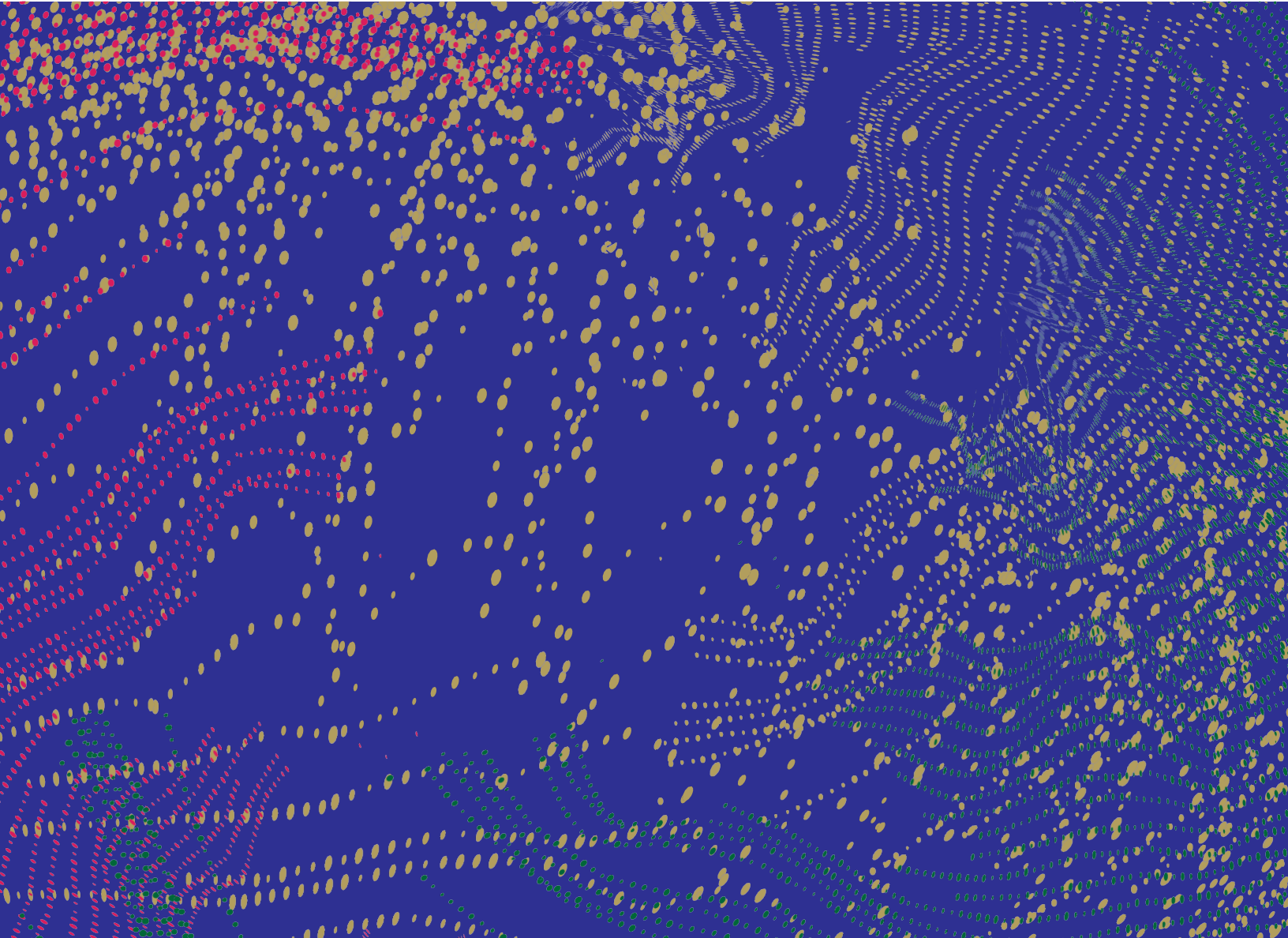


The World Humanities Report
**Unearthed Bamboo
and Silk Documents
and the Development
of Chinese Humanities**

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Unearthed Bamboo and Silk Documents and the Development of Chinese Humanities

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Traditional Chinese scholarship centering around the study of Confucian classics¹ has undergone many redirections and transitions in the past two thousand years. But for centuries, despite controversies over the Old Texts versus the New Texts for Confucian classics and differences between Han and Song dynasty schools of scholarship, traditional Chinese scholarship consistently followed the inner logic of the texts themselves—that is, until the late Qing. At that time, during the cultural clash between the East and the West amid the “eastward dissemination of Western learning” [*xixue dongjian*], traditional Chinese scholarship faced real challenges and underwent fundamental change. Experts on the history of Chinese scholarship and others have written abundantly about the development and evolution of the humanities during and since the late Qing,² and we will not rehearse their work here. Rather, we will focus on more recent radical changes within Chinese humanities that have occurred since the discovery of large quantities of bamboo and silk [*jianbo*] manuscripts from the pre-Qin, the Qin (221–206 BCE), and the Han (202 BCE–220 CE) dynasties in the 1990s.³ This essay summarizes the role these newly unearthed manuscripts have

¹ Qiu Xigui described the field as Chinese “classical studies.” See Qiu Xigui, “Chutu wenxian yu gudian xue chongjian,” *Chutu wenxian*, no. 4 (2013): 1.

² For systematic discussions, see Fan-sen Wang, *Zhongguo jindai sixiang yu xueshu de xipu* (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian shudian, 2018); Chen Yong and Xie Weiyang, eds., *Zhongguo chuantong xueshu de jindai zhuanxing* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2011); Yao Manlin, *Jidang xia de chonggou: Wan Qing yilai Zhongguo wenhua bianqian yanjiu* (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2019).

³ There is as yet no comprehensive summary of the development of Chinese humanities scholarship during these years, but see Li Ling’s *Jianbo gushu yu xueshu yuanliu* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2004). Since its first publication, this book has been revised, expanded, and reprinted many times. See also, Qiu Xigui, “Chutu wenxian yu gudian xue chongjian”; Li Junmin,

played in the recent development of the humanities and explores their significance and profound impact on Chinese self-reflection and the future direction of Chinese humanities.

Earlier Challenges to Ancient Books, Ancient History, and Traditional Scholarship in China

To fully comprehend the significance of bamboo and silk manuscripts unearthed in the past thirty years, let us first look back at questions presented to transmitted texts in the late Qing dynasty. During the Jiaqing (1796–1820) and Daoguang (1821–1850) reigns of the Qing dynasty, severe corruption, conservatism, and continuous foreign invasions led to the crumbling of the traditional political order, which had been maintained for over two thousand years. In a society that was undergoing unprecedented changes, traditional intellectuals, who had devoted most of their time to the study of Confucian classics and history, looked beyond their evidential scholarship for ways traditional scholarship might save the country. In the last years of the Qing, Kang Youwei (1858–1927) created a new system of social evolutionist thought by amending New Text Confucianism to create the basis of the political reform during the Hundred Days of Reform in 1898. Among his most significant and influential writings are *Xin xue weijing kao* [An examination of the forged classics of the Xin dynasty; 1891] and *Kongzi gai zhi kao* [An investigation of Confucius as a system reformer; 1897]. By claiming that the transmitted Old Text Confucian classics were largely forged by Liu Xin (46 BCE–23 CE) and that the learning of Confucius had been altered repeatedly, these two books called into question an academic tradition that had been in existence since the Han dynasty. After scrutiny, Kang's doctrine was found not to be an original creation. Instead, he inherited the skepticism toward Confucian classics developed since the Song dynasty (960–1127, 1127–1276) and had probably also borrowed from the scholarship of his contemporaries.⁴ However, Kang Youwei's innovation was to parlay this intellectual skepticism into a political movement in accordance

Dangdai Zhongguo jianbo xue yanjiu: 1949–2019 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2019).

⁴ It is generally believed that the main ideas of *Xin xue weijing kao* and *Kongzi gai zhi kao* are derived from Liao Ping's books *Pi Liu pian* and *Zhi sheng pian* respectively. Recently, Wu Yangxiang offered another interpretive analysis over this matter. For details, see Wu Yangxiang, "Chonglun Liao Ping Kang Youwei xueshu gongan," *Zhongguo shehui kexue*, no. 4 (2020): 181–203.

with the demands of his generation—to save the nation from subjugation and ensure its survival. Because of this, his doctrine was not only influential among intellectuals but also played a role in scuttling the conservative culture.

Although eager to study the advanced technologies of the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chinese intellectuals did not want to give up their cultural and academic traditions that had been developed over many centuries. Therefore, they came up with some ideas to reconcile Chinese and Western culture and learning, such as “Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application” [*zhongti, xiyong*] and “learning from foreigners to compete with foreigners” [*shiyi zhiyi*]. That said, a few intellectuals advocated radical breaks with traditional culture. Hu Shi (1891–1962), the leader of the New Culture movement, put forward the slogan of “Full-Scale Worldization” [*chongfen shijiehua*]. Another scholar, Qian Xuantong (1887–1939), wrote: “If you do not want China to fall, if you want the Chinese nation to become a civilized nation of the twentieth century, we should resort to abolishing Confucianism and eliminating Daoism as the real solutions. The abrogation of Chinese characters, the script that records Confucian teachings and Daoist fallacies, is the cardinal solution for the complete eradication.”⁵ Even though both claimed to be practicing the intellectual skepticism of Western academic methodologies, their views and slogans were in fact the negation of traditional culture and academics in service of political reforms. At their base is an antagonistic logic that “there is no construction without destruction” [*bupo buli*].

Unlike these scholars, Gu Jiegang (1893–1980) cast reasonable doubt on traditional scholarship from a scientific perspective and had a wide impact with his so-called doubting antiquity school [*gushi bian pai*]. He sublimated the previous simple denial of ancient history into a more logical and systematic view of the “accumulated creation of ancient history of China” [*cenglei de zaocheng de Zhongguo gushi*]. He found many credible examples to prove that Confucian classics were constantly evolving in their accounts of ancient history, and this approach was found to be refreshing in the late Qing transition from the old to the new. In addition, Gu adopted archaeological and linguistic methodologies newly introduced from the West to conduct a comprehensive inspection of the foundation of traditional Chinese scholarship—the transmitted ancient books.⁶

⁵ Qian Xuantong, “Zhongguo jinhou zhi wenzi wenti,” *Xin qingnian*, no. 4 (1918).

