CHAPTER 6

Editing the Tsinghua Strips

Having successfully cleaned the Tsinghua strips and treated them for preservation, and after photographing the entire collection, we next turned our attention to editing the manuscripts and preparing them for publication. In March of 2009, renowned paleographer Zhao Ping’an 趙平安 arrived at Tsinghua University and was appointed as vice director of the Research and Conservation Center for Excavated Texts. Zhao Ping’an joined our team as we formally began to translate the Tsinghua strips, compile separate manuscripts, and edit the entire collection for publication.

Initial Read-Through of the Tsinghua Strips

As mentioned previously, when personnel from the center cleaned and conducted preservation work on the Tsinghua strips, we also familiarized ourselves with some of the collection’s content, aided in particular by Li Xueqin’s 李學勤 guidance. Our observations however were only cursory, and we did not have a chance to examine the collection in full. With the Tsinghua strips now photographed, we could finally give the strips’ content a more thorough investigation. Beginning in March of 2009, personnel from the Research and Conservation Center for Excavated Texts sat down with the photographs and began reading and transcribing the collection strip by strip. This read-through lasted from March to the beginning of May.

In general, during the read-through we projected digital images of the bamboo strips’ photographs onto a wall and enlarged them. All the participants then considered each strip in turn, one by one, giving their preferred readings of a given character. Proceeding in this fashion, we faced two difficulties. First, the original strip order for this cache had long since been forgotten, and moreover it was uncertain if and where broken pieces of strips should be joined together. Without knowing what the relationship between individual strips might be, it was therefore hard to gain a clear understanding of the material holistically. Second, the characters were written in a Warring States script, which made the task at hand even more difficult. Although most of the characters on the Tsinghua strips were written in what could be classified as Chu
script, to which scholars are perhaps more familiar, there were still many rare
characters in this cache which had not been adequately interpreted in the past,
and what’s more, a number of characters were also completely new, never hav-
ing been seen before in other contexts.

In light of these two difficulties, there were obvious limitations to what we
could accomplish by only skimming through the Tsinghua collection in this
manner. Yet over the course of reviewing the material, we did time and again
discover a lot of content belonging to the *Shangshu* and various other histori-
cal records. These finds were always exciting, and impressed on us all the more
just how important the Tsinghua strips truly were. Moreover, we also noticed
that certain strips were of an unusual size and shape, so we began to pull them
out and tried ordering them into complete manuscripts. *Baoxun* 保訓 was one
such manuscript we were able to put together at this stage, using this method.

Regardless, the three-month read-through laid a solid foundation for future
attempts by the center to order the strips, compile individual manuscripts, and
then accurately transcribe the entire cache. Indeed it should be mentioned
that detailed notes were kept on all the work we conducted, both during the
preservation and photography of the Tsinghua strips, but also during this ini-
tial read-through. These notes would prove invaluable when our editing of the
Tsinghua strips later commenced in full.

In March, Li Xueqin, Yang Zhenning 楊振寧, and Wu Liangyong 吳良鏞 wrote to Premier Wen Jiabao 溫家寶, both to inform him of the significance
of the Tsinghua strips, and to invite him and other government figures to visit
Tsinghua University, where they might personally view the collection and
comment on our efforts. On the afternoon of April 2nd, State Councilor Liu
Yandong 劉延東 arrived on campus to observe our work, and during her visit
she made a special point to tour the Research and Conservation Center for
Excavated Texts. Upon listening to Li Xueqin’s introduction of the Tsinghua
strips, State Councilor Liu Yandong seemed enthusiastic, and commended our
center for the work we’ve conducted to date, urging us to continue to carry out
our research with the utmost care.

**Preliminary Publications on the Tsinghua Strips’ Content**

In order to keep scholars apprised of the progress we’ve made on the Tsinghua
strips, and to introduce each of our most important discoveries, the Research