12.B Excavated Texts

I Introduction

At the time of cultivating the fields, I do not wish to levy the black-headed ones.

田時毆(也)，不欲興黔首。¹

This passage is seen on the front side of three published wooden documents found from the well no. 1 at the Liye 里耶 site in Hunan Province, which was the office of Qianling County 遷陵縣 in the Qin 秦 State and Empire. The passage is part of an instruction given by a governor (*shou* 守) of Dongting Commandery 洞庭郡,² named Li 禮, on mobilizing laborers for the transportation of armaments from Dongting Commandery to the Capital Area and other commanderies in 220 BCE. During the reform of official terminologies held after the Qin unification in 221 BCE, the term *min* 民 ('commoner') was changed to *qianshou* 黔首 ('black-headed one').³ In his instruction, Governor Li refers to an ordinance (*ling* 令) that stipulates that when levying laborers for delivery and transportation, officials must first mobilize the forced laborers and people who were paying off fines, redemption-fees, or debts by their labor; only when there was an urgent matter that could not be delayed, the officials could levy the black-headed ones for government service.⁴ Governor Li adds the above-quoted passage in order to explain his intention behind the instruction, which was passed from Dongting Commandery to Qianling County on March 30, right in the middle of a peak season in agricultural production.

Governor Li's instruction shows us two basic principles of the state economy during the Qin. First, the Qin placed agricultural production, also known as 'the fundamental occupation' (*benye* 本業), as a higher priority than other types of production, which appears to be in line with the records in transmitted texts such as

1 Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2007, 192–194, board nos. 16–5, 16–6; 2017, 242, board no. 9–2283. Translation after Ma 2015. All translations are my own unless stated otherwise.

2 Dongting does not appear in any transmitted records as a Qin commandery. Chen 2003 suggests that it was located between modern Hunan, Hubei, and Sichuan Provinces. The Qin and Han local administrative structure had four levels: commandery (*jun* 郡), county (*xian* 縣), district (*xiang* 鄉), and village (*li* 里), see Yen 1961.

3 Note that it was also during this reform that the title 'king' (*wang* 王) was changed to 'emperor' (*huangdi* 皇帝). For the Qin reform of legal and administrative terminologies, see Chen 2014.

4 An ordinance was a form of law during the Qin and Han dynasties, see Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015, 68–88.

Note: I would like to thank Maxim Korolkov, Thies Staack, and Tong Chun Fung for their helpful comments.

those in the *Book of Lord Shang* (*Shangjun shu* 商君書).⁵ Second, and more importantly, it reflects the Qin priority of mobilizing laborers. Considering the commoners or black-headed ones the major labor force in agricultural production, the Qin did not want to overburden them with additional labor tasks such as transportation of armaments during the agricultural season. The government would rather assign these tasks to forced laborers who were mainly criminals and prisoners of war, and people who were paying off fines, redemption-fees, or debts by their labor.⁶ This new evidence questions the stereotyped traditional view that the Qin had brutally and irrationally exploited the commoners, who were also the potential farmers.⁷

Two decades before the excavation of the Liye materials in 2002, the late historian Jack L. Dull had already raised doubts about the traditional image of the Qin dynasty, but unfortunately, he was not able to see how the newly excavated materials may support his arguments.⁸ The last few decades have witnessed an unprecedented growth of ancient texts excavated from archaeological sites in mainland China.⁹ The above-mentioned one is just one of the many examples showing how the newly excavated texts can add to or reshape our knowledge of the early Chinese empires. This chapter will briefly introduce the excavated texts that can shed light on the economic history of early imperial China. Our discussion is selective and focuses on the genres of legal, administrative, and economic texts.¹⁰

II Archaeological Contexts and Written Contents

The ‘excavated texts’ mentioned in this chapter refer to those texts which were archaeologically excavated, randomly discovered, or illegally looted from tombs or other sites in mainland China in recent years, mainly preserved in the forms of bamboo, wooden, or silk manuscripts.¹¹ The discovery of these texts began with the wave of European expeditions in Central Asia and northwestern China in the late

5 Pines 2017. Von Glahn categorizes the Qin as a “military-physiocratic state” (2017, 85).

6 As Barbieri-Low argues, “The government made conscious cost-benefit analyses when employing various pools of labor for a given project, taking into account the nature of the work, the season of the year, and the overall cost to the peasant-based economy” (2007, 26). See also Ma 2015.

