

# On *Shu* 書 (Documents) and the origin of the *Shang shu* 尚書 (Ancient Documents) in light of recently discovered bamboo slip manuscripts\*

Sarah Allan

Dartmouth College

Sarah.Allan@Dartmouth.edu

## Abstract

In light of the recent discovery of Warring States period bamboo slips, now in the collection of Tsinghua University, inscribed with texts described as *shu*, “documents” or “similar to *shu*”, this article explores the question of “what were *shu*?” It suggests that *shu* can be understood as a literary form apart from the history of the Confucian classic, the *Shang shu* 尚書 (Ancient Documents) or *Shu jing* 書經 (Book of Documents) and the *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書. Formal characteristics include: *shu* were – or pretended to be – contemporaneous records; and *shu* include formal speeches by model kings and ministers from ancient times. Many *shu* include the expression *wang ruo yue* 王若曰, which is also found in bronze inscriptions, where it indicates that a royal speech was read aloud by an official. Thus, the literary form originated with the practice of composing speeches in writing before they were read out in formal ceremonies, with a bamboo slip copy presented to the officials addressed. Later *shu* were fictional compositions, written in the style of these ancient documents.

**Keywords:** *Book of Documents*, *Shang shu* 尚書, *Shu jing* 書經, *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書, Bamboo slip manuscripts, Origin of Chinese literature

In the summer of 2008, Tsinghua University in Beijing acquired a collection of about 2,000 bamboo slips with brush-written characters in Warring States period (476–222 BC) script.<sup>1</sup> Radio-carbon testing of a sample slip produced a date of

\* Research for this paper was supported by a Chiang Ching-kuo Senior Research Fellowship, 2009–10. An earlier version, “*Shu de lai yuan yu yi yi* 書的來源與意義” (The origin and meaning of the *Documents*), was delivered as the Wang Guowei Lecture, Tsinghua University, 17 December 2010. Some of the ideas were also published in: “Hewei ‘shu’ 何為《書》” (What were the “documents?”), *Guangming ribao* 光明日報, 20 December 2010; and “What is a *shu*?” *Research essay* in the *Newsletter* of the European Society for the Study of Chinese Manuscripts, April 2011, 1–5.

1 See Qinghua Daxue Chutu Wenxian Yanjiu yu Baohu Zhongxin 清華大學出土文獻研究與保護中心, “Qinghua Daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian *Bao xun shiwen* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡〈保訓〉釋文”, *Wenwu* 文物 2009.6, 73–5; Li Xueqin 李學勤, “Qinghua jian jiu pian zongshu 清華簡九篇綜述”, *Wenwu* 2010.5, 51–7. The bamboo slips had been looted, presumably from a tomb, and placed on sale in the Hong Kong antiquities market as early as 2006. These manuscripts will be introduced in chapter 1 of my forthcoming book, *Written on Bamboo: Political Theory and Pre-Dynastic Legend in Early*

around 305 BC, which corresponds to the approximate dating of the closure of Tomb One at Guodian, near Jingmen, Hubei Province.<sup>2</sup> The bamboo slips found in the Guodian tomb are in the script of the ancient state of Chu, and the writing on the bamboo slips in the Tsinghua University collection is very similar. However, whereas the texts found at Guodian are primarily philosophical, according to Li Xueqin 李學勤, who leads the editorial team preparing the Tsinghua manuscripts for publication, the Tsinghua manuscripts are primarily historical and many of them are “*shu* 書” (“Documents”) or “similar to *shu*”.<sup>3</sup> This description associates them with the Confucian classic, the *Shang shu* 尚書 (“Ancient Documents”) which, according to Chinese tradition, is a collection of *shu* made by Confucius and later canonized as the *Shu jing* 書經.

