modern scholarship in the relevant languages. This is obviously true for those contributions that analyze the textual structure and rhetoric of par-

ticular *Shangshu* chapters, but it is no less true for those that examine central ideas of political philosophy and legal thought.

To some extent, our dual attention to language and ideology has emerged from newly defined contexts of philological and historical inquiry that only recently have entered the mainstream of the study of early China. For some time now, all but the youngest of the scholars assembled in this volume have been easily recognizable voices in this development; in fact, our very careers developed along and through the issues and methodologies found in this volume. Even those among us who now find themselves serving as deans and department chairs completed their dissertations only in the mid- to late 1990s, barely two decades ago; and we surely sense that our time is different from previous ones. In expanding earlier perspectives, our essays apply a wide range of disciplinary approaches, including those from the fields of political and economic history, intellectual and legal history, literary criticism, manuscript studies, religious studies, anthropology, and others. As will be clear from the following studies, we also emphasize comparative perspectives wherever they help us to open prospects that are not overtly suggested by the Chinese material itself. Max Müller's (1823–1900) famous dictum “He who knows one [religion], knows none” remains useful to remember, especially in a field like Sinology, which, after all, is a latecomer within the humanities curriculum outside East Asia. In our view, the insights gained from cultural comparisons across ancient civilizations have much to offer to our field even as we cherish the two millennia of Chinese learning through which a text like the *Shangshu* has reached us. Without Qing dynasty (1644–1912) philology, Western Sinology would be in a much lesser place; but Qing philology, including its contemporary reiterations, is not the end of all there is to know and think about.

That said, we do take it upon ourselves to defend the texts of Chinese antiquity against highly politicized contemporary appropriations for transparently nationalistic purposes that in recent years have become visible, especially in the Chinese mainland. When contemporary Chinese political scientists draw on the texts from early China while lacking the necessary training to thoroughly penetrate the linguistic and historical difficulties involved, it is not always easy for them to steer clear of trivial and vulgar preconceptions about some of these ancient writings. With the *Shangshu* as the fountainhead of Chinese political and legal philosophy, the present collection of essays may therefore also be read as an intervention into the contemporary uses and abuses of Chinese antiquity, and here especially in the fields of the social sciences. It is our hope that the studies assembled here—sometimes technical by necessity but always accessible to the educated nonspecialist—prove useful for political scientists and legal scholars as they grapple with the fundamental

ideas that were formulated during the foundational period of Chinese political thought and that proved instrumental to the establishment of both the Chinese empire and the Chinese intellectual tradition.

Finally, as we embrace cross-cultural comparisons, we certainly hope—and to some extent, as twenty-first-century scholars, even expect—to see other classicists and ancient historians, including those working on the ancient Mediterranean world, discover the richness of early Chinese thought and textual formation for their own comparative purposes and gains. The present volume aims to help in this overdue endeavor. Neither the Chinese nor any other antiquity is most compellingly interpreted purely on its own terms or within the confines of the particular academic tradition it has engendered over the centuries. Certainly, our attempts to rediscover one of the core texts of the entire Chinese tradition have only been improved by our awareness of the ancient world broadly conceived. When we first planned our *Shangshu* project, we thought of something like the present volume as only the first half of our overall enterprise; the second half, yet to be conceived and prepared in detail, would be to explore ancient political and legal thought in a comparative framework, with China as one case among others, and to discuss the textual and rhetorical forms through which such thought took shape in different cultural environments.



The initial inspiration to even imagine a project on the *Shangshu* came unexpectedly and from elsewhere, namely, a conference that Yuri Pines organized at the Hebrew University's Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem in May 2012, "Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China." On that occasion, Martin Kern presented a paper, "The 'Yao dian' as Political Rhetoric: Style, Argument, and Purpose," that emerged from a *Shangshu* graduate seminar he had just taught at Princeton in the spring of 2012.²² Shortly thereafter, Dirk Meyer, too, became enthusiastic about a larger project on the *Shangshu*, and so we successfully applied to our two universities for an Oxford/Princeton Collaborative Research Grant to support two conferences, as well as the publication of this volume: the first conference was held in May 2013 at Princeton, and the second, in March 2014 at Oxford. At Princeton, we received generous funding from the Center for International Teaching and Research and the University Center for Human Values and, in addition, administrative support

22 The revised version of this conference paper is in Kern 2015. A Chinese version is Kern [Ke Mading 柯馬丁] 2014.

from the East Asian Studies Department and Program; at Oxford, the funding came from the John Fell Oxford University Press (OUP) Research Fund and the Davis Funds, with generous additional support from The Queen's College and the Oriental Institute.

