

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: *EARLY CHINA* AT 40

With this issue, *Early China* reaches volume 40 (2017).¹ The journal was founded by David N. Keightley (1932–2017), who died on February 23 of this year. This volume is dedicated to his memory. Keightley, a specialist in oracle-bone inscriptions and Shang dynasty history, taught in the History Department at the University of California at Berkeley from 1969 to 1998. I was a graduate student in what was then called the Department of Oriental Languages from 1966 to 1972. I had already finished my coursework when Keightley began teaching, but, in 1970–1971, he offered graduate seminars on reading oracle bone and bronze inscriptions that I attended. They were the perfect complement to Boodberg’s philology and this experience was critical to the direction of my later research. Indeed, Keightley’s focus on ancient inscriptions as a source material for the study of Chinese history influenced the trajectory of the entire field of early China studies in the West and gave this journal its particular character. Thus, in this volume’s “Letter from the Editor,” I would like to take the opportunity to reminisce a little about the period when the journal was founded and to make some personal observations about the future of the field.

Early China, founded in 1975, was preceded by four issues of a “Newsletter for the Study of pre-Han China,” published by the “Society for the Study of pre-Han China,” which was founded by David Keightley and Sydney Rosen in 1968. When that Society expanded its scope to include the Han period, it became the “Society for the Study of Early China.”² Soon, the “newsletter” had become a “journal,” published for the Society for the Study of Early China by the Institute for East Asian Studies at the University of California at Berkeley. Keightley was the editor of the inaugural volume and the associate editors were: Stanley L. Mickel, Ken-ichi Takashima, Nancy Thompson Price, Barry B. Blakeley, Cho-yun Hsu, Sydney Rosen, Jack L. Dull, John Cikoski, William G. Boltz, and Gilbert L. Mattos. Nancy Price was particularly important in getting the journal off the ground.³ The stated purpose of the inaugural issue was

1. *Early China* was founded in 1975. Although the journal has always been annual in theory, there were many double volumes in earlier years. These usually had double numbers, but not always, so this issue is 40 rather than 42.

2. This seems to be the origin of the current convention in which “Early China” refers to this period.

3. David Keightley, Nancy Price, Jeffrey Riegel, and William Boltz were editors or co-editors of *Early China* 2–13 (1975 to 1988); Edward Shaughnessy was editor of *Early China* 14–20 (1989–1995); Donald Harper, of *Early China* 21–27 (1996–2002); Robin Yates,

the “dissemination of information and the testing of new ideas in the fields of pre-historic, Shang, Chou, and Han China.” (vol. 1, 1975, i). Although the journal has grown with the field over the years, this is still its essential purpose.

In 1975, David Keightley was a young scholar with an exotic specialization. With the formation of the Society for the Study of Early China and the launch of its newsletter/journal, he brought the field and his own scholarship to the attention of the wider sinological community in the West. The timing was especially propitious. The Cultural Revolution was drawing to a close and scholarly activities were beginning anew. In 1971, Gu Jiegang, who had been declared a counter-revolutionary early on in the Cultural Revolution, was appointed to take charge of the production of a new, punctuated version of the twenty-four histories. In 1972, Nixon went to China. In 1973, a major exhibition of Chinese archaeological discoveries was held at the Royal Academy in London. In the same year, there were significant new archaeological discoveries, including finds that yielded writing. A cache of oracle bones to the south of Xiaotun 小屯 at Yinxu 殷墟 in Henan Province were discovered. Moreover, three remarkably preserved early Han Dynasty tombs were excavated at Mawangdui 馬王堆 in Hunan Province. One of these contained a remarkably well preserved corpse of a woman; another, ancient texts written on silk, some of which had counterparts in the transmitted tradition.

Scholarly exchanges with China were also beginning. Although many of the older generation of Western scholars had lived or travelled in China before Liberation in 1949, the People’s Republic had been closed for twenty-five years. It was a heady period for those of us who had begun to study China at a time when it was uncertain whether or not we would ever be able to go to there. It was especially exciting for specialists in early China because of the importance to our research of newly excavated materials. Books from China were available in libraries and it was even possible to subscribe personally to the journals *Wenwu* 文物, *Kaogu* 考古, and *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報. However, in the US, in order to receive these journals, you had to go to the post office and sign a form saying you were willing to receive “Communist propaganda.” But, who were the people who wrote these works? What were the latest discoveries? Could one go and see the sites? What was China really like now? Thus, as China opened up, news-sharing about travel and scholarship in the People’s Republic was one of *Early China’s* primary functions.

