

Dingzhou : the story of an unfortunate tomb

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen
Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société
Suisse-Asie**

Band (Jahr): **63 (2009)**

Heft 4: **The genius loci of Chinese manuscripts**

PDF erstellt am: **04.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147838>

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DINGZHOU: THE STORY OF AN UNFORTUNATE TOMB

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Abstract

In 1973, Chinese archaeologists excavated a tomb of considerable dimensions near Dingzhou. This tomb, which dates to the Former Han dynasty, yielded a rich array of funerary furnishings, including jade ware, gold ware, bronze ware, lacquer ware and a large cache of inscribed bamboo strips, with significant potential for study. Sadly, though, the tomb and its contents were struck by several disastrous events (robbery, fire, earthquake). These disasters severely affected the quantity and quality of the find and may have tempered scholarly enthusiasm for Dingzhou, which remains little-known to date. This paper, the first English-language specialized study of the topic, provides an overall account of the Dingzhou discovery; it draws attention to fundamental issues regarding the tomb (e.g. its date) and the manuscripts (e.g. their transcription); and it explores the significance of the tomb and its contents, and their potential importance for the study of early imperial Chinese history, philosophy, literature and culture.

Introductory Remarks

In 1973, a team of Chinese archaeologists excavated a Former Han dynasty tomb near Dingzhou 定州 in Hebei Province 河北省.¹ In eight months of excavation, from May to December, the team revealed a tomb of considerable dimensions and brought to light a rich array of funerary furnishings, including several manuscripts, with significant potential for the study of early imperial Chinese history, philosophy, literature and culture.

Sadly, the discovery did not achieve its full potential. In the three decades that have passed since, studies of the Dingzhou find have come to influence our understanding of a few philosophical texts (e.g. *Lunyu* 論語, *Wenzi* 文子) and some aspects of early Chinese culture (e.g. funerary rituals, clerical script), but

1 At the time of the discovery, Dingzhou was known as Dingxian 定縣, a name it kept until 1986. Both names, Dingxian and Dingzhou, as well as that of Bajiaolang 八角廊, the actual location of the archaeological site, occur in Chinese literature on the topic. For consistency, I refer to the tomb and its content by the name of Dingzhou only.

broadly speaking, Dingzhou remains little-known. The list of publications that expatiate on the discovery is short. The research team who analyzed the tomb and its content has produced a small number of preliminary reports and transcriptions of manuscripts (see References), but to date, no final report has come out and some transcriptions still await publication. The discovery is also discussed at some length in studies of texts with a manuscript copy in the Dingzhou tomb.² Most studies of such texts, however, make use of the transcriptions without offering background information or questioning their reliability. Outside these works, the scholarly world took little heed of the Dingzhou discovery.

One reason for the lack of attention for Dingzhou may be the unfortunate fate of the tomb and its content, which were exposed to tomb robbers, to a tomb fire, and to an earthquake, three devastating events that severely affected the quantity and quality of the find. Another reason may be the impressive archaeological discoveries elsewhere, that appealed more to scholars' fascination. For example, the year 1973 also witnessed the spectacular discovery at Mawangdui 馬王堆, which produced high-quality silk manuscripts of admired scriptures, such as the *Laozi* (老子), and long-lost texts, such as the *Essay on the Five Forms of Proper Conduct* (*Wuxing pian* 五行篇), or the *Four Canons of the Yellow Emperor* (*Huangdi sijing* 黃帝四經).

Now, over thirty-five years after the Dingzhou discovery, the project of analyzing the content of the tomb appears to have come to a halt, with no apparent enthusiasm for revitalization.³ This calls for an evaluation of the Dingzhou project.

This paper has three objectives. First, to provide an overall account of the Dingzhou discovery, that is, a discussion of the tomb and its content, with the ultimate goal of making these better-known to the academic community. Second, to draw attention to fundamental issues regarding the tomb (e.g. its date) and the manuscripts (e.g. their transcription). Third, to explore the significance of the tomb and its contents, and their potential importance for the study of early imperial Chinese history, philosophy, literature and culture.

2 E.g. AMES/ROSEMONT, 1998:271–278; VAN ELS, 2006:13–35.

3 The project leader, Liu Laicheng 劉來成, retired several years ago and no one has yet taken his place, according to the Hebei Cultural Relics Research Institute (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo, personal communication, July 2007).

1. The Tomb

1.1 *Location, Dimensions, Style*

The tomb was situated at the southern edge of Bajiaolang 八角廊, a small village four kilometers south-west of Dingzhou. When its construction was completed in the Former Han dynasty, the burial site must have formed an impressive sight. The tomb was covered by a burial mound with an estimated height of 16 meters and a diameter of 90 meters, and circumvallated by an earthen wall of 145 by 127 meters, enclosing thus an area of nearly two hectares. However, centuries of precipitation and farmers borrowing soil for their lands resulted in the disintegration of the tumulus and its circumvallation. By 1973, both were practically flat.⁴

The tomb was built in a style known in Chinese archaeological literature as “wooden outer coffin tomb” (*muguo mu* 木槨墓) or, even more appealing to one’s imagination, as “yellow intestines with gathering heads” (*huang chang ti cou* 黃腸題湊). Tombs of this type consist of large quantities of debarked cypress slats (the “yellow intestines”), a meter or more in length, piled up with their heads facing inwards to create a rectangular or square barricade structure. This barricade structure constitutes a wooden burial chamber, the “outer coffin”, which houses the inner coffin or set of inner coffins. In his article on state funerals of the Han empire, Loewe notes that such outer coffin structures were “intended to provide a stout defense for the tomb, presumably against both the destructive powers of the elements and the malevolent intentions of robbers, which were too frequent to be ignored.”⁵ During the Former Han dynasty (202 BCE–8 CE), this barricade structure was the prevailing type of posthumous housing for emperors, kings and occasionally, by way of special privilege, also for high officials. Afterwards, such tombs became rare.⁶

The Dingzhou tomb is built on a north-south axis and comprises three parts with a total length of 61 meters. A long passageway that descends from south to

4 See HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1981:1, for a sketch map of the location and layout of the tomb.

5 LOEWE, 1999:11.

6 Wooden tombs appeared as early as the Shang dynasty (16th–11th c. BCE), but the complex wooden outer coffin structure is typical of the Former Han. The team that excavated the Dingzhou tomb explains that the structure became extinct before the beginning of the Latter Han (25–220 CE), though there are indications of sporadic use until after the Han. See: HEBEI SHENG BOWUGUAN, 1976:59.

north provides access to a front chamber, which leads into a larger rear chamber. This multi-chambered structure, a Former Han development in tomb architecture, aims to represent the residence of the living. Chambers in such posthumous residences variously include a bedroom, restroom, library, garage for chariots, and so on.⁷ Each chamber in the Dingzhou tomb is subdivided into three compartments (east, center, west), with the central compartment of the rear chamber serving as the final resting place of the deceased. Grave goods were found in nearly all compartments, with the most precious items nearest the deceased.

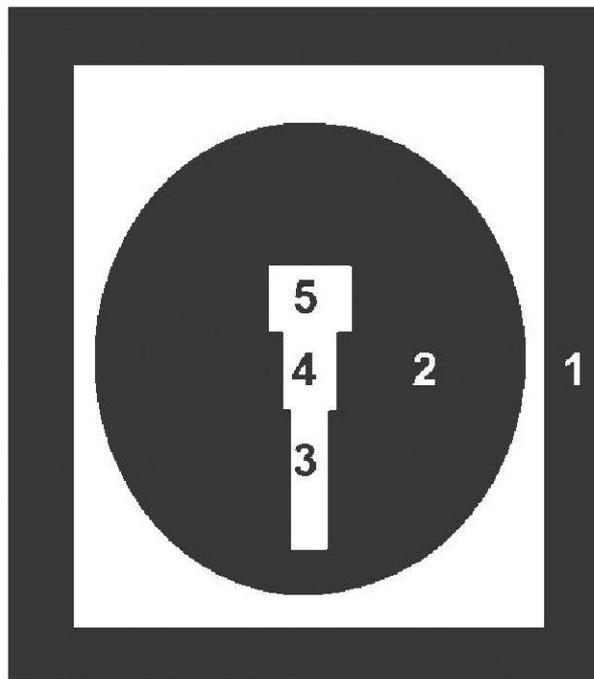


Figure 1: Layout of the Dingzhou tomb.⁸ (1) Wall; (2) Burial Mound; (3) Passageway; (4) Front Chamber; (5) Rear Chamber.