⁶ The main research output of scholars from the doubting antiquity school is presented in the seven-volume books compiled by Gu Jiegang and his followers. See Gu Jiegang, *Gushi bian*

At that time, scholars such as Lu Xun (1881–1936) and Qian Mu (1895–1990) opposed Gu Jiegang’s suspicion of ancient history and his work of scrutinizing ancient books. Wang Guowei (1877–1927) believed that those who doubt the ancient history are “not without merit in their skeptical attitude and spirit of criticism” but that “it is a pity that they do not handle the ancient historical materials adequately.” He criticized them for “being more destructive than constructive” and proposed his own “method of twofold evidence” [*erchong zhengju fa*], which took into account oracle bones, bronze inscriptions, and other underground materials, “to prove that a certain part of the ancient book is all true record and that even the indecent words of the variant schools [other than Confucianism] also expressed a certain aspect of the facts.”⁷

Even though there were many opposing voices, subsequent scholars adopted a newly rigorous attitude in their consideration of ancient books and ancient history. The mainstream view among scholars became that there is no book that does not include forgeries and all ancient records contain adulterations. The scholarship of the doubting antiquity school essentially reflected a rational attitude and a scientific methodology, and historical conditions kept opponents from presenting a solid rebuttal. After the authority of the ancient books was struck down, traditional Chinese scholarship, which was based on them, fell into a state of decline after more than two thousand years of glory. Without the ancient books, the ancient history of China and traditional scholarship became a rootless tree.

The Newly Discovered Pre-Qin and Qin-Han Texts

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Chinese humanistic scholarship did not turn a corner; instead, it suffered further damage during the years of the Cultural Revolution. Only after the economic reform in the 1980s did the humanities and social sciences in China begin to break through their confinement and develop once again. In a “retaliatory” fashion, the humanities, which had long been in a semi-closed state, adopted Western academic methods and concepts. In a short period of time, every discipline established a disciplinary framework based on Western styles.

(Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982). Zhang Jinghua offered a summarization of their impact in his book, *Gushi bian pai yu Zhongguo xiandai xueshu zouxian* (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 2009).

⁷ Wang Guowei, *Gushi xinzheng* (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 1994), 2.

Wang Xuedian of Shandong University has divided the transformations that Chinese humanities and social sciences went through after the Chinese economic reform into two stages from the perspective of the system of academic disciplines: the late 1970s and the 1980s, and the mid-1990s to the present. The former was focused mainly on restoration and reconstruction of disciplines, and the latter on encouraging cross-disciplinary cooperation and integration.⁸ All of these processes have affected traditional Chinese humanities, but, unlike in other disciplines, the introduction of modern Western academic ideas and the collision between Chinese and Western have not been the main driving forces behind the field's rapid transformation over the past thirty years. Rather, it was the discovery of a large number of ancient books on bamboo slips and silks in the 1990s that set the study of traditional Chinese humanities, which focuses mainly on classics from the pre-Qin, onto a unique developmental path.

Many texts written on bamboo slips and silks had already been discovered throughout the country before the 1990s. For example, fragments of a bamboo slip book of the Warring States period (ca 475–221 BCE) were unearthed at Changtai guan (Xinyang, Henan) in 1956. Some scholar believes that they might be from a lost chapter of the *Mozi* based on a conversation between the Duke of Zhou and Shentu Di (ca 1600 BCE) featured in it.⁹ Military texts such as *Sun Wu's Art of War* [*Sun Wu bingfa*], *Sun Bin's Art of War* [*Sun Bin bingfa*], *Six Secret Teachings* [*Liutao*], and *Military Science of Wei Liao Zi* [*Wei Liaozi*] were unearthed in a tomb of the Western Han (206 BCE–220 CE) at Yinque shan (nearby Linyi, Shandong) in 1972. In the same year, manuscript versions of Chinese classics such as *Laozi* and *Zhou Yi* and their annotations from the early years of the Western Han were also discovered in silk documents unearthed in Mawangdui (Changsha, Hunan). In 1973 the *Analects* [*Lunyu*], *Rujiazhe yan*, and *Wenzi* were unearthed in the grave of King Huai of the Zhongshan Kingdom (aka Liu Xiu, d. 54 BCE) of the Western Han in Bajiaolang (Dingxian, Hebei). In 1977 the *Classic of Poetry* [*Shijing*], the *Book of Changes* [*Zhou Yi*], *Zhuangzi*, *Cangjie*, and other ancient texts were found in the tomb of the Marquis of Ruyin (aka Xiahou Zao, d. ca 165 BCE) of the Western Han in Shuanggu dui (Fuyang, Anhui).

⁸ Wang Xuedian, "Xueshu shang de juda zhuanxing: Renwen shehui kexue 40 nan huigu," *Zhonghua dushu bao*, January 2, 2019.

⁹ Li Xueqin, "Changtai guan zhujian Zhong de mozi yipian," in *Xu Zhongshu xiansheng jiu shi shouchen jinian wenji* (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1990), 1–8; He Linyi, "Xinyang zhushu yu Mozi yiwen," *Anhui daxue xuebao (Zhhexue shehui kexue ban)*, no. 1 (2001): 27–29.

Although these precious texts were edited relatively well after their discoveries, they were not researched sufficiently, and the value of these texts for disciplines such as textual philology [*wenxian xue*] and historiography are yet to be revealed. The general dreariness in the studies of traditional Chinese humanities continued, until the other discoveries of manuscripts on bamboo strips and silk in the late 1990s. Then full-scale transformations in terms of the depth of content and methodology came to contemporary Chinese humanities. These discoveries include the following:

(1) In 1993 archeologists unearthed more than eight hundred bamboo slips from a tomb dating to the Chu Kingdom of the Warring States period at Guodian (Jingmen, Hubei), including books such as *Laozi*, *Taiyi shengshui* [The Great One generates water], *Wuxing* [The five conducts], *Ziyi* [Black robes], *Xingzi mingchu* [Human nature is brought forth by decree], *Chengzhi wenzhi*, *Zun de yi* [Revering virtue and propriety], *Liu de* [The six virtues], *Qiong da yishi* [Failure and success depend on the age], *Lu Mugong wen Zisi* [Duke Mu of Lu asked Zisi], *Tang Yu zhi dao* [The way of Tang and Yu], *Zhong Xin zhi dao* [The way of loyalty and good faith]. These eight hundred bamboo slips represent the first large-scale discovery of the Warring States literature since the late nineteenth century. They contain both Confucian classics and Daoist documents, which are particularly important for studying the history of thought. Also, because the manuscripts of the Warring States period were not included in the book burnings and the evolution of the writing system of the Qin, they are of especial value to scholarship. For all of these reasons, the Guodian bamboo slips have attracted significant attention from academic circles domestically and internationally.

(2) In 1994 the Shanghai Museum purchased overseas a batch of bamboo slips dating from the Chu Kingdom (ca 1030–223 BCE) of the Warring States period. These 1,700 pieces include Confucian classics, historical texts, literary texts, texts on the history of thought, texts on numerology, and more. Among them are ancient versions of transmitted texts such as *Zhou Yi*, *Ziyi*, as well as previously lost texts, such as *Kongzi shilun*, *Zigao*, *Xingqing lun*, *Rongcheng shi*, *Heng xian*, *Fanwu liuxing*, *Cao Mo zhi Chen*, *Zhengzi jia sang*, among others. The significance of the Shanghai Museum bamboo strips comes first from its reference value in studying the Guodian bamboo strips. They also enrich our understanding of the thoughts of Confucius because they offer an opportunity to reexamine his work in compiling pre-Qin literature. These texts also reflect

how the people of the Warring States period perceived ancient history and the legendary era, as well as their own time.

(3) In July 2008 Tsinghua University purchased about 2,300 Warring States period bamboo slips from abroad, which are now called the Tsinghua bamboo slips. Most of these bamboo slips are comprised of early versions of classical and historical texts, which feature various aspects of the traditional Six Arts (such as *Qi ye*, *Zhongong zhi Qin wu*, *Rui Liangfu bi*, *Yin Gao*, *Fu Yue zhi ming*, *Houfu*, *Sheming*, *Biegua*, *Xinian*, *Chuju*). They also include books on ideologies and theories about governing a state and dealing with policies taken from books of various philosophers (*Zhibang zhi dao*, *Zhizheng zhi dao*, *Bangjia chuwei*, *Bangjia Zhizheng*, *Xinshi weizhong*). They even include texts on practical knowledge, such as astronomy, calendrics, divination, and supplications (such as *Sishi*, *Xingcheng*, *Suanbiao*, *Shifa*, *Zhuci*, *Daoci*, and *Xiangma jing*). The contents of the Tsinghua University bamboo slips are highly diverse. They enrich our understanding of the composition and transmission of pre-Qin texts, and, although the cataloging and transcribing of the Tsinghua bamboo slips are only half completed, they have already had a major impact due to their enormous academic value.

(4) In 2015 another set of precious Chu Kingdom bamboo slips were rescued from abroad and are now housed at Anhui University. This set of bamboo slips include pieces from the “Airs of the States” section of the *Classic of Poetry*. These texts contain characteristics of the Chu area such as *Chu shi* (The history of Chu) and *Chu ci* (Verses of Chu), and the writings of various philosophers. They also contain a few texts that can be compared with the bamboo slips titled “Cao Mo zhi Chen” of Shanghai Museum and the bamboo slips featuring the conversation between the Duke of Zhou and Shentu Di unearthed from Changtai guan.¹⁰ The first compilation report on bamboo slip books hosted at Anhui University was released in 2019,¹¹ and the released manuscript version of the *Classic of Poetry* triggered a heated discussion among historians and literary scholars.

(5) In 2009 Peking University obtained a set of bamboo strips of the Western Han.¹² Texts preserved in these bamboo strips include *Laozi*, *Cang Jie pian*,

¹⁰ Huang Dekuan, “Anhui daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian gaishu,” *Wenwu*, no. 9 (2017): 54–59.

¹¹ See Huang Dekuan, Xu Zaiguo, eds., *Anhui Daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian*, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2019).—Trans.

¹² See Christopher J. Foster, “Introduction to the Peking University Han Bamboo Strips: On the Authentication and Study of Purchased Manuscripts,” *Early China*, no. 40 (2017): 167–239.—Trans.

Zhou Xun, Zhao Zheng shu, Wang Ji, Fan Yin, Rujia shuo cong, and Yinyang jia yan. The *Laozi* manuscript, which is divided into two parts, is another important discovery of an early version of *Laozi* after the silk version found in Mawangdui in 1972 and the bamboo strip version found in Guodian.

(6) In 2011 the tomb of the Marquis of Haihun (aka Liu He, 92–59 BCE) was unearthed in Nanchang, Jiangxi. It included not only the intact burial of a marquis of the Han dynasty but also a set of precious bamboo strip books from his time. According to reports, bamboo strip books from the tomb include ancient manuscripts (such as the *Classic of Poetry*, the *Classic of Rites*, the *Analects*, and other classics), texts that can be compared with the *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* [*Yili*], the *Classic of Filial Piety* [*Xiaojing*], and the three commentaries on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* [*Chunqiu*], literary works such as *Rhapsody of Master Emptiness* [*Zixu fu*] and *Rhapsody of Burial* [*Zang fu*], as well as books on numerology.¹³ However, since bamboo slips from the tomb of the Marquis of Haihun are still in the process of compilation, their academic value has not yet been fully demonstrated.