7 Note that before the modern excavation of the Qin texts, most of the Qin sources were transmitted through the texts composed or compiled in the Han 漢 dynasty, which often include Han criticism of the Qin dynasty, Pines et al. 2014. A few exceptions include those Qin stele inscriptions which represent the Qin official portrayal of the First Emperor, for which see Kern 2000.

8 Dull 1983.

9 See also Ma, ch. 14, this volume.

10 Other genres include religious, literary, philosophical, and medical texts. For more details on the genres, see Giele 2003; Pian and Duan 2006.

11 On relatively rare occasions, they were written on early forms of paper as well. For the uses of paper in the early imperial periods, see Wang 2012.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since 1901 when Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943) first discovered around 40 pieces of Chinese wooden documents at the Niya 尼雅 ruins (in Xinjiang Province) until now, archaeologists (and tomb looters) have discovered more than 200,000 bamboo and wooden boards and slips (including fragments) in mainland China.¹² The earliest major findings such as those from Dunhuang 敦煌 were mostly discovered by European expeditions at the frontier military sites in northwestern China.¹³ After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the state-organized archaeological teams completely took over the role of the European expeditions in the excavations of ancient Chinese texts.¹⁴

Despite suffering from the political instability during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), the 1970s witnessed a significant growth in the discoveries of ancient texts, such as those from the sites at Shuihudi 睡虎地 and Mawangdui 馬王堆. Major findings were not confined to the frontier military sites. Archaeologists have discovered a significant quantity of ancient texts from a number of tombs across mainland China (with a concentration in the Yangtze River valley), which has attracted wide attention among scholars of early China.¹⁵

Another major change happened in 1996 when archaeologists first discovered around 100,000 bamboo and wooden slips and boards dated to the Three Kingdoms period (220–280 CE) from well no. 22 at Zoumalou 走馬樓 in Changsha 長沙, Hunan Province. About 70,000 pieces are inscribed with characters. Since then at least six groups of documents have been found in wells (*jing* 井) or storage pits (*jiao* 窖) in the nearby area in Changsha, as well as several groups of documents from wells in southern China. These documents were local administrative documents before they were discarded as trash in wells. Given their specific archaeological context, these texts now constitute a new category in the study of unearthed Chinese texts.¹⁶ Because the archaeological context is a crucial factor in determining the nature of these excavated texts, we will discuss the texts by the categories of archaeological sites and select some examples to illustrate their value as sources of economic history under each category.¹⁷

12 A few wooden documents were found in the northern Korean Peninsula where the eastern border of the Han Empire had been, for example Yun 2009.

13 As early as the 1920s, Chinese scholars started to organize archaeological teams to excavate ancient texts in northwestern China. However, the formation of the Chinese-Swedish archaeological team in the excavation of Juyan material in 1930s suggests that European archaeologists still played a significant role in the excavations of ancient texts during that time.

14 Since then, no Western archaeologists have participated in the excavations of ancient Chinese texts in mainland China.

15 It is worth noting that, in 2000, the University of Hamburg organized a workshop specifically on early Chinese 'tomb texts.' For an introduction to this workshop, see Richter 2003.

16 Ling 2015, 455–472.

17 For an introduction to the excavated early Chinese texts in chronological order, see Pian and Duan 2006, 379–348. For the importance of the archaeological contexts in studying the excavated texts, see Giele 2010.

III Frontier Documents

The invasions of the steppe group the Xiongnu 匈奴 was the major security problem of the northwestern border of early imperial China. During the first 70 years of the Han dynasty, due to the economic and societal damage caused during the late Qin civil war and the internal conflict between the central government and regional kingdoms, China was unable to conduct aggressive campaigns against the Xiongnu. With the accumulation of wealth during the reigns of his grandfather (Emperor Wen 文, r. 180–157) and father (Emperor Jing 景, r. 157–141 BCE), Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141–87 BCE) successfully strengthened central control over local governments and turned to an offensive foreign policy. During his reign, the Han forces retrieved the lands which were formerly occupied by the Xiongnu in modern Gansu Province and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and established four commanderies (Jiuquan 酒泉, Zhangye 張掖, Dunhuang and Wuwei 武威) in these areas which later became known as the Gansu or Hexi corridor.¹⁸