1.2 *Robbery and Fire*

The prospect of finding valuable funerary objects is a strong incentive for thieves, and tomb robbery is an all too common phenomenon, in China as much as elsewhere. Unfortunately, the Dingzhou tomb was not spared. In their excava-

7 Rawson notes on the change from shaft tombs to chambered tombs that while the shaft tomb was used well into the Former Han, this period also witnessed a new development, namely “the construction of tombs with several rooms rather than a single pit”. See: RAWSON, 1980:199–200. The Dingzhou tomb may be seen as representative of this development.

8 HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1981:1.

tion report, the archaeologists note that the tomb was plundered in the distant past, probably not long after its construction, when an unknown number of objects were taken away.⁹

The tomb also contains obvious traces of fire, which the archaeologists suspect was caused by the robbers. The valuables remaining in the tomb indicate that the robbers were forced to flee before finishing their job and that the fire, supposedly the result of carrying torches in a wooden construction, was unintended. A sad consequence of the fire is that many of the remaining objects are damaged. Items made of wood and other easily ignitable materials were particularly affected: if not reduced to ashes, they were charred by the fire. Fortunately, plenty of funerary objects survive, some even in excellent condition.

1.3 *Funerary Objects*

From the fragments of charred wood in the burial chamber, the archaeologists infer that its occupant was encased by a complex of five nested coffins, one within the other.¹⁰ Such a five-layered coffin-structure was reserved for rulers of the highest strata of society. The high-ranking deceased was buried in the innermost coffin, head to the north and feet facing south, possibly a posture of authority. While his corpse had disintegrated by the time of the discovery, the jade garment that clothed him survived. This funerary suit measures 1.82 meters in length and consists of 1,203 jade tesserae, mainly trapezoid and rectangular in shape. The pieces of jade, perforated in all four corners, were sewn together by circa 2,580 grams of fine gold threads.¹¹ According to Loewe, the practice of enclosure in a jade suit became increasingly frequent after circa 130 BCE.¹² The practice probably lasted until the end of the Latter Han (25–220 CE) dynasty. While such precious garments obviously bear witness to the status and wealth the deceased enjoyed in his lifetime, they are also important in the afterlife, as Rawson points out:

Jade, it was believed, without any grounds whatsoever, would preserve the body from corruption. This inhibition of bodily decay was to enable the attainment of immortality. While

9 HEBEI SHENG BOWUGUAN, 1976:57.

10 HEBEI SHENG BOWUGUAN, 1976:57.

11 HEBEI SHENG BOWUGUAN, 1976:57–59, contains an analysis of the jade suit, including pictures of the suit and a close-up of pieces of jade.

12 LOEWE, 1999:15.

the jade preserved the whole body intact, it could house the earthly soul, leaving the spiritual soul to achieve immortality.¹³

In Han dynasty funerary customs, three types of metal thread were used to link the jade plaques: gold, silver, copper. As a rule, only emperors were enshrouded in jade suits sewn with gold threads. Rulers of lesser status had to make do with inferior metals, though in exceptional cases the privilege of being clad in a gold-sewn jade costume was granted to kings as well.¹⁴ This privilege seems to apply here, because Dingzhou is far from the capital city of Chang'an 長安 and no typical place for imperial burials. Moreover, the archaeologists report that the jade suit of Dingzhou was not tailor-made, but ready-made at the central court and adapted to the posture of the deceased after it was bestowed upon him. Naturally, the sheer value of jade costumes is a strong motive for tomb robbers. Loewe speaks of several tombs where only a few pieces of perforated jade were found, drop-offs left behind by looters who carried away the rest of the suit.¹⁵ The complete suit discovered at Dingzhou, which survived only due to the fire that chased out the looters, therefore provides rare evidence for the study of Han dynasty funerary practices.



Figure 2: Jade suit.¹⁶

13 RAWSON, 1980:197.

14 For example, Liu Sheng 劉勝, King Jing of Zhongshan 中山靖王 (r. 154–113 BCE), received this privilege. This son of Emperor Jing 漢景帝 (r. 157–141 BCE) and brother of Emperor Wu 漢武帝 (r. 140–87 BCE), was buried in a jade suit sewn with gold thread in a tomb in Mancheng 滿城, Hebei province, which archaeologists opened up in 1968. For details, see LOEWE, 1999:23.

15 LOEWE, 1999:15.

16 HEBEI SHENG BOWUGUAN, 1976.

In addition to the jade suit, the tomb yielded a wealth of precious funerary objects, including jade ware, gold ware, bronzeware, lacquerware and some 300 pieces of earthenware. Noteworthy objects include a richly decorated bronze mirror, several jade discs, jade bracelets and jade pendants, a few golden objects in the shape of horse hoofs and unicorn feet, and forty discus-shaped gold ingots.¹⁷ Some of these objects are typical of the Former Han, especially those made of gold. For instance, the horse hoof and unicorn foot shapes of gold refer to events of the year 95 BCE, when, according to the *Book of the Han* (*Han shu* 漢書), a white unicorn was captured, a heavenly horse was spotted, and gold was discovered at Mount Tai (Taishan 泰山). The emperor then issued an edict saying that in accordance with these auspicious presages, gold was to be cast in the shape of horse hoofs and unicorn feet and distributed among the vassal kings as grants to them.¹⁸ Gold ingots are also repeatedly found in Former Han tombs. The Mancheng 滿城 tomb, neighboring the Dingzhou tomb in location and date of closure, even yielded the same number of gold ingots, which, if no coincidence, may bear witness to a Former Han burial regulation.¹⁹

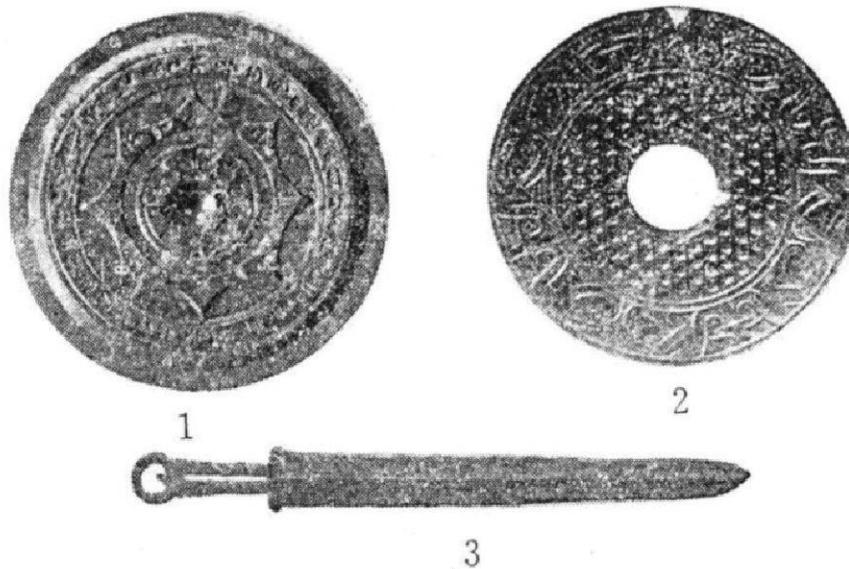


Figure 3: Valuable objects from the Dingzhou tomb:²⁰ (1) Bronze mirror; (2) Jade disk; (3) Bronze sword.

17 For pictures and further details, see HEBEI SHENG BOWUGUAN, 1976, and HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1981.

18 *Han shu*, 6.206; DUBS, 1944:110–111.

19 For more information regarding the Mancheng tomb, see note 14.

20 HEBEI SHENG BOWUGUAN, 1976:57.

The Dingzhou tomb also yielded objects that are more practical. The western compartment of the front chamber, for instance, housed the remains of three horse-drawn chariots, which the archaeologists identify as a means of conveyance used by kings in Han times, and the eastern compartment of the rear chamber stored a charred bamboo basket containing inscribed bamboo strips, a scribe's knife and other writing utensils.

