

Of Trees, a Son, and Kingship: Recovering an Ancient Chinese Dream

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The first volume of the Tsinghua University Warring States bamboo-strip manuscripts contains a text with passages that match medieval quotations of a text referred to as Cheng Wu 程寤 or Awakening at Cheng, which in turn is said to be a lost chapter of the Yi Zhou Shu 逸周書 or Leftover Zhou Documents. The passages concern one of Chinese literature's earliest interpretations of a dream, and were quoted in medieval encyclopedias in their sections on dreams. This article discusses the significance of this discovery both for Chinese textual history and for the interpretation of this particular dream. In particular, it shows that trees seen in the dream predict the Zhou conquest of Shang, and the subsequent Shang acquiescence to Zhou rule. It also notes that this discovery simultaneously confirms the antiquity of this text, but also calls into question the dominant traditional interpretation of the dream.

Keywords: arboreal symbolism, China, dreams, history, languages, literature, philology, philosophy, Yi Zhou Shu, Zhou conquest

EVER SINCE XI JINPING 習近平 first enunciated the notion of the “Chinese Dream” in November 2012, it has become almost national policy in China. For Xi, this dream predicts a glorious future for China: “to realize the great renewal of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream for the Chinese nation in modern history” (*Xinhuanet News* 2012). However, it is important to note that national dreams, like personal dreams, can be, and often are, bidirectional: they point to the future, to be sure, but they are also deeply rooted in past experience. It is no coincidence that Xi first mentioned this Chinese Dream on the occasion of a visit to the National Museum of China, which is devoted to preserving and displaying China’s millennia-old traditional culture. The “renewal” of a glorious future requires a glorious past, and so it is also no coincidence that while the Chinese government is investing heavily in the training of new engineers at its major universities to realize its dream, it has also established at many of those universities National Studies institutes that are intended to develop new, multidisciplinary approaches to understanding Chinese history. One of the most prominent of these National Studies institutes is at Xi’s own alma mater, Tsinghua (Qinghua 清華) University in Beijing.

Although Tsinghua University is now known primarily as an engineering school, “the MIT of China,” this has not always been the case. From 1925 until the reorganization of China’s universities in 1952, Tsinghua was home to the most famous Institute of National

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Studies in China, first staffed by its “four great teachers”: Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927), Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969), and Zhao Yuanren 趙元任 (i.e., Y. R. Chao; 1892–1982). This tradition was renewed in 2004 when another of its most famous alumni, Li Xueqin 李學勤, returned to the university to take up the directorship of a newly established Center for Advanced Studies in the Humanities. Just four years later, the university procured a substantial cache of ancient bamboo-strip manuscripts and established yet another new center, the Center for Unearthed Documents Research and Protection. In the decade that this Center has been in existence, it has been remarkably productive, already publishing six volumes of these manuscripts. These manuscripts have been hailed as “revolutionizing our understanding of early Chinese thought” (Allan 2015, 3).¹

The first volume of the Tsinghua University Warring States bamboo-strip manuscripts prompted an outpouring of scholarship in China, and even attracted attention in the Western scholarly world, primarily for its version of texts that either were included as chapters in the *Shang Shu* 尚書 or *Venerated Documents* (also known as the *Shu Jing* 書經 or *Classic of Documents*) or that share the same format as those texts.² These manuscripts seem finally to have brought to an end the centuries-long debate over the authenticity of the *guwen* 古文 or “ancient text” chapters of this classic; as Li Xueqin (2011b, 105–6) has pointed out, comparison of the Tsinghua manuscript **Yin Gao* 尹誥 or *The Proclamation of Yin* with the “ancient text” chapter “Xian You Yi De” 咸有一德 or “Both Had a Singular Virtue” shows that the latter is almost certainly a late forgery (Qinghua Daxue Chutu Wenxian Yanjiu Yu Baohu Zhongxin 2011). Another of these manuscripts corresponds to the famous “Jin Teng” 金縢 chapter of the *Documents*, and has led in its own turn to an outpouring of scholarship, including discussion of what differences between the manuscript and the received text may mean for the writing and transmission of texts in ancient China.³

¹One of the anonymous reviewers for JAS asked that these manuscripts be acknowledged as “unprovenanced,” which is to say that they came onto the market through tomb robbing. This is certainly the case, but this does not negate the manuscripts’ authenticity or their historical value. For a detailed demonstration of the authenticity of another corpus of unprovenanced manuscripts—those in the collection of Peking University—but with relevance also to both the Tsinghua University and the Shanghai Museum manuscripts, see Foster (2017). I comment further on the authenticity of the **Cheng Wu* manuscript below. In referring to these manuscripts, I here adopt the increasingly common practice of marking with an asterisk titles that have been added by the modern editors, whereas titles without an asterisk indicate texts that bear an explicit title. I also write all manuscript titles in italics, whereas chapters in traditional texts are presented in Roman letters within quotation marks.

²These chapters are **Yin Zhi* 尹至 or *The Arrival of Yin*; **Yin Gao* 尹誥 or *The Proclamation of Yin*, which corresponds with the chapter “Xian You Yi De” 咸有一德 or “Both Had a Singular Virtue”; *Zhou Wu Wang You Ji Zhou Gong Suo Zi Yi Dai Wang Zhi Zhi* 周武王又疾周公所自以弋王之志 or *The Record of King Wu of Zhou Being Ill and the Duke of Zhou Substituting Himself for the King*, which corresponds closely with the “Jin Teng” 金縢 or “Metal-Bound Coffin” chapter; and **Bao Xun* 保訊 or *The Treasured Instruction* (see Qinghua Daxue Chutu Wenxian Yanjiu Yu Baohu Zhongxin 2011).