But what were *shu*? How do we recognize a manuscript as such when we see (i.e. read) it? And what distinguishes *shu* from other ancient texts? The simple answer to such questions would be that *shu* are what is in the *Shang shu*, including its lost chapters. We might also add the chapters of the *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書 (“Remaining Zhou documents”), since its chapters are also called *shu* and were supposedly omitted when Confucius selected documents for inclusion in the *Shang shu*. Straightforward though this answer may seem, it has two problems. First, *shu* were banned by imperial edict during the Qin dynasty (221–206 BC) and the *Shang shu* was reconstructed during the Western Han (206–8 AD), so we know very little about its form and content before the Qin; we know even less about the origin and history of the *Yi Zhou shu*. Second, there appear to have been many more *shu* circulating in pre-Qin times than were ever included in either of these two corpuses.

### The transmitted *shu*

The title *Shu jing* is sometimes translated as the “Book of History”. It is not, however, a work of narrative history. Each chapter is a self-contained document, supposedly contemporaneous with the historical period in which it is set and entirely independent of the other chapters; in other words, the chapters are a collection of independent texts that have been arranged in chronological order but not linked to one another by their language or content. Many Han dynasty texts refer to a “100-chapter” work, which was supposedly selected by Confucius from more than 3,000.<sup>4</sup> This account parallels that in which Confucius is presented as having selected 300 songs from 3,000 and possibly mimics it.<sup>5</sup>

---

*Chinese Manuscripts*, and a previously unknown *shu*, the *Bao xun* 保訓, will be discussed in detail.

- 2 Jingmenshi bowuguan 荊門市博物館, ed. *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1998).
- 3 The first volume of the official publication, Li Xueqin (ed.), *Qinghua Daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡 (Shanghai: Zhong Xi shuju, 2010), includes nine manuscripts, eight of which are designated *shu*.
- 4 See Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, *Shang shu tonglun* 尚書通論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 81–2.
- 5 The *Shi ji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973[1959]), *juan* 61 (“Bo Yi liezhuan 伯夷列傳”), 2121, where the *Suoyin* 索隱 commentary of Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (Tang dynasty)

Similarly, the chapters of the *Yi Zhou shu* are supposedly a compilation of the *shu* which Confucius discarded.

The history of the *Shang shu* is too complex to explain in detail here. Briefly, there are two transmitted versions: a “modern script” (*jinwen* 今文) version with 28 (or 29 where one is divided) chapters, and an “old script” (*guwen* 古文) version with a further 30 (58 in all) chapters. Historians argue about the date of composition of almost all of the chapters of both versions. According to tradition, the “modern script” version was hidden by Fu Sheng 伏生 in the Qin dynasty and reconstructed after the establishment of the Han. Most modern scholars accept this version as authentic in the sense that the current text was transmitted from the Han dynasty. The “old script” version was said to have been found in the walls of Confucius’s house by Kong Anguo 孔安國 (d. c. 100 BC), but modern scholars generally agree that the transmitted version was a construct of the fourth century AD.<sup>6</sup>

The modern script version includes four (or five) sections: “Yu shu 虞書” (sometimes divided as: “Tang shu 唐書” and “Yu shu”), attributed to the time of Yao and Shun; “Xia shu 夏書”; “Shang shu 尚書”; and “Zhou shu 周書”. The documents in each section purport to be contemporaneous texts of their respective periods. While most modern scholars agree that the *shu* attributed to periods before the beginning of the Zhou, with the possible exception of the *Pan Geng* 盤庚 chapter of the “Shang shu 尚書”, were written later, they also generally agree that at least some of the Western Zhou documents genuinely date from the Western Zhou period.

The *Yi Zhou shu*, with 71 chapters in the current anthology, presents even greater problems of dating and authenticity than does the *Shang shu*. Although, according to tradition, it consists of *shu* that were omitted when Confucius compiled the *Shang shu*, the transmitted work had diverse sources with different dates of origin.<sup>7</sup> Huang Peirong, whose 1976 dissertation remains

---

cites the *Shu wei* 書緯 as the source for an account that Confucius selected 100 chapters from 3,333, and links Confucius’ selection of the *Shi* and *Shu*.