When we invited our colleagues from around the world to our project, we were only modestly optimistic about our prospects; after all, considering our collective track record of almost total lack of interest in the text, who would suddenly be willing to work on the *Shangshu*? Yet the response to our call was overwhelming: just about everyone we asked immediately said yes. Moreover, all agreed to a very simple plan for the first meeting: not to present a discursive paper, as we normally do at our conferences, but to introduce a single chapter, or perhaps two chapters, of one's own choosing from the perspectives of rhetoric and ideology. Considering the poor state of *Shangshu* studies regarding these two questions, our first goal was to establish a sound textual basis for all further discussion, a repository of well-examined chapters that would allow us to see both peculiarities and commonalities within and across the ancient book. After we succeeded in this way at the Princeton meeting, the second step was easy: for the Oxford conference, we asked everyone not to write entirely new papers but to develop their Princeton contributions more broadly, and now with an added thematic focus. After two days at Oxford, we knew we had a batch of high-quality papers that not only established entirely new readings of various *Shangshu* chapters but, equally importantly, also showed unusual coherence as a collaborative body of research. As we could not include all presentations from the two conferences, the idea of coherence then served as the guiding principle in our selection of contributions for publication.

As is evident everywhere in the following pages, each essay benefits from its multiple relationships to others, and the sum is significantly more than its parts. Moreover, because Kern's original Jerusalem essay fits so closely with the other studies (and is repeatedly cited there), we considered it both appropriate for our project and convenient for the reader to have it reprinted in the present collection. A similar decision was made about two further essays that have been published elsewhere by now but that are intimately related to our project: Magnus Ribbing Gren's essay on the Qinghua University manuscript that is the counterpart to the received *Shangshu* chapter "The Metal-Bound Coffin" ("Jinteng" 金滕) emerged from the 2012 Princeton graduate seminar and was originally presented at our Princeton conference; it is reprinted here from its recent publication in *T'oung Pao*.²³ Fortuitously, this study is matched by Dirk Meyer's essay on the same topic, which was first published in *Asiatische*

23 Ribbing Gren 2016.

*Studien / Études Asiatiques*²⁴ and has been thoroughly revised—indeed rewritten—for our present volume. As a result, the current volume now includes three pairs of essays that are closely related in addressing particular parts of the *Shangshu*: those by Kern and Kai Vogelsang speak to the “Canon of Yao”; those by Ribbing Gren and Meyer address the “Metal-Bound Coffer”; and those by Yuri Pines and Michael Hunter analyze the “Without Idleness” (or “Against Luxurious Ease”; “Wu yi” 無逸). In juxtaposing different readings of the same chapters (that are also further alluded to elsewhere across our volume), we aim to reveal the rich interpretive possibilities of these difficult texts, and we further attempt to present our model of collegiality that includes both mutual inspiration and lively debate. At the same time, needless to say, we could not possibly aim to cover all chapters of the *Shangshu*, not even all those included in the modern-script recension—that would have required an entire series of massive tomes. Inevitably, specialists will thus be missing the coverage of certain chapters they consider particularly interesting or important; hopefully, these can be addressed in future research, perhaps even inspired by our present efforts. If anything, we view our collection of essays as only the beginning of a new era in *Shangshu* studies. In this sense, we are quite happy with our business remaining unfinished and incomplete.



