
***Zhou History Unearthed: The Bamboo Manuscript Xinian and Early Chinese Historiography.* By Yuri PINES. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. Pp. xiv+333.**

Olivia MILBURN

Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Seoul National University

With the discovery of a vast number of ancient bamboo texts over the course of the last half century or so, understanding of many different aspects of early China has been revolutionized, and history writings are no exception. This particular revolution is largely the result of the unearthing of a single historical text, the *Xinian* 繫年 or *String of Years*, now in the collection of Tsinghua University. Not only does this text throw new light on a number of key historical events, it also provides important insights into the way that history was written in the pre-imperial era.

With this study, Yuri Pines provides a magisterial account of the process by which history was documented and transmitted in early China. *Zhou History Unearthed* is divided into two parts: a study of the creation of historical records from the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770–255 BCE) to the Western Han (202 BCE–9 CE) and an annotated translation of the *Xinian*: an episodic record in twenty-three sections covering events in different parts of the Zhou realm for the years 1046–396 BCE.

As it happens, detailed annotated translations of the text of the *Xinian* are already available in a number of languages (including English) and hence this is not the most interesting part of the book. Of far greater significance is the state-of-the-art account of how historical records were collected, shaped, and disseminated within the courts of the states of the Eastern Zhou dynasty; the process of canonization by which particular documents came to be passed on while others faded into obscurity; and how the materials recovered in modern times through archaeology or tomb robbery are related to the great transmitted texts — most notably the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo Commentary) and *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the historian) — which have hitherto defined understandings of Eastern Zhou history for more than two millennia. Thanks to the discovery of the *Xinian*, it is now possible to consider with much greater clarity than ever

before some of the issues concerning the composition and reliability of these key transmitted texts.

Part One of the *Zhou History Unearthed* consists of five chapters. The first chapter, “Zhou Historiography as Seen from the Transmitted Texts” provides an overview of the most important history writings produced during the pre-unification era, in particular the *Zuozhuan*. This analysis pays particular attention to what can be known about the sources for the *Zuozhuan*: the lost records of the states of the Zhou confederacy, which nevertheless left their traces in this very lengthy text. Understanding this process of compilation is important, because it appears that the *Xinian* represents an early stage of Eastern Zhou historical writing, not as fully fleshed-out as the *Zuozhuan*, and even less didactic in tone.

The second chapter, “*Xinian* and Zhou Historiography” considers the dating and authenticity of the *Xinian*, which (as with any text recovered from the international antiques market rather than a controlled archaeological excavation) is a matter of considerable concern. This chapter goes on to consider the somewhat eclectic coverage of events in this text, and argues that it represents a compilation of government briefing documents and position papers, for use by officials and diplomats in one or more of the states of the Zhou confederacy. Although the *Xinian* was most likely originally derived from a Chu tomb, and some parts of the contents have a Chu focus, the text as a whole gives evidence of multiple sources.

Meanwhile, the third chapter, “Zhou Historiography in Other Newly Discovered Sources” is one of the most interesting parts of the whole book, as it explores the way in which a number of different recently discovered bamboo texts and inscriptions on bronze vessels have transformed our understanding of Eastern Zhou history, partly by providing new information and partly by confirming that some aspects of the transmitted textual tradition — long assumed to be entirely legendary or at least heavily fictionalized — are in fact accurate accounts of genuine historical events.

The fourth chapter, “Beyond Sima Qian: Zhou History Revisited” considers how some sections of the *Xinian* point to the existence of errors within the *Shiji*. While recognizing that this is likely to be the fault of the scanty sources available to Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 155–90 BCE) in the Western Han dynasty, it is important that these mistakes be acknowledged rather than simply ignored. It does not detract from the significance of Sima Qian’s magnum opus within the Chinese historiographical tradition to accept that sometimes (most notably in the sections dealing with early Western Zhou history and the early Warring States era) the information at his disposal was

faulty and insufficient.