- 6 Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 132–6 and Edward L. Shaughnessy, in Michael Loewe (ed.), *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley and the Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), 386–9, provide succinct textual histories. For summaries of the scholarship on dating, see Jiang Shanguo 蔣善國, *Shang shu zongshu* 尚書綜述 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1988), 135–40, and Kai Vogelsang, “Inscriptions and proclamations: on the authenticity of the ‘Gao’ chapters in the *Book of Documents*”, *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 74, 2002, 140–8. Vogelsang argues against the generally held opinion that these chapters are authentically contemporaneous by means of a statistical analysis comparing their vocabulary with that found in W. Zhou bronze inscriptions. I do not find his methodology convincing because the statistical count is affected by differing subject matter. Moreover, even if these chapters are authentic, they have been copied over a 3,000 year period, most importantly in the standard script of the Han dynasty, so a certain amount of corruption is inevitable but does not prove a later origin. More convincing are the many cases in which terms used in the *Shang shu* have been convincingly explained in recent years by bronze inscriptions and other archaeological materials.
- 7 Succinct textual histories of the *Yi Zhou shu* in English include: Robin McNeal, “The body as metaphor for the civil and martial components of empire in *Yi Zhou shu*, chapter

the most exhaustive study of the text, observes that seven chapters are similar in style to the “Da Gao 大誥” chapter of the *Shang shu* and therefore probably relatively early.<sup>8</sup> More recently, Li Xueqin has argued that the “Shi fu 世俘”, “Shang shi 商誓” and “Chang biao 嘗表” are authentic documents of the Western Zhou, using evidence from bronze inscriptions.<sup>9</sup> However, most chapters of the *Yi Zhou shu* were probably composed in the Warring States period. Indeed, Huang Peirong argues that some 32 chapters were probably composed by a single hand.<sup>10</sup>

Although Confucius was closely associated with a “one hundred chapter” *Shang shu* from the Han dynasty on, the early evidence is much less clear. The *Lun yu* confirms Confucius’s interest in the *shu*, but it tells us almost nothing about the form of the text or texts held by Confucius. It includes only four references to the *shu*, two of which are very general. One states that Confucius used “formal speech” – perhaps a form of court language – for *shi* (“songs”), *shu*, and in the performance of rituals.<sup>11</sup> In the other, the disciple Zilu 子路 exclaims, “Why must one first read the documents and only then be considered learned! (何必讀書，然後為學).”<sup>12</sup> The other two references are more specific. In one, Confucius’s disciple Zizhang 子張 remarks: “the *shu* says, ‘Gaozong went into seclusion and did not speak for three years’”. (書云：高宗諒陰，三年不言).<sup>13</sup> This line corresponds roughly to a line from the “*Wu Yi* 無逸” chapter of the transmitted text.<sup>14</sup> In the other, Confucius, asked why he does not take part in government, responds: “The *Shu* says, ‘He who is filial, simply by being filial and acting as a friend to his elder and younger brothers, can extend the effect to government’”. (書云：孝乎惟孝，有于兄弟，施於有政).<sup>15</sup> This citation is included in a modified form in the forged old script version of the *Jun shi* 君奭 chapter of the *Shang shu*, but the original source is no longer extant.<sup>16</sup> From these references, we cannot even tell whether Confucius had a single

32: with an excursion on the composition and structure of the *Yi Zhou shu*”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 122/1 (Jan–Mar.), 2002, 46–60; Edward L. Shaughnessy in Michael Loewe (ed.), *Early Chinese Texts*, 229–33 (based on Huang Peirong, *Zhou shu yanjiu*, see next note).