Our volume opens with Martin Kern’s study of the “Canon of Yao” (“Yao dian” 堯典), the celebrated first chapter of the *Shangshu*, which presents the foundational myth of how Yao and Shun established Chinese civilization and the Chinese polity at the dawn of history. The essay suggests three key revisions to the traditional understanding of “Yao dian”: it divides the chapter into two clearly distinct narratives about Yao versus Shun, yet without rehabilitating the ancient-script version of the *Shangshu*, where these are placed into separate chapters; it identifies the Yao narrative as a dramatic and poetic staging of Yao through the emperor’s own performative speech, structured by rhyme, meter, anadiplosis, and other rhetorical devices; and it shows how in both diction and content, the narrative of Shun, organized by catalogs, numerological systematization, and the mimetic representation of comprehensive political unity, departs radically from Yao’s model of archaic kingship. Where Yao is presented as the charismatic and idiosyncratic persona at the dawn of time, Shun appears as the invisible force behind and within the impersonal machinery of the empire; Shun’s account, which appears to be a much younger textual stratum,

24 Meyer 2014.

offers a vision of rulership fully consonant with the political philosophy of the early imperial state, including the rejection of abdication as a legitimate process for the transfer of power.

Kai Vogelsang's essay, "Competing Voices in the *Shangshu*," examines three chapters—"Counsels of Gao Yao" ("Gao Yao mo" 皋陶謨), "Canon of Yao," and "Punishments of Lü" ("Lü xing" 呂刑)—with respect to their textual integrity. Analyzing linguistic discrepancies and inconsistencies of content, Vogelsang shows that each of these chapters comprises heterogeneous sections that appear in part to stand in outright opposition to one another. The coincidence of linguistic and ideological differences suggests that competing parties advocating strikingly different views of rulership were involved in the composition of these chapters: whereas some sections make a case for "charismatic rule" with a strong emphasis on both the people and the "virtue" of their ruler, others advance the ideal of bureaucratic government. Intriguing as these patterns may be, a cursory glance at the remaining *Shangshu* indicates that these oppositions are largely confined to the three chapters under discussion. Although other chapters clearly betray a composite nature, they do not follow the same clear lines of linguistic usage or ideological outlook. Altogether, Vogelsang's chapter, which in many ways harmonizes with, and extends further, Kern's discussion of "Yao dian," suggests that the *Shangshu* as a whole is not built around uniform textual layers or ideological strands.

In "Recontextualization and Memory Production," Dirk Meyer offers a close textual analysis of both the "Testamentary Charge" ("Gu ming" 顧命) chapter and the recently discovered "Prized Instructions" ("*Baoxun" 保訓) bamboo manuscript. By reading "Gu ming" through "*Baoxun," Meyer identifies reduplicative text patterns in the narrative framing devices of these texts and demonstrates how during the Warring States period certain text patterns stabilize into molds that then determine some of the ways in which events are told. By presenting a historical or legendary event according to such rhetorical molds of text production, the narrativized event can be transposed into different contexts and arguments, representing not only the event itself but a *type* of event. Taking its position in the narrative continuum of the textual tradition, this normative type not merely frames past events but also establishes *how* to frame historical narratives more broadly. Once established—as visible in "Gu ming" and "*Baoxun," when viewed together—it informs the ways and shapes the discursive terms in which intellectual communities conduct their debates and claim both their authority over the past and their cultural identity with it. Thus, texts like "Gu ming" and "*Baoxun," whose received versions were probably composed only in Warring States times but possibly contain earlier textual

strata, become important tools in the sociopolitical and philosophical debates of the time.

Joachim Gentz's essay, "One Heaven, One History, One People," analyzes the cultural and historical contexts of the "Many Officers" ("Duo shi" 多士) and "Many Regions" ("Duo fang" 多方) chapters of the *Shangshu* together with the "Harangue to Shang" ("Shang shi" 商誓) chapter of the *Yi Zhoushu*, three Zhou royal addresses to the officers of the subdued Shang dynasty. It discusses the chapters' relationships with other texts and their argumentative and rhetorical structures to explore when and for what purpose these chapters were written, what their historical function was, and why two such chapters are preserved in the *Shangshu*. According to Gentz, these texts present a framework of regulations that defined a new sociopolitical order stratified on the principle of meritocracy, together with a mode of discourse based on persuasive reasoning. The situation where a king addresses the subdued officers of the enemy—which, from a cross-cultural perspective, is highly exceptional—highlights this meritocratic ideology as a means of integration and of exerting central control under the Mandate of Heaven. This authority appropriates not only space (by military excursions) but also time by inventing an expanded "patterned" past defined by universal principles and manifested in historical analogies and continuities. Far beyond the Western Zhou, these speeches appear to belong to a cultural archive of texts that provided models of speech acts for further circumstances of conquest and assimilation.