Finally, in the last chapter of this section, entitled “Chu Historiography and Chu Cultural Identity,” Pines returns to the ever controversial question of the relationship between the kingdom of Chu and the states of the Zhou confederacy. While a scholarly consensus now seems to have been established that during the Western Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–771 BCE), Chu culture was indistinguishable from that of Zhou, the process of divergence remains very difficult to analyze and interpret. This problem is particularly significant — and particularly vexed — thanks to the fact that so many bamboo texts from the pre-imperial and early imperial era have emerged from Chu tombs, which cannot be compared with textual survivals from elsewhere. While these texts do not necessarily have an obvious bias in favor of Chu (and this is certainly true of the *Xinian*), it is not clear whether Chu’s textual traditions in the late Eastern Zhou dynasty were entirely commensurate with those found in the states of the Zhou confederacy; furthermore, the presence of so many strikingly “other” art and ritual objects in Chu tombs makes the cross-regional cultural connections which appear so strongly in the written records very difficult to understand. This ever-increasing divergence in material culture combined with an apparent congruence in the written record remains a highly mysterious feature of Chu civilization in the Eastern Zhou period.

In this review, there are two issues I would particularly like to raise. The first concerns understandings of the role of *shi* 士 class individuals in shaping the cosmopolitan culture of the educated elite in the Eastern Zhou period (a topic that the author explicitly considers in pp. 146–47). While it is quite clear that the *shi* became increasingly politically important as time went on, and the travels of famous *shi* from one state or kingdom to another are well-documented in ancient texts, they may not have been the primary mechanism for establishing this pan-Zhou culture among the ruling classes. While the author is probably correct in saying that the aristocracy were more likely to be tied through family connections and long-established loyalties to the culture of the country in which they and their ancestors served, it is a mistake to ignore the role played here by women.

Since kings and aristocrats commonly married wives from other ruling houses (not to mention junior consorts and concubines), all with a view to confirming local and trans-regional political alliances and establishing connections with powerful families at home and abroad, the highest echelons of the ruling elite of the Eastern Zhou dynasty were raised from birth in households in which a cosmopolitan culture reigned. Since many if not most

elite men lived in households that included foreign wives, in addition to foreign mothers and grandmothers (who in turn did not travel to their new homes alone, but arrived accompanied by a host of male and female servants from their natal state), this must have had an effect on their general outlook and cultural competence.

To give but one example of this, when Lady Mu Ji of Jin 晉穆姬 travelled to the state of Qin to marry Lord Mu 秦穆公 (r. 659–621 BCE), she had among her suite a former serving government official from the state of Yu 虞 named Baili Xi 百里奚— at this stage reduced to the status of a prisoner-of-war — who would eventually rise to hold high ministerial rank in Qin. Although he ran away on route and escaped to the kingdom of Chu, Qin was able to recover him, since he formed a part of Lady Mu Ji's dowry. Lord Kang of Qin 秦康公 (r. 620–609 BCE), Lady Mu Ji's son, would therefore have been brought up in a cultural atmosphere that did not only encompass Qin and Jin, their allies and subordinate states, but also included knowledge of the customs and cultures of enemy states that had been conquered by them, thanks to the presence of individuals like Baili Xi.

Even in situations where elite men were marrying local wives, their palaces and ancestral temples are likely to have been stuffed with foreign objects, the relics of past intermarriages and alliances, not to mention items obtained through bribery, diplomatic gifts, or as booty after warfare. All these factors must have served to create a consciousness of a greater Zhou polity that transcended borders, that was in place long before *shi* class individuals became politically important, and encouraged an awareness among the hereditary aristocracy of a cultural interconnectedness that meant they could seek friends and allies beyond the immediate confines of their state.

It is particularly odd that Pines fails to consider the importance of elite intermarriage in creating a cosmopolitan culture at this higher social level, given that the discussion in Chapter Three of *Zhou History Unearthed* considers the texts of the Zifan 子犯 bells and the inscribed bronzes made for Mi Jia 嬭加, the wife of Bao, Marquis of Zeng 曾侯寶. The author notes that the Zifan bells were made for Hu Yan 狐偃, a Rong 戎 nobleman serving in the state of Jin, and remarks with surprise on the way in which he presents himself as a member of the Zhou nobility (pp. 83–84). However, the reason a member of the Rong nobility held high office in the state of Jin in the first place is that Hu Yan's sister was married to Lord Xian of Jin 晉獻公 (r. 676–651 BCE), and their son, Chong'er 重耳, Lord Wen of Jin 晉文公 (r. 636–628 BCE), was brought up to enjoy an exceptionally close relationship with his uncle. Meanwhile the inscribed bronzes made for the Chu princess Mi

Jia, which confirm that Zeng 曾 and Sui 隨 are in fact one and the same place, formed part of the lavish dowry which she brought with her on the occasion of her marriage.