- 8 See Huang Peirong 黃沛榮, “*Zhou shu yanjiu* 周書研究”, PhD. dissertation presented to the Taiwan University, Taipei, 1976, 83.
- 9 Li Xueqin 李學勤, preface to Huang Huaixin 黃懷信, Zhang Maorong 章懋鎔 and Tian Xudong 天旭東 (eds), *Yi Zhou shu huijiao jizhu* 逸周書彙校集注 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1995); Li Xueqin, *Gu wenxian cong lun* 古文獻叢論 (Shanghai: Shanghai Yuandong, 1996), 69–95 (the original articles were published in 1984, 1994, and 1993).
- 10 Huang Peirong, “*Zhou shu yanjiu*”, 83 ff.
- 11 *Lun yu jishi* 論語集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), *juan* 14, 475 (7.18). The term I translate as “formal speech” here is *ya yan* 雅言. I suspect that this was a form of “Mandarin” or “common speech” which was used on formal occasions and in court from Shang times on. This language was the basis of all written works and is the reason why there is so little evidence of regional languages or dialects in the writing system.
- 12 *Lun yu jishi*, *juan* 23, 795 (11.25).
- 13 *Lun yu jishi*, *juan* 30, 1036 (14.40).
- 14 Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 and Liu Qiyu 劉起鈺 (eds), *Shang shu jiaoshi yilun* 尚書較釋譯論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), vol. 3, 1532 ff.
- 15 *Lun yu jishi*, *juan* 4, 121 (2.21)
- 16 D.C. Lau, *Analects* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1992), 17.

text with multiple chapters or an open-ended collection of independently circulating manuscripts like those in the Tsinghua University collection.

Since Confucius and the later Confucian tradition have been so closely associated with the *shu*, many scholars writing about manuscripts in the Tsinghua University collection assume that *shu* composed during the Warring States period should be associated with the Confucian school. However, most pre-Han thinkers, including masters who were not followers of Confucius, sometimes cite *shu* for historical authority. Most significantly, the Confucians' most vociferous critic, Mozi 墨子, frequently cites the *shu*. Indeed, the *Mozi* repeatedly refers to the "documents of the former kings" (*xian wang zhi shu* 先王之書), rather than simply *shu*. This suggests that he had a collection of such documents attributed to the ancient kings. He also uses specific terms for documents of different periods, i.e. "Xia *shu*", "Shang *shu*" and "Zhou *shu*". That he does not refer to "Tang *shu* 唐書" or "Yu *shu* 虞書" even though he often discusses the legend of Yao and Shun may indicate that these chapters, generally thought to be relatively late, were not included in his collection of documents.

Although there is more evidence that Mozi had a defined collection of *shu* than there is for Confucius, we do not know whether his *shu* were limited in number or whether they were open-ended. Neither do we know how closely the *shu* of Mozi resembled those of Confucius. Some of the titles Mozi cites are familiar from the 100 titles given in the "Preface" (*xu* 序) to the *Shang shu*, which is traditionally attributed to Confucius, and some of his citations correspond to lines in the transmitted text – but many do not.<sup>17</sup> Even when the titles of Confucius's and Mozi's *shu* are the same, we do not know whether the contents of the documents were identical. Confucius and Mozi (and all the philosophers of the Warring States period) used historical legend to present their own political philosophy, and in so doing transformed the legends about ancient kings to accord with their own philosophical stance.<sup>18</sup> Were there different versions of the same text reflecting the two versions of ancient history? Were there some chapters that were held only by Confucius or by Mozi? These questions cannot be answered with existing evidence.

The stories of Confucius making a selection of 100 *shu* from 3,000, with the *Yi Zhou shu* representing documents he had left out, may be apocryphal, but they are based upon an assumption that the category "*shu*" included many more texts than those found in the transmitted tradition. Indeed, if the *Shang shu* and *Yi Zhou shu* are a collection of speeches and accounts of ancient kings, it is unlikely that they were the only ones. Though some of the speeches from the Western Zhou period are probably contemporaneous, the rulers of that period surely made more speeches than have been transmitted in these anthologies, and since scholars agree that many of the *shu* in the *Shang shu* and *Yi Zhou shu* are products of the Warring States period, later people clearly continued to compose texts in the style of ancient *shu* and we may reasonably assume that not all of

17 See Chen Mengjia, *Shang shu tonglun*, 11–35. The forged "old script" text makes use of early quotations, so only the "modern script" version can be validly compared.