1.4 *Tomb Occupant*

The rich array of costly and high-quality funerary objects points to a tomb occupant of considerable status and wealth, yet none of the objects are reported to contain inscriptions that reveal the identity of the deceased. Nonetheless, the sheer dimensions of the burial site, the capaciousness of the tomb chambers, the complex wooden tomb structure, the five-layered coffin, the jade costume with gold threads, the horse hoof and unicorn feet shapes of gold, and the type of chariots interred in the tomb suggest that the deceased was a member of the imperial clan, who headed one of the subordinate kingdoms in Former Han times.

The possible date of the tomb ranges from 95 BCE, the year of the auspicious presages, to the end of the Former Han dynasty, after which wooden outer coffin tomb structures became rare. Some of the unearthed bamboo strips contain dates, which further delimit the possible period of the tomb's construction. The excavation report gives the latest mentioned date as "tenth day of the fourth month in the second year of the Five Phoenixes reign period" (五鳳二年四月十日). The Five Phoenixes reign of Emperor Xuan 漢宣帝 (r. 73–49 BCE) lasted from 57 to 53 BCE and the said date corresponds to the 8th of May in the year 56 BCE. The tomb must have been constructed between that year and the final stages of the Former Han. In those days, Dingzhou was a walled fortification known as Lunu 廬奴 and served as the capital city of the Kingdom of Zhongshan 中山. Three kings are known to have ruled over the Zhongshan fiefdom during this period:

- (1) Liu Xiu 劉脩 (d. 55 BCE), King Huai of Zhongshan 中山懷王;²¹
- (2) Liu Jing 劉竟 (d. 35 BCE), King Ai of Zhongshan 中山哀王;

21 Chinese scholars usually put Liu Xiu's death at 55 BCE. In his biographical dictionary, Loewe puts it at 54 BCE (LOEWE, 2000:388). The *Book of the Han* (*Han shu*, 14.414) is not helpful here, because it states that Liu Xiu died either *in* or *after* the fifteenth year following his accession to the throne in 69 BCE. Since there is no way of deciding between the two years, I take it at 55 BCE in accordance with the conventions of Dingzhou studies.

(3) Liu Xing 劉興 (d. 8 BCE), King Xiao of Zhongshan 中山孝王.

Historiographical sources report that Liu Jing is buried in Duling 杜陵, near present-day Xi'an 西安, which leaves Liu Xiu and Liu Xing as possible candidates for the Dingzhou tomb.

In a first article on the Dingzhou discovery, published in the July 1976 issue of the academic journal *Cultural Relics* (*Wenwu* 文物), the research team put forward Liu Xing as the most likely occupant of the tomb.²² Their argument was twofold:

- (1) Liu Xiu, the other king, was only remotely related to the contemporary Emperor Xuan and would not have been offered a jade suit sewn with gold thread.²³ Moreover, for his lack of posterity, effectively ending the Zhongshan ancestral line, that king would not have been offered a rich funeral.
- (2) Liu Xing, their candidate, had direct blood ties with the imperial court and the size of the tomb and the gold thread of the suit are said to match his status.²⁴ He may have been offered these privileges as a compensation for not having been nominated to succeed the childless Emperor Cheng, his half-brother, who considered him unsuitable for the throne.

In a second publication on the Dingzhou discovery, in the August 1981 issue of *Cultural Relics*, the team retract their earlier conclusion.²⁵ They now identify the deceased as Liu Xiu, offering these four arguments:

- (1) Emperor Xuan, who was reputedly open-minded, once offered a jade suit to Huo Guang 霍光, his father-in-law and a high official at his court, and he may have favored Liu Xiu, also no close relative, in a similar way.
- (2) Liu Xing's death in 8 BCE postdates the second year of Emperor Xuan's Five Phoenixes reign by 48 years. Liu Xiu's death in 55 BCE, the third year

22 HEBEI SHENG BOWUGUAN, 1976:59.

23 Liu Xiu belongs to the fifth generation of descendants of Liu Sheng, son of Emperor Jing and the first king enfeoffed with Zhongshan (see note 14).

24 Liu Xing was a son of Emperor Yuan 漢元帝 (r. 49–33 BCE), a half-brother of Emperor Cheng 漢成帝 (r. 33–7 BCE) and the father of Emperor Ping 漢平帝 (r. 1 BCE–5 CE).

25 HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1981:10.

of that same reign period, is much closer to the dates mentioned on the bamboo strips.

- (3) Historiographical sources portray Liu Xing as an imprudent, unintelligent man and see this as the reason for his failure to become emperor. A person of such deficient intellectual caliber would not have been buried with objects highlighting erudition, such as the bamboo manuscripts discovered in the Dingzhou tomb.
- (4) Lingbei village 陵北村, also near the former Zhongshan capital, houses a tomb even larger than that of Bajiaolang. Liu Xing, related to three Han emperors by blood, makes the ideal candidate for that tomb of imperial dimensions.

Overall, I find the arguments for either hypothesis unconvincing. Liu Xiu's lack of posterity, Liu Xing's lack of intelligence, or their respective connections to the imperial throne cannot serve as ironclad proof. Moreover, as far as I am aware, the Lingbei tomb has not yet been excavated, so Liu Xing's occupancy of that tomb cannot be confirmed.

Studies based on materials from Dingzhou rarely question the tomb's date and, instead, generally accept the research team's second hypothesis, that is, they take the king buried in the Dingzhou tomb as Liu Xiu. One scholar who does raise the question is Loewe, who discusses the tomb's date in his *Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods*.²⁶ Aware of the counterproposal, Loewe still tentatively identifies Liu Xing as the occupant of the Dingzhou tomb, because he attaches most importance to the argument that Liu Xing may have been offered the jade suit by way of compensating for the treatment that he had received, i.e., being passed over for nomination to succeed his half-brother.²⁷

I share Loewe's doubts regarding the dating issue and agree with him on the importance of explicating one's choice of hypothesis. Unlike Loewe, however, I find the dated bamboo strips slightly more convincing. The bamboo strips displaying a date from the Five Phoenixes reign period reportedly belong to the manuscript of a text that was completed one year before Liu Xiu died (see further on). According to the research team that excavated the Dingzhou tomb,

26 LOEWE, 2000:387–388.

27 LOEWE, personal communication, June 2001.

this text discusses happenings of that period.²⁸ In my view, knowledge of these happenings may have been pertinent to Liu Xiu's functioning as a king. The same text would have probably been outdated by the time of Liu Xing's death, half a century later. This, taken together with the absence of disentombed bamboo strips mentioning a date after Liu Xiu's death, may indicate that the tomb was closed soon after the last date was inked on bamboo, and lead to the conclusion that the tomb's occupant is Liu Xiu. This corresponds to the archaeological team's revised conclusion of 1981. Given that scholars rarely question this conclusion and normally take the king buried in the Dingzhou tomb as Liu Xiu, and given the absence of strong evidence for a converse conclusion, I accept, with the above reservations in mind, 55 BCE as the closing date of the tomb. This year also serves as a *terminus ante quem* for the manuscripts buried inside.

2. Manuscripts

The eastern compartment of the rear chamber in the tomb was probably intended as a workplace for the deceased to conduct his studies, for it stored a scribe's knife, three rectangular ink-slabs, a small copper pot possibly used for catching excess ink from the brush, and a large cache of inscribed bamboo strips. It is the spectacular discovery of this posthumous library that constitutes the Dingzhou tomb's primary importance.

Sadly, though, an unknown number of bamboo strips must have vanished in the tomb fire, because the unearthed manuscripts are incomplete. Moreover, alongside the pile of surviving bamboo strips, the archaeologists found a chest containing fragments of charred silk, which they suspect to be the remnants of inscribed rolls. Hence, the library entombed in the Former Han was much larger than the one disentombed in 1973. Had robbers not disturbed the peace of the tomb, the Dingzhou discovery would have been even more impressive.