The silk and bamboo slip documents that have come to light since the 1990s now comprise the core of pre-Qin classics and many other texts. In terms of quantity and breadth, these discoveries surpass those from two other significant discoveries of ancient books, namely, the manuscripts found in the walls of Confucius's former house and the manuscripts found in the tomb at Ji. On the basis of these new discoveries, it is no exaggeration to say that modern research on the history and literature of the pre-Qin period has greatly surpassed that of premodern scholars, who had much less material. In particular, the discovery of ancient books such as the *Book of Documents* [*Shangshu*], the *Classic of Poetry*, the *Book of Changes*, and others has given us new understandings of some of the important controversial issues in traditional humanities scholarship in China.

The controversy over Old Texts versus New Texts [*jin gu wen zhi zheng*] in the *Book of Documents* took place during the Han dynasty, and, together with the accusation of spurious archaic texts raised later in the Wei-Jin periods (220–420 BCE), represents some of the long-standing “meta” questions in the traditional scholarship on Confucian classics. After comparing the transmitted texts to the large number of texts from the Tsinghua University bamboo slips, the

¹³ Jiangxi Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology et al., “Jiangxi Nanchang Xi-han Haihun hou Liu He mu chutu jiandu,” *Wenwu*, no. 11 (2018): 87–96.

so-called ancient Book of Documents is a forgery.¹⁴ When you compare the ancient manuscript of “Yin gao” [The announcement of Yin] with the chapter of “Xian you yi de” [The common possession of pure virtue] in the spurious *Book of Documents*, you will notice that their sentences are completely different except the sections that had been cited in other ancient books. The same is true of a comparison of the “Fu Yue zhi ming” [Fu Yue’s command] and the chapter of “Shuo Ming” in the spurious *Book of Documents*. It is obvious that the old, transmitted texts of the *Book of Documents* are indeed spurious. Moreover, since the Tsinghua University bamboo slips contain a few chapters (such as “Yin Zhi,” “Hou Fu,” “Si Gao,” “Feng Xu zhi ming,” etc.) that are not even included in the one hundred entries of the “Preface to the *Book of Documents*” and are not confronted with any contradictions like what we see between the *Book of Documents* and the *Yi Zhou Shu* [*Lost Book of Zhou*], they offer a better opportunity for us to get a clearer understanding of the formats of these documents and the process of their compilation and circulation.¹⁵

There are fewer questions regarding the texts of the *Classic of Poetry* in the study of Confucian classics. Major differences between commentaries on this classic mainly concern the interpretation of the gist and the exegesis. The discovery of *Kongzi lunshi* in the Shanghai Museum bamboo slips enabled us to grasp the basic understanding of the *Classic of Poetry* among pre-Qin scholars, especially followers of Confucius. The exposure of textual variations of the *Classic of Poetry* during the Warring States period in the Anhui University bamboo slips not only settled matters regarding the punctuation and interpretation of many keywords and lines that had remained unsolved for millennia but also enriched our understanding of the compilation of poetry and the circulation of texts in the Warring States period. For example, many scholars pointed out that the bamboo slip version of the *Classic of Poetry* collected in Anhui University is very likely related to the transmission of the anthology in the state of Wei (403–225 BCE) from around the same time.¹⁶

The *Book of Changes* occupies a special place in traditional Chinese scholarship. Li Xueqin once remarked that “the crown of laurels of the study of classics

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion, see Liu Guangsheng, “Guwen shangshu zhenwei gongan zaiyi,” *Lishi yanjiu*, no. 4 (2020): 198–218.

¹⁵ Cheng Hao has discussed this in detail in the book *Youwei yanzhi: Xianqin “shu” lei wenxian de yuan yu liu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2021).

¹⁶ Ma Yinqin, “Anda jian Shijing wenben xingzhi lice,” *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu*, no. 3 (2020): 9–15; Zhang Shuguo, “Anda jian Shijing wei Zixia xihe ‘Shichao,’” *Zhongyuan wenhua yanjiu*, no. 5 (2020): 88–95.

belongs to the study of the *Book of Changes*.¹⁷ However, because this book has long regarded as a historical dross and its content recondite, research on the *Book of Changes* from paleographical and intellectual perspectives has remained inadequate since the 1950s. The surfacing of Warring States period and Western Han bamboo slip versions of the *Book of Changes* at Shanghai Museum and Fuyang and the discovery of the silk book version at Mawangdui have improved our understanding of the textuality of the *Book of Changes* to a large extent. In addition, the discoveries of *Shi fa* at Tsinghua University and *Gui Cang* [Returned concealment] among Qin bamboo slips unearthed at Wangjia tai (Jingzhou, Hubei)—two divination texts that are completely different from the *Book of Changes*—have impelled us to think about systems of divinations of the pre-Qin from a much broader perspective.¹⁸

As indicated above, many of the above-mentioned ancient bamboo and silk texts were rescued and collected after they had circulated abroad (except for the two sets from Guodian and the tomb of the Marquis of Haihun). Due to their “origins,” voices of doubts never stopped despite most scholars considering them to be of exceptionally high value. Two questions have been directed toward the bamboo and silk texts that had been brought back to mainland China.

The first question is about the authenticity of these antiquities. Since skeptics think that the authenticity of antiquities circulating in the markets is mixed, they believe that bamboo and silk texts with unknown sources may also be forgeries. The second question concerns the ethics of collecting and researching antiquities that are acquired and made accessible to the public through tomb robberies. Given these concerns, skeptics argue that, since knowledge about the archeological background and unearthing process of these antiquities is incomplete, especially those obtained through tomb robberies, research based on them can easily lead to errors. Furthermore, purchasing unlawfully obtained goods participates in a vicious cycle that indirectly encourages tomb robberies.¹⁹

Both skepticisms are essential in maintaining the scientific spirit of the humanities and academic ethics. However, in our view, as has been pointed out by others, not only have rigorous methods been used in authenticating the bamboo and silk documents, but technical supports based on scientific

¹⁷ Li Xueqin, “Jingxue de guanmian shi yixue,” *Guangming ribao*, August 5, 2014.

¹⁸ Cheng Hao, “Qinghua jian Shifa yu zhoudai zhan shi xitong,” *Zhouyi yanjiu*, no. 6 (2013):11–16.

¹⁹ See Ke Mading [Martin Kern], “Zaoqi Zhongguo shige yu wenben yanjiu zhu wenti: Cong ‘Xishuai’ tanqi,” *Wenxue pinglun*, no. 4 (2019): 133–51.

detections have also been employed. Therefore, contemporary Chinese scholars are fully capable of judging the authenticity of bamboo and silk documents that have scattered across different parts of the world and of assessing their value.²⁰ Tomb robberies are prohibited illegal activities, and China has strict regulations and criminal laws in place. However, we will never eradicate thefts of antiquities due to their monetary value. Rescuing historical antiquities is the only responsible way to protect rare cultural relics when they have been scattered in the markets. Therefore, it is mistaken to accuse academic institutions, which rescue antiques, maintain, and study them, of violating academic ethics and encouraging tomb robberies.

The Impact of the Unearthed Texts on Humanistic Studies in Contemporary China

Wang Guowei famously stated in 1925: “All new study stems from new discoveries.”²¹ The discoveries of bamboo and silk documents since the 1990s prove him right, as they have helped solve many long-standing disputes. Beyond that, the expansion of available historical materials and the attendant proliferation of research have brought about a comprehensive transformation of the pertinent fields in the Chinese humanities. The remainder of this essay discusses the critical issues that the bamboo and silk documents have helped to solve and shows their significance in improving the contemporary humanities following the framework of modern subject classification.

Classical Textual Philology

Traditional classical philology studies ancient classics through a variety of methods: textual collation, bibliographical and textual study, annotation, textual investigation, authentication, the compilation of textual fragments, among others. These traditional academic methods remain essential to the study of textual philology. One of the most noticeable attributes of the newly surfaced bamboo and silk documents is that they have expanded the scope of materials available to textual philology. This expanded scope is of great significance to the study of pre-Qin texts, which previously were minimal among transmitted materials.

²⁰ For details, see Hu Pingsheng, “Lun Jianbo bianwei yu liushi jiandu qiangjiu,” in *Chutu wenxian yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 9:76–108.

²¹ Wang Guowei, “Zuijin ersanshi nian zhong Zhongguo xin faxian zhi xuewen,” in *Wan Guowei yishu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji shudian, 1983), 5:65.

For example, when researching the modern edition of the *Book of Documents*, researchers could rely on only twenty-eight chapters of the New Text version. However, the Tsinghua University bamboo slips add another eleven chapters.²² This new material is equal to half of the *Book of Documents*. Another example is *Laozi*. Before these new discoveries, the only commented versions of *Laozi* were those made by Heshang Gong and Wang Bi (226–249 BCE), but now there are three Warring States period bamboo slip *Laozi* manuscripts: one unearthed at Guodian, the silk manuscript version found in Mawangdui, and the Western Han bamboo slip version collected at Peking University. Research materials regarding *Laozi* have been greatly enriched in terms of the number of manuscripts, time periods, and contents.

The discoveries of the bamboo and silk documents also prompted scholars to rethink a number of important issues in studying classical textual philology. I focus on three here: errors in previous authentications, the formation and circulation of ancient texts, and the material forms of ancient texts.

First, the recent discoveries of the bamboo and silk documents proved that scholars of traditional authentications and scholars from the doubting antiquity school often went too far in criticizing the authenticity of ancient books. A typical example is their holding that *The Commentary of the Classic of Changes* [*Yi zhuan*] did not exist before the Han dynasty. However, manuscripts of this book from the Warring States period and the early years of the Western Han were found in the silk documents unearthed at Mawangdui. Moreover, the book *Shi fa*, which surfaced in the Tsinghua University bamboo slips, contains thoughts on studying the *Book of Changes* and is also closely relevant to the chapter of *Yi zhuan* titled “Commentary on Trigrams.” The doubting antiquity school stands corrected.²³ *Guicang*, one of the *Three Changes* [*san Yi*],²⁴ had long been considered a fraudulent book and therefore refuted. However, the names of hexagrams in *Shi fa* and *Bie gua*, two texts discovered in the Tsinghua

²² The fourteen pieces are: “Jinteng,” “Yin gao,” “Fu Yue zhi ming” (three versions), “She ming,” “Cheng wu,” “Huang men,” “Ji gong zhi guming,” “Yin zhi,” “Hou fu,” “Feng Xu zhi ming,” and “Si gao” (the first two chapters). The first two chapters of “Si gao” are certainly writings of the “document” genre. However, the production date of the other two chapters in it needs further research; therefore, we did not count them in.

²³ Liao Mingchun, “Qinghua jian ‘Shifa’ and ‘Shuo gua zhuan,’” *Wenwu*, no. 8 (2013): 70–72.