18 See Sarah Allan, *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China* (San Francisco: CMC, 1981), 125–31 where I discuss the manner in which Confucius and Mozi transformed historical legend for their own ends.

these Warring States period imitations were included in either anthology. Thus, although some unearthed manuscripts may be lost chapters of the *Shang shu* or *Yi Zhou shu* – or lost versions of those chapters, we should not make this assumption without clear support.

### *Shu* as a literary form

We need to define *shu* in a more comprehensive manner – as a form of literary composition, rather than as chapters of known historical compilations – in order to understand these manuscripts. Thus defined, we can discuss *shu* without entering into the complex history of the *Shang shu*. We can also begin to understand the origin and history of *shu*, as opposed to that of the transmitted text. The most significant features of *shu* are that: (1) they were – or pretended to be – contemporaneous records; (2) they include formal speeches by model kings and ministers from ancient times (Western Zhou or earlier); and (3) many *shu* include the expression, *wang ruo yue* 王若曰, “the king seemingly said”. This expression is not found in all *shu*, but it provides a key to understanding how *shu* differed from other texts.

My hypothesis is that *shu* originated as the pre-prepared, written scripts for royal speeches and that later *shu* were fictional compositions, written in the style of these ancient documents. That the basic form of *shu* is that of a formal speech is evident in the names of the six traditional types of *shu*: “canon” (*dian* 典), “counsel” (*mo* 謨), “oath” (*shi* 誓), “instruction” (*xun* 訓), “proclamation” (*gao* 誥) and “decrees” (*ming* 命). With the exception of *dian* these are all types of oral utterance. The early graphic forms of *dian* include bamboo slips tied together, often placed on an altar, and in Zhou bronze inscriptions, the term is used with reference to formal records.<sup>19</sup> Later, however, *dian* appear to be exclusively associated with the most ancient period in Chinese history, from which, even in the Warring States and Han periods, direct transmission of the words of the ancient kings probably seemed unlikely. In the transmitted *Shang shu*, the only *dian* is the “Yao dian” (sometimes divided into the “Yao dian” and “Shun dian 舜典”). Moreover, the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 defines *dian* as “the documents of the five emperors” (*wu di zhi shu* 五帝之書), which corresponds to the number of “emperors” (*di*) in the “Basic Annals” of the *Shi ji* 史記.<sup>20</sup> This suggests that there may have been *dian* attributed to Huang Di 黃帝 and Zhuan Xu 顓頊 in the Han dynasty.

### *Wang ruo yue*

As already noted, many *shu* include the expression, *wang ruo yue*, “the king seemingly said”, a form of words which is also found in Western Zhou bronze

19 Chen Chusheng 陳初生, *Jinwen Changyong Zidian* 金文常用字典 (Xi'an 西安: Shanxi Renmin 陝西人民, 1989), 485–6. Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 17, notes that the term was used in bronze inscriptions as a verb to refer to the archival purpose of the inscriptions in recording a contract.

20 *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1981), 200.

inscriptions. Indeed, to my knowledge, the expression is only found in *shu*, citations of *shu* in other texts, and in bronze inscriptions. The context in the inscriptions is similar to that of the *Shang shu*; that is, in bronze inscriptions, *wang ruo yue* introduces a formal speech given by the king. As noted above, most scholars agree that at least some of the transmitted *shu* attributed to the early Western Zhou period are authentic, because of similar linguistic formulae and the overlap between the historical events recorded in the *shu* and those mentioned in bronze inscriptions. *Shu* do not, of course, include ancestral dedications, which are a standard part of Zhou bronze inscriptions. Nevertheless the format of many Western Zhou bronze inscriptions is similar to the conventional form of speeches recorded in the *Zhou shu* section of the *Shang shu*: that is, a short preface in which the physical setting and/or circumstance is recorded, often with a date, and followed by the words of the king or a minister.