The unearthed bamboo strips are charred, fragmented and disorganized. The process of carbonation had completely blackened the strips. Some are even too dark to discern any graphs. To date, inadequate facilities and financial resources have prevented specialists from applying infrared, ultra-violet or more complicated and costly methods, which may enable them to read more graphs. The strips are also severely damaged. Of a handful, either end has been pre-

28 GUOJIA WENWUJU GU WENXIAN YANJIUSHI, 1981a: 12.

served; most others have both ends broken off. Some fragments contain no more than two or three graphs. The strips were originally joined in bundles by three silk threads, two at both ends and one in the middle. The threads are no longer there, but some bamboo fragments still contain their imprints. Disintegration of the threads caused the strips to lose their sequential order and fall into disarray. Deciphering and arranging these charred bamboo fragments proved a complicated and laborious undertaking.

In June 1974, the bamboo fragments were sent to the National Cultural Relics Bureau (Guojia wenwuju 國家文物局) in Beijing for conservation and analysis. Two years later, in June 1976, several specialists who worked on the Mawangdui silk rolls, including the renowned palaeographer and historian Li Xueqin 李學勤, joined the project. The team started by assigning a consecutive number to each bamboo strip and transcribing legible graphs on the strips onto note cards, one strip per card. After one month of work, in July 1976, a harsh fate befell the strips again. According to the report, the devastating Tangshan 唐山 earthquake overturned the wooden storage chest, causing the bamboo strips to be thrown once more into disarray and suffer further damage. The project abruptly came to a standstill and was continued only after an interlude of four years, with the foundation of the Committee for Arranging the Bamboo Strips of Dingxian (Dingxian zhujian zhengli zu 定縣竹簡整理組) in April 1980. Their efforts resulted in the publication, in 1981, of a brief report on the excavation of the tomb, a short introduction of the disinterred bamboo strips and the transcription of a small portion of them. Soon afterwards, however, the project was again halted, for reasons that remain unspecified. Fourteen years later, in August 1995, the Subcommittee for Arranging the Han-Dynasty Bamboo Strips of Dingzhou (Dingzhou Han jian zhengli xiaozu 定州漢簡整理小組) was founded. Continuing where the previous team had ended, the Subcommittee has published several transcribed texts to date.²⁹

Graphs on all bamboo strips of the Dingzhou find are written in a mature Han dynasty “clerical script” (*lishu* 隸書). The clear handwriting is remarkably similar to modern script, which facilitates recognition of the graphs. In sufficient light, the jet-black graphs on most strips stand out against their dull-black background. Having transcribed all legible graphs on the bamboo fragments, the research team was then able to distinguish the remnants of eight distinct manuscripts, citing differences in calligraphy, content and format of the bamboo strips

29 For a detailed report of the work on the bamboo strips, see HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1995:38–39.

as criteria for organizing them into groups.³⁰ Four manuscripts, totaling over 12,500 graphs on more than 1,100 strips, have thus far been published in transcription in *Cultural Relics*; the rest still awaits publication.

Manuscripts		Strips	Graphs	Transcript
(1)	<i>Words of the Ru Lineage</i> 儒家者言	104	884	1981.08
(2)	<i>Wenzi</i> 文子	277	2,790	1995.12
(3)	<i>Analects</i> 論語	620	7,576	1997.05
(4)	<i>The Grand Duke's Six Secret Teachings</i> 太公•六韜	144	1,402	2001.05
(5)	<i>Duke Ai Inquires about the Five Ways of Righteousness</i> 哀公問五義	?	?	n/a
(6)	<i>Biography of the Grand Tutor</i> 保傅傳	?	?	n/a
(7)	<i>Hemerologies – Divination</i> 日書•占卜	?	?	n/a
(8)	<i>Record of the King of Lu'an's Visit to the Imperial Court in the First Month of the Second Year of the Five Phoenixes Reign</i> 六安王朝五鳳二年正月起居記	?	?	n/a
Total		1,145	12,652	

Table 1: The Eight Dingzhou Manuscripts.

All four published manuscripts have parallels in transmitted texts, which facilitated the process of transcription. (1) The *Words of the Ru Lineage* manuscript has parallels in texts generally ascribed to the Confucian school, such as *Garden of Persuasions* (*Shuo yuan* 說苑) and *School Teachings of Confucius* (*Kongzi jiyu* 孔子家語). (2) The *Wenzi* manuscript is related to the Daoist treatise transmitted under that name. The fragmentary manuscript differs fundamentally from the transmitted text and is crucial for our understanding of the *Wenzi*'s textual history.³¹ (3) The *Analects* manuscript is the earliest handwritten copy ever found of this record of sayings and discussions by Confucius and his disciples.³² The manuscript is incomplete: the 7,576 graphs on 620 surviving strips approximate only half the length of the transmitted text. It also differs from the

30 See their report in HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 2001:84.

31 Cf. VAN ELS, 2006.

32 A complete transcription of the Dingzhou *Analects* was published in a separate booklet (in traditional characters); *Cultural Relics* contains only a partial transcription of this bamboo manuscript. See: HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1997a and 1997b.

transmitted text, for instance in the division of chapters and sections, or in the choice of certain words, and therefore sheds much light on the transmission of the *Analects*.³³ (4) The manuscript most recently published in transcription is a copy of one of the most famous military treatises of China, that is known under three titles: *The Grand Duke* (*Taigong* 太公), *The Six Secret Teachings* (*Liu tao* 六韜), or both combined.

Two hitherto unpublished manuscripts are also said to consist of passages found in transmitted texts. (5) The manuscript titled *Duke Ai Inquires about the Five Ways of Righteousness* contains intertextual links with *Master Xun* (*Xunzi* 荀子), *Record of Rites by Dai Senior* (*Da Dai li ji* 大戴禮記) and *School Teachings of Confucius*. (6) The manuscript titled *Biography of the Grand Tutor* overlaps partly with *New Writings* (*Xin shu* 新書) and partly with *Record of Rites by Dai Senior*.

The last two manuscripts, also unpublished to date, are not reported to have a transmitted equivalent or parallels in other texts. (7) The *Hemerologies* are described as a fragmentary manuscript on divinatory practices. (8) The *Record of the King of Lu'an's Visit to the Imperial Court* is said to tell the journey by Liu Ding 劉定, King Miu of Lu'an 六安繆王, to Emperor Xuan's court, undertaken in 56 BCE. All bamboo strips with "Five Phoenixes" dates on them apparently belong to this travelogue, in which King Miu mentions the places he passed through and the distances between them, and describes the court activities he witnessed or participated in.

2.1 Problems with the Transcriptions

The published transcriptions are used in studies and translations of their respective texts. There are, however, problems with the transcriptions that, in my view, should be addressed before using a transcription in research.³⁴

One problem concerns the tomb robbery, the effects of which are reflected in the transcription. As the bamboo strips were found in disorder, scholars organized and read the manuscripts through their transmitted counterparts. While transmitted texts offer something to hold on to, they also affect our understanding of the ancient texts. This concerns the reading of individual graphs as much as the order of the bamboo strips. Since it is impossible to know the original order of the surviving bamboo fragments, the transcriptions present them in the

33 Cf. AMES/ROSEMONT, 1998:271–278; SIMSON, 2006:148–152.

34 Cf. WANG, 2000; SUN, 2007. These articles focus on problematic aspects of the *Wenzi* and *Analects* transcriptions, respectively.