In his detailed study of the Qinghua University bamboo manuscript that has its counterpart in the "Metal-Bound Coffin" in the received *Shangshu*, Magnus Ribbing Gren employs sophisticated philological and linguistic analysis to reveal how the manuscript text differs starkly from the received version and should be read independently of it. Specifically, whereas in the *Shangshu* chapter the Duke of Zhou offers himself up as a sacrifice for the dying king, in the manuscript version he expresses his straightforward ambition to ascend the throne. As such, the bamboo text represents a continuation of the story of King Wu's 武 abdication in favor of his meritorious brother (the Duke of Zhou) that is elsewhere recorded in the *Yi Zhoushu*. Read in this light, the fourth-century BCE manuscript provides further evidence for the prominence of abdication doctrines during the Warring States period, and it presents the Duke of Zhou in a decidedly different light from later idealizations of his purported self-sacrifice. Abdication doctrines flourished during the Warring States period, but they were deemed subversive in the early empire (as also noted in Kern's essay on "Yao dian") and were gradually obliterated. As Ribbing Gren points out, we must assume the existence of two diametrically opposed readings of the "Jinteng" story in late Warring States and early imperial times, each

with its own significant political implications. What is more, his study shows the critical importance of not forcing newly discovered texts into the existing framework of traditional intellectual history; instead, we must make space for radical challenges to the latter.

In “Shu’ Traditions and Text Recomposition,” Meyer addresses the same manuscript text, but from a different perspective. Interpreting the performative character of the manuscript narrative through detailed structural analysis, his study casts light on the social uses of texts, in particular their application in politico-philosophical discourse, during the Warring States period. With reference to the theoretical work by Mieke Bal and Jan Assmann on narratology and memory production, Meyer’s analysis casts further light on the circulation of knowledge, as well as on the production and circulation of textualized “Shu” (“Documents”). Meyer considers the “Shu” traditions in dynamic cultural terms, with its constituents incessantly evolving as they continue to be rearticulated in ever-new forms by different communities in varying contexts and situations. He concludes that not only do the form and style of such recomposed texts differ but so do their messages. Meyer considers the manuscript text a carefully composed artifact meant to reveal distrust and doubt about the Duke of Zhou’s integrity—but only in order to address such preexisting sentiments directly and, finally, to dispel them. In this analysis, the manuscript text, unlike the “Jinteng” chapter in the *Shangshu*, appears designed in a strict hierarchy of narrative elements for rhetorical purposes: it guides its audience through the experience of doubt toward a final discovery of truth. In other words, the manuscript text, once again unlike its received counterpart, is taken as performative and experiential.

In “The *Yi Zhoushu* and the *Shangshu*,” Yegor Grebnev identifies groups of analogous texts within the *Shangshu* and the *Yi Zhoushu* and proposes a set of formal criteria to classify speeches across the two collections. In particular, Grebnev distinguishes “dramatic” and “nondramatic” speech: while the former is emotionally charged and personalized and contains a richer repertoire of emphatic devices, the latter is a form of treatise only superficially enhanced by such rhetoric. Grebnev further correlates the two different speech types with different types of contextualizing frames—that is, the ways in which a speech is introduced to the audience at its outset. Texts of dramatic speech are often characterized by “background-centered” contextualization that provides a unique setting with memorable background details, while nondramatic speech tends to be introduced by only brief and formulaic framing. Showing the prevalence of such distinctions in both the canonical *Shangshu* and the much-less-esteemed *Yi Zhoushu*, Grebnev advocates moving beyond the conventional dichotomy where the former appears “genuine” and the latter “dubious.” The variances in compositional patterns and intertextual formulas transcend the

boundaries between the two collections and reveal concerns and purposes shared by both and by the textual communities that produced them.