The inscription on the Da Yu *ding* 大盂鼎, an early Western Zhou vessel (reign of King Kang 康王) is famous because its reference to the inebriation of the last Shang kings tends to support the authenticity of the *Jiu Gao* 酒誥 chapter of the *Shang shu*, which also refers to excessive drinking and inebriation by the last Shang kings. Here, it may serve as an example of this format for the introduction of a speech with the expression *wang ruo yue*:

It was the ninth month when the king was at Zong Zhou 宗周 that he gave Yu 盂 his command. His majesty seemingly said, “Yu, the illustrious King Wen received the great command that was [seen] in the sky. King Wu succeeding King Wen and developing the region, expelled the evil, [his beneficence] spread to the four quadrates, and he truly made the people upright. In carrying out the duties of office, when using ale, they did not dare to sink into drunkenness and in making roasted and steamed offerings, they did not dare to be inebriated. . . .”<sup>21</sup>

唯九月，王在宗周，令(命)盂。王若曰：「盂，丕顯文王，受天有大令(命)，在武王嗣文作邦，闢厥慝，敷有四方，允正厥民，在御事，獻，詐酒無敢酖，有紫蒸祀，無敢醜。 . . .

The inscription ends with a list of gifts and a solemn injunction that Yu not fail in the duties of his appointment, in commemoration of which the vessel was cast.

The other Western Zhou bronze inscriptions that include the expression *wang ruo yue* also record ceremonial appointments in which the king gives a speech charging the appointee with the duties of office and presenting him with various gifts. As Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 observed in his “Wang ruo yue kao 王若曰考”, although the speeches were attributed to the king, they were delivered by someone else. *Ruo* in the expression *wang ruo yue* serves to indicate this.<sup>22</sup> These

21 For rubbings and direct transcriptions see: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Yuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院考古研究所 ed., *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng* 殷周金文集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua 中華, 1984), 5, 2837; Yan Yiping 嚴一萍 ed., *Jinwen zongji* 金文總集 (Taipei: Yiwen, 1983), no. 1328.

22 As reprinted in Chen Mengjia, *Shang shu tonglun*, 146–70. The first publication of this article was in 1939.

appointment inscriptions often describe the ceremony in detail, including the arrival of the king, the entrance of the appointee, and the king's verbal order that a certain scribe should make the appointment with a text written on bamboo slips (*ce ming* 冊命). The speech that is then read out is preceded by the expression, *wang ruo yue*. For example, in the inscription on the Mu *gui* 牧簋, we find: "His majesty gave the order to the Scribe of the Interior, Wu, to appoint Mu with a text written on bamboo slips. His majesty seemingly said. . .". The speech is followed by an expression of gratitude by the appointee. Then, the bamboo slip manuscript of the speech of appointment (*ming ce* 命冊) is presented to the appointee, who hangs it from his waist and goes out. From this we know that the term *ce* refers to bamboo slips as a material object, and that they were given to the appointee.<sup>23</sup>

In a small number of bronze inscriptions, a speech attributed to an official rather than the king is preceded by the expression *ruo yue*.<sup>24</sup> Thus the function of *ruo yue* is not to indicate royalty *per se*. Rather, it marks the oral performance of a speech by someone other than the person to whom the words are attributed. In the *Shang shu*, the context is similar to that of bronze inscriptions – formal speech attributed to a king or high official. Thus, we may reasonably assume that, at least in those *shu* which are authentic texts of the Western Zhou, the expression had the same meaning as it did in the bronze inscriptions; that is, it denoted that the speeches attributed to the ruler were actually delivered by someone else.

