ILLUSTRATION 9  Tsinghua University's Yinzhi.

ILLUSTRATION 10  Tsinghua University's Yingao.
CHAPTER 7

Unraveling the Mysteries of the Shangshu

One of the most stunning aspects of the Tsinghua strips lies in the discovery of several Shangshu-genre texts that will certainly exert a profound influence over research on early Chinese history and culture. Why is the Shangshu so important, and what impact will the Tsinghua strips have on our understanding of this classic? This chapter will explore these questions and more.

Compilation of the Shangshu

The Shangshu 是中國最早的一部史籍，也被認為是最重要的古典之一。它記載了殷商時代的歷史。在傳統的中國，歷史被視為一種政治的工具，它的政治學說是儒家思想的重要來源。

The appearance of the Shangshu is tied to the historiographical tradition in ancient China. History was studied seriously, serving as a mirror for both proper human conduct and good governance. For this reason, an intricate system was established where historians recorded on a daily basis the ruler's activities and other important events that occurred at court. Just as the phrase “if the ruler rises, it must be written” (君舉必書) suggests, the ruler's every action was recorded in detail. Traditionally, the office of historian was divided between the Historian of the Right (youshi 右史) and the Historian of the Left (zuoshi 左史), each bearing their own responsibilities. For instance, it is said that the “Historian of the Left recorded words, while the Historian of the Right recorded deeds” (左史記言，右史記事). That is to say, the Historian of the Left was in charge of recording political speeches by the rulers and various discussions at court. The Historian of the Right on the other hand was responsible for

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1 As quoted in the “Yi wen zhi” 藝文志, Hanshu 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 30.1715.
2 “Yi wen zhi”, Hanshu, 30.1715. Another explanation gives “the Historian of the Right recorded words and the Historian of the Left recorded deeds”, an exact reversal of their responsibilities.