

# The Cherished Instruction (Baoxun 保訓)

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Entry tags: Religious Group, Chinese Religion, Text, Early Chinese text, Excavated text

The Baoxun 保訓 ("The Cherished Instruction") is an excavated text of eleven bamboo strips that is part of the collection of such texts purchased by Tsinghua in 2008. As with other such collections, their provenance is unknown. The text is notable because its content and self-identification as a xun 訓 "instruction," associate it with the Shangshu 尚書 or "Book of Documents" (for more, see the entry on the Shangshu by Maddalena Poli). Despite the fact that xun is one of the six types of documents in the Shangshu, the Baoxun has no counterpart in the Shangshu or the received tradition more broadly. The Baoxun, thus, points to the idea that shu were not simply the documents of the Shangshu, but a genre of texts defined by their claimed contemporaneity. Shu originated as the pre-prepared scripts of speeches by kings and ministers that were read out during formal ceremonies and often presented to those they addressed. Later texts of the shu genre were fictional compositions written in imitation of those earlier records. Accordingly, they adopt the formal style of those speeches, employing phrases such as "the king so said" (wang ruo yue 王若曰) - a phrase also found on bronze vessel inscriptions from the Western Zhou period (1046-771 BCE). In doing so, shu texts claim to be contemporary to the events that they portray, irrespective of when they were actually written. In the case of the Baoxun, it was likely written during the Warring States period but it is set during the final days of the life of King Wen 文. It takes the form of an instruction left by King Wen to his son, King Wu 武, who would go on to conquer the Shang 商 dynasty (1600-1046 BCE) and establish the Zhou 周 dynasty (1046-771 BCE). In his instruction, King Wen presents the sage-king Shun 舜 and Shang Jia Wei 上甲微 (an ancestor of the Shang) as models and urges his son to hold fast to the "center" (zhong 中) in order to rule. The center is both actual - meaning Mount Song 嵩 in Henan 河南 province, traditionally considered the center of All under Heaven - and cosmological and to rule with the celestial mandate of the high god entailed possessing the center in both a literal and figurative sense. This emphasis on the center would have been more relevant to the Warring States than the Zhou dynasty because during the former period there was no longer a central authority and so the concern was with establishing a central power rather than overthrowing an existing one.



Date Range: 325 BCE - 278 BCE

Region: Tsinghua University

Region tags: China, Beijing

Tsinghua University (Qinghua Daxue 清華大學) purchased a cache of bamboo texts (the "Qinghua Strips"). Because these texts are looted materials, their provenance is unknown. As many of them are previously unknown texts, the only known location that can be associated with them is the university itself.

## Status of Readership:

✓ Elite    ✓ Religious Specialists

## General Variables

## Materiality

### Methods of Composition

#### – Written



Inked

– with Ink

### Medium upon which the text is written/incised

– Other textile: The Baoxun is a short text of eleven bamboo strips that exhibit some minor damage and missing characters.

### Was the material modified before the writing or incising process?

#### – Physical preparation

Notes: Presumably, the bamboo would have needed to be cut into strips to facilitate the writing of the text, but no information is available as to the details of that process.

### Was the text modified before the writing or incising process?

– Other [specify]: No information is available on this point.

## Location

### Is the text stored in a specific location?

[Note at which point in time, for reference, if known; select all that apply]

#### – Field doesn't know

Notes: The Baoxun was part of a collection of bamboo texts that were purchased by Tsinghua University in Hong Kong in 2008. Presumably, these texts were originally stored in a tomb, but because they were sold by tomb robbers who had looted them, their provenance is unknown, and no information is available regarding the site. It is likely that they came from a tomb of the state of Chu, the same region as the Shanghai and Guodian bamboo text collections (Allan 2015, 299-301). At present, the text is stored at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

### Is the location where the text stored accompanied by iconography or images?

#### – Field doesn't know

### Is the area where the text is stored accompanied by an-iconic images?

#### – Field doesn't know

## Production & Intended Audience

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## Production

Is the production of the text funded by the polity?

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The uncertain provenance of the text means that no information is available regarding issues of production or intended audience.

Is the text considered official religious scripture?

– No

Notes: The text presents itself as a contemporary document written from the perspective of King Wen and is of the same genre as works that were later compiled into the Shangshu. However, even after it was declared a "classic" (jing 經) in the Han, the Shangshu was not considered a religious scripture and there's no reason to think that the Baoxun was ever considered one either.

