NEW LIGHT ON ANCIENT CHINESE MILITARY TEXTS:
NOTES ON THEIR NATURE AND EVOLUTION, AND THE
DEVELOPMENT OF MILITARY SPECIALIZATION
IN WARRING STATES CHINA

BY

ROBIN D.S. YATES

Harvard University

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The military texts of the late Eastern Chou period, roughly 500
to 220 B.C have received very little attention from scholars in com-
parison to those of a literary, historical and philosophical nature,
and as a consequence have not been used as primary source ma-
terial for general studies of the development of state and society
in the crucial period leading up to the founding of the Chinese
empire by Ch’in Shih Huang-ti in 221 B.C. to the extent that they
undoubtedly deserve.¹ The text that has been studied in greatest
detail is the Sun-tzu 孫子, which has also been translated into several

¹ Henri Maspero, La Chine Antique, Paris: De Boccard, 1927, rev. 1965, trans-
lated by Frank A. Kierman Jr., as China in Antiquity, Boston (?): University of
Analysis of Social Mobility, 722–222 B.C., Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press (1965),
and Derk Bodde, China’s First Unifier: A Study of the Ch’in Dynasty as Seen in the Life
of Li Ssu 李斯 (280?–208 B.C.) (1938) Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press,
1967, are the best historical studies in English on the period. I would like to thank
Professors Kidder Smith and Kwang-chih Chang, and the editors of T’oung Pao,
for valuable suggestions on the draft of this essay. Regrettably, I have not been
able to include all their comments in the final version.
different languages. But as D.C. Lau has pointed out, there remain many difficulties of interpretation in it because it has not been subjected yet to much detailed philological analysis. The same may be said to an even greater extent of the other military works, even though in general they are less terse and obscure than the Sun-tzu. Indeed, this lack of attention has led some scholars to doubt the authenticity of some of these texts and therefore to have ignored their contents almost entirely.

In recent years, however, Chinese archaeologists have made a number of important discoveries of texts in tombs of Han date which prove without any doubt whatsoever that these texts are genuine and therefore may be relied upon for important information concerning the Warring States period. Those that possess the most relevance for the present study are the Hsing Te passages found among the silk manuscripts at Ma-wang-tui, which most regretfully have not yet been published, and the hoard of

[Notes]


4 Among the most important scholars in traditional times of these texts was Liu Yin 劉寅 of the early Ming, who wrote “Direct Explanations” Chih-chieh 直解 on the Seven Military Classics, which were made canonical in the Yuan-feng 元豐 reign period (began in 1078). The edition I have used is the Japanese Kambun taikei 漢文大系 vol. 13, edited by Hattori Unokichi 服部字之吉, Tokyo: Fusan-bö 1912. On the Wei Liao-tzu 魏駆子, see Tay Lien-soo (Cheng Liang-shu) 鄭樹良, "Wei Liao-tzu chiao-cheng," 註釋子兵, Chu-chien po-shu lun-wen chi 譯竹簡吶書論文集 Peking, Chung-hua shu-chü, 1982, pp. 115–148.


7 A large number of the articles on the Ma-wang tui finds have published in Hu-nan sheng po-wu kuan 湖南省博物館, Ma-wang-tui Han-mu-yen-chiu 馬王堆