The second issue that I wish to raise in this review concerns the translation and interpretation of *Xinian* 5, a section which describes the circumstances in which the kingdom of Chu annexed the state of Xi 息 during the reign of King Wen of Chu 楚文王 (r. 689–675 BCE). The *Xinian* provides an account which develops on that found in the *Zuozhuan*, while providing more information about the malign role played by Marquis Ai of Cai 蔡哀侯 (r. 694–675 BCE) in these events. The author’s translation and interpretation, however, serve to downplay and whitewash the actions of the marquis of Cai, to the point where it seems to be perverting the meaning of the text (see pp. 49–52, and 169–72). This issue touches upon sexual violence against women, which is a topic that many scholars continue to feel uncomfortable about tackling, but since this is explicitly mentioned in the text, it behooves us to take it seriously.

The *Zuozhuan* states that, in the tenth year of Lord Zhuang of Lu (684 BCE), when Lady Xi Gui 息嬀 was travelling through Cai, the marquis of Cai (her brother-in-law) had her stopped and then “did not treat her as a guest” (*fubin* 弗賓).¹ This term has greatly puzzled commentators on the *Zuozhuan*, with various more or less innocuous options being suggested as to what this might mean. Although interpretations of *fubin* by later commentators tended to focus on the lack of respect, it is clear from the *Zuozhuan* that this caused a serious breach between the marquis of Xi (Lady Xi Gui’s husband) and the marquis of Cai. The *Xinian* tells us that what occurred on this occasion was that Marquis Ai of Cai stopped Lady Xi Gui and “treated her as a wife” (*qi zhi* 妻之): that is he raped her.

Pines chooses to interpret the term *qi zhi* as meaning “to commit adultery with a married woman” which implies consent on the woman’s part. Given that Marquis Ai of Cai gave orders that she be stopped and forced to enter the city to join him — a process set out step by step in the text of *Xinian* 5 — there is no doubt that this was not a consensual relationship. Furthermore, *qi* was used in a wide range of other early texts to mean “rape” (e.g. the four instances of the compound word *qilüe* 妻略 used in the biographies of *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書). Although many scholars are uncomfortable about explicitly addressing the issue of sexual violence perpetrated against women, there are particularly

1 *Zuo Tradition / Zuozhuan: Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals,”* trans. and intro. Stephen Durrant, Wai-ye Li, and David Schaberg (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2016), 163.

good reasons in this instance for doing so.

First, Chinese historical records are generally extremely circumspect in recording this kind of thing, which means that the history of such abuse is obscure. That makes the clarification provided by the *Xinian* particularly valuable. Secondly, the use of the term *qi* or “to treat as a wife” to mean rape opens up a very interesting line of enquiry concerning attitudes towards marital rape in early China. While this behavior was not problematized until very recent times, the extensive literature provided by survivors of abuse tells us that a lack of recognition of the problem by society as a whole does not prevent the victim from experiencing trauma. Finally, as Pines himself notes (p. 52 and p. 254 note 36), the story of Lady Xi Gui appears in the *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 (Biographies of exemplary women), where she is said to have refused to speak to her second husband, King Wen of Chu, even after she had borne him two sons: King Du’ao 堵敖 (r. 675–672 BCE) and King Cheng of Chu 楚成王 (r. 672–626 BCE). Lady Xi Gui has traditionally been understood to have martyred herself out of loyalty to her first spouse, but that may just reflect the ignorance of later commentators, unaware of the existence of the earlier tradition that represented her as a victim of sexual violence. The story of Lady Xi Gui in the *Lienü zhuan* now really needs revisiting, to see how feminist and psychological interpretations of her silence change our readings of this tale.

The issues raised in this review should not be seen as detracting from what is otherwise an extremely fine scholarly achievement. Even with these caveats, this book represents a fine synthesis of the available evidence, which will prove enormously useful for anyone trying to understand the historiographical traditions of the Eastern Zhou dynasty. As new sources become available through archaeology or chance discovery, it is important that this material should provoke a reevaluation of the transmitted tradition in the light of these fresh insights. With *Zhou History Unearthed*, Pines has added enormously to our understanding of how history was produced before the unification of China, and the processes that determined whether an individual text was handed down to later generations, or buried in the silence of a tomb.