²⁴ “Three changes” refers to “three different configurations of the eight trigrams and sixty-four hexagrams that were used in divination and omens interpretations.” See Dominic Steavu, *The Writ of the Three Sovereigns: From Local Lore to Institutional Daoism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2019), 295.—Trans.

University bamboo slips, share a lot of similarities with names in *Guicang*. Bamboo slips from the Qin dynasty unearthed at Wangjia tai even include relevant sentence. This appears to mean that the transmitted version of *Guicang* had an earlier source.²⁵ *Laozi* is also a text that had suffered unjustified criticism. Scholars from the doubting antiquity school argued that this book was produced no earlier than the Han dynasty. However, that contention turned out to be unfounded with the unearthing of *Laozi* at Guodian. And whereas military books such as *Sun zi bingfa*, *Sun Bin bingfa*, *Wei Laozi*, and *Liu Tao* were deemed untrustworthy in the past, the discovery of Han dynasty bamboo slips at Yinque shan corrected the biased views of these books.

The discovery of ancient versions has directly proved that some books previously considered “spurious” are in fact authentic. Moreover, the unprecedented surfacing of a large quantity of ancient books also invites us to reevaluate the total number of books and documents of the pre-Qin. Bamboo slips discovered and hosted at Guodian, Tsinghua University, and Shanghai Museum contain many ancient books that had not been recorded in any ancient catalogs such as the “Yiwen zhi” chapter of the *Han shu*, and yet they are of great value in terms of their contents. We now know that the number of ancient books in circulation during the pre-Qin period was large and that the transmission of a text to the later generations was not the result of the “survival of the fittest.” The transmitted ancient books that we now see are merely a fraction of books from the pre-Qin period, and our understanding of the early civilization based upon these books is incomplete. Therefore, when examining books from the pre-Qin period, we must always keep in mind that many ancient books were lost.²⁶ We should acknowledge that some unexplainable phenomena are a result of the missing material from ancient books and do not indicate that a book is forged.

The second area in classical textual philology that these new texts have led scholars to rethink is the formation and circulation of ancient books. Li Ling has characterized the significance of bamboo slip and silk books for the history of scholarship thus: “the discovery . . . allows us to feel ancient books, the oldest books, directly, and to find out a set of generalizable rules, and accordingly develop a deeper understanding of the compilation, the structure, the reading, the interpretation, the selection, the sifting, the spreading, and the preservation

²⁵ Cheng Hao, “Jiben Guicang yuanliu lice,” *Zhouyi yanjiu*, no. 2 (2015): 40–45.

²⁶ Li Rui, *Tongwen yu zuben: Xin chu jianbo yu gushu xingcheng yanjiu* (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2017), 162–63.

of ancient books.”²⁷ The complex diversity of texts presented by the bamboo slips and silk documents demonstrates multidimensional compilation and circulation processes of ancient books. For example, texts discovered from the Tsinghua University bamboo slips belonging to the “document” genre are different from those in the transmitted *Book of Documents* in terms of their chapter titles, paragraphing, and phrasing. This tells us that there were anthologies of documents different from the version compiled by Confucians in the pre-Qin period. The text changes caused by factors such as the genre and objective gains and losses are actually much more drastic than we previously imagined.²⁸ Scholars in the doubting antiquity school lived before a large quantity of bamboo slip and silk documents had been discovered, so therefore, it is unsurprising that they did not have an adequate understanding of the authentication, the date, or authorship of ancient books. As a result, their research on the historical value of some specific content or the relationship between different books are overly simplified and, from our perspective today, defective.²⁹ Now, a hundred years later, after these ancient bamboo slip and silk documents have renewed our understanding, few scholars are thinking from this single, linear perspective.

A third area where the newly resurfaced texts have brought about changes is in our understanding of the material form of ancient books. Bibliographical and textual study in traditional philology relied mainly on editions printed during and after the medieval period. The rediscovery of a large quantity of earlier manuscripts from the pre-Qin, the Qin, and the Han dynasties presents a much broader spectrum in terms of physical appearance, writing styles, textual compositions, and compilation methods. The study of the material aspects of manuscripts has become an important topic in the study of early texts. With the help of the progress made in compiling bamboo slip and silk documents, scholars have provided detailed reports on the significance of the material form of bamboo slips and silk documents in studying ancient texts.³⁰ The bamboo slips gave

²⁷ Li Ling, *Jianbo gushu yu xueshu yuanliu*, 7.

²⁸ Cheng Hao, “Cong ‘Mengfu’ dao ‘Xingtian’: Xian Qin ‘Shu’ lei wenxian de shengcheng, jieji, yu liubian,” *Qinghua daxue xuebao (Zhhexue shehui kexue ban)*, no. 6 (2021).

²⁹ Xie Weiyang, “Gushu chengshu he liuchuan qingkuang yanjiu de jinzhuan yu gushi shiliao xue gainian: Wei jinian Gushi bian diyi ce chuban bashi zhounian er zuo,” *Wen shi zhe*, no. 2 (2017): 47–54.

³⁰ For representative works, see Cheng Pengwan, *Jiandu boshu geshi yanjiu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2017); Jia Lianxiang, *Zhanguo zhushu xingzhi ji xiangguan wenti yanjiu: Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian wei zhongxin* (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2015). Jia Lianxiang has published many articles after the publication of this book, as more compilation is completed on the bamboo slips at Tsinghua University.

rise to problems such as missing, cracked, or displaced slips. These issues as well as the rules required in joining and separating scrolls of bamboo books remind us that we need to take into consideration the important role that material supports play in the evolution of a text.³¹

Historiography

In his 1928 essay “Contextualizing ‘The Aims of Setting-up the Institute of History and Philology,’” Fu Ssu-nien (1896–1950) argued that the high importance placed on historical materials is an important characteristic of modern historiography. He wrote: “historiography in the early modern period was nothing but the study of historical materials.”³² The bamboo slip and silk documents have expanded the scope of materials available for the study of ancient Chinese history, and they have corrected mistaken judgments on the transmitted historical documents. As a result, they enabled significant progress in almost every field in the study of ancient history. We offer here three prominent examples.

The Verification of the Xia Dynasty

Previous historical knowledge on the Xia dynasty relied on the “Basic Annals of the Xia” in *Shiji* [Records of the Grand Historian] and other documents from the Spring and Autumn or the Warring States periods (770–221 BCE). However, these materials were untrusted due to skeptical attitudes toward ancient history. Many scholars, especially Western Sinologists, did not want to acknowledge that the Xia dynasty existed.³³ In recent years, however, this view is facing direct challenges because the unearthed bamboo slip and silk documents confirm repeatedly the recorded history of the Xia dynasty. For example, when reviewing the rise and fall of the Xia dynasty in “Houfu”³⁴—a document from the early years of the Western Zhou preserved in the Tsinghua University bamboo slip—King Wu of Zhou (r. 1046–1043 BCE) and Houfu mentioned not only founding rulers such as Yu and Qi but also the stories of Gao Tao and

³¹ Cheng Hao, “Gushu chengshu yanjiu zai fansi: Yi Qinghua jian ‘shu’ lei wenxian wei zhongxin,” *Lishi yanjiu*, no. 4 (2016): 132–43.

³² Fu Ssu-nien, *Minzu yu gudai Zhongguo shi* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 467.

³³ See Han Ding, “Cong Ailan ‘Xiandai shenhua shuo’ kan zhong xi fang xuejie Xia wenhua yanjiu de chayi,” *Zhongguo shehui kexue pingjia*, no. 3 (2020): 106–16.

³⁴ For details regarding the date of this document, see Cheng Hao, “Qinghua jian ‘Houfu’ ‘Zhoushu’ shuo,” in *Chutu wenxian* (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2014), 5:145–47.

Kong Jia, which also appear in *Guoyu* [Discourses of the states] and *Shiji*. Although the details of their lives are slightly different across these texts, the basic framework of the stories matches. This means that the history of the Xia dynasty told by descendants of the Xia people were nearly the same as those recorded in the “Basic Annals of the Xia” no later than the time of the King Wu of Zhou (d. 1043 BCE). This example should remind us that it is necessary to continually verify the independent status of the transmitted texts if they are to serve as historical materials.³⁵

Furthermore, the “background of historical facts” [*shi shi sudi*] in legendary stories are also worth further exploration. Compared with ancient books such as *Zhuangzi*, descriptions of the lineages of ancient emperors in the Shanghai Museum bamboo slip book *Rongcheng shi* have both difference and similarities. As Xie Weiyang has written recently, “the distribution of the constituent elements of a legend in different recording systems is helpful in explaining the presumably true facts that gave birth to these relevant variants.”³⁶ It is not that we cannot study the history of the legendary period. It is just that we face more challenges in authenticating historical materials and must be more precise in understanding of how they came to be.

Confirmations of the History of the Shang Dynasty

Although there are more historical materials about the Shang dynasty (ca 1766–1122 BCE) than the earlier Xia dynasty, materials are still not sufficient to reconstruct the history of the Shang. However, the previously unseen chapters on the history of the dynasty discovered in the ancient bamboo slip books at Tsinghua University greatly expand historical materials on the Shang. For example, pieces such as *Yin zhi*, *Yin gao*, and *Chihu zhi ji Tang zhi wu* from the reign of King Tang detail how he overthrew King Jie of Xia with the help of Yin Yi and his way of governing after replacing the Xia dynasty. The three pieces on “Fu Yue zhi ming” from King Wuding’s time narrate how King Wuding dreamed of Fu Yue and appointed him as a prime minister. Although people later forged pieces such as *Tang chuyu Tang qiu*, *Tang zai chimen*, and *Yin Gaozong wen yu san shou*, using the ancients as pretexts, these documents

³⁵ Xie Weiyang, “Gushu chengshu qingkuang yu gushi shiliao xue wenti,” in *Xin chutu wenxian yu gudai wenming yanjiu*, ed. Xie Weiyang and Zhu Yuanqing (Shanghai: Shanghai daxue chubanshe, 2004): 283–86.

³⁶ Xie Weiyang, “Gushu chengshu de fuza qingkuang yu chuanshuo shiqi shiliao de pinzhi,” *Xueshu yuekan*, no. 9 (2014): 127–36.

provide indirect historical materials worthy of reference. Even though the re-discoveries of these materials are not adequate enough to cover every link in the chronological span of the Shang, and some of them still need to be further studied and authenticated, they have undoubtedly produced a huge advance in the study of the “under-documented” Shang.

Supplements to and Corrections of the History of the Zhou Dynasty

The Western Zhou (ca 1046–771 BCE) is the best documented of the earliest three dynasties, and the discovery of a large amount of lengthy bronze inscriptions now makes it possible to reconstruct its history. This is why scholars are working on new editions of *Xi Zhou shi* [The history of the Western Zhou].