Written in distinctly religious/sacred language?

– No

Notes: The text is written in Classical Chinese and would, presumably, have been accessible to any literate person of the time.

## Intended Audience

What is the estimated number of people considered to be the audience of the text

This should be the total number of people who would serve as the intended audience for the text.

– Field doesn't know

Does the Religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members?

– No

Are there clear reformist movements?

(Reformism, as in not proselytizing to potential new conservative, but "conversion" - or rather, reform - to the "correct interpretation"?)

– Field doesn't know

Is the text in question employed in ritual practice?

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Because the text was buried in a tomb, it can be considered part of the ritual practice of formal burial, although the details of its role are not known. Most likely, the text was a personal possession of the deceased that was placed in the tomb in order to reflect the identity of the deceased as perceived by his or her mourners (Allan 2015, 26; 57-58)

Is there material significance to the text?

– Field doesn't know

## Context and Content of the Text (Beliefs and Practices)

### Context

Is the text itself accompanied by art?

– No

Are there multiple versions of the text?

– No

Notes: Thus far, only one manuscript of the Baoxun has been discovered and the work is unknown in the received tradition.

Is the text part of a collection of texts?

– Yes

Notes: The text is part of the collection of texts purchased by Tsinghua University. Presumably, they were all stored in the same tomb together, but no information is available as to why they were grouped together.

↳ Is there a sense of canonization?

– No

↳ Is the text part of a series of volumes?

– No

If the text is not explicitly scripture, is it part of another important literary tradition?

– Yes

↳ Cultural with religious implications?

– Yes

↳ Behavioral literature?

– Yes

Notes: The text's emphasis on obtaining the "center" reflects Warring States concerns about establishing a central political authority and suggests that the text is encouraging its readers to behave in a way that would facilitate that obtainment. For example, King Wen encourages his son to be reverent, respectful, diligent, and to not transgress against the desires of the common

people in order obtain it (Allan 2015, 304-311).

## ↳ Other

– Other [specify]: "Documents" (shu 書)

Notes: Shu was a genre of text. Originally written as the pre-prepared scripts for royal and official speeches, they were likely read out at formal ceremonies. Later works within this genre were written as fictional compositions that imitated these speeches and utilized similar formal language. A key feature of shu texts (a number of which were collated into the Shangshu, the "Book of Documents," and Yizhoushu, "Remaining Zhou Documents") is a sense of contemporaneity with the events that they described. In other words, they were meant to be read as if they were from the perspective of a specific individual and from a specific time, irrespective of when they were actually composed (Allan 2015, 272-277).

## Content

Is the text - or does the text include - a ritual list, manual, bibliography, index, or vocabulary? (Select all that apply)

– Other [specify]: None of the above. The text is written as an instruction from King Wen to his son, King Wu.

Are there lineages or a single lineage established by the text?

– Yes

↳ Does the lineage involve establish a chain of authority?

– Yes

Notes: The text deals exclusively with lineages of kingship.

↳ Is the lineage defined by concrete cycles or measures of time?

– Yes

Notes: The major lineages discussed by the text, the Shang and the Zhou, are each associated with their own dynastic periods of rule.

↳ How is the lineage established?

– Supernatural forces

Notes: Throughout the text, the Baoxun indicates that the Shang and the Zhou lineages, as well as the model ruler, Shun, all received the mandate from the high god and were thus entitled to rule (Allan 2015, 304-311).

– Blood or Marriage relations

Notes: The text depicts the lineage of the Zhou royal house in the form of King Wen and his son, King Wu. At the same time, the text mentions the lineage of the Shang royal house, specifically in the person of Shang Jia Wei and his descendant, Cheng Tang (who founded the

Shang dynasty) (Allan 2015, 285-286)

– Other [specify]: The center

Notes: The text's key idea is the center and it mentions those that obtained it in the past, such as Shun, in order to provide a model for King Wu to do the same. In this way, it establishes a lineage of kingship based on the center.

– Other [specify]: Abdication

Notes: The text mentions the story of Yao abdicating the throne to Shun, thereby creating a lineage of sage-rulers (Allan 2015, 309). However, the presence of this narrative and method of lineage construction is less important in this text than in others due to its focus on the "center" (Allan 2015, 302).

