

Foreword

The stars have realigned in the study of ancient China. Earlier generations of scholars relied on constellations of transmitted texts that informed their reconstructions of ancient Chinese society, politics, thought, religion, and literature. These sources served them well and provided the guidance that led to the production of works the respected titles of which are near legendary in their respective disciplines. But in the last several decades the privileged positions of transmitted works have been challenged by the discovery of new works, manuscripts written on bamboo slips and pieces of silk that date from the fourth to the second century BCE. The first finds of such sources at sites like Mawangdui in Hunan shed promising new light on the past. We knew from early bibliographies that transmitted sources represented only a fraction of the rich literature produced in antiquity. Archaeological discoveries have shown this to be true.

As the corpus of discoveries has grown—thanks to archaeological work at sites such as Shuihudi and Guodian, both in Hubei, as well as the recovery of looted documents that are now, thankfully, in the collections of the Shanghai Museum, Tsinghua University in Beijing, and other public institutions in China—scholars find themselves in the possession of works that not merely shed new light on the past but significantly correct, supplement, and amplify what had come to be almost truisms extracted from the works handed down from antiquity. The knowledge gained from these sources touches deeply upon our understanding of China's past and what we took to be foundational certainties in the study of early Chinese philosophy, forms

of governance, warfare, and record-keeping, to name but a handful of the fields affected by the unearthing of the “new” documents. And the corpus has grown large—so large that it will take the concentrated efforts of several generations of scholars to begin to disclose the richness of its contents. But the first steps have been taken.

Kuan-yun Huang’s *The Lost Texts of Confucius’ Grandson* is a most welcome example. Working largely with texts from the site of Guodian that he associates with Confucius’ grandson Zisi, Professor Huang carefully explicates what the newly discovered manuscripts teach us about fate, moral cultivation, familial love and obligation, and service in government, as well as other concepts that were originally meant to provide social order in the Warring States during the time of Zisi and the generations of thinkers subsequent to him. Through close textual analysis and with each explanation of these ideas, Professor Huang shows that we must shake ourselves loose from earlier assumptions about their significance and embrace what the recently recovered sources tell us. More than that, he argues that we must re-examine our assumptions and, more carefully than before, interrogate the sources that led us to hold fast to them in the first place. For, as we and future generations navigate the way through to a more thorough and balanced understanding of ancient China, the unearthed manuscripts are our guiding stars. Thanks to the labors of Professor Huang and others working with these sources, we are in a better position to recognize, understand, and use them.

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Acknowledgments

This book has been more than a decade in its making. Some parts go back to my Ph.D. dissertation, “Warring States ‘Echoes’ of the Past,” submitted to the University of Chicago in 2010. Some go back earlier still, to the end of 2006, when I read the Guodian texts for the first time with any seriousness. Before that, there was the International Symposium on the Chu Slips from Guodian, held in Wuhan in October 1999, which I had the good fortune to audit as a wide-eyed college senior. But wait ... is that it? Am I remembering everything correctly? Even before Wuhan, my first trip to China, there were words going around about a cache of manuscripts discovered in a rural town in 1993. Maybe I overheard them, and they left behind an impression. So it goes and it goes.

These are the people I encountered along the way:

At the University of California, Berkeley, David N. Keightley (1932–2017) was my first teacher in early China. Jeffrey Riegel has guided me ever since. David Johnson showed me how to be a scholar. Lydia Liu reminded me I was studying the past from the present, a task never quite as simple as it seems. Stephen West, with all his humor and generosity, said to me the first time I walked into his office: “Don’t be nervous!” Looking back, I find it incredible that an introductory class with Raphael Sealey (1927–2013) was probably what got me interested in ancient history in the first place. Later on, Maria Mavroudi opened my eyes to the world beyond China. Some of the older graduate students who inspired me to follow in their footsteps were Mark McNicholas, Luo Shaodan, He Yuming, Andrea Goldman, Tamara Chin, Miranda Brown, and Gao Fengfeng.

At Chicago, I benefitted from studying with Donald Harper, Edward L. Shaughnessy, and Wu Hung. David and Yunchiahn Sena were kind to this younger classmate of theirs, and I looked up to them as I did to other senior students, some of whom I had met in Beijing during a year studying abroad: Paize Keulemans, Kate Lingley, Lam Ling Hon, Bao Weihong, and Xu Dongfeng. With Smadar Winter and Garret Olberding, I feel a special bond based on our surviving the ordeal that is graduate school. I am especially grateful for Viren Murthy and Li Yuhang lending their ears one evening in Leiden, when I was at a particularly low point in my life. Liu Cong (1979–2008) passed away too young but has remained dear to my heart.

Among the scholars who influenced me in my formative years were Li Ling, Qiu Xigui, Wang Bo, Li Jiahao, William Boltz, William Baxter, and Chen Jian. With Lai Guolong and Yen Shih-hsuan I had many memorable conversations.

Since I finished my degree and began teaching in 2010, Chen Zhi, Lin Ching-chang, Chiang Chiu-hua, and Kwok Pang Fei have been supportive of my career. At Tsing Hua, Chang Shyang was a source of inspiration, and Yang Rur-bin was the model of a true scholar. Chou Feng-wu (1947–2015) was the most special teacher whom I would have loved to make proud of.

During my return to the U.S. as a visitor in 2016–2017, when this book was beginning to take shape, I received help and advice from Harold Roth, Sarah Allan, Edward Slingerland, David Schaberg, Li Wai-ye, and John Major. Conversations with Kuriyama Shigehisa were especially delightful. Fay and Dr. Harry Lee went out of their way to take care of a couple fish out of water. At South Cove Community Center, Dr. Melissa Huang was a calming force to this pair of new parents. Much of the actual writing of the book was done at Thomas Crane Public Library in Quincy, and later New Haven Public Library next to the exquisite Yale campus.

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My wife Lee-moi was my companion throughout the writing of this book. She debated with me on all the major points, and even when I failed to persuade her, instilled in me the confidence to push forward, holding nothing back. I thank her for the enormous sacrifices she made that enabled me to finish the project. Since 2015, on a most unusual day, our son Roy has been the third voice in the mix, chiming in whenever he wondered why mom and dad weren’t talking about him. The joy of watching him grow is what gives me hope.

I dedicate this book to my parents, Chou Chiung-hwa and Huang Chin-shan.