order in which they appear in corresponding passages in the transmitted texts. This does not necessarily reflect the original order. Moreover, it only works for bamboo strips with corresponding content in transmitted texts, but what about text on bamboo strips without a transmitted counterpart? Take, for example, the *Wenzi* manuscript. For two-thirds of the 277 surviving bamboo fragments that have been associated with the *Wenzi* manuscript, no corresponding content has been found in the transmitted *Wenzi*. How were these “non-corresponding” strips organized? And on what grounds were such strips judged to belong to the *Wenzi* manuscript? The Dingzhou research team cites differences in calligraphy, content and format of the bamboo strips as criteria for associating a bamboo strip with a manuscript. But how does this work for the *Wenzi*? Some non-corresponding strips evidently belong to the *Wenzi* manuscript, because they mention *Wenzi* or King Ping (Ping wang 平王), two names that also appear on strips with corresponding content in the transmitted text and do not appear on bamboo strips associated with other manuscripts from the same tomb. Most non-corresponding strips, however, mention neither of the two names. In the worst case, they contain no more than two or three graphs. For example, only 聞 *wen* ‘to hear’ and 所 *suo* ‘place’ are intelligible on strip 0451, two graphs of frequent occurrence in any early Chinese text. In such cases, it seems that content can hardly be a reason for associating a bamboo fragment to the *Wenzi* manuscript. The unearthed bamboo fragments, especially the many smaller ones, are too damaged to apply the usual association of strips based on such qualities as their measurements or the position of the threads that hold them together (that is, strips of equal length or with bundling threads on the same position probably belong together). In such cases, it seems that format can hardly be a criterion for associating a bamboo fragment to a manuscript. And, as I will discuss further on, the tracings provided with the various transcriptions show no striking differences in calligraphy between the various Dingzhou manuscripts. Hence, if the tracings are accurate, it seems that calligraphy can hardly be a criterion for associating bamboo strips either. It therefore remains unclear how bamboo fragments with no corresponding content in a transmitted text were associated with a manuscript.

Another problem concerns the Tangshan earthquake, the effects of which are also visible in the transcriptions. Numerous graphs in the transcriptions are placed between square brackets. These are graphs that can no longer be verified: they occurred on bamboo strips that were damaged or lost after the earthquake.

Take these two examples (bamboo strips 17 and 20, respectively) from the *Analects* transcription:³⁵

子曰：“君子不[器].”³⁶

The Master said: “Exemplary persons are not mere vessels.”

[子曰：“學而不思則罔，思而不]學則殆.”

The Master said: “Learning without due reflection leads to perplexity; reflection without learning leads to perilous circumstances.”

In the first example, which corresponds to what is now *Analects* 2.12, the graph 器 can no longer be read. In the second example, which corresponds to what is now *Analects* 2.15, the damage is far greater: the majority of graphs (子曰學而不思則罔思而不) can no longer be read. With the strips either missing or no longer legible, these graphs survived only as transcriptions on note cards made prior to the devastating natural disaster; their transcription can no longer be confirmed. The brackets indicate that these characters are to be used with caution; a reasonable procedure on the part of the editors.

Other problems that influence the quality and reliability of the transcriptions are not related to the tomb robbery or the earthquake. These are: (1) the lack of photographs and tracings; (2) the use of simplified script; (3) the insertion of modern punctuation; and (4) the omission of ancient punctuation.

- (1) The only photographic representation of the Dingzhou bamboo manuscripts ever published is a set of 15 pictures of bamboo fragments accompanying an article by Wang Dongming 王東明 et al. on the development of clerical script.³⁷ Tracings of a selection of 96 bamboo fragments were published in 1981 with the brief report on the excavation of the Dingzhou tomb.³⁸ Tracings of bamboo fragments also accompany the transcriptions of *Wenzi* (18 fragments), *Analects* (11 fragments), and *The Grand Duke* (20 fragments) as published in *Cultural Relics*. These photos and tracings are valuable

35 The Chinese text can be found in HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1997a:12. For coherence, I have changed the simplified graphs in the transcription to non-simplified graphs. The translation is from AMES/ROSEMONT, 1998:78–79, who somewhat unorthodoxically translate *wang* 罔 as ‘perplexity’.

36 Cf. the legend on p. 938 for the use of symbols occurring in the transcribed texts of the Dingzhou bamboo fragments.

37 WANG/FENG/LUO, 1981:23–76.

38 HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1981:6–9.

resources, for they offer scholars a glimpse of the original size and shape of the bamboo strips and the graphs inked on them. Yet, they represent only a fraction of all bamboo strips unearthed near Dingzhou. For scholarly purposes, photographs and tracings of all unearthed strips that survived the earthquake would be essential.

- (2) The transcriptions of Dingzhou manuscripts first appeared in *Cultural Relics*, an academic journal published in Mainland China, and hence in simplified script. The choice of simplified script for the transcription, determined by the journal's policy, reduces methodological accuracy. Boltz writes about the transcription of the *Laozi* manuscript discovered at Guodian:

As a general methodological rule, manuscripts such as this one should be transcribed so as to reveal as precisely and unambiguously as possible the exact form of what is written, without introducing any interpolations, alterations, or other extraneous material based on assumptions, biases, or subjective decisions of the scholar-transcriber or of anyone else. In a nutshell, this means that the transcription should reflect exactly what is written and nothing more.³⁹

Boltz' argument also applies here: the change to simplified graphs is an alteration of the Dingzhou manuscripts. This violates the principle of structural consistency, which, Boltz explains, entails that the transcription of a graph "should not deviate from the actual structural form of the graph in the manuscript".⁴⁰ The structural form of some graphs in the Dingzhou manuscripts differs from that of their standard counterparts, which in turn differs from that of their simplified alternatives. For example, the graph 唯 in the manuscripts, a short form of the graph now written 雖 in non-simplified script, bears no graphical resemblance to the simplified graph 虽, its representation in transcription. Without the intermediary step of non-simplified graphs, the link between a manuscript graph and its simplified counterpart may be unclear, particularly when the two are graphically and phonetically dissimilar. More importantly, problems occur when one simplified graph stands for several non-simplified ones. Is 尽 in the transcription of bamboo strip 2470 a simplification of *jin* 儘 'to the greatest extent' or *jin* 盡 'exhausted'? Does 余 in the transcription of strip 2341 transcribe *yu* 余 'I, me'

39 BOLTZ, 1999:596.

40 BOLTZ, 1999:597.

or *yu* 餘 ‘surplus’?⁴¹ In the absence of published photographs or tracings, and with no proper reports to be published in the foreseeable future, only those who had the privilege to see the actual manuscript know the answer. Fortunately, problems of ambiguity arise only in a small number of cases, but they do signal the need for an accurate transcription.

- (3) The transcribed texts contain modern punctuation marks, as we have seen in the two examples from the *Analects* transcription. The introduction of punctuation marks, “extraneous material” in Boltz’ terminology, is problematic because they force an interpretation of the text that may limit the possibilities offered by unpunctuated transcription. The reader should have the opportunity to see exactly what the ancient scribe wrote, not what the modern editor thinks the ancient scribe intended to write. In addition, several instances of punctuation in the transcribed text of the Dingzhou manuscripts are simply wrong, as several scholars have pointed out. Take the *Wenzi* transcription as an example. Ho Che-wah 何志華 shows that three misplaced commas in the transcription of bamboo strip 0198 obscure the link between this strip and the transmitted text.⁴² Given the small number of strips that correspond to the transmitted text and the questionable status of those that do not, every single strip that can be re-classified from non-corresponding to corresponding is important. Wang Sanxia 王三峡, who devotes an entire article to erroneous punctuation in the *Wenzi* transcription, lists numerous examples of wrong or misplaced punctuation marks.⁴³ The former include full stops where quotation marks would have been more appropriate, and commas that should have been semi-colons. The latter break the text where it should not have been broken or vice versa, or link graphs with the preceding sentence where they belong to the following or vice versa. In the spirit of the Chinese adage that “a mistake by a hairbreadth may lead to an error of a thousand miles” (失之豪釐差以千里), small mistakes in punctuation can lead to an erroneous understanding of the text’s content, which reaffirms the need for a more accurate transcription.

41 HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1995:31, 33.

42 HO, 1998:170–171.

43 WANG, 2000.

- (4) Whereas modern punctuation is unnecessarily inserted into the transcriptions, ancient punctuation is occasionally omitted. The transcriptions mention several black dots, most of which appear to function as section markers. Surprisingly, Li Xueqin mentions two more strips with black dots that appear in the *Cultural Relics* transcription without dots.⁴⁴ Each of the two dots mentioned by Li precedes a new query in the text: they obviously serve as section markers. Although neither is mentioned in the transcription, the one on strip 2419 is clearly visible on the tracing of this strip, which incidentally occurs in a selection of tracings appended to the transcription.⁴⁵ In other words, the tracing of this strip is more accurate than its transcription. This also extends to other tracings. The tracings of strips 2482 and 2210 contain imprints of silk threads that bundled the strips.⁴⁶ The imprints on 2210 are represented in the transcription by the symbol // ; those on 2482 are not mentioned. This affirms the uneven quality of the transcriptions.