Does the text express a formal legal code?

– No

Formulating a specifically religious calendar?

– No

## Beliefs

Is a spirit-body distinction present in the text?

– No

Is belief in an afterlife indicated in the text?

– No

Is belief in reincarnation in this world specified in the text?

– No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses indicated in the text?

– No

Does the text indicate if co-sacrifices should be present in burials?

– No

Does the text specify grave goods for burial?

– No

Are formal burials present in the text?

– No

Are there practices that have funerary associations presented in the text?

– No

Notes: However, the text itself is framed as a written instruction made by King Wen to King Wu shortly before the former's death. King Wen explains that he is leaving a written instruction as opposed to instructing King Wu through recitation because he fears that his illness (the cause of his eventual death) will not permit him to recite it (Allan 2015, 279-282)

Are supernatural beings present in the text?

– No

Notes: The mention of the "mandate," implies the presence of the high god, di/tian, but no direct mention is made (Allan 2015, 304-311).

Previously human spirits are present

– No

Non-human supernatural beings are present

– No

Notes: The mention of the "mandate," implies the presence of the high god, di/tian, but no direct mention is made (Allan 2015, 304-311).

Does the text attest to a pantheon of supernatural beings?

– No

Are mixed human-divine beings present according to the text?

– No

Is there a supernatural being that is physically present in the/as a result of the text?

– No

Are other categories of beings present?

– Other [specify]: None

Notes: Only humans are directly present in the text.

Does the text guide divination practices?

– No

Notes: There is, however, a very brief mention of Shun engaging in divination using yarrow stalks to

cause the myriad things to thrive: "When the stalks were arrayed, the myriad living things (that grow) in shady valleys and on sunny slopes, all accorded (with their nature) and did not go against it." (Allan 2015, 282-284).

## Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present in the text?

– Yes

Notes: The repeated mention of losing and gaining the "mandate" implies the monitoring of the high god, though no direct reference is made.

↳ There is supernatural monitoring of prosocial norm adherence in particular

– Yes

Notes: Certain traits are associated with receiving and retaining the mandate. For instance, Cheng Tang is said to have been "reverent..and not remiss" and King Wu is advised to be "compassionate," "respectful" and "not dissolute" (Allan 2015, 310-311).

↳ Do expectations of ritual offerings play a role in supernatural monitoring?

– No

↳ Supernatural being care about taboos

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of coreligionists

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other religions

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other polities

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about sex

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about lying

– No



- ↳ Supernatural beings care about honouring oaths
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about laziness
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about sorcery
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about non-lethal fighting
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about shirking risk
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about disrespecting elders
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about gossiping
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about property crimes
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about proper ritual observance
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about performance of rituals
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about conversion of non-religionists
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about economic fairness
  - No

↳ Supernatural beings care about personal hygiene

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect the maintenance of the place?

– No

Notes: However, insofar as the "center" is a physical location (Mount Song) and its possession is a key feature of the mandate, one could say that there is a concern with the maintenance of a place.

↳ Supernatural beings care about other

– Specify: Good rulership/obtaining the center

Notes: Shun is said to have cared for the common people and obtaining the center is presented as the key to maintaining the mandate (Allan 2015, 310-311).

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment in the text?

– Yes

Notes: The repeated mention of losing and gaining the "mandate" implies the intervention of the high god and the idea of losing the mandate could be seen as a punishment, though no direct reference is made.

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known?

– Yes

↳ Done only by high god

– Yes

Notes: Only the high god would be able to withdraw the mandate.

↳ Done by many supernatural beings

– No

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle

– No

↳ Done by other entities or through other means

– No

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known?

– Yes

Notes: The typical reason for losing the mandate was poor rulership and the stress on good rulership in the text would seem to imply a similar perspective. However, no explicit reference is made in the text.

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence?

– No

↳ Done to enforce group norms?

– Yes

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness?

– No

↳ Done randomly

– No

↳ Other

– Yes

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife?

– No

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime?

– Yes

Notes: The mandate is withdrawn during the lifetime of the king who loses it.

↳ Highly emphasized by the religious group?

– Yes

Notes: The text places great emphasis on King Wu preserving and continuing the mandate he inherits from King Wen (e.g. Allan 2015, 311).