³In the five years since this manuscript was first published, there have been at least twenty articles devoted to it formally published in journals in China, and dozens more published online. For a recent offering that discusses larger issues, see Cheng (2016). For an English-language study, see Meyer (2014).

It has been less noted that the first volume of the Tsinghua University manuscripts also includes three separate texts that correspond with chapters of the *Yi Zhou Shu* 逸周書 or *Leftover Zhou Documents*, documents that are said not to have been included by Confucius in his editing of the *Shang Shu* but that were preserved nonetheless: **Huang Men* 皇門 or *The August Gate*, which corresponds closely with the *Yi Zhou Shu* chapter of the same title; *Zhai Gong Zhi Gu Ming* 祭公之禩命 or *The Retrospective Command of the Duke of Zhai*, which corresponds closely with the “Zhai Gong” 祭公 chapter of that text; and **Cheng Wu* 程寤 or *The Awakening at Cheng*, which corresponds closely with medieval quotations of a “Cheng Wu” chapter of the *Yi Zhou Shu*.

In this latter case, the reason that one can say only that the text corresponds with quotations is because the “Cheng Wu” chapter of the *Yi Zhou Shu* has long been lost, editions of that text preserving only its title. However, because the text concerns the prognostication of a dream, a topic of great interest throughout traditional Chinese history, medieval collectanea all quoted more or less substantial passages from the text in their sections on dreams; the Tsinghua University editors provide an appendix listing ten different quotations in a variety of sources from the Han through the Northern Song dynasties, which, in retrospect, if not explicitly, can be seen to derive from the *Cheng Wu* text (Qinghua Daxue Chutu Wenxian Yanjiu Yu Baohu Zhongxin 2011, 140–41).⁴ These quotations correspond to passages in the Tsinghua manuscript to an almost startling degree, so that even though the Tsinghua manuscript is not titled, there can be no question that it is indeed the long-lost *Cheng Wu* text.⁵ Just this correspondence between the manuscript and the medieval quotations would suffice to make this discovery an important event in the modern reconstitution of China’s ancient literary tradition. But what makes this discovery truly extraordinary is that the manuscript not only provides the portion of the text that concerns the dream, but also includes almost twice as much content again discussing the significance of the dream for political philosophy. None of this could have been guessed at based on the early quotations.⁶

The manuscript opens by recounting a dream that Tai Si 大姒, the wife of King Wen of Zhou 周文王 (r. 1099/59–1050 BCE),⁷ had concerning bushes or trees at the court of the Shang king, the planting of another tree there by their son Fa 發, the future King Wu of Zhou 周武王 (r. 1049/45–1043 BCE), and the transformation of some of this foliage into other types of trees. Tai Si is said to have awakened in alarm, and reported

⁴The listing of these quotations by no means exhausts all medieval quotations of the “Cheng Wu” text; for a fuller listing, see Lü Miaojun (2012).

⁵For **Cheng Wu*, the editor of which was Liu Guozhong 劉國忠, see Qinghua Daxue Chutu Wenxian Yanjiu Yu Baohu Zhongxin (2011, 6–7 [full-size photographs], 47–51 [magnified photographs], and 135–41 [transcription and notes]). As noted in n. 1 above, the asterisk in **Cheng Wu* indicates that the Tsinghua manuscript does not bear a title; in this article, references to the manuscript will be in this form. References to the *Yi Zhou Shu* chapter will be to “Cheng Wu.” References to *Cheng Wu* (i.e., in italics without an asterisk) will signify a hypothetical *urtext* of the text.

⁶A sampling of studies that have been formally published to date would include Huang Huaixin (2011), Liu (2012), and Zhong and Liu (2013); many other studies have been published online. I will refer to those below as relevant. As far as I know, there have been two studies published in a Western language: Liu (2015) and Luo (2015).

⁷For these dates, which are here intended only as a general approximation, see Loewe and Shaughnessy (1999, 25).

the dream to King Wen. He too seems to have been startled by it, and enlisted clairvoyants at the Zhou court to interpret the dream. The clairvoyants exorcised the subjects of the dream and then performed various sacrifices and rituals in the Zhou court. King Wen and the crown-prince Fa then pronounced the dream to be a “lucky dream” (*ji meng* 吉夢) portending that they would receive from the “august Di on high” (*huang Shang Di* 皇上帝), the Shang “mandate” (*ming* 命) to rule. The Tsinghua manuscript then goes on to offer various interpretations and to draw lessons concerning government.