This usage explains the puzzling appearance of the term *wang ruo yue* in some chapters of the *Shang shu* in which the Duke of Zhou rather than the king is the protagonist. For example, the *Duo fang* 多方 chapter includes the line, "the Duke of Zhou said, 'the king seemingly said'" (周公曰王若曰), and in the *Duo shi* 多士 chapter, we find:

It was the third month, when the Duke of Zhou first dwelled at the new settlement, Luo. He thereby declared to the remaining many officers of the Shang king, "His majesty seemingly said, 'Oh, [you] remaining officers of Yin. . .

惟三月，周公初于新邑洛，用告商王士。王若曰：“爾殷遺多士

Some scholars have interpreted these lines as meaning that the Duke of Zhou was calling himself king and thus attempting to usurp the throne, but, as Chen Mengjia pointed out, a more apt interpretation is that the Duke of Zhou delivered the speech but the words were attributed to the king. In the *Li zheng* 立正 and *Jun shi* 君奭 chapters, on the other hand, we have Zhou Gong *ruo yue*. In those cases, Zhou Gong would have been speaking on his own behalf, with someone else reading the speech, but the term would not imply that he was claiming kingship.

23 For the Mu *gui* see *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng*, 8, 4343, *Jinwen zongji* 4, 2857. For reconstructions of this ceremony see Chen Mengjia, "Wang ruo yue kao" and Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 105–10.

24 *Ni zhong* 逆鐘: *Yin Zhou Jinwen Jicheng*, 1, 61; *Shi Hui gui* 師毀簋: *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng*, 8, 4311.

## “Documents” (*shu*) and “bamboo slip manuscripts” (*ce*)

The term *ming shu* 命書, “document of appointment”, also occurs in bronze inscriptions, with a similar meaning to *ming ce*. Here, Li Feng has had an important insight that helps us to understand the difference and, I believe, the meaning of *shu* more generally. Observing a pattern of distinction in the usage of these two expressions, Li suggests that *ming ce* refers to the physical document, i.e. the bamboo slip manuscript which was physically given to the official appointed after he expressed gratitude to the ruler, whereas *ming shu* refers to its text.<sup>25</sup> A particularly revealing example is this inscription on the *Mian gui* 免簋, a late Western Zhou vessel:

It was the first auspiciousness period of the twelfth month; the king was at Zhou. At daybreak, his majesty approached the Great Temple, Xing Shu assisted Mian. When the appointment was made, his majesty bestowed the document (*shu*) on the Bamboo-slip-manuscript maker Yin to use in appointing Mian. [It] said, I command you...  
 唯十又二月初吉，王在周，昧爽，王各于大廟，邢叔佑免，即令，王授作冊尹書，俾冊命免，曰：令汝...<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the term *shu* refers to the document in the abstract – the text of the speech which is a literary composition, whereas *ce* is its physical form as writing.

### The origin of *shu*

We may hypothesize, then, that *shu* were originally the scripts of speeches composed for the purpose of delivery by officials on behalf of the ruler or high minister in a formal ceremony. Since they were the scripts of speeches delivered by someone other than the person to whom the words were attributed, they were necessarily written down in advance of the performance. The expression *ruo yue*, “seemingly said”, marked the fact of their performance by someone other than the purported author; the king or minister “seemed” to say them, but did not actually voice them. Presumably a copy would have been kept in the royal archives, with a record as to the date, place and circumstances of delivery, and the bronze inscriptions indicate that a bamboo slip manuscript of the speech was given to the person to whom the speech was addressed.

Western Zhou bronzes were commonly cast for the particular purpose of recording official appointments or other benefices, and so they record the speeches made by the king at the time of appointment. However, the kings would also have made other formal speeches that were not cast on bronze.