↳ Consists of bad luck?

– No

↳ Political failure?

– Yes

Notes: Losing the mandate means losing the position of ruler and is thus a political failure.

↳ Defeat in battle?

– Yes

Notes: Assuming the mandate was lost through battle e.g. how the Shang lost to the Zhou and were conquered.

↳ Crop failure or bad weather?

– No

↳ Disaster on journeys?

– No

↳ Mild sensory displeasure?

– No

↳ Extreme sensory displeasure?

– No

↳ Sickness or illness?

– No

↳ Impaired reproduction?

– No

↳ Back luck visited on descendants?

– Yes

↳ Other?

– Specify: Loss of rulership - same as political failure?

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards in the text?

– Yes

Notes: The mandate to rule can be considered a reward for proper behavior and for obtaining the center.

↳ Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known?

– Yes

↳ Done only by high god

– Yes

↳ Done by many supernatural beings

– No

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle

– No

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence

– No

↳ Done to enforce group norms?

– Yes

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness?

– No

↳ Done randomly

– No

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in the afterlife?

– No

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in this lifetime?

– Yes

Notes: The typical reason for receiving the mandate was good rulership and the text's emphasis on ruling well would seem to imply a similar perspective. However, no explicit reference is made in the text.

↳ Highly emphasized?

– Yes

Notes: Retaining possession of the center and the mandate is the text's primary concern.

↳ Consists of good luck?

– No

↳ Consists of political success or power?

– Yes

Notes: Obtaining the center and the mandate means that one is able to rule and so they are thus political successes.

↳ Consists of success in battle?

– No

Notes: Unless the obtainment of the mandate was achieved through military means as when the Zhou conquered the Shang.

↳ Consists of peace or social stability?

– Yes

↳ Consists of healthy crops or good weather?

– No

↳ Consists of success on journeys?

– No

↳ Reward in this life consists of mild sensory pleasure?

– No

↳ Reward in this life consists of extreme sensory pleasure?

– No

↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced health?

– No

↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced reproductive success?

– No

↳ Reward in this life consists of fortune visited on descendants?

– Yes

↳ Other?

–Specify: Rulership - same as political success?

## Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present in the text?

– No

Is an eschatology present in the text?

– No

## Norms & Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the text?

– Yes

Notes: In the sense that the text discusses certain ways that King Wu should behave and what elements of rulership lead to one being considered a good king.

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious text?

– No

Notes: However, one could argue that the importance of possessing the center is a moral imperative that applies in all contexts and time periods.

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the text?

– Yes

↳ Honesty/trustworthiness/integrity

– Yes

↳ Courage (in battle)

– No

↳ Courage (generic)

– No

↳ Compassion/empathy/kindness/benevolence

– Yes

Notes: King Wen remarks that: "I have heard that when compassion has not been longstanding, the mandate will not have a source from which to be prolonged" (Allan 2015, 311).

↳ Mercy/forgiveness/tolerance

– No

↳ Generosity/charity

– Yes

Notes: The text notes that Shun "bestowed (his benefices) on those above and below, far and near" (Allan 2015, 307).

↳ Selflessness/selfless giving

– No

Notes: The general vision of rulership in the text implies a certain degree of selflessness on the part of the king.

↳ Righteousness/moral rectitude

– Yes

↳ Ritual purity/ritual adherence/abstention from sources of impurity

– No

↳ Respectfulness/courtesy

– Yes

Notes: King Wu is repeatedly advised to be respectful by King Wen (e.g. Allan 2015, 311).

↳ Familial obedience/filial piety

– Yes

Notes: This is implied by the fact that King Wu is being instructed in how to rule in accordance with his father's instructions.

↳ Fidelity/loyalty

– No

↳ Cooperation

– No

↳ Independence/creativity/freedom

– No

↳ Moderation/frugality



– Yes

Notes: King Wen repeatedly cautions King Wen to not be dissolute (e.g. Allan 2015, 311).

↳ Forbearance/fortitude/patience

– No

↳ Diligence/self-discipline/excellence

– Yes

Notes: King Wen states that King Wen must "not slacken" with respect to rulership and maintaining the mandate.