I emphatically note that the purpose of pointing out these problematic aspects of the transcriptions is *not* to criticize Chinese colleagues who faced the complex task of making sense of the unpromising heap of charred bamboo fragments from the Dingzhou find, and whose professional facilities may have left much to be desired by international standards. However, these problems do highlight the need for especially careful treatment of ancient manuscripts. Bamboo and silk documents do not always reach us in unscathed fashion: even if no human factors, such as tomb robbers, are involved, the writing materials tend to decay during centuries of subterranean storage. Surviving fragments deserve utmost care. This also involves taking transcription seriously. New methodologies of transcribing early Chinese manuscripts are required to provide broad scholarly audiences with access to accurate copies of manuscripts and strengthen the foundation of studies based on tomb texts.⁴⁷ A methodologically accurate transcrip-

44 LI, 1996:38.

45 HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1995:28.

46 HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1995:28.

47 Many scholars of early Chinese manuscripts nowadays advocate the need for accurate transcriptions. Matthias Richter, for example, suggests that transcriptions of early Chinese manuscripts should include Direct Transcription (faithful representation of all structural features of the graph in its original shape), Analogy (notation of the modern graph with the closest resemblance to the original graph) and Reading (notation in modern orthography of the word that the graph presumably represents). If a Direct Transcription, which accords

tion, taking into account the above considerations, would do full justice to the importance of the discovery. Fortunately, in the past decades, such transcriptions have started to appear for other archaeological discoveries.

2.2 Features of the Manuscripts

The handwriting on the bamboo strips from Dingzhou is typical for the Han dynasty. Certain words, as identified by modern palaeographers, are represented by graphs that differ from their modern counterparts. Some graphs are written without a classificatory semantic component. For example, the graph 兆 on one bamboo strip has been interpreted by the palaeographers to stand for *tao* 逃 ‘to escape’. Other examples are:

反 for *pan* 叛 ‘to rebel’
 正 for *zheng* 政 ‘to rule’
 曹 for *zao* 遭 ‘to meet’
 知 for *zhi* 智 ‘wisdom’

There are also graphs with semantic components that differ from later standards. These include:

刑 for *xing* 形 ‘shape’
 說 for *yue* 悅 ‘pleased’
 適 for *di* 敵 ‘to oppose’
 陸 for *mu* 睦 ‘friendly’
 殃 for *yang* 殃 ‘calamity’

The bamboo manuscripts also have a “single standing-man” component 亻 in graphs now written with a “double standing-man” component 彳 such as:

住 for *wang* 往 ‘to go’
 侍 for *dai* 待 ‘to wait’

Some words in the manuscripts are represented by more than one graph. For example, *wei* 謂 ‘to refer to’ is sometimes written in full, but at other times only as 胃; *huan* 歡 ‘to be glad’ appears without the 欠 ‘deficiency’ component on the

with Boltz’ principle of structural consistency, is provided, the change to simplified graphs or the introduction of modern punctuation in a Reading is much less of a problem. Cf. RICHTER, 2003.

right, but with either a 馬 ‘horse’ or a 言 ‘word’ element on the left instead. The manuscripts also contain phonetically similar but structurally different loan graphs, such as *bei* 倍 ‘times’ for *bei* 背 ‘back’.

These are just a few orthographic variations in the Dingzhou manuscripts.⁴⁸ Most of these variations also occur in other Han dynasty manuscripts. They are typical for handwritings of that time, when no orthographic standard had yet been reached.

The Dingzhou manuscripts also contain features that formally structure their content: (1) section markers; (2) section and graph counts; (3) chapter titles.

- (1) Several bamboo strips from the Dingzhou find display black dots. Such dots frequently appear in unearthed bamboo or silk documents from the latter part of the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1045–256 BCE) onwards. Their function is not always well understood, but they usually demarcate sections. For example, two black dots in the Dingzhou *Wenzi*, on strips 0869 and 2439, evidently serve this purpose:

[...] 耶。” • 平王曰：“用義何如？” 文子[曰：“君子□].”

[...] isn't it?” • King Ping asked: “What is it like to implement righteousness?” Wenzhi replied: “The gentleman [...].”

[...] 道產。” • 平王曰：“道之于人也，亦有所不□ // .”

[...] the Way is produced.” • King Ping asked: “The Way, in its relation to man, also has something which does not [...].”

Both black dots appear in front of a question and separate this question from the answer to a preceding question. The new questions apparently negotiate new topics and may have been conceived as forming new sections; hence the black dots. One bamboo strip of the Dingzhou *Analects* even contains two small black dots, between the end of what is now *Analects* 20.2 and the beginning of what is now *Analects* 20.3.⁴⁹ Interestingly, the text of *Analects* 20.3, which is the last section in the transmitted *Analects*, is written in small graphs in two columns, possibly to highlight its questionable authenticity.⁵⁰

48 For a list of variations between the *Analects* manuscript and the transmitted *Analects*, see HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1997a:2–4.

49 HEBEI SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1997a:98–99.

50 Cf. CHEN, 2003:10.

The function of some dots is unclear. For example, the transcription of *The Grand Duke* mentions a black dot on bamboo strip 2256:

[...] □其權, 守其德, 不以蕩人□. • 故王人之 [...].

[...] his power, preserves his virtue, without thereby shaking the people [...]. • Therefore, to rule over the people as a king [...].

The text after the black dot continues with 故 *gu* ‘therefore’ and is unlikely the start of a new section. Similarly, the dot mentioned in the middle of strip 0645 of the Dingzhou *Wenzi* is clearly no section marker, as it separates two parallel phrases:

[...] 如四時之[□受, • 如風雨之][...].

[...] like the [...] giving of the four seasons, • like the [...] of wind and rain [...].

Since the latter half of the strip (all the graphs, including the dot, between square brackets) is now lost, the size and shape of the black dot can no longer be verified. Its function therefore remains unclear.

- (2) Several bamboo strips of the Dingzhou *Analects* exhibit the number of sections in a textual unit, and the number of graphs in these sections. Take, for instance, strips 616 and 621, which use black dots to demarcate the section and word counts:

[...] • 凡卅章 • 凡七百九十字.

[...] • 30 sections • 790 graphs.

[...] • 凡廿八章 [• 凡八百五十一字].

[...] • 28 sections • 851 graphs.

One Dingzhou *Wenzi* bamboo strip also exhibits the total number of graphs in the textual unit to which the strip belongs (without black dots or section count). Strip 0696 reads:

[...] 不道始于弱細者, 未之[有也]. 百一十八字. ⁵¹

[...] that someone disobeyed the Way and yet began as weak and small [has never occurred]. One hundred and eighteen graphs. |

What kind of textual unit these “one hundred and eighteen graphs” represent is unclear, because sections are apparently demarcated by black dots, not graph counts, and 118 graphs would be rather small for a chapter. Nonetheless, the mention of “one hundred and eighteen graphs” is noteworthy for two reasons. On the one hand, it underscores the sad fact that due to the fragmented and disorganized status in which the Dingzhou *Wenzi* was found, its original length and the exact number and size of its constitutive textual units are no longer known. On the other hand, it reveals the need felt by the scribe to “lock” the number of graphs in the constitutive units of a text, presumably to prevent (accidental or purposeful) addition or deletion of words, as frequently happened in those days of fluctuating texts.

- (3) The Dingzhou manuscripts also contain numerous titles of chapters or sections. For example, bamboo strips 1101 and 2505 of *The Grand Duke*:

[...] □賢而不知賢仁, 第四.

[...] the worthy without understanding the humaneness of the worthy, section 4.

[...] □□□國所貴, 第八.

[...] what the state values highly, section 8.