Kern's chapter on the "harangues" (*shi* 誓) in the *Shangshu* addresses a series of ancient battle speeches. Attributed to the culture heroes of successive dynasties, these thundering addresses were purportedly given on the eve of major military assaults, and especially in cases that resulted in the overthrow of an existing dynasty and the establishment of a new one. The speeches share a series of rhetorical and linguistic features, patterns, and propositions, always in the same sequence; and the coherence of this structural organization across historical periods reveals the constructed and ritualized nature of these texts and marks them as retrospective creations of Zhou cultural memory. The harangues are intensely ideological in portraying their speakers as both fierce and virtuous; and they overwrite the bloody realities of China's ancient wars with a benign version of history that represents military assault and invasion as a moral necessity sanctioned by Heaven—a worldview best contextualized in the Warring States period. Linguistically, the speeches are shaped as actual performance texts or literary re-creations of such utterances, and it is likely that at least some of them were once staged on ceremonial occasions. Philosophically, they provide the justification for rebellion, regicide, and war, mandated by Heaven and fulfilling the needs of the common people.

David Schaberg's "Speaking of Documents" looks back at the *Shangshu* from the way it appears across Warring States period texts. As Schaberg reminds us, the core of the text, while seemingly a collection of "documents" (*shu* 書), comprises speeches that never fully represent the communications they re-create as written communications. Marked by rhetorical patterns of ceremonial archaism, they retained their oratorical presence in authoritative royal utterances over centuries into the Spring and Autumn period (770–453 BCE) and then reappeared in the early empire with the Qin imperial stele inscriptions and Han ritual hymns and edicts. If the *Shangshu* speeches were also archived in written form, such writing would, from the very beginning, have been embedded in a larger culture of oral performance that could be drawn upon at any time in early history as remembered royal speech, in particular in contexts and for purposes that mimic earlier rituals. As Schaberg demonstrates through detailed case studies of particular citations—and their highly suggestive variants—in Warring States texts, the same ceremonial archaism was responsible for both the preservation of old materials and the production of new archaizing prose, based primarily not on the reading of the old "documents" but on the dynamics of their oral remembrance.

In "A Toiling Monarch?" Yuri Pines proposes a new reading of "Against Idleness" ("Wu yi" 無逸), a seemingly more marginal chapter of the *Shangshu*. Through analyzing the chapter's content and contextualizing it within the

political discourse of both Western and Eastern Zhou periods, Pines holds that “Wu yi” presents a radically different vision of monarchy than the majority of known Zhou texts. While some of its recommendations—for example, that the monarch should avoid moral laxity and remain close to his subjects—are commonplace in early Zhou documents, others are highly peculiar. In particular, the chapter’s valorization of the ruler’s personal experience of manual labor before his ascendancy and its unusual selection of paragons, who mostly did not inherit the throne directly, come dangerously close to questioning the principle of hereditary transfer of power. As Pines further suggests, this distinctive perspective, glossed over by the vast majority of later exegetes, may reflect an exceptional background for the chapter’s composition, possibly in the aftermath of the collapse of Western Zhou rule in 771 BCE.

Like Pines, Michael Hunter addresses the “Wu yi” chapter, though from a different, broadly comparative perspective. In his analysis, the chapter can be read as both a typical example of and a distinctive contribution to a global genre of ancient wisdom literature we might refer to as “instruction texts.” Depicting scenes in which an older, established authority figure (often a king) imparts the wisdom that his successor (often a prince) will need in order to succeed in his new position, these texts in several ancient traditions exhibit a common ideological agenda, particularly with respect to the value of diligence. “Wu yi” shares many of these same characteristics even as it adopts a more reflective perspective on diligence, arguing that the success of one generation increases the likelihood that subsequent generations will fall into idleness. Diligence, in other words, is an unstable value from a generational perspective. Hunter proposes taking this claim, together with the chapter’s tightly organized structure and certain other cues, as an indication that “Wu yi” was composed as a unified whole and is a text of Warring States philosophy in *Shangshu* clothing. Finally, Hunter reads “Wu yi” with reference to several recently discovered manuscripts to explore the possibility that the nuanced didactic stance found in “Wu yi” may have been prompted by a different kind of didacticism: that of the banquet hall, where indulgence in pleasure was both encouraged and restrained.