↳ Assertiveness/decisiveness/confidence/initiative

– No

↳ Strength (physical)

– No

↳ Power/status/nobility

– No

↳ Humility/modesty

– Yes

Notes: Shun is described as being circumspect, sincere, and reverent (Allan 2015, 309).

↳ Contentment/serenity/equanimity

– No

↳ Joyfulness/enthusiasm/cheerfulness

– No

↳ Optimism/hope

– No

↳ Gratitude/thankfulness

– No

↳ Reverence/awe/wonder

– Yes

Notes: Shun is described as being circumspect, sincere, and reverent (Allan 2015, 309).

↳ Faith/belief/trust/devotion

– No

↳ Wisdom/understanding

– No

↳ Discernment/intelligence

– No

↳ Beauty/attractiveness

– No

↳ Cleanliness (physical)/orderliness

– No

↳ Other important virtues

– Yes

Notes: Good rulership is the general concern of the text. One could also define the ability to obtain and hold the center as a virtue of the utmost importance.

## Advocacy of Practices

Does the text require celibacy (full sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require castration?

– No

Does the text require fasting?

– No

Does the text require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods)?

– No

Does the text require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations?

– No

Does the text require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of adults?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of children?

– No

Does the text require self-sacrifice (suicide)?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of property/valuable items?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of time (e.g. attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.)?

– No

Does the text require physical risk taking?

– No

Does the text require accepting ethical precepts?

– Yes

Does the text require marginalization by out-group members?

– No

Does the text require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household)?

– No

Notes: The text does, however, make a brief mention of King Wen rinsing his face in a ritual of ablution

(Allan 2015, 279).

Does the text require participation in large-scale rituals?

– No

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present as indicated in the text?

– No

Does the text employ fictive kinship terminology?

– No

Does the text include elements that are intended to be entertaining?

– No

Does the text specify sacrifices, offerings, and maintenance of a sacred space?

– No

Notes: Although the admonition to possess the center could be viewed as an emphasis on controlling a specific, sacred site.

## Institutions & Production Environment of Text

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### Society & Institutions

Society of religious group that produced the text is best characterized as:

– A state

Notes: The text dates from the Warring States period (475-221 BCE), a time after the Zhou dynasty when multiple, centralizing states engaged in constant warfare with one another (Allan 2015, 11-15).

Are there specific elements of society that have controlled the reproduction of the text?

– Other

Notes: Unknown

Are there specific elements of society involved with the destruction of the text?

– Other

Notes: Unknown.

### Welfare

Does the text specify institutionalized famine relief?

– No

Notes: The text does not mention specific welfare institutions. However, presumably the good rulership needed to maintain the mandate (such as that of Shun) would obviate any need for such institutions.

Does the text specify institutionalized poverty relief?

– No

Does the text specify institutionalized care for elderly & infirm?

– No

Other forms of welfare?

– No

## Education

Are there formal educational institutions available for teaching the text?

– Field doesn't know

Are there formal educational institutions specified according to the text?

– No

Does the text make provisions for non-religious education?

– No

Does the text restrict education to religious professionals?

– No

Does the text restrict education among religious professionals?

– No

Is education gendered according to the text?

– No

Is education gendered with respect to this text and larger textual tradition?

– Yes

Notes: While it is generally thought that women were excluded from education during the Warring

States, there is some evidence that women may have been educated and literate (though not necessarily due to official sanction) (Allan 2015, 55-58).

Does the text specify teaching relationships or ratios? (i.e.: 1:20; 1:1)

– No

Are there specific relationships to teachers that are advocated by the text?

– No

Are there worldly rewards/benefits to education according to the text specified by the text itself?

– No

### **Bureaucracy**

Is bureaucracy regulated by this text?

– No

### **Public Works**

Does the text detail interaction with public works?

– No

### **Taxation**

Does the text specify forms of taxation?

– No

### **Warfare**

Does the text mention warfare?

– Yes

Notes: The text suggests military action on the part of Shang Jia Wei who temporarily took control of the center to punish You Yi. However, no details are provided (Allan 2015, 310).



Does the text dictate how to control an institutionalized military?

– No

↳ Does the text restrict/advocate for participation in exogenous military organizations?  
– Yes

↳ Does the text celebrate/bemoan protection/subjugation by an exogenous military force?  
– Yes

### **Food Production**

Does the text mentioned food production/disbursement?

– No