The value of recently discovered bamboo and silk documents in the reconstruction of the history of the Western Zhou is mainly reflected in their function as a correction mechanism. For example, there has long been controversy over the contradictory recordings in different texts around topics that people of the Zhou dynasty were proud of, such as “King Wen and King Wu received the mandate,” “King Wen called himself king,” and so forth. The Tsinghua University bamboo slips include a piece titled “Cheng wu,” only the title of which survives in the *Yi Zhou shu*, edited by people of the Han dynasty; the text had been lost after the Tang and Song dynasties. The rediscovery of the bamboo slip edition of this chapter recounts the whole process during which King Wen of the Zhou takes off from Shang for Cheng and receives the mandate of heaven with King Wu of Zhou in an auspicious dream. The problem of “King Wen and King Wu received the mandate” can be clarified. The contents of “Baoxun,” which was the earliest published of all the Tsinghua University bamboo slips, are the last words of King Wen of Zhou before his death. The opening phrase, “At the fiftieth year [of my governing], I, the King. . .” clearly indicates that King Wen of Zhou called himself king when he was alive. This could change the opinion, which many had held since the Han dynasty, that King Wen of Zhou had not referred to himself as king. In addition, pieces such as “Qi ye,” “Jin Yin,” and “Xi nian” offer important clues for pursuing questions in the study of Confucian classics, such as Who was the Chief of the West in the “Chief of the West Conquered Li” [*Xi bo kan li*]? When did King Wu of Zhou pass away? At what age did King Cheng of the Zhou assume the throne for the first time? and Did the Duke of Zhou reside or campaign in the east?

Historical documents concerning the early years of the Western Zhou dynasty are abundant, yet those about the middle and later years are scarce. Among

all chapters of the transmitted *Book of Documents*, “Lüxing” [Marquis of Lü on punishments] from the time of King Mu of Zhou (ca 976–922 BCE) is the only one that is about Western Zhou history after its middle period. The rediscovery of many documents about the middle and late years of Western Zhou in the Tsinghua University bamboo slips have narrowed this gap. Although the chapter “Zhai gong zhi gu ming” was transmitted through the *Yi Zhou shu*, a simple comparison of the two versions will lead to the conclusion that the transmitted version contains many errors and that the bamboo slip version could supplement many relevant historical events regarding institutions such as the so-called three ducal ministers [*sangong*]. “She ming” (Commend to She) is an important appointment document from the middle era of the Zhou dynasty at a length of nearly one thousand characters.³⁷ There are currently two opinions about its author, King Mu of Zhou or King Xiao of Zhou (r. 891–886 BCE). If it was indeed authored by King Xiao, then this chapter will become even more important because no documents from the time of King Xiao have yet been identified. “Rui Liangfu bi” was written in the style of a poem, but it also has great historical importance because this poem narrates contemporary political situations from the perspective of Rui Liangfu, who was an important minister of King Li of Zhou (r. ca 877–842 BCE). Records about historical events during the reigns of King Li, King Xuan (r. 827–782 BCE), and King You (r. 781–771 BCE) can also be found in a previously unseen historical book, *Xinian* [*Annals*].³⁸ Some of *Xinian*’s writings on historical events such as the Rebellion of Capital Dwellers [*guoren baozheng*], Gonghe Regency [*gonghe xingzheng*], the Revival of King Xuan [*xuanwang zhongxing*], and the fall of the Western Zhou match what is written in transmitted texts; some do not. Therefore, *Xinian* offers new perspectives for understanding the last years of the Western Zhou and the transitioning periods between the Western Zhou and the Eastern Zhou.

We can also find clues about the migrations, developments, and integrations of many famous ancient ethnic groups or states in the bamboo slip and silk documents. The third chapter of *Xinian* records that after suppressing the Three Supervisors Rebellion, King Cheng of Zhou (r. ca 1042–1021 BCE) relocated

³⁷ For a full translation and study of this document, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, “A Possible Lost Classic: The *She ming, or *Command to She,” *T’oung Pao* 106, no. 3/4 (2020): 266–308.—Trans.

³⁸ See Yuri Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed: The Bamboo Manuscript Xinian and Early Chinese Historiography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).—Trans.

Qin people from Shangyan to Zhuyu,³⁹ which makes it clear that Qin people originated from the east. This changed the conventional understanding of the origin of the Qin people. “Chu ju” (Chu residences), a record kept by Chu people themselves, laid out the clan origins of the Chu Kingdom, including the birth of their progenitor Jilian, the name of the Chu people, as well as the migration and stages of their royal lineages in the south. The new text provided precious previously unknown historical materials related to the history of the Chu. In addition, it is reported that two sets of bamboo slips in the collection of Anhui University contain more detailed accounts of the historical development of the Chu Kingdom.

The Spring and Autumn period was an important period in early China characterized by radical social and historical transitions. Historical documents such as *The Commentary of Zuo* and *Discourses of the States*, among others, provide support for our understanding of this period. However, these books are not comprehensive in describing the history of the Spring and Autumn period. Although the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Commentary of Zuo* provide detailed descriptions of events regarding Jin and Chu, their recordings of the history of other kingdoms are less impressive. *Discourses of the States* contains twenty-one *juan*⁴⁰ and includes discourses on eight states. However, the section on the Jin Kingdom takes up nine *juan*. It also does not include a section on the Qin, which would not correspond to the historical status of the Qin Kingdom at that time.

Fortunately, documents in the genre of “discourses” that were newly identified in the Tsinghua University bamboo slips make up for what the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Commentary of Zuo* did not include. They also confirm that historical records in the transmitted texts are basically reliable. The *Ziyi* document, which records a conversation between Duke Mu of Qin (659–621 BCE) and Ziyi, Duke Shen of Chu, might be a lost piece of the “Discourses of the Qin,” because the omitted subject of the opening phrase “After . . . was defeated at Xiao” is either “Duke Mu of Qin” or “Qin.” Documents related to affairs of the Zheng Kingdom such as “Zheng Wu furen gui ruzi” and “Zheng Taigong wen Wenbo” could possibly be grouped as “Discourses of the Zheng.” These texts provide more information than the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Commentary of Zuo* and hence further enrich our understanding of the

³⁹ Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed*, 108–112, 161–62.—Trans.

⁴⁰ A *juan* is a counting unit used in traditional Chinese books. It may refer to a “chapter” or “scroll.”—Trans.

cultural conditions and political situations of the Central Plains during the Spring and Autumn period. Although the records about the Jin Kingdom are already abundant, the increasing numbers of discovered documents are helpful too. “Zifan Ziyu” and “Jin Wengong ru yu jin” in the Tsinghua University bamboo slips recount stories of Chong'er, Duke Wen of Jin (r. 636–628 BCE), including his exile, his restoration of the rulership, and how the Jin Kingdom ascended to hegemony after the battle of Chengpu. “Zhao Jianzi” records lessons and admonitions that Fan Xianzi and Cheng Tuan offered to Zhao Jianzi (ca fifth century BCE) when Zhao was newly promoted as a minister of the state at the court of the Jin Kingdom. All these documents can be grouped as “Discourses of the Jin.” The most noteworthy is the document “Yue gong qi shi.” The close relation between this text and the sections “Discourses on the Wu” and “Discourses on the Yue” in the *Discourses of the States* is obvious. Apart from the abundant documents of the “discourse” genre, the historical book *Xinian* is also of great value for the reconstruction of the history of the Spring and Autumn period. This text describes the rise and fall of the main powers of the Spring and Autumn period in detail in a chronology-like format and presents much information that can be used to correct mistakes and confusion in transmitted texts.

In general, the discovery of bamboo and silk manuscripts has revealed many details of the history of the Zhou that were either previously unknown or reported only briefly, and they have enabled research to transform from an extensive operation to an intensive cultivation.

Philosophy and Intellectual History

Among the bamboo and silk manuscript documents that have come to light since the 1990s, those from Tsinghua University, Anhui University, and the tomb of the Marquis of Haihun mainly concern the classics and history, and those from Guodian, Shanghai Museum, and Peking University mainly concern intellectual history. The philosophy and intellectual history of the pre-Qin periods are thus one of the important new fields that has opened up in contemporary Chinese humanities due to the discovery of bamboo and silk manuscripts. We present four important examples here.

First, they clarify the original meaning of *Laozi*. After the initial publication of the bamboo slips of Guodian, the first wave of scholarly discussions dealt with the manuscripts of *Laozi* preserved in three different formats and paragraph

arrangements. By comparing these three versions with the silk manuscript version found at Mawangdui and the Han dynasty bamboo slip version held at Peking University, scholars gained many new insights into the formation and circulation of the *Laozi*. Apart from its significance to traditional textual philology, textual differences in these versions provided supports for discerning the original meaning of the text. Qiu Xigui has done a lot of work in this area, including the analysis of “jueren qiyi,” the rereading of “Chongru ruojing,” and the reinterpretation of “wuwei” and “wei.”⁴¹ This research is based on the bamboo and silk manuscripts. Because he realized that the text of *Laozi* had gone through many changes in the transmissions, Qiu proposed to compile a version of *Laozi* that is the closest to its original status by making the bamboo and silk manuscripts the master copy while also taking the various transmitted versions into full consideration.⁴² In addition, apart from the original text of *Laozi*, it is now believed that *Taiyi shengshui* from Guodian, *Heng xian*, *Fanwu liu xing*, and *San de* from Shanghai Museum, and *Tang zai chimen*, *Tang chuyu Tang qiu* from Tsinghua University are also related to the thoughts of the Huanglao Daoism. Relevant research can be found in Cao Feng’s works.⁴³

A second significance of the discovery of bamboo slip manuscripts at Guodian is that they contained many Confucian documents that scholars had never seen and shed light on the transmission of Confucian thought. Li Xueqin noted that *Ziyi*, *Wuxing*, and *Lu Mugong wen zisi* were authored by Zisi (ca 481–402 BCE) and that *Chengzhi wenzhi*, *Xing zi ming chu*, *Liu de*, and *Zun de yi* were also to some extent connected to Zisi.⁴⁴ Pang Pu argued that the unearthing of these important bamboo manuscripts would fill in the missing link between Confucius and Mencius in intellectual history.⁴⁵ Liang Tao’s more

⁴¹ Qiu Xigui, “Guanyu Laozi de jueren qiyi he juesheng,” in *Chutu wenxian yu guwenzi yanjiu* (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 1:1–15; Qiu Xigui, “Chongru ruojing shi chongru ruorong de wudu,” *Zhonghua wenshi luncong*, no. 3 (2013): 1–12; Qiu Xigui, “Shuo ‘Laozi’ zhong de ‘wuwei’ he ‘wei’: Jian shuo Laozi de shehui, zhengzhi sixiang,” *Zhonghua wenshi luncong*, no. 4 (2019): 1–95.

⁴² Qiu Xigui, *Laozi xin yan* (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2020).

⁴³ Cao Feng, *Jinnian chutu Huanglao sixiang wenxian yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2015); Cao Feng, *Wenben yu sixiang: Chutu wenxian suojian Huanglao Daojia* (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2018).