25 Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 112; See also Li Feng, “‘Offices’ in bronze inscriptions and Western Zhou government administration”, *Early China* 26–27 (2001/2), 50.

26 *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng* 8, 4240; *Jinwen zongji* 4, 2762. The graph read here as *shu* 書 is written as: 者. This loan is unusual, but there are many examples in excavated texts in which *zhu* 箸 is used as a loan for *shu*. See Wang Hui 王輝 (ed.), *Guwenzi tongjia zidian* 古文字通假字典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 108–9.

Presumably, these were also pre-recorded on bamboo slips, read out by an official in a formal ceremony, and archived with a record of the date, place and circumstances of delivery. Another copy (or copies) may also have been presented to those to whom the speech was addressed. This practice of writing scripts in advance of formal utterances that solemnized government appointments on bamboo slips suggests a context for the origin of the documents found in the *Shang shu* and helps us to understand how *shu* were unlike other literary compositions.

Since the earliest *shu* were the archived scripts of ceremonial utterances made at specific times and places, we may reasonably suppose that they would be accompanied by a notation concerning the time, place and circumstances of their delivery. Similarly, the documents of the *Shang shu* often have a preface setting the scene, usually with a date, followed by a speech. Some of those *shu* attributed to the early Western Zhou in the *Shang shu* may even have originated as actual scripts, although they will necessarily have undergone a certain amount of alteration in the process of transmission, which included rewriting in different stages of the development of the script, including the “new” Han script. Later, texts that were written in the style of such scripts were also regarded as *shu*.<sup>27</sup> Significantly in terms of their development, the early Western Zhou *shu* tend to provide only sparse information concerning the date, place and circumstances of delivery, whereas *shu* attributed to earlier periods, but presumably written later, tend to have more elaborate narrative information in addition to the speeches.

How these scripts of speeches came to be circulated is not clear. However, the presentation of the bamboo slip manuscripts after royal speeches were delivered to the person(s) addressed in the speech, mentioned in the bronze inscriptions, suggests that there was a mechanism. The traditional supposition that Confucius had access to the archives of the state of Lu is also worth noting, since the core chapters of the *Shang shu* are documents associated with the founder of that state, the Duke of Zhou. We may also suppose that once such documents began to be circulated they inspired imitations. Thus, while the original *shu* were actually scripts of speeches, other works were written in the style of such scripts. While these might be considered forgeries, it is possible that at least some of them were written in the spirit of fictional reconstructions.

An important aspect of this literary form – a contemporaneous record of direct speech – is that the form itself demands an acceptance of historical authenticity: this is not a historical record or an interpretation. There is no intermediary: it is what kings and ministers actually said. Because the *shu* originated as scripts of speeches, they have an authenticity as contemporaneous documents that is absent from narrative history. This point is essential because it meant that by studying them, one could commune directly with the kings of ancient times without the intervention of interpretation. To read or recite such words and perform the ritual actions was thus to model oneself upon them. It is why only the speeches of greatest kings and ministers were included and why the

27 Since the discovery of oracle bones, many scholars have considered the Pan Geng to be an authentic text, though linguistically it is very different from oracle bone inscriptions.

*shu* were so important to Confucius, who claimed that he “transmitted, but did not create” (述而不作).<sup>28</sup>

In sum, if we define *shu* as a literary form, a *shu* is any text which claims to be a contemporaneous record of a speech of an ancient king. Some *shu* will be authentic scripts of speeches prepared for royal delivery, some will be based upon such speeches, and others will be fictional reconstructions of what an ancient ruler or minister might have said. Like the *Songs* (*shi*), for which – as we have seen above – Confucius used a type of formal speech, the *shu* represent actual words of the ancients. However, whereas the *Songs* originated with oral performance and were written down later, *shu* were literary compositions from the outset, though they were intended for oral performance. In this sense, they can be regarded as the first Chinese literary compositions.

28 *Lun yu jishi*, *juan* 13, 431 (7.1).