On the northwestern defense lines, the Han forces built chains of watchtowers (*sui* 燧) to defend against the invasions from the Xiongnu, set up checkpoint-like passes (*guan* 關) to control the mobility of people, and established a postal relay system to facilitate communication between the central government and frontier zone.¹⁹ The ‘frontier documents’ were found at the archaeological sites of the fortified constructions on the defense lines, where environmental conditions such as dry weather helped preserve the documents. Most of them were discarded as waste in trash heaps at the sites.²⁰ Mostly dated between the mid-Western Han and early Eastern Han periods, the majority of these documents were of an administrative nature (with a small amount of private documents such as personal letters of officials and soldiers).²¹ They include registries of personnel, such as officials, conscripts, and convicts; account books of various types of daily military and administrative tasks; tallies for verifying and recording the transfers of money or commodities; records of disbursement of clothing and grain rations; official documents sent between officials of different statuses; and copies of imperial instructions, which directly shed light on the daily operation of the frontier system and the local economic activities.

III.1 Evidence for the State-Organized Agricultural Production on the Frontier

The frontier administration was different from that in the interior regions of the empire. The wooden slips and boards excavated from the watchtowers and frontier

¹⁸ For more on this background, see Loewe 1967; Yü 1967; Di Cosmo 2002.

¹⁹ For these fortified constructions and their terminologies, see Lien 2015, 21–33.

²⁰ Giele 2010, 122–123.

²¹ For private letters excavated from these sites, see Giele 2015.

offices at Juyan 居延, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and Dunhuang, Gansu Province show that on the northwestern frontier, the chief commandant (*duwei* 都尉) of the commandery, appointed by the central government, was the official in charge of the military administration. Several company commanders (*hou* 候), who were at the same rank as county magistrates (*xianling* 縣令) in the interior regions, were serving under him. Each company commander was in charge of a number of headquarters (*bu* 部), each of which supervised several watchtowers located on the defense lines.²²

Parallel to the military administration was an agricultural administration. In order to avoid the high transportation cost of grain from the interior regions and ensure that there were enough supplies for the military campaigns in the northwest, the Han government enforced a system of agricultural garrisons or colonies (*tuntian* 屯田) on the northwestern border.²³ The agricultural magistrates (*nongling* 農令 or *nongzhang* 農長) of the Offices of the Agricultural Fields (*tianguan* 田官) were in charge of the agricultural production in the garrisons. At the end of each year, the agricultural office had to submit an account book on the amount of agricultural fields (*kentain* 墾[墾]田) that had been cleared for cultivation to the higher authority for evaluation.²⁴ From the registries found from Juyan, we know that the conscripted soldiers (*zu* 卒) constituted the major labor force of this state-organized agricultural production. A registry of an agricultural conscript (*tianzu* 田卒) reads: “Agricultural conscript Zhang Wu, of the rank *gongshi*, from Fan Village, Fugou County, Huaiyang Commandery, age twenty-seven.” 田卒淮陽郡扶溝反里公士張誤年廿七²⁵ (fig. 1).

Most of the registries of agricultural conscripts follow the same format, listing their personal information such as place of origin (village, county, and commandery), order of rank (*jue* 爵),²⁶ name, and age.²⁷ This evidence offers an opportunity to look into the composition of the population of agricultural conscripts in the Juyan area. These conscripts were mainly from the interior regions of the Han Empire, and formed a large proportion of the immigrant population on the frontier. According to Suzuki Naomi’s 鈴木直美 recent research, the average age of these agricultural conscripts was 29, which is in line with the average age of the overall conscripted soldiers in the Juyan area.²⁸ After the reform of the conscription system held during

22 For the Han defense system on the northwestern border, see Loewe 1967, 1:74–77; Chen 1980, 37–96.

23 For an overview of this system, see Liu 1988; Tong 2014.

24 Jiandu zhengli xiaozu 2014, slip no. 113.6+139.24.

25 Jiandu zhengli xiaozu 2017, slip no. 514.31A.

26 A rank (*jue* 爵) holder during the Han dynasty enjoyed certain privileges, including using his rank to reduce punishment (Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015, 876).

27 Some registries might have additional information such as the clothing issued by the government to the conscripts, see Loewe 1967, 2:261–273.

28 These figures are based on 570 registries of conscripted soldiers, of which 156 are agricultural conscripts (Suzuki 2017, 144).