⁴⁴ Li Xueqin, “Xianqin rujia zhuzuo de zhongda faxian,” in *Zhongguo zhaxue* (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), 20:13–15.

⁴⁵ Pang Pu, “Kong Meng zhijian: Guodian Chu jian de sixiangshi diwei,” *Zhongguo shehui kexue*, no. 5 (1995): 88–95.

detailed work later revealed the significance of these texts in the development of Confucian thought.⁴⁶

After the discovery at Guodian, variances of *Ziyi* and *Xing qing lun* were discovered again at Shanghai Museum along with *Kongzi shi lun*, *Xizhe jun lao*, and *Neili*, which are generally believed to be works of Confucius's disciples. Besides, a few texts from the Tsinghua University bamboo slips such as *Xin shi wei zhong* and *Zhi bang zhi dao* also reflect deep Confucian thoughts. Discovering Confucian documents in the territory of the Chu Kingdom of the southern periphery of the Zhou pushes scholars to rethink the transmission of Confucianism in its early days and its influence on society and culture.

Third, the documents also provide new insights into traditional discourse. The fact that documents of the Huanglao Daoism and Confucianism were unearthed from the same tomb at Guodian reminds us of that boundaries and demarcations of different currents of thoughts in the pre-Qin periods were probably not as strict and rigid as we had previously surmised. It is true that the various philosophical masters had their own schools of thoughts, but they also share some commonalities, which reside in their shared knowledge background and resources of thoughts. The framework of traditional “six schools” (Yin Yang School, Confucianism, Mohism, Famous School, Legalism, Moralists) or “nine currents and ten schools of thought” (Confucianism, Daoism, Yin and Yang, Dharma, Ming, Mo, Zongheng, Zao, Nong, Novel) was probably constructed later through summarization and construction and hence does not necessarily reflect the reality of the pre-Qin period. The bamboo and silk manuscripts reflect the intersection, fusion, and mutual influence of different schools from different regions.

Except for the relationship of Daoism and Confucianism reflected in manuscripts of Guodian,⁴⁷ bamboo and silk documents contain proof for the mixture of Confucianism and Mohism. For example, *Rongcheng shi* and *Gui shen zhi ming* in the Shanghai Museum bamboo slips are both Confucian and Mohist. Some parts of *Zhi bang zhi dao*, *Zhi zheng zhi dao*, and *Bang jia zhi zheng* of the Tsinghua University bamboo slips emphasize Mohist ideas such as elevate the worthy, moderate the expenditure, moderate burials, and anti-fatalism.

⁴⁶ Liang Tao, *Guodian zhujian yu Simeng xuepai* (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2008).

⁴⁷ Cao Feng, ed., *Chutu wenxian yu Ru Dao guanxi* (Guilin: Lijiang chubanshe, 2012).

However, Confucian thoughts are instilled more in these texts in general.⁴⁸ The authorship of *Bang jia zhi zheng* was even ascribed to Confucius.

Finally, the bamboo and silk manuscripts have also changed timelines. They show that some thoughts and concepts were based on earlier sources than we had thought. For example, the fact that King Tang of Shang and Yinyi value the people and the populace in “Yin gao” in the Tsinghua University bamboo slips shows an early model of the idea of taking people as the foundation of governing. The repeated emphasis on respecting the Heaven and valuing the virtue in “Hou fu” indicates that the early Zhou had already made noticeable progress in governing through virtue compared to the Shang dynasty. *Bang jia zhi zheng* from the Tsinghua University bamboo slips discussed the pros and cons of many practices that could lead a state to thrive or decline before telling the rulers that they should “have something that they will do and something that they will not do.” *Bang jia chu wei*, on the other hand, addressed the serious consequences of employing people without the proper qualifications and argued for the importance of selecting the worthy and appointing the capable in keeping clerkships uncorrupted. The *Tian xia zhi dao* text illustrates that what had enabled ancient sage kings to own the whole world was their ability to win the hearts of the people. Now we know that these well-known thoughts about governing a state had fully developed no later than the Warring States period.

Another text, *Xin shi wei zhong*, is a text full of the wisdom of critical thinking. It attempts to integrate the Mandate of Heaven (the power of the king is bestowed by heaven), in which people of ancient times had firmly believed, with “the destiny of self.” It contains propositions such as “every person has the destiny of heaven, as well as the destiny of self” and “it is heaven that ends one’s destiny, it is the ghost that causes ones’ diseases, and it is people that take one’s life.” Apparently, this is an early articulation of the philosophical idea that one must respect the objective laws in exerting one’s own subjectivity.

Linguistics and Paleography

Bamboo and silk manuscripts are written in archaic scripts. Bamboo slips from Guodian, Shanghai Museum, Tsinghua University, and Anhui University are all written in the script of Chu. The surfacing of these materials directly advances the field of paleography, the study of ancient writing systems and the

⁴⁸ Li Junming, “Qinghua jian Bangjia zhi zheng suo fanying de Ru Mo jiaorong,” *Zhongguo zhhexue shi*, no. 3 (2019): 25–29.

deciphering and dating of historical manuscripts. In traditional Chinese humanities, paleography had long been an appendage to the study of classics and taken as a tool for illuminating classics. The subject of studying archaic scripts was gradually set up after the discovery of oracle bone scripts in the late nineteenth century. However, since the study of oracle bone scripts and bronze scripts had always occupied the central positions, the study of scripts of the Warring States period had been obscured within the field of paleography. The appearance of the bamboo manuscripts from the Chu Kingdom since the 1990s has greatly changed this situation, and now the study of the scripts of the Warring State period is witnessing an unprecedented development.

One of the advantages that the study of bamboo and silk manuscripts brings to the interpretation of other ancient scripts is that often you can read bamboo and silk manuscripts against transmitted texts. Many pictographs that are difficult to analyze in terms of structure have not been accurately interpreted for a long time, but now they are decoded by comparing the ancient and modern scripts. There are too many examples of this kind to comprehensively list. In addition to the study and interpretation of the scripts of the Chu, pictograms that appeared on Chu bamboo slips can also be useful for the interpretation and examination of scripts found on oracle bones and bronzes. For example, an ideographic version of the character *shi* 視 has long been misread as the character *jian* 見 due to their similar glyphs. It was only when these two characters appeared together in the line *shi zhi bu zu jian* 視之不足見 in the bamboo slip version of the *Laozi* unearthed at Guodian that scholars finally recognized their differences and accordingly corrected a conventional mistake in the field of paleography.⁴⁹ In another case, one of the bronze scripts had long been confused with the character *hui* 惠. It was not until the same script appeared again in *Huangmen* in the Tsinghua University bamboo slips that people figured out the counterpart for this bronze script is *zhu* 助.⁵⁰ Through tracing the evolution of Chinese characters using pictographs collected from bamboo slips of the Chu, Zhao Pingan and many other scholars decoded some of the complicated and difficult pictographs in oracle and bronze scripts and promoted the study of

⁴⁹ Qiu Xigui, “Yi Guodian Laozi jian wei li tantan guwenzi de kaoshi,” in *Zhongguo zhhexue* (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 21:187–88.

⁵⁰ Yang An, “Zhu zi bu shuo,” website of the Innovative Institute for Unearthed Texts and Ancient Character Studies at Fudan University, accessed August 31, 2021, <http://www.gwz.fudan.edu.cn/Web/Show/1477>.

ancient scripts.⁵¹ Apart from the achievements in studying and interpreting complicated and difficult bronze and oracle bone scripts, scholars also made important breakthroughs in the study of the evolution of ancient Chinese characters and in theories on the configurations of characters, reaching a deeper understanding of the structure and the development of Chinese characters.⁵²

Taking bamboo and silk manuscripts as a corpus in the study of classical Chinese has also become a hot spot in the field of linguistics. Before the excavations of a large quantity of bamboo and silk manuscripts, Qiu Xigui has keenly pointed out that texts written in ancient scripts are indispensable resources for the study of classical Chinese because they have clear dates, fewer mistakes, and numerous varieties.⁵³ Based on bamboo and silk documents unearthed since the 1990s, many scholars have grown into experts in grammar, vocabulary, linguistics, and even the dialects of the pre-Qin period.

Literary History of the Pre-Qin, Qin, and Han Dynasties

The pre-Qin, Qin, and Han dynasties are the key stage in the formation and early development of classical Chinese literature, and bamboo and silk manuscripts have provided invaluable new materials for the study of the literary history. Literary historians have attached more and more importance to the implications of the bamboo and silk manuscripts in their research. In recent years, the community of Chinese literary historians has held seven consecutive scholarly conferences “The Unearthed Documents and the Study of Chinese Literature.”

In addition to the *Classic of Poetry*, a version of “Beifeng” transcribed in the script of Chu during the Warring State period was also excavated at Xiajia Tai (Jingzhou, Hubei). Lost poetry such as “Qi ye,” “Zhou Gong zhi Qin wu,” and “Rui Liangfu Bi” discovered in the Tsinghua University bamboo slips are also closely related to the *Classic of Poetry*. Texts such as “You Huang jiang qi,” “Li Song,” and “Lan Fu” at Shanghai Museum, “Wang Ji” and “Fan Yin” in Peking University Han dynasty bamboo slips, “Tang Le” at Yinque shan, “Zixu Fu”

⁵¹ For example, see Zhao Ping'an, *Wenzi, Wenxian, Gushi: Zhao Ping'an zixuan ji* (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2017).

⁵² Qiu Xigui, *Wenzi xue gaiyao* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1988); Liu Zhao, *Gu wenzi gouxingxue* (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2006); Huang Dekuan, ed., *Gu wenzi puxi shuzheng* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2007); Huang Dekuan, *Gu Hanzi fazhan lun* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014).

⁵³ Qiu Xigui, “Tantan gu wenzi ziliao dui gu hanyu yanjiu de zhongyao xing,” *Zhongguo yuwen*, no. 6 (1979).

and “Zang Fu” at the tomb of the Marquis Haihun of the Han, and “Shenwu fu” at Yinwan among others have greatly enriched the corpus of poetry and rhapsodies of the pre-Qin, Qin, and Han dynasties. The Han dynasty bamboo manuscript “Wang Ji” at Peking University and the bamboo manuscript “Chi Hu zhi ji Tang zhi wu” at Tsinghua University even offer us a chance to look at the situation of fiction in the pre-Qin period.⁵⁴ The discoveries of these new materials enabled some significant breakthroughs in the study of early literary history.