In her essay on Western Zhou oath texts and legal culture, Maria Khayutina focuses on “The Oath at Bi” (“Bi shi” 柴誓),²⁵ which renders an oath that a duke of Lu 魯, an early Zhou colony in eastern China, took with his subordinates while preparing for war against neighboring peoples. Examining (and finally rejecting) the oath’s traditional attribution to the first ruler of Lu, *bo* Qin 伯禽 (ca. eleventh to tenth centuries BCE), Khayutina distinguishes between the

25 For the translation of *shi* 誓 as “oath” in this chapter title, see n. 2 in Khayutina’s chapter.

historical setting to which this text relates and the historical context in which it was, plausibly, produced. She concludes that a comparison with Western Zhou bronze inscriptions speaks against an early date for the “Oath at Bi” even though the document reveals familiarity with Western Zhou legal culture, documentary practice, and language. Considering other commemorative texts as well as various historical references in the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuo zhuan* 左傳) and other sources, Khayutina concludes that it is plausible that “Oath at Bi” was produced in Lu during the second part of the seventh century BCE or later. Thus, the text is best understood as a product of local official memory culture that, in imitation of royal Zhou commemorative texts, served the symbolic representation of political power, often camouflaging a moment of crisis.

Charles Sanft’s contribution, “Concepts of Law in the *Shangshu*,” suggests the existence of multiple viewpoints and understandings of law and legal practice in the *Shangshu*, refuting the long-held view of the *Shangshu* as being internally consistent in these respects. The actual diversity of thought is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the case of the chapter “Lü xing” (“Punishments of Lü”), which propounds practices strongly at variance with the rest of the *Shangshu*. Nevertheless, there are shared interests across chapters. Much content relevant to legal practice in the *Shangshu* concerns systems of justice and their functional, if fallible, processes. It speaks of integrating these processes into systems and returns repeatedly to the potential for error, deception, malfeasance, and, in particular, persistent doubt. It proposes methods for dealing with doubt, including especially the use of redemptions in place of other punishments. Yet despite broad accord across the various *Shangshu* chapters about the necessity of a legal system, there remains one fundamental disagreement: most of its chapters (as well as other early texts), including the much-cited “Proclamation to Kang” (“Kang gao” 康誥), consider penal practice as necessary but ideally to be done away with, while “Lü xing” holds proper punishment as inherently beneficial.

Robin McNeal’s contribution, “Spatial Models of the State in Early Chinese Texts,” explores how descriptions of the spatial layout of the state conceived of political space in terms of the flow of power, authority, and material goods. In particular, McNeal examines how the “Tribute of Yu” (“Yu gong” 禹貢) chapter and other texts depict the movement of usually exotic goods to the political center, and how they engage the notion of a far-flung and diverse empire held together by movement through networks centered on ritual, economic, and political activity. In addition to the well-known portrayal of the Xia dynasty found in “Tribute of Yu,” the “King’s Convocation” (“Wang hui” 王會) chapter of the *Yi Zhoushu*, describing the tribute systems of the Shang and Zhou, similarly

participates in the broader discourse centered on the notion that power was generated and maintained through the creation and sustenance of networks of exchange and interaction. This conception of the state—not as a static territory defined by borders but as a dynamic entity defined by movement—may be extended to better grasp the nature of the early Chinese empire. “Tribute of Yu” in particular exerted a profound influence on the imagination of unified political space and cultural geography and helped to transform an imagined past into the structures and institutions of the imperial state.

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Such is the scope of the present volume, as it has come together in its final form within little more than two years of our second conference. We thank all the participants at the Princeton and Oxford meetings for their presentations and engaged discussions, which helped to enhance every one of the studies assembled here. The essays selected for this book bespeak the ambition and courage of our contributors to chart new, original paths in the study of one of China’s most ancient and most influential texts; reflect the current state of our field in terms of historical, philological, and conceptual sophistication; and, so we hope, retain in written form some lingering echoes of the congenial exchanges during our meetings and beyond. A final word of profound gratitude, spoken on behalf of all contributors to the present volume, goes to one of the two readers of the manuscript: Robert Eno, professor emeritus of Indiana University (who had kindly released the publisher from keeping his identity anonymous). Professor Eno’s—no, *Bob’s*—review was everything an author and a volume editor can hope for, and then so much more. Clocking in at forty-seven single-spaced pages, it provided an enormous wealth of questions, suggestions, and critical remarks that challenged all of us to do better and to bring our essays to their full potential. With gratitude, we consider him our editor *honoris causa*.

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