Early China 28–31 (2003 to 2007). The author of this Letter is the current editor. Beginning with vol. 37 (2014), the journal has been published by Cambridge University Press.

Today, more than forty years after the founding of the journal *Early China*, Western and Chinese scholars of this period are well acquainted with each other. Young Western scholars in the field have usually spent time in China as undergraduates and, again, as part of their doctoral programs. Many study in Chinese universities for several years before completing their doctorates. Similarly, young Chinese scholars are required to have at least a good reading knowledge of English and even specialists in early China often take advantage of government-sponsored fellowships to study at Western universities. Western sinology is often translated into Chinese and published in China and, increasingly, Chinese sinology is translated and published in the West. Conferences in China and elsewhere routinely include delegates with different nationalities and different sinological traditions. It has become a truly global field. This cross-fertilization has enriched the quality of research everywhere and is a major contributor to the dynamism that now characterizes early China studies.

As we go forward, the study of early China appears to be entering an entirely new phase. One reason is archaeological discoveries resulting from China's rapid economic development. Many of these discoveries are in areas known for their historic importance, but others, serendipitously, come from areas where planned excavations would not have taken place without the intrusion of infrastructure building and other construction. The accumulation of archaeological materials has now reached a critical mass but is not yet well integrated. Moreover, in China, as in the West, archaeologists have begun to apply new previously unknown scientific technologies, such as DNA analysis, stable isotope analysis, remote sensing technologies, and satellite imagery, which provide new types of information about ancient populations. The introduction of regional survey methodologies is also producing a better understanding of ancient populations and their range of relationships beyond the elite on which earlier archaeology.

The discovery of silk texts at Mawangdui 馬王堆 in 1973 was a harbinger of what was to come. The Warring States period bamboo manuscripts—with philosophical, historical, and literary materials that relate directly to the transmitted tradition—have received the most attention. However, the implications for social history of the more practical writings, such laws and administrative regulations, court cases, household registries, as well as divination works and other technical texts, are equally astounding. And some five thousand bamboo slips discovered in the Jiangxi Province tomb of Han Emperor Wu Di's deposed grandson, Haihun Hou 海昏侯, should shed entirely new light on the development of the textual tradition at the end of the Western Han Dynasty before Liu Xin 劉歆 and Liu Xiang 劉向 catalogued the imperial library.

These large quantities of Warring States, Qin, and Han bamboo and silk manuscripts are not yet fully published and new materials will undoubtedly be uncovered. The study of transmitted texts has also been transformed in recent years by searchable databases that allow them to be analyzed in new ways and more easily collated with excavated materials. As the implications of these materials and methods begin to be absorbed and integrated with one another, all aspects of our knowledge of early China—philosophy, religion, daily life, medicine, technology, law, government, social organization, etc., are likely to be transformed.

The challenge for all of us now will be to integrate these various types of knowledge. It seems no longer to be a question of “doubting” or not “doubting” the ancient books, but one of understanding what they represent and how all of this evidence can work together to achieve a better understanding of the development of early Chinese civilization.

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I would like to thank all of the people who contributed to the obituary materials for David Keightley below. Special thanks are due to Frank Joseph Shulman and Wen-Yi Huang, who assisted him, for their work in compiling the “Comprehensive Bibliography and Research Guide” of Keightley’s work at great speed and with meticulous care. I would also like to thank Steven N. Keightley for providing the photographs of his father. And, thanks to Robin Yates and Donald Harper, we will soon post “Early China: The Early History,” an unpublished account of the early days of the journal written by David Keightley in 2002 on the earlychina.org website.

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18 June, 2017

In the first printing of *Early China* 40 (2017), the translation section of the article “The Wuwei Medical Manuscripts: A Brief Introduction and Translation” by Yang Yong 楊勇 and Miranda Brown was accidentally omitted, leaving only the introductory remarks. The full translation had been included in the online “first view” article. It is now restored in this printing and in the online publication. Thus, the pagination for this article and those following it have been changed. If you have already received the defective volume, in order to avoid confusion and in fairness to the authors, we request that you discard it.

Sarah Allan
26 October, 2017