One bamboo strip from the Dingzhou *Wenzi* lists titles for coherent textual units and shows that the largest unit, the text itself, was originally titled *Wenzi*. Strip 2465 reads:

[文子上經聖□明王]

Li Xueqin interprets the graphs discerned on this strip as:⁵²

《文子》上經: 〈聖□〉, 〈明王〉

- 51 The syntax of the beginning of strip 0696, especially the two graphs 不道, is unclear. My tentative interpretation is that it has never occurred that someone who starts out as weak and small, which is considered a positive quality in the *Wenzi*, ends up as going against the Way.
- 52 LI, 1996:38.

In this interpretation, the first two graphs, 文子, represent the overall title of the text: the *Wenzi*. The next two graphs 上經 may be rendered in English as “Upper Canon”, or even as “Part One”, for they indicate that the text consists of at least two parts, each with an unknown number of chapters. The last four graphs 聖□明王, one of which is illegible, are the titles of two chapters in Part One: ‘Sagacity and [...]’ and ‘The Enlightened King’. No one has objected to Li Xueqin’s reading of the first four graphs, but the last four graphs have been the subject of heated scholarly debate. Xing Wen 邢文 identifies the unknown as 知, which I take to be a short form of 智, since the bamboo manuscript and the transmitted text often pair *sheng* 聖 ‘sagacity’ and *zhi* 智 ‘wisdom’ as philosophical concepts.⁵³ Hence, in my understanding, the last four graphs on strip 2465 may be read as: 聖智明王. Xing Wen furthermore argues that any reading of the last four graphs on strip 2465 other than as chapter titles is syntactically implausible. I find Xing Wen’s arguments convincing. Like Li Xueqin and Xing Wen, I believe that strip 2465 provides an inventory of the text, mentioning its overall title, its division into at least two parts and its subdivision into several titled chapters. This “table of contents” on a separate strip makes the Dingzhou *Wenzi* an exceptional document, because titles are usually mentioned immediately before or after the textual units they represent, and there are few bamboo or silk manuscripts that list titles separate from the main text. Most likely, strip 2465 was positioned at either end of the *Wenzi* bundle, with graphs facing outwards to facilitate identification of this bundle as the *Wenzi* on a bookshelf.

In sum, the Dingzhou manuscripts may be fragmentary, but they reveal interesting features that formally structure their content, probably to improve readability and ensure stability of the texts.

2.3 Date of the Manuscripts

The clerical script indicates that the manuscripts were copied onto the bamboo strips in the Former Han, but evidence for a more precise date is in short supply.

In the study of early Chinese texts, the date of a manuscript can occasionally be determined through its observance of taboo, when a graph in the text is replaced in the manuscript with an alternative graph to avoid mentioning the

53 XING, 1997.

name of a person who merits respect, such as a ruler. This method is not watertight, though, for the use of taboos is marked by ambiguity. When were taboos in force? During the ruler's reign or after his death? How strictly were they observed? And when was the ban on a prohibited graph lifted? No clear-cut answers exist, so prudence is in order when applying the taboo criterion in the dating of texts. Three possible cases of taboo observance have been suggested for the Dingzhou manuscripts, which, if confirmed, would mean that the manuscripts avoid the personal name of Emperor Gao 漢高祖 (r. 206–195 BCE), Emperor Hui 漢惠帝 (r. 195–188 BCE), or Emperor Zhao 漢昭帝 (r. 87–74 BCE).

The first case of possible taboo observance is reported by Ames and Rosemont, who suggest that the Dingzhou *Analects* manuscript respects imperial taboos, using *guo* 國 'realm' for *bang* 邦 'state', since the latter happens to be the personal name of Liu Bang 劉邦, founder of the Han dynasty.⁵⁴ While it is true that all published Dingzhou manuscripts display a marked preference for *guo* 國, and barely mention *bang* 邦, at least one *Analects* bamboo strip (595) does mention the latter graph:

[...] [不可]及也, 猶天之不可階而升也. 夫子得[邦家] [...].

[...] cannot be matched, just as a ladder cannot be used to climb the sky. Were he to become a head of state or of a clan [...].

The graph *bang* 邦 on this bamboo strip, which corresponds to *Analects* 19.25, may be a slip of the brush. Or it shows that the Dingzhou manuscripts do not consistently avoid Liu Bang's name.⁵⁵

The second case involves bamboo strip 0806 in the Dingzhou *Wenzi*, which maintains that for achieving enduring prosperity, the ruler must "be grand and not decline" (大而不衰). The parallel line in the transmitted text urges him to "be fulfilled and not discontented" (盈而不虧). Zhao Jianwei 趙建偉 suggests

54 AMES/ROSEMONT, 1998:277.

55 Either way, even if the *Analects* bamboo strips (and other Dingzhou manuscripts) respect the taboo for the founder of the Han Dynasty, one must be cautious in concluding that these handwritten manuscripts date from his reign. Cf. CHEN, 2003; ZHENG, 2007. This conclusion would suggest that the bamboo strips were no less than 140 years old by the time of their entombment, and that the *Analects* received its current form around the beginning of the Han. Makeham convincingly argues that this took place half a century later. Cf. MAKEHAM, 1996. Perhaps the taboo of Bang was simply observed much longer and more systematically than that of other emperors, due to Liu Bang's special status as the founding father of the dynasty.

that 盈 *ying* ‘fulfilled’ is the proper graph, that was retained in the transmitted text but replaced by *da* 大 ‘grand’ in the bamboo manuscript to avoid the tabooed name of Emperor Hui: Liu Ying 劉盈.⁵⁶ However, Zhang Fengqian 張豐乾 notes that *da* 大 ‘grand’ and *ying* 盈 ‘fulfilled’ are not mutually interchangeable.⁵⁷ Since these graphs differ widely in meaning, one would not be used for the other. Zhang also notes that scribes commonly used the graph *man* 滿 ‘full’ to avoid Emperor Hui’s name. Hence, this particular instance of lexical variation cannot be credibly explained as taboo observance.

The third case involves strip 0876, also in the Dingzhou *Wenzi*, which warns the ruler that if he “does not nourish” (不養) the people, they will revolt. The parallel line in the transmitted text has “does not nourish them” (弗養). Ho Che-wah suggests that *fu* 弗 ‘does not ... them’, as in the transmitted text, may be the original graph and that the bamboo manuscript replaced it with *bu* 不 ‘does not’ to avoid the tabooed name of Emperor Zhao: Liu Fuling 劉弗陵.⁵⁸ However, the Dingzhou manuscripts frequently vary between 弗 and 不, and since both are common negations, I think that one may have been used for the other due to changed linguistic preferences, rather than taboo observance.

In sum, even irrespective of the required prudence, evidence for taboo observance is unconvincing. In the absence of persuasive cases of taboo observance, we must look for alternative ways to date the manuscripts. One possible way, I think, is through their handwriting. We know that the Dingzhou manuscripts must have been inked onto the bamboo strips between the introduction of clerical script (beginning of the Han dynasty) and the closure of the Dingzhou tomb (probably 55 BCE). In terms of stylistic and structural features, the calligraphy of the Dingzhou manuscripts differs markedly from that of Former Han dynasty manuscripts found in other tombs. Take, for instance, the silk rolls of Mawangdui, also discovered in 1973, which date from the turn of the second century BCE. The calligraphic style of the silk manuscripts is more expressive, with many elongated strokes of varying width and graphs more complicated to decipher. This may, of course, reflect regional variation (Dingzhou in the north versus Mawangdui in the south), or the quality of the writing materials (precious silk versus cheaper bamboo), or even the aesthetic preferences of the scribes. Yet, the calligraphy of the Dingzhou manuscripts is exceedingly uniform and displays a noticeably higher degree of resemblance to Latter Han “regular script”

56 ZHAO, 2000:233.

57 ZHANG, 2002:27–28, 50.

58 HO, 2004:ix.

standards, which seems to indicate a later time of writing. Moreover, the tracings of select bamboo strips from the Dingzhou cache show a high degree of calligraphic similarity for all manuscripts found in that tomb (cf. Fig. 4).