As might be expected, most of the attention given to this text has been devoted to the opening narrative of the dream. In the manuscript, this portion reads as follows:⁸

惟王元祀貞月既生魄，大妣夢見商廷惟棘，廼小子發取周廷梓樹于厥間，化爲松柏柞栲。

【1】寤驚，告王。王弗敢占，詔太子發，俾靈名總祓、祝祈祓王、巫率祓大妣、宗丁祓太子發，幣告【2】宗祔社稷，祈于六末山川，攻于商神。望微，占于明堂。王及太子發並拜吉夢，受商命【3】于皇上帝。

It was the king's first year, first month, after the growing brightness. Tai Si dreamed of seeing that in the Shang court were brambles, and then that the young son Fa took the Zhou court's catalpa and planted it in their midst, transforming into pine and cypress, white oak and sawtooth oak. 【1】 She awakened alarmed, and reported it to the king. The king did not dare to prognosticate it, but summoned the crown prince Fa and had Clairvoyant Ming perform a general exorcism, Invocator Qi exorcise the king, Magician Shuai exorcise Tai Si, and Templar Ding exorcise the crown prince Fa, reporting with silks 【2】 at the ancestral temple and sacrificing inside the gate at the altars of state, praying to the six extremities and the mountains and rivers, and casting out the Shang spirits. They looked to the signs and prognosticated in the Bright Temple. The king and Crown Prince Fa together bowed to the auspicious dream and received the Shang mandate 【3】 from the august Di on high.

In a subsequent section of this study, I will consider the opening portion of this passage in detail, and consider especially the symbolic significances of the various trees seen in the dream. Before doing so, however, it is worth examining two early quotations of the text that allow it to be identified as the *Cheng Wu* text. They both appear in the *Taiping Yulan* 太平御覽 or *Imperial Survey of the Taiping Era*, completed in 984, and both mention the text by title. Differences between these two quotations suggest that at least two different versions of the text may have been extant into the early Northern Song dynasty.

十年正月，文王自商至程。大妣夢見商庭生棘，太子發取周庭之梓樹之于闕間。梓化爲松柏柞栲。覺而驚寐覺以告文王。文王不敢占，詔太子發，命祝以幣告于宗廟群神，然後占之于明堂。及發並拜吉夢，遂作《程寤》。

⁸I here offer just an “exploded” (i.e., interpretive) transcription that provides standard readings as well as punctuation. In a different venue, it would be desirable to present also a strictly literal transcription. The numbers refer to the strips on which the text is found.

In the tenth year, first month, King Wen from Shang arrived at Cheng. Tai Si dreamed of seeing in the Shang court growing brambles, and the eldest son Fa taking the Zhou court's catalpa and planting it between the gatehouses. The catalpa transformed into pine and cypress, sawtooth oak and white oak. Awakening and being alarmed, she reported it to King Wen. King Wen did not dare to prognosticate, but summoned the eldest son Fa and commanded the priests to use cloth to report to the many spirits in the ancestral temple, and only afterwards prognosticated it in the Bright Hall. Together with Fa they both bowed to the auspicious dream, and subsequently made *Awakening at Cheng*. (*Taiping Yulan*, 84, 1836)

又《程寤》曰：文王在翟。大姒夢見商之庭產棘，小子發取周庭之梓樹於闕間，化爲松柏槭柞。驚以告文王。文王曰昭發于明堂，拜告夢，受商之大命。

Again *Awakening at Cheng* says: King Wen was at Di. Tai Si dreamed of seeing that the Shang's court produced brambles, and that the young son Fa took the Zhou court's catalpa and planted it between the gatehouses, transforming into pine and cypress, white oak and sawtooth oak. Alarmed she reported to King Wen, and King Wen said: "Summon Fa to the Bright Hall," and bowed to report the dream, receiving Shang's great mandate. (*Taiping Yulan*, 533, 2418)

It is easy to see that the opening of the Tsinghua manuscript **Cheng Wu* does indeed coincide to a very great extent with the information contained in these quotations, as indeed in other earlier quotations as well. Notably, the quotations mention the same six trees seen in the manuscript text. However, while the quotations as well as the Tsinghua manuscript agree that Fa (i.e., the eventual King Wu), whether described as the "young son" (*xiaozhi* 小子) or "eldest son" (*taizi* 太子), took a "catalpa" (*zi* 梓 or 柞) from the Zhou court and planted it in the midst of the "brambles" (*ji* 棘) growing in the Shang court, there is one important point of difference between these two quotations (a difference seen also in other quotations): the first quotation states explicitly that it was this catalpa that "transformed into" (*hua wei* 化爲) "pine and cypress, white oak and sawtooth oak" (*song bai yu zuo* 松柏槭柞), while both the Tsinghua manuscript and the second *Taiping Yulan* quotation leave unspecified what transformed into "pine and cypress, white oak and sawtooth oak." I believe that this is a point of considerable importance in the interpretation of the dream, and one that I will examine in some detail below.

The interpretation of the dream obviously hinges on the symbolism of the six different types of trees mentioned: *ji* 棘—"brambles" (also known as "jujubes" or "buck-thorn"); *zi* 梓 or 柞—"catalpa"; *song* 松—"pine"; *bai* 柏—"cypress"; *yu* 槭—"white oak"; and *zuo* 柞—"sawtooth oak." There can be little doubt that, on the one hand, brambles have a bad connotation, while, on the other hand, the catalpa has a good connotation. Brambles are low-standing bushes, pervasive throughout north and central China. Although they are known for their red date fruit (i.e., jujubes), their most striking characteristic, or perhaps I should say their most piercing characteristic, is their thorns, whence their name: *ji* 棘, the character being a pictograph of the dagger-like spikes on the branches of the shrub. In the *Mozi* 墨子, another mention of brambles in reference to the court of the last Shang king Zhou 紂 (r. 1086–1045 BCE) illustrates well their

symbolic significance. The passage recounts portents that appeared at the change of past dynasties, and then describes the scene at the Shang court:

還至乎商王紂，天不享其德，祀用失時。兼夜中十日，雨土于薄，九鼎遷止。婦妖宵出，有鬼宵吟。有女為男，天雨肉。棘生乎國道，王兄自縱也。

And still coming to the Shang king Zhou, Heaven did not accept his virtue, and his sacrifices therewith lost their timeliness. For ten nights and ten days it rained earth at Bo, and the nine caldrons moved about. Female sprites came out at night, and there were ghosts wailing in the night. There was a woman that became a man, and Heaven rained meat. Brambles grew in the state's ways and the king's brethren let themselves become dissolute. (*Mozi*, 5.9a)

It might not be too impressionistic to see in this mention that “brambles grew in the state's ways,” a veiled allusion to the *Cheng Wu* text.⁹ In any event, it is clear that the appearance of brambles at the Shang court was a portent of the impending demise of the dynasty.

The contrast between the brambles and the catalpa is obvious. Said by Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518–93) in the *Bencao Gangmu* 本草綱目 to be the “head of the hundred trees and thus called ‘the king of trees’” (*zi wei bai mu zhang, gu hu zi wei mu wang* 梓為百木長，故呼梓為木王; *Bencao Gangmu*, 35.58a), the catalpa invariably carries positive connotations. It is included in the name of one chapter of the *Classic of Documents*: “Catalpa Timber” (*Zi Cai* 梓材), in which context the *Shang Shu Zhengyi* 尚書正義 says that “it is the finest of trees, the properly refined of governors” (*mu zhi shanzhe, zhi zhi yi jing* 木之善者，治之宜精; *Shang Shu Zhengyi*, 14.96). Its wood is said to be particularly pliable, an excellent timber for building materials, furniture, and musical instruments. In the *Cheng Wu* text, it clearly symbolizes the Zhou court. It is also worthy of note, and perhaps important for the symbolism of the catalpa, that the manuscript writes the character as 梓, confirmed also elsewhere as the *guwen* or “ancient script” form of the character 梓. Perhaps because of this form of the character, the catalpa is also associated with “sons” (*zi* 子), as seen, for instance, in the *Shang Shu Da Zhuan* 尚書大傳 comment on the “Zi Cai” chapter: “The catalpa is the way of the son” (*zizhe, zi dao ye* 梓者，子道也; *Shang Shu*

⁹I prefer not to speculate on the date of the *Cheng Wu*'s composition. Li Xueqin (2010) suggests that *Cheng Wu* shares grammatical features with several other chapters of the *Yi Zhou Shu* that might be termed the “core” of that text. Prominent among these features is a type of rhetorical question formed by “what” (*he* 何) is “not” (*fei* 非), as on strips 3 and 4 of the manuscript:

何警非朋？何戒非商？何用非樹？

What warnings are not in pairs! What guarding is not of Shang! What effect is not what is planted!

For further discussion of this feature, which however does not take account of the manuscript evidence, see Grebnyev (2016, 101–3). Li Xueqin would date these core chapters to the Spring and Autumn period, Grebnyev to the Warring States period. Regardless of when they might date to, the Tsinghua manuscript demonstrates that the text was available to be copied by no later than 300 BCE.

Da Zhuan, *Shang* 上 24b). This may inform its association in the **Cheng Wu* text with Fa, the crown prince (whether called the “young son” or “eldest son”). I will return to this point below.

The symbolism of the other four trees—“pine and cypress, white oak and sawtooth oak”—is not so immediately apparent; hence, there has been considerable disagreement among interpreters of the **Cheng Wu* text, if not perhaps also among early interpreters of Tai Si’s dream. The first discussions of the manuscript proposed that whereas pine and cypress are “auspicious” trees, symbolic in this context of upright ministers, the white oak and sawtooth oak are inauspicious trees, symbolic of miscreants at the Shang court (Huang Jie 2011; Li Rui 2011; Liu 2012; Wang 2011). They suggested that pine and cypress are both “lofty” trees (*qiaomu* 喬木), while white oak and sawtooth oak are shrubs (*guanmu* 灌木). They noted too that in the *Shi Jing*, pine and cypress have consistently positive symbolism, as seen in the poem “Tian Bao” 天保 (Mao 166):

如月之恆，
如日之升。
如南山之壽，
不騫不崩。
如松柏之茂，
無不爾或承。

Just like the moon’s constancy,
Just like the sun’s ascendancy.
Just like South Mountain’s longevity,
Not leaping up, not crumbling down.
Just like the pine and cypress’s lushness,
There is nothing that does not support you.

Those first discussions suggested that in contrast to this positive symbolism of the pine and cypress, the white oak and sawtooth oak need to be “pruned” (*ba* 拔), as in the poem “Huang Yi” 皇矣 (Mao 241):

帝省其山：
柞棫斯拔，
松柏斯兌。
帝作邦作對，
自大伯王季。
維此王季！
因心則友，
則友其兄。
則篤其慶，
載錫之光。
受祿無喪，
奄有四方。

Di examines his mountains:
 The white oak and sawtooth oak are pruned,
 The pine and cypress are removed.
 Di makes the country, makes a match,
 From Tai Bo through to Wang Ji.
 It is this Wang Ji!
 In accord with his heart befriended,
 Then befriended his brothers,
 Then made steadfast his celebration.
 And now bestowed on him brightness.
 Receiving blessings without loss,
 Covering all the four quarters.

However, in this poem, the reference to the white oak and sawtooth oak is strictly parallel to that of the pine and cypress, the one pair being “pruned” (*ba* 拔), the other pair being “removed” (*dui* 兌), so there would seem to be no difference in their symbolic nature.¹⁰ Moreover, as several other scholars have separately argued, there is nothing in the *Shi Jing* or anywhere else in Chinese botanical symbolism to suggest that the white oak and sawtooth oak are different from the pine and cypress in terms of symbolic significance (Gao, n.d.; Shen Baochun 2011; Zi 2011). In the poem “Han Lu” 旱麓 (Mao 239), found just two poems before “Huang Yi” in the received text of the *Shi Jing*, the two oaks are also mentioned together with entirely positive connotations.

瑟彼柞棫，
 民所燎矣。
 豈弟君子，
 神所勞矣！

Dense those white oak and sawtooth oak,
 What the people have tended, indeed.
 How fraternal is the lord's son,
 What the spirits have graced, indeed!

The discussion of this poem by Zheng Xuan 鄭宣 (127–200) indicates that it is not the trees that need “tending” *per se*, but rather the grasses growing beneath them, thus

¹⁰For *dui* 兌, the verb applied to the pine and cypress, the Mao commentary states that it means “easy and straight” (*yi zhi ye* 易直也), which is almost unintelligible in this context. The commentary of Zheng Xuan 鄭宣 states:

省，善也。天既顧文王，乃和其國之風雨，使其山樹木茂盛，言非徒養其民人而已。

To examine is to regard as good. Heaven having looked back upon King Wen, then harmonizes his state's wind and rain and makes the trees on his mountains flourish. This means that not only does it nourish his people and that is all.

For both of these comments, see *Mao Shi Zheng Jian*, 16.11b.

allowing the trees to flourish (*Mao Shi Zheng Jian*, 16.9a). It is quite strange to suggest that the pine and cypress are “lofty” trees and that the white oak and sawtooth oak are “shrubs”; while botanical identifications are not always precise, it would be hard to see any categorical difference between these four trees as they appear in nature. Indeed, the two oaks would appear to be “loftier” than the pine and cypress.¹¹

Moreover, in the text of *Cheng Wu*, the four trees are simply listed sequentially, so that it would be hard to understand why two of them would have a positive symbolism and two of them a negative symbolism. It seems clear to me that they represent loyal supports of the Zhou state, as stated explicitly in the poem “Tian Bao” with respect to the pine and cypress.

如松柏之茂，
無不爾或承。

Just like the pine and cypress’s lushness,
There is nothing that does not support you.

Shen Baochun 沈寶春 (2011, 151) has suggested that the names of the four trees can also be read without the “tree” (*mu* 木) signfic, such that the pine (*song* 松) and cypress (*bai* 柏) stand for “dukes and elders” (*gong bo* 公伯), while the white oak (*yu* 楸) and sawtooth oak (*zuo* 柞) signify “the state arises” (*huo zuo* 或乍 or 作). I am sure that this sort of metonymy is part of the trees’ symbolic significance.

However, the difficulty with understanding this arboreal symbolism in the text as favorable to the Zhou cause is that Tai Si awakened from her dream “alarmed,” and when she reported it to King Wen he too “did not dare to prognosticate it.” This suggests that both the king and his wife suspected that the dream had baleful implications. It was only after the clairvoyants prognosticated that the king was assured that it was an “auspicious dream.” What gave Tai Si and King Wen such concern? To try to answer this question, let us examine in more detail the descriptions of the dream in the different quotations cited above as compared with the Tsinghua manuscript.

太平御覽：大姒夢見商庭生棘，太子發取周庭之梓樹之于闕間。梓化為松柏柞楸。

Taiping Yulan: Tai Si dreamed of seeing in the Shang court growing brambles, and the eldest son Fa taking the Zhou court’s catalpa and planting it between the gatehouses. The catalpa transformed into pine and cypress, sawtooth oak and white oak.

太平御覽：大姒夢見商之庭產棘，小子發取周庭之梓樹於闕間，化為松柏柞楸。

¹¹In his comment to the mention of these two oak trees in the *Shi Jing* poem “Mian” 緜 (Mao 237), Zheng Xuan identifies the sawtooth oak as a chestnut-leaf oak (*li* 櫟), of which the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 in turn says that “its height looks down on mountains” (*qi gao lin shan* 其高臨山); *Zhuangzi*, 2.12a. While the language of the *Zhuangzi* is not always realistic, the height of the oak would seem to be beyond question.

Tai ping Yulan: Tai Si dreamed of seeing that the Shang's court produced brambles, and that the young son Fa took the Zhou court's catalpa and planted it between the gatehouses, transforming into pine and cypress, white oak and sawtooth oak.

清華簡：大姒夢見商廷惟棘，迺小子發取周廷梓樹于厥間，化爲松柏槭柞。

Tsinghua ms.: Tai Si dreamed of seeing that in the Shang court were brambles, and then that the young son Fa took the Zhou court's catalpa and planted it in their midst, transforming into pine and cypress, white oak and sawtooth oak.

For the most part, there are only very minor differences in wording, an added particle here or there. However, the Tsinghua manuscript contains one explicit variant vis-à-vis both quotations, writing that Fa planted the catalpa “in the midst” of the brambles (*yu jue jian* 于厥間) whereas the *Tai ping Yulan* quotations (and indeed, all other quotations) both write that he planted it “between the gatehouses” (*yu que jian* 于於闕間). In addition to this one explicit variation, the manuscript and one of the quotations also reveal one implicit variation: whereas the first the *Tai ping Yulan* quotation writes the “catalpa” as the explicit subject for what transforms into “pine and cypress, white oak and sawtooth oak,” neither the Tsinghua manuscript nor the second *Tai ping Yulan* quotation provides a subject before the verb “to transform into” (*hua wei* 化爲). Something is transforming, but what?

There are two possible antecedents that could serve as the subject in the Tsinghua manuscript and the second *Tai ping Yulan* quotation. The nearest antecedent, and thus the grammatically most likely, would be the “catalpa” mentioned in the immediately preceding clause. If the catalpa is indeed a symbol of kingship, its transformation into the lesser trees would indeed be alarming to Tai Si and to King Wen. It might portend the decline of royal authority, whereas the lesser trees into which the catalpa transformed might symbolize the growing power of ministers, perhaps portending the civil war that would break out shortly after the Zhou conquest, or merely the growing power of the local states that would eventually lead to the downfall of the Zhou royal house. On the other hand, as we have seen from the portion of the Tsinghua manuscript quoted at the beginning of this study, and as we will see from the complete text of the Tsinghua **Cheng Wu* translated below, King Wen went on to determine that the dream was an “auspicious dream” (*ji meng* 吉夢), one portending the Zhou receipt of the Shang mandate to rule. It would seem hard to reconcile this prognostication with a portent about civil war or the decline of the state.

I would like to suggest another explanation. Since the Tsinghua manuscript and the second of the two *Tai ping Yulan* quotations do not make explicit the subject of the transformation, it is possible to understand it as the “brambles” in the Shang court, the antecedent in the first clause of the dream record. If the brambles symbolize the miscreants and disorder at the Shang court, as they surely do so in the passage from the *Mozi* quoted above, their transformation into pine and cypress, white oak and sawtooth oak, symbolic of loyal ministers, would surely be an “auspicious” portent. Admittedly, this reading is grammatically awkward, but by no means impossible. Indeed, in addition to the general symbolism implied by the dream and its interpretation, there are also two

grammatical points in support of it. First of all, although Chinese nouns are not differentiated between singular and plural, there is some reason to view the brambles as plural. Not only do they grow as a bush with multiple trunks, but more important, later in the Tsinghua manuscript they are referred to as being “paired” (*peng* 朋), seemingly indicating their plural nature. It is thus perhaps understandable that the brambles could transform into several different trees. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine that the catalpa, said to stand alone at the head of all other trees, could have such split symbolism.

The second reason to question the grammar of the passage derives from the second variant between the Tsinghua manuscript and both of the quotations. As noted above, whereas the quotations indicate that Fa planted the catalpa “between the gatehouses” (*que jian* 闕間) of the Shang court, the Tsinghua manuscript writes this same expression as “in their midst” (*jue jian* 厥間). It is easy to see the graphic relationship between the words *que* 闕 “gatehouse” and *jue* 厥 “their,” and also easy enough to understand why editors of the “Cheng Wu” text might have chosen to add a “gate” (*men* 門) signfic to 歛 (certainly the original form of *jue* 厥), turning it into “gatehouse”: *que* 闕. However, it is perfectly possible to read the phrase as written in the Tsinghua manuscript, with the pronoun *jue* pointing back to the brambles. Indeed, I would suggest that it is far easier and more sensible to read the sentence in this way than by introducing a “gatehouse” that is probably more redolent of later Chinese city architecture than of that of the Shang dynasty. Read in this way, the brambles become the immediate antecedent for what “transforms into” the other four trees.

Support for this interpretation might also be drawn from traditional textual criticism. It might be a kind of poetic justice to employ a Lachmannian *stammbaum* to display the relationship between the two different textual traditions. We can draw this tree with a putative *urtext* (Ω) or original text at the top, branching into two lines of transmission, with the *Taiping Yulan* quotations (Q) representing one branch and the Tsinghua manuscript (T) a second branch as shown in figure 1. Q₁ refers to the first *Taiping Yulan* quotation (as well as the great majority of other quotations found in medieval sources) that indicates that it was the catalpa that transformed into the lesser trees, which we might indicate as “+梓,” while Q₂ refers to the second *Taiping Yulan* quotation that leaves the subject unexpressed, indicated here as “-梓.”¹² “T,” the Tsinghua manuscript, would also be characterized as “-梓,” since it too leaves the subject unexpressed. According to the usual understanding of this sort of *stammbaum*, if there is agreement across the

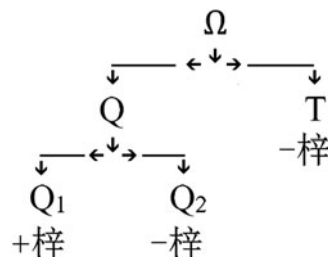


Figure 1. *Stammbaum* analysis of *Wu Cheng* texts and quotations.

two branches of the tree, this should predict the reading of the original text (Ω). In this case, since Q_2 matches T, both leaving the subject unexpressed (“-粹”), the *urtext* can be reconstructed as having left the subject unexpressed. The explanation for Q_1 would seem to be quite natural: at some point in time, a scribe or copyist was perplexed by the absence of an explicit subject and “corrected” the text, inserting what he took to be the immediate antecedent. Unfortunately, he was almost certainly wrong in this, and confused the issue hopelessly until the Tsinghua manuscript was discovered.¹³

If I am right in this botanical interpretation, both in terms of the symbolism of the trees mentioned in the text and of the *stammbaum* analysis, the dream would seem to be fairly simple to interpret. The brambles or buckthorn at the Shang court symbolize danger, both for Shang and for Zhou. Fa’s planting of the catalpa in their midst of course symbolizes the Zhou conquest of Shang. For the brambles then to transform into pine and cypress, white oak and sawtooth oak symbolizes the Shang acknowledgment of Zhou rule. All of this is certainly “auspicious.”

However, if the dream is as straightforward as this, why should Tai Si have been so alarmed and why would King Wen have declined to prognosticate it? I would suggest that their concern lies in another feature of the catalpa mentioned above. The catalpa is not only “the king of trees,” but it also symbolizes the son, written into the very character of the tree, as it is written in the manuscript and as its “ancient script” form shows: 梲; i.e., a “tree” signific with the character for “son” (zi 子). Since the dream makes explicit that it was Fa, the son, who planted the catalpa in the Shang court, this would suggest that the Zhou conquest would not be achieved until the son came to power. Indeed, the dream might well be understood to portend the imminent death of the father, King Wen. If so, it is understandable why Tai Si and King Wen should have been alarmed. As it turns out, King Wen did die before the Zhou conquest of Shang, which was achieved by his son Fa, known to history as King Wu of Zhou. Although the conquest was not without its complications, it did succeed in establishing China’s longest-lived dynasty and one that has always been looked upon as the Golden Age of Chinese civilization—an auspicious symbolism, indeed.

Not only does the Tsinghua manuscript provide, for the first time in perhaps a thousand years, a complete text of *Cheng Wu*, but, if I am right in my analysis of the text and its various quotations, it also allows an early editorial error in the transmission of the text to be corrected. This editorial error rendered the symbolism of the dream all but unintelligible. Now, with a complete text finally at hand, we have the opportunity to recover if not “the Chinese Dream,” certainly a very ancient Chinese dream.

By way of conclusion, let me consider in brief what implications the discovery of the Tsinghua **Cheng Wu* manuscript might hold for Xi Jinping’s vision of a Chinese Dream.

¹²The second *Taiping Yulan* quotation is not unique among all medieval quotations of the “Cheng Wu” text. Lü Miaojun (n.d.) cites, among other texts, the “Furui Zhi” 符瑞志 of the *Song Shu* 宋書 and Li Shan’s 李善 commentary to the *Wen Xuan* 文選 as similarly leaving the subject unspecified (*Song Shu* 27.764-65; *Wen Xuan* 56.2419).

¹³In fact, the confusion has persisted to the present, since all studies of the Tsinghua manuscript published to date that have commented on this matter have simply assumed that the reading of the medieval quotations, which is to say “+粹,” also represents the original. (Though I should note that many have not commented on it.)

The political philosophy of the manuscript is easy to see: revolution is not achieved all at once but requires the following generation or even generations to plant trees, if only metaphorically, so that they—the trees, and the new government—might take root. As the manuscript concludes, “Guard against what is to come, guard against what is to come! If others use your plans, it is a pity that the days will not be sufficient.” More than sixty-five years on, the communist revolution in China still feels the need to tend to its trees and ensure against internal dissent. However, as pointed out at the beginning of this essay, dreams are also rooted in the past, and in terms of its significance for China’s past the **Cheng Wu* manuscript is not so unambiguous. True, the manuscript demonstrates the antiquity of the text that was quoted in medieval sources, and so archaeology seems to confirm Chinese literary and historical traditions; this has long been seen in China as one of the important purposes of archaeology. However, the manuscript also shows that errors were introduced into the text in the course of its transmission over the centuries, mistakes that rendered its interpretation problematic at best. To pursue the arboreal metaphor, not all the roots of the Chinese past are as deep as we might think, and many other roots that are still to be found underground have left no lasting trace above ground. “The great renewal of the Chinese nation” may sprout from roots yet unknown.

THE TSINGHUA **CHENG WU* MANUSCRIPT

The Tsinghua **Cheng Wu* 程寤 manuscript was formally published in *Qinghua Daxue Cang Zhanguo Zhujian (Yi)* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡 (壹).¹⁴ The text is written on nine bamboo strips, each 45 centimeters long by .6 centimeters wide. The strips were originally bound with three binding straps, one at about 1 centimeter from the top, one at about 1 centimeter from the bottom, and one at about 24.5 centimeters from the top.¹⁵ The strips are uniformly well preserved, with one minor break at the top of strip number two resulting in the loss of part of one character; another minor break at the top of strip number three, but with no loss of writing; as well as apparent breaks across strips five, seven and eight, all of which however can be rejoined. The text begins just beneath the top binding strap and runs to just above the bottom binding strap; extra space was left for the middle binding strap, so that it did not cover any writing. The writing is evenly spaced, with five of the nine strips having thirty-two characters (numbers three, four, five, six, and seven), two with thirty-three characters (numbers one and two), one with thirty-one (number eight), and the text finishing on the final strip with twenty-seven characters (the remainder of the strip being left blank). Other than standard ligature marks and the 乙-shaped mark that concludes texts, there is only a single reading mark in the middle of strip number six. There is neither a title nor numbering on the backs of the strips, though diagonal lines are visible on some of the strips in the published photographs, a point that is crucial in the arrangement of the correct sequence of the text.

¹⁴Qinghua Daxue Chutu Wenxian Yanjiu Yu Baohu Zhongxin (2011, 6–7 [full-size photographs], 47–51 [magnified photographs], and 135–41 [transcription and notes]). The editor of the **Cheng Wu* manuscript was Liu Guozhong 劉國忠.

¹⁵The editors have not published exact measurements, so these figures are only approximate, based on the published photographs. That the middle binding strap is well below the midpoint of the strips is not unusual, though it does not usually come so far below the midpoint.

It is now well recognized in studies of ancient Chinese bamboo-strip manuscripts that diagonal scoring on the back of the strips can be very useful in reconstructing the sequence of the strips. First pointed out by Sun Peiyang 孫沛陽 (2011) with respect to the Han-dynasty bamboo strips in the possession of Peking University, this feature has now been confirmed on most archaeologically excavated manuscripts, as well as on strips of the major collections of looted material, including not only the Peking University bamboo strips, but also the Shanghai Museum strips and the Tsinghua University strips. This feature is firm evidence of the authenticity of these looted strips. Since it was entirely unknown prior to the publication of Sun Peiyang's study in 2011, it is impossible to imagine that a forger could have applied it to strips that came into the possession of these institutions prior to that date. With respect to the **Cheng Wu* manuscript, the feature plays an important role in allowing a slight reordering of the strips as opposed to the order given by the Tsinghua editors.

Whereas the Tsinghua editors number the strips from one to nine, and arrange the text in that sequence, the Fudan Daxue Yanjiusheng Dushuhui 復旦大學研究生讀書會 (Fudan University Graduate Student Reading Group) suggests that strip number seven be moved to between strips five and six. Indeed, this seems to make better sense of the text, and is adapted in the translation given below (though retaining the original Tsinghua strip numbers). More important, this sequence also accords with the diagonal scoring on the backs of the strips (Fudan Daxue Yanjiusheng Dushuhui 2011).

For the purposes of the present article, it seems sufficient to present a complete, integral translation formatted to show the structure of the text. There will be other venues for the presentation of a complete paleographic apparatus.

AWAKENING AT CHENG

It was the king's first year, first month, after the growing brightness. Tai Si dreamed of seeing that in the Shang court were brambles, and then that the young son Fa took the Zhou court's catalpa and planted it in their midst, transforming into pine and cypress, white oak and sawtooth oak. **[1]** She awakened alarmed, and reported it to the king. The king did not dare to prognosticate it, but summoned the crown prince Fa and had Clairvoyant Ming perform a general exorcism, Invocator Qi exorcise the king, Magician Shuai exorcise Tai Si, and Templar Ding exorcise the crown prince Fa, reporting with silks **[2]** at the ancestral temple and sacrificing inside the gate at the altars of state, praying to the six extremities and the mountains and rivers, and casting out the Shang spirits. They looked to the signs and prognosticated in the Bright Temple.

The king and Crown Prince Fa together bowed to the auspicious dream and received the Shang mandate **[3]** from the august Di on high. Arising, he said: "Fa, you should respectfully listen to the auspicious dream. The paired brambles detested the catalpa, which the pine and cypress assisted and the white oak and sawtooth oak covered, transforming into ochre."

"*Wuhu!* What warnings are not in pairs! What guarding is not **[4]** of Shang! What effect is not what is planted! The tree is based on what is wished, and does not go against the timber. It is like Heaven sending down affliction; after delicious flavors have been used, it cannot be medicated. The time is not far off. Since it is that Shang's

troubles are in Zhou, and Zhou's troubles are in Shang, [5] would that it choose to use Zhou, truly dispatch the unbearable, and bring comfort with many blessings."

"It is the catalpa that overshadows the improper and flourishes throughout Shang, causing conduct to be measured and without deficit.

Bright, bright on high,"
Is the collecting together of brambles,

or [7]

Wishes being a cypress dream,
Foot-soldier hordes speak of success.

How much more so if it were something without a trunk.¹⁶ This illustrates martial awe, as if the white oak and sawtooth oak were without roots. *Wuhu!* Be warned indeed! I have heard that Zhou has long not been duplicitous, but has strived [6] not to have anything to use that is unanticipated, wishing to make the weak harmonious and accordant and the living people not afflicted, but cherished truly.

"*Wuhu!* What reflection is not of the time! What striving is not for harmony! What awe is not of culture! What [8] protection is not of the way! What love is not of the self! What strength is not of the other! When others plot to contend, it cannot be good. Guard against what is to come, guard against what is to come! If others use your plans, it is a pity that the days will not be sufficient."¹⁷ [9]

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¹⁶I freely admit that this translation is no more than a guess. I suspect that "Bright, bright on high" (*ming ming zai shang* 明明在上) is the first phrase of a poetic couplet, perhaps balanced by another poem made up of the first eight characters on strip number six. I suspect too that the poems were quoted because of their respective reference to "brambles" and "cypress."

¹⁷My understanding of this difficult final passage is taken from Li Xueqin (2011a).

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