Rethinking Warring States History in the Light of Recently Unearthed Bamboo Manuscripts

The study of China’s Warring States period has always been marked by both the richness and yet incompleteness of its textual resources. For all the wealth of works that remain to us after over two millennia of transmission, a great many more texts have long since been lost to us, and those that have survived invariably did not make it unscathed. Until recently, we had relatively little means of knowing just what may have been lost or the precise nature of the errors or accretions that were introduced. However, a flurry of excavations (archaeological and otherwise) over the past dozen years has brought with it an abundance of new textual resources to help transform our knowledge and enrich our understanding of a whole host of historical and textual issues. The papers of this panel demonstrate how materials from both the Shanghai-Museum and Cili manuscripts—recently unearthed from Hubei and Hunan provinces, respectively—may compel us to considerably rethink a number of major topics in Warring States history, ranging from political mythologies of dynastic succession and philosophies of military leadership to the dating and significance of transmitted documents and the rereading of classical texts in the light of such manuscripts. Each of the papers will thus both introduce an entirely new text and present an analysis of some of the unique contributions that particular text has to make to the study of early China, together opening up a multitude of possibilities for further inquiry.