In addition to providing more literary materials, the excavated texts also offer favorable opportunities for scholars to observe more closely the conditions under which these literary works were produced. It has become an important addition to the field of literary history to study the concept of literary styles of the pre-Qin period through investigating unearthed texts. Scholars such as Luo Jiaxiang, Wu Chengxue, and Jiang Linchang have successively explained the significance of this research.⁵⁵ Chen Minzhen and others have put these methodologies into good practice.⁵⁶

In summary, it is obvious that bamboo and silk manuscripts have brought about comprehensive improvements to contemporary Chinese humanities studies, which is related to traditional Chinese scholarship in terms of content, methodologies, and concepts. Today, no scholar can neglect bamboo and silk documents when studying the early civilization. Accordingly, institutions that are dedicated to the study of excavated documents and ancient bamboo and silk manuscripts have grown in numbers and sizes; more and more academic journals specializing in the study of bamboo and silk documents have been launched. All these demonstrate that the study of bamboo and silk documents as a new interdisciplinary subject, is growing vigorously.

⁵⁴ Huang Dekuan, “Qinghua jian Chihu zhi ji Tang zhi wu yu xianqin xiaoshuo: Lue shuo Qinghua jian dui xianqin wenxue yanjiu de jiazhi,” *Fudan daxue xuebao (Zhhexue shehui kexue ban)*, no. 4 (2013): 81–86.

⁵⁵ Luo Jiaxiang, “Chutu wenxian de wenti xue yiyi,” *Zhengzhou daxue xuebao (Zhhexue shehui kexue ban)*, no. 2 (2018): 90–92; Wu Chengxue and Li Guanlan, “Mingpian yu mingti: Jianlun zhongguo gudai wenti guanlian de fasheng,” *Zhongguo shehui kexue*, no. 1 (2015): 161–82; Jiang Linchang, “Kaogu faxian yu Zhongguo gudai wenti xue lilun tixi jiangou,” *Zhongguo gaoxiao shehui kexue*, no. 2 (2018): 83–96.

⁵⁶ Chen Minzhen, *You wenti zhi qian: Zhongguo wenti de shengcheng yu zaoqi fazhan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2019).

Institutionalizing the Study of the Recently Unearthed Texts

Most important universities in China have set up institutions to research unearthed documents. Tsinghua University established a Research and Conservation Center for Unearthed Texts in 2008, initially led by Li Xueqin; Huang Dehuang is the current director. Peking University also has an Excavated Manuscript Research Center, led by Zhu Fenghan. Qiu Xigui set up an Innovative Institute for Unearthed Texts and Ancient Character Studies at Fudan University in 2005 (currently led by Liu Zhao). The Center of Bamboo and Silk Manuscripts of Wuhan University was also founded in 2005, with Chen Wei as director. The Institute of Ancient Books of Jilin University has a long tradition in the study of paleography and prominent scholars such as Yu Xingwu, Yao Xiaosui, Lin Yun, and Wu Zhengwu have worked there. Additionally, over twenty years ago, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the leading institute in the studies of philosophy and social sciences in China, established a Center for the Study of Bamboo and Silk Manuscripts.

Although it is difficult to make an accurate estimation of the number of scholars who are studying unearthed documents and ancient paleography, their ranks have been growing rapidly and continuously. After the first academic convention on the study of ancient paleography, which was held in Changchun, Jilin, in 1978, the Xinhua News Agency remarked that “there are fewer than a hundred people who are doing research on ancient paleography” and that “we must rescue and save the newly excavated written texts. Otherwise, they will be damaged in a few years.”⁵⁷ In the forty-some years since, many professional researchers have been trained in the compiling and researching of those unearthed written texts. There are at least one thousand scholars engaged in the study of unearthed manuscripts and ancient paleography. Although some of them specialize in the study of oracle bone writings or letters written on bamboo and wooden slips and hence do not dig into bamboo and silk documents, the number of scholars is still very sizable if we also include researchers who deal with bamboo and silk documents in the fields of intellectual history and literary history.

As for places for publications, according to Liu Zhao, there are at least seventeen journals that are related to the study of excavated documents or ancient

⁵⁷ Xinhua News Agency, “Xunsu gaibian gu wenzi keyan gongzuo de luohou zhuangkuang: Yixie gu wenzi xuejia jiuci wenti tichu jianyi,” *Wenhui bao*, January 24, 1979.

paleography.⁵⁸ Among them, *Chutu wenxian*, *Jianbo*, and *Jianbo yanjiu* have had a wide range of academic influences, the English versions of *Jianbo* (*Bamboo and Silk*, published by Wuhan University and Brill) and *Zhongguo wenzi* (*Journal of Chinese Writing Systems*, published by East China Normal University and SAGE Publishing) have also been published abroad. Although the research on unearthed documents, especially bamboo and silk documents from the Warring States period, the Qin, and Han dynasties, is developing rapidly, it is also facing some severe challenges. The disciplinary barriers caused by the modern classification of disciplines are among the most prominent challenges. In the past two thousand years of development, traditional Chinese scholarship on the humanities has been a stable and comprehensive field. However, in the modern classification of disciplines, scholarship on traditional Chinese humanities has been segmented into many subjects such as textual philology, history, linguistics, ancient paleography, literature, and philosophy. Given that contemporary scholars have been assigned to different disciplines, they cannot adjust to the interdisciplinary nature of the study of unearthed documents and ancient paleography in terms of knowledge composition and a vision for the future of the subject. The current disciplinary classification system cannot provide the all-around academic training that an ideal scholar ought to receive for the study of Chinese classics. Therefore, there is an urgent need to break through the barriers caused by the current disciplinary system and to establish a new structure that is suitable to further improve and develop scholarship on traditional humanities in contemporary China.

A Model for the Humanities in China

Wang Xuedian has characterized the shifts that have taken place in the humanities and social sciences in the People's Republic of China as follows:

The study of humanities and social sciences in China has gone through a series of shifts in terms of guiding principles since 1949. We first experienced the transition from the Republic of China to the People's Republic of China after 1949. From 1978 onward, we experienced the second transition from taking "class struggle" as the guiding principle to taking "modernization" (Westernization) as the guiding principle. Currently, we are experiencing a third huge transition in the study of

⁵⁸ Liu Zhao, "Dangqian chutu wenxian yu wenxue yanjiu de jidian sikao," *Jinan daxue xuebao* (*Shehui kexue ban*), no. 4 (2019): 1–20.

humanities, that is, from “modernization” to “China-fication” as that guiding principle.⁵⁹

Scholarship on traditional Chinese humanities, however, was not influenced by the second shift of guiding principles and, in fact, thanks to the historical opportunities granted by the discovery of bamboo and silk manuscripts, became one of the earliest fields to reflect on the impact of Western scholarship.

With the discovery of a large number of bamboo and silk manuscripts, the study of humanities has regained its vitality in contemporary China. As they acquired new knowledge and understanding, many researchers felt an awakening of self-knowledge that led to an academic awareness of the improper restraints of Western scholarship. As early as 1981, Li Xueqin pointed out that the level of development of ancient Chinese civilization needs a new objective assessment because previous scholarship had obviously underestimated it.⁶⁰ Li’s comment is based on the latest archaeological discoveries and his long-term scholarly research. As he participated in the compilation of silk documents of Mawangdui, Qin dynasty bamboo slips of Shuihu Di, Han dynasty bamboo slips of Yinque shan, Han dynasty bamboo slips of Dingxian, and bamboo slip manuscripts of Tsinghua University, he realized that even though “skepticism toward ancient books,” an academic approach that has been profoundly influenced by Western academic principles, is helpful in promoting a scientific attitude in the field of traditional Chinese humanities, it is at the same time destructive. After Li Xueqin came up with the slogan “walking out of the era of doubting antiquity” [*zouchu yigu shidai*], many scholars who had been studying the unearthed manuscripts responded to him positively. This new awareness has had a profound impact in academia. From believing in antiquity to doubting antiquity, interpreting antiquity, and walking out of the era of doubting antiquity, this circuitous learning process has left many scholars in the humanities in awe of the early period of Chinese civilization because it is a complicated historical period full of unknowns. Traditional research methods can, of course, be criticized, and the knowledge produced by traditional scholarship can be knocked down or reconstructed, but there is no need to over-question history itself.

⁵⁹ Wang Xuedian, “Xueshu shang de juda zhuanxing: Renwen shehui kexue 40 nian huigu,” *Zhonghua dushu bao*, January 2, 2019.

⁶⁰ Li Xueqin, “Chongxin gujia Zhongguo gudai wenming,” in *Li Xueqin ji: Zhuisu, Kaoju, Gu wenming* (Harbin: Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1989), 15–27.

Of course, there are still some scholars who are opposed to “walking out of the era of doubting antiquity.” For example, as Li Zhenhong has pointed out, “the essential attribute of academic work is to doubt and criticize. If there is no doubting, questioning, negating, and criticizing, there will be no academic development.”⁶¹ This is indeed the truth. Skepticism and criticism are the sources of vitality for academic studies. However, since it is said that “the core of the spirit of modern scholarship is criticism,” the academic thinking and methods of the doubting antiquity school can also be doubted and criticized. In fact, “walking out of the era of doubting antiquity” is itself precisely a process of all-around “doubting, questioning, negating, and criticizing” of the “doubting antiquity” based on academic practice. As Liang Tao put it:

“Walking out of the era of doubting antiquity” does not necessarily mean that we will return to the old path of “believing in the antiquity,” nor does it mean that we will give up the scrutiny of historical materials. It only means that we will readjust the approaches we take in examining historical materials. There are three aspects to this readjustment. First, replacing a “presumption of guilt” with a “presumption of innocence” and acknowledging that historical materials came into form in a long process of transmission. Although there are some distortions, they are basically trustable and are the preconditions and necessary prerequisites for studying ancient history. Second, changing our roles from the accuser to the adjudicator, and deciding the authenticity of ancient historical materials objectively as a judge. In this scenario, the research achievements of the doubting antiquity school can be recycled as “indictments.” But the defendants have the right to appeal. If their appeals are approved, then they are guiltless; if not, they are guilty. Third, sticking to the “dual-evidence methodology.” Unearthed archeological materials should be taken into consideration; we should put more importance on evidence, not interpretation.⁶²

These remarks reflect and sum up the shared understandings of the scholars who have been engaged in the study of bamboo and silk manuscripts in the past three decades, as opposed to those critics who make theoretical deductions at a remove.

This awakening of self-knowledge among Chinese scholars who study ancient civilization quickly attracted the attention of Western academia. Since they have not followed Western academic paradigms like other disciplines, their

⁶¹ Li Zhenhong, “Gu Jiegang yigu shixue de xiandai jiazhi,” *Qilu xuekan*, no. 2 (2020): 30–33.

