

**Political Mythology and Dynastic Legitimacy in the Rong Cheng shi manuscript**

Abstract

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The *Rong Cheng shi* is one of the largest and relatively well preserved texts from the Shanghai Museum collection of Chu state bamboo manuscripts. This previously unknown text is the only recently unearthed work that presents a systematic account of the earliest stages of China's history, beginning with barely identifiable mythological rulers and ending with the establishment of the Zhou dynasty. The text focuses specifically on dynastic changes in the past, and it is in this regard that its account differs – at times considerably – from other known narratives from transmitted sources. In particular, it contains a hint of a possibility of "the people" establishing the supreme ruler; strongly promulgates the idea of yielding the throne to a worthy candidate as advantageous over the prevalent principle of lineal succession; and contains a novel account of the overthrow of the Shang dynasty. In my paper, I shall analyze these and related narratives to show that the political mythology constructed by the *Rong Cheng shi* represents a heretofore barely noticed radical anti-dynastic undercurrent in the political thought of the Warring States period.