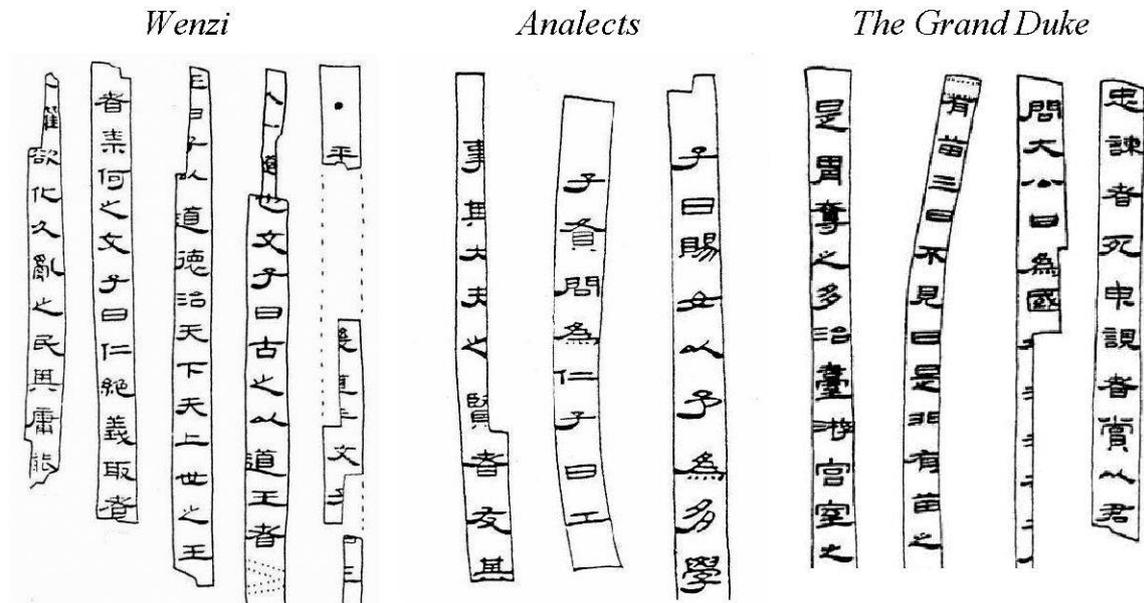


Figure 4: Tracings of bamboo fragments from three Dingzhou manuscripts.

If these tracings are accurate, this uniform handwriting suggests that the manuscripts may have been copied roughly in the same historical period and geographical area, and perhaps even by the same hand. It is not unlikely, I think, that the manuscripts were copied by a scribe, or a team of scribes, who worked at the Zhongshan court when Liu Xiu ruled over this fiefdom, between 69 and 55 BCE. The Dingzhou texts may have been copied onto bamboo close to their entombment in 55 BCE. Perhaps even for that very occasion.⁵⁹

3. The Significance

Despite their significance, the Dingzhou tomb and its manuscripts do not attract the amount of scholarly attention that other archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century enjoy. Perhaps this is because the tomb's funerary objects are

59 I thank Enno Giele for suggesting this possibility to me (personal correspondence, April 2004).

quantitatively and qualitatively inferior to those from tombs that had not been subject to robbery or fire, such as Mancheng. Another reason may be that the Dingzhou manuscripts appeal less to scholars' imagination than those discovered elsewhere, such as Guodian or Mawangdui, which, moreover, survived in better condition and larger quantity. In addition, the many setbacks the Dingzhou team had to endure delayed publications on the discovery and prevented scholars from quick access to the manuscripts, which may also have tempered scholarly enthusiasm.

Nonetheless, the Dingzhou find provides important information for the study of early Chinese history and culture. One aspect deserving our attention is the handwriting on the bamboo strips, which presents a crucial piece of the puzzle that is the evolution of the Chinese script. Chinese scholars, such as Wang Dongming, were quick to note the high degree of calligraphic regularity and uniformity on all Dingzhou strips. The Dingzhou calligraphy differs markedly from the "seal script" (*zhuan shu* 篆書) of the Qin (221–206 BCE) and early Former Han dynasties, while closely resembling the "regular script" (*kai shu* 楷書) that allegedly came into use at the end of the Latter Han. They therefore conclude that the maturation of Han dynasty clerical script did not take place in the Latter Han, as scholars had previously maintained, but much earlier, and certainly before the sealing of the Dingzhou tomb.

The mere fact that the Dingzhou tomb contains a posthumous library is in itself remarkable, for most tombs do not. It appears to show the Zhongshan king's proclivity to literature and may reveal something of his personal background and interests. The literary diversity of the library is no less important. The Dingzhou library, like that of Mawangdui, contains texts on a wide range of subjects, including what we would now label philosophy, strategy and divination. Would the deceased have prided himself on the breadth of his library, or would he consider the manuscripts as one coherent corpus? Perhaps all documents are aspects of one and the same topic: governance. Philosophical treatises provide the king with an ethical foundation for his rule; strategic knowledge is required in his dealings with others, especially when he has to resort to violence to restore order; divinatory texts regulate his relationship with divine powers and their predictive value is both needed and acclaimed by people of his high social strata; and the travelogue is perhaps not a noncommittal description of a leisurely voyage for literary enjoyment, but a prescription for kings on dealings with the emperor.

The Dingzhou library also calls attention to the function of tomb texts, which is not yet well understood. They may be a display of the deceased's this-

worldly vocation and interests, or serve as posthumous advice to help him in the afterlife, or both. In the Dingzhou case, the travelogue is of particular interest, because if the occupant is indeed Liu Xiu, the text was barely one year old when he died. What was the relationship between Liu Xiu and Liu Ding, whose journey to the imperial court is described in the document? How did a king of Zhongshan in the North come to obtain the travelogue of a king of Lu'an in the South? And why was it entombed with him? We need not even take into consideration the speed of publication, reduplication and transportation of texts in Former Han times, to say that the travelogue was relatively new when it was buried in the Dingzhou tomb, which shows that interred texts are not necessarily canonical works of great importance, but also everyday documents valued by the deceased for one reason or another.

The Dingzhou discovery also makes us think about the intellectual affiliation of entombed manuscripts and the alleged polemical relation of different intellectual trends. Similar to the discoveries of Guodian (early third century BCE) and Mawangdui (early second century BCE), the Dingzhou find (mid-first century BCE) contains texts of both “Confucianist” and “Daoist” orientation.⁶⁰ Naturally, rulers are at liberty to store works of different, even incompatible, schools of thought on their bookshelves, but the repeated discoveries of supposedly incongruous works in posthumous libraries – in tombs covering three centuries! – may well point to the imposition of modern ideas on an old reality, rather than real ideological or generic distinctions in the eyes of contemporary readers. If a “struggle between schools” ever took place, ancient libraries bear no witness to it. Therefore, tomb libraries and the manuscripts they contain should be studied as units in their own right, irrespective of their supposed intellectual affiliation, as the Dingzhou tomb again confirms.

60 In the Guodian corpus, *Laozi* and *The Great One Engenders Water* (*Tai yi sheng shui* 太一生水) generally classify as “Daoist”, other manuscripts as “Confucianist”. In the Mawangdui corpus, the two *Laozi* manuscripts are Daoist, and the *Four Canons of the Yellow Emperor* is said to belong to its Huang-Lao branch, whereas the *Essay on The Five Forms of Conduct* is considered a Confucianist work. The Dingzhou tomb counts four Confucianist texts (*Analects*, *Words of the Ru Lineage*, *Biography of the Grand Tutor*, *Duke Ai Inquires about the Five Ways of Righteousness*) and one Daoist (*Wenzi*). With reference to current debates (PETERSEN, 1995; RYDEN, 1996; QUEEN, 2001; CSIKSZENTMIHALYI/NYLAN, 2003; SMITH 2003) which are beyond the scope of this study, I believe that labels such as “Confucianist” and “Daoist” are unsuitable when referring to individual texts dating to the Former Han or earlier.

Legend

These symbols occur in the transcribed text of the Dingzhou bamboo fragments:

- [] square brackets enclose graphs that are now available in transcription only, on note cards made prior to the Tangshan earthquake; on the damaged bamboo strips these graphs can no longer be read.
- black dot.
- illegible graph.
- // traces of silk thread that was used to bundle the text.
- | end of a bamboo strip.

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