Fig. 1: A registry of an agricultural conscript from the Han dynasty, slip no. 514.31A from Edsen-Gol, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. © Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica.

the reign of Emperor Jing (r. 157–141 BCE), it was mandatory for adult males who reached age 23 to enlist for government service and military conscription.²⁹ However, not every adult male would serve himself. For one who did not want to serve, he could choose to pay a certain amount of money to hire someone to take his

²⁹ Before the reform, subject to the rank of their fathers and the rank they might hold, young men who reached the ages between 20 and 24 were mandatory to enlist for government service and military conscription. For the details, see section III.5 below.

place through the arrangement of the local government.³⁰ The Juyan and Dunhuang materials preserve this kind of record in detail. An example reads:

Agricultural conscript Gao Qianqiu, who is at the age of twenty-six, of the rank *shangzao*, from Jing Village, Xiping County, Huaiyang Commandery, hires Hu Bu, who is at the age of twenty-four, of the rank *shangzao*, from Si Village, Ningping County, [Huaiyang Commandery,] to substitute for him.

田卒淮陽郡新平景里上造高千秋年廿六 取寧平駟里上造胡部年廿四為庸³¹

The hiring of substitute conscripts during the Qin and Han periods was under the government's supervision. According to a Qin law preserved in the collection held by the Yuelu Academy 嶽麓書院, a conscripted soldier who wanted to have someone substitute for him must first report to the government.³² As seen in the Juyan and Dunhuang materials, the Han must have inherited this system. Almost all the conscripted soldiers and their substitutes were from the same county or commandery and held the same rank. This must be the result of the local government's arrangement, which shows the high degree of state control over the use of labor forces in the agricultural production on the frontier.³³

III.2 Records on Economic Activities on the Frontier

In the frontier area, the local residents, the conscripted soldiers, the officials and their families, and the convicts who were sent to the northwest for hard labor punishment together formed a local community, within which economic activities occurred daily. The frontier documents preserve many records concerning the sale of commodities, lending of money, hiring of laborers, and legal cases regarding economic affairs among the members of this community. An example of the sale of clothing (fig. 2) reads:

In the second year of Jianzhao [of the reign of Emperor Yuan] (37 BCE), on the Bingxu day of the leap month, Scribe Director of Jiaqu Company Dong Zifang purchased a fur robe at the price of 750 cash from garrison soldier Yin Wei. They agree to make the full payment by spring. The witness (lit. the one by the side) is Du Junjuan.

建昭二年閏月丙戌甲渠令史董子方買鄯卒殷威裘一領直七百五十約至春錢畢已旁人杜君雋³⁴

³⁰ Transmitted texts suggest that the amount of money an adult male had to pay to hire a substitute conscript to serve on the frontier was 300 cash for three months (*Shiji* 106.2823). This amount might have changed subject to inflation or changes of the conscript system over time. For more on the wages of laborers, see Shi 2012.

³¹ Gansu jian du bowuguan et al. 2013, 70, slip no. 73EJT26:9.

³² Chen 2015, 128, slip nos. 1414–1, 1298.

³³ Lai and Ma 2011, 55. For hired laborers in general, see Ma 2012.

³⁴ Jian du zheng li xiao zu 2014, 78, slip no. 26.1A. Translation modified from Scogin 1990, 1347; Zhang 2010, 15.

While the garrison soldiers would receive clothing from the local government, the officials on the frontier would have to provide their own.³⁵ Such transaction records show that some soldiers would rather trade the clothes received from the government for money.³⁶ To avoid any arguments in the future, a third party was present to witness the writing of the agreement, like Du Junjuan in the above example.

However, even with the written agreement, conflicts between the two parties could still occur. In addition, in some cases, there was only an oral agreement. When arguments occurred, one or both of the parties would seek help from the local authorities. An excellent example is a legal case composed of 33 wooden slips found during the excavation of Juyan documents in the 1970s. It tells us that Company Commander Su 粟 filed a lawsuit in 28 CE against commoner Kou En 寇恩 for failing to fulfill the terms of their employment agreement. Su originally hired Kou En to sell fish in a nearby county called Lude 鱸得 and agreed to pay Kou En one ox and 27 bushels of grain for selling 5,000 fish at the price of 400,000 cash. However, eventually, Kou En could only bring back 320,000 cash. To make up the difference, Kou En gave the goods he had recently purchased to Su's wife. His son Qin 欽 also caught fish for Su for three months and ten days. Whereas Kou En thought that he had already fulfilled his part in the agreement, Su was not satisfied with the result and brought a lawsuit against him.³⁷ Such a case shows us the economic relationship among the members of the local community on the Han northern frontier, and the conflicts that might have occurred among them.

III.3 Routine Records from a Han Postal Station on the Diplomatic and Trading Route

To facilitate communications between different regions within the empire, the Han government had established a postal relay system which served four major functions: (1) the transmission of official documents; (2) the provision of room and board for travelers; (3) the provision of horses and carriages for transportation; and (4) the establishment of stables to house and care for animals used in the postal service.³⁸ From 1990 to 1992, Chinese archaeologists discovered about 23,000 wooden slips at the Xuanquan 懸泉 site (near the city of Dunhuang), which had been a postal station (*zhi* 置) located on the diplomatic and trading route between Han China and Central Asia. The Xuanquan postal station was under the administration of Xiaogu 效穀

³⁵ Different from the conscripted soldiers, despite receiving monthly salaries and grain rations, the frontier officials did not receive clothing and salt from the government (Zhao 2012, 278–281).

³⁶ The Han government had once prohibited the transaction of government-issued clothing (Zhao 2012, 351–352).

³⁷ Scogin 1990, 1362–1365; Zhang 2010, 1–2.

³⁸ Lien 2015, 33; Sanft 2008–2009.

County.³⁹ The documents found at the site provide direct evidence for studying the daily operation of the Han postal relay system and the visits of foreign delegations from the states in Central Asia.

As reported by the excavators, the Xuanquan documents mention the names of at least 24 states in Central Asia, such as Loulan 樓蘭, Yuezhi 月氏, Dayuan 大宛, Yutian 于闐 and Jingjue 精絕.⁴⁰ The size of these foreign delegations could be huge. A document shows that a delegation of 1,074 members was sent from Yutian; another document records that there were 479 visitors from different states such as Jingjue on their way back home.⁴¹ By presenting a passport (*zhuan* 傳) issued by the local government, these foreign visitors were able to receive free food and accommodation in the Xuanquan postal station.⁴² The Xuanquan documents include many records of the issuing of food to these foreign visitors. A typical example reads as follows:

Issued 2 *dou* and 4 *sheng* (4 liters and 800 milliliters) of millet to feed three envoys of the Great King of Wusun. Each of them ate two meals and for each meal ate 4 *sheng* (800 milliliters) of millet. [They headed] west.

出粟二斗四升，以食烏孫大昆彌使者三人，人再食，食四升，西。⁴³

Following Yü Ying-shih's argument about the Han tributary system,⁴⁴ Jidong Yang has suggested that the foreign visitors seen in the Xuanquan documents might not come for purely diplomatic or political purposes. Some of these visitors were actually 'merchants' who 'sold' camels (*tuotuo* 橐佗) or other goods to the Han government. Although the documents often use the term *fengxian* 奉獻 or *xian* 獻 ('to contribute' or 'to offer') to refer to these actions, the Han emperor might have 'paid' for the camels in the form of imperial gifts.⁴⁵ Such an argument has now faced criticism. Scholars such as Armin Selbitschka point out that the argument was made mainly based on the biased account in Chinese transmitted texts. There is no clear record showing that these foreign visitors were granted imperial gifts in return of their tributes.⁴⁶ Regardless of the real motives, the records of the foreign tributes offered to the Han court provide new evidence for the exchange of goods between Central Asia and Han China.

³⁹ Hao and Zhang 2009, 23; Sanft 2008–2009, 129.

⁴⁰ Hao and Zhang 2009, 194.

⁴¹ Hu and Zhang 2001, 110, 114.

⁴² Yang 2015, 427.

⁴³ Hu and Zhang 2001, 143.

⁴⁴ Yü has argued that the foreign delegations "took the tribute as a cloak for trade" (1967, 144). He suggested that it was this economic interest that motivated them to visit Han China. Under such a tributary system, these foreigners offered tributary goods to the Han emperor in exchange for generous imperial gifts; see also von Glahn 2017, 155.

⁴⁵ Yang 2015, 429.

⁴⁶ Selbitschka 2015, 103.