⁶² Liang Tao, “Yigu Shigu yu chongxie sixiangshi: Ping He Bingdi ‘Youguan Sunzi, Laozi de sanpian kaozheng,’” *Ershi yi shiji*, no. 87 (2005).

attempt to “re-evaluate ancient Chinese civilization” is in irreconcilable conflict with Western academia’s understanding of ancient Chinese civilization. As a result, contemporary Chinese humanities, especially the study of ancient Chinese history, are accused of being “nationalist” and “nativist,” sometimes they are even critiqued as “in the service of politics.” Martin Kern, a Sinologist at Princeton University, wrote an article to criticize this “pre-modernist and anti-critical thought.”⁶³

Although Martin Kern’s assessment of the study of Chinese humanities in contemporary China reflects that of a considerable share of Western scholars, it is full of misunderstandings. For example, Kern points out that Chinese scholars are often “monolingual” (namely, the only language they know is Chinese) and that they refuse to communicate with Western scholars or to benefit from cross-cultural comparisons. But Chinese scholars have always advocated for scholarly exchange and mutual learning among civilizations. Chinese humanities scholars have never ceased to think in the multicultural context even in the most difficult circumstances. But according to Kern, Chinese scholars’ attitudes toward foreign scholarship is only “paying obligatory lip service.” There are indeed Chinese scholars who read Western Sinologist works (especially in the original language), but there is a whole generation of scholars in China who did not learn foreign languages under certain historical conditions. Scholars who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s were not in the position to master many foreign languages and lacked opportunities to converse and communicate with Western scholars. It was not because they were conservative or close-minded. And this phenomenon exists not only in China. Apart from Martin Kern and a few others who are active both in Chinese and Western academia, Western scholars have not given the work of Chinese scholars much regard, nor have they been able to refer to work of Chinese scholars. Therefore, the current situation is a problem faced by both Chinese and Western scholars and needs to be solved by mutual efforts. Western scholars should not ignore how passionately Chinese presses have introduced important research of Western scholars in the past several decades. Most of the important academic theories and works have been translated into Chinese. In addition, the Chinese government

⁶³ Ke Mading, “Chaoyue bentu zhuyi: Zaoqi zhongguo yanjiu de fangfa yu lunli,” *Xueshu yuekan*, no. 12 (2017): 112–21. The quoted words and phrases here are from the English abstract attached to the Chinese version of Kern’s article. For the English version of the article, see Martin Kern, “Beyond Nativism: Reflections on Methodology and Ethics in the Study of Early China,” in *“At the Shores of the Sky:” Asian Studies for Albert Hoffstädt*, ed. Paul Kroll and Jonathan Silk (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 83–98.

supports a great number of students to study and “acquire scriptures” from Western universities. The Chinese government also invites many influential Sinologists to lecture or take up posts, including directors of academic organizations, in China.⁶⁴ This open-minded attitude and high investment should not be considered “obligatory lip service.”

As for the transnational and comparative research methods that are advocated by Western scholars, Chinese scholars have been making efforts to adopt them in studying ancient Chinese civilizations. Take Li Xueqin, a scholar who is often skeptical of Western scholars, as an example. Li had already published a book titled *Bijiao kaogu xue suibi* (*Notes on Comparative Archeology*) as early as 1991, in which he emphasized comparative studies between different civilizations.⁶⁵ In later interviews, Li also said that the comparative study of ancient civilizations is something that he had wanted to do but did not manage to:

Is it possible to conduct a comparative study of ancient China with other ancient civilizations directly? You know that it is a very difficult task. First, you have to have a thorough understanding of ancient China. Then, you also have to develop a similar deep familiarity with ancient foreign civilizations, at least of one or two ancient nations. This is really difficult to achieve because it involves learning many foreign languages. . . . We hope that there are individuals who can take up two or three facets of this comparative study. In the ideal situation, this person should study ancient Greece and Rome first and then study ancient Egypt before turning to ancient China. However, the prerequisite for accomplishing all these three things is that the person must know two or three modern languages and all languages used in these three ancient civilizations. I truly wanted to develop in this direction, and it was my dream. This is not totally impossible. I probably would have been able to achieve a part of this if there had been no “Cultural Revolution.”⁶⁶

In fact, not only did Li Xueqin not accomplish it, but few Western scholars have truly achieved it either. We advocate mutual learning between civilizations with a precondition that we should have a deep understanding of both sides. If we take ancient Chinese civilization as a benchmark, then we should do what Li Xueqin said, “first, you have to have a thorough understanding of ancient China. Then, you also have to develop a similar deep familiarity with

⁶⁴ Martin Kern himself is the director of the International Center for the Study of Ancient Text Cultures at Renmin University of China.

⁶⁵ See Chen Minzhen, “Bijiao shiye Zhong de Zhongguo gudai wenming: Li Xueqin xiansheng yu bijiao kaoguxue yanjiu,” *Zhongguo wenhua*, no. 49 (2019): 245–57.

⁶⁶ Li Xueqin, “Zhebeizi xiangzuo er meiyou zuodao de shi,” *Shucheng*, no. 1 (2018): 5–11.

ancient foreign civilizations, at least of one or two ancient nations.” However, this expectation is too demanding for both Chinese and foreign scholars. People tend to be reluctant to offer reckless opinions and arbitrary judgment when they lack subtle understanding. Chinese scholars who “only take bows but do not speak” due to their prudent attitudes should not be targeted with this criticism.

On the contrary, as Martin Kern acknowledges, Western scholars actually cannot have a rich intuitive understanding of the best Chinese texts. The bamboo and silk manuscripts of the Warring States period written in Chu script present many difficulties for Western scholars. Unlike oracle bone scripts and bronze scripts, which are in direct succession with writings of the later generations, scripts of the Chu are much more difficult to read and interpret. If Western scholars have made contributions to the study of oracle bone scripts and bronze scripts, they, but for exceptions such as Edward Shaughnessy and Scott Cook, could barely read the scripts of the Warring States period, let alone interpret and research them. Since the thresholds for researching and referring to bamboo and silk manuscripts are so high, Western scholars have not paid enough attention to absorb the latest Chinese scholarship on these areas.

When doing research on ancient Chinese civilization, Western scholars cannot fully understand early manuscripts from a “close-up observation” as their Chinese counterparts can, nor can they perceive the patterns of development of Chinese civilization resulting from its continuous development with enough empathy. They can also not solve research problems simply by mechanically appropriating Western academic theories to frame Chinese history. For example, based on research on Homer’s epics, the New Testament, Malagasy verbal dueling, folk songs of Yugoslavia, and Old English poetry, Western scholars have found that early texts share characteristics of oral literature. Some Western scholars have tried to interpret the Chinese literary tradition with this theoretical framework. They advocate the positions that oral transmissions played a role dominant to writing in the composition and transmission of the *Classic of Poetry*. This research approach is a typical example where Western scholars neglected the objective fact that writing was the major tradition of early Chinese manuscripts by using universal literary theories developed in the study of oral literature to force the study of Chinese literature into that agenda. Evidence that disproves the argument that the *Classic of Poetry* was transmitted orally appeared in a few newly unearthed copies of the book and early manuscripts related to

it, but it remains the mainstream understanding among Western scholars.⁶⁷ Either they fail to act according to the idea of mutual exchange and lack awareness of the accomplishments of Chinese scholarship, or they simply choose not to acknowledge them.

Some Western scholars have derived academic viewpoints from the same or similar materials that are quite different from those of Chinese scholars because they lack knowledge of the materials, because they lack interpretive ability, or because they believe in the universality of theories that they have constructed. Faced with this situation, Western scholars are accustomed to asserting the righteousness of their research by questioning the scientific spirit of Chinese scholars and criticizing their conclusions as being based on nativist political positions. We must admit that, in the early years after the founding of the People's Republic of China, under the influence of taking class struggle as their guiding principle, Chinese scholars indeed made exaggerated and inappropriate claims when they did not have sufficient materials. However, in recent decades, scholars who are working on traditional Chinese humanities no longer have such a constraint, and their conclusions are basically scientific judgments based on objective facts. In an age when the spirit of modern science has been fully popularized, people who continue with empty slogans that lack a factual basis would be treated as a laughingstock by scholars in China.⁶⁸

If you take off the “tinted glasses” and examine the current research on ancient Chinese civilization, the basic understandings of ancient Chinese civilization that Western scholars oppose are factual judgments that Chinese scholars made based on new historical materials. Western scholars have considered Li Xueqin to be too close to the Chinese government because of his leading role in the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Chronology Project, but even Kern had to note that the slogan “walking out of the era of doubting history” raised by Li does “not reduce early China to simple truths.” If scholars cannot look at academic issues with a pragmatic spirit, they will never be able to establish themselves in the academia of China or the West.

In recent years, Chinese scholars working in the humanities and social sciences, especially the humanities, have started conducting in-depth reflection on

⁶⁷ Edward Shaughnessy is the only Western scholar who disagrees; see Shaughnessy, “Chutu wenxian yu Shijing koutou he shuxie xingzhi wenti de Zhengyi,” *Wen shi zhe*, no. 2 (2020): 21–38.

⁶⁸ There are indeed some people who advocate the slogan that “the West is faking history,” but scholars do not think that they are based on scientific facts.

the “side effects” brought about by copying and transplanting Western theories and methodologies. This has led to redevelopments in many fields, from rebuilding from scratch to adjusting the direction and path for future development. One of the key concerns of Chinese humanities scholars is how to show Chinese characteristics in their scholarship based on the reality of Chinese historical and cultural development while also benefitting from Western scholarship but avoiding its disadvantages. There have been plenty of discussions about how Chinese humanities communicate with their Western counterparts. In fact, as discussed earlier, the discoveries of bamboo and silk documents since the 1990s have captured the attention of most scholars in China. The collisions between Chinese and Western scholarship in the past few decades have not in the mainstream of the study of Chinese humanities, which is rooted in a long historical tradition. Compared with other disciplines, scholarship in this area had begun to liberate itself earlier from the inappropriate restrictions loaded on it during the transitions of the last century, and it is among the earliest to develop a characteristic path. In general, the basic mode of contemporary Chinese scholarship on the humanities should be to continue the basic methods of traditional Chinese humanistic scholarship and to take advantage of modern Western scholarship and theories, when appropriate. Over the past thirty years, scholars on early civilizations in China have worked hard on such a path.

With continuous stimulation coming from the discoveries of bamboo and silk documents, modern Chinese humanities scholarship has returned to the center of the academic arena. In the past ten years, Chinese humanistic scholarship centered on unearthed documents and ancient bamboo and silk manuscripts has received more and more attention from the country and society. Direct government support on research and education such as Project 211, the Program on Less Popular Majors and Interrupted Learning [*Lengmen juexue xiangmu*], the Project on the Inheritance and Development of Ancient Chinese Scripts and Chinese Civilization [*Gu wenzi yu Zhonghua wenming chuancheng fazhan gongcheng*], and the Plan for Strengthening Basic Disciplines [*Qiangji jihua*] have helped relevant disciplines to flourish. In the process of constructing a philosophy and social science system that embodies Chinese characteristics, Chinese style, and Chinese department in a new era, the study of ancient Chinese civilization has always been at the forefront, and Western scholarship has rarely influenced the study of traditional Chinese humanities based on the newly surfaced bamboo and silk documents. Rather, it has always centered upon Chinese scholarship, and it has generated a strong centripetal force

culturally. Therefore, it should become the model and representative in the construction of Chinese scholarship.

Translated from the Chinese by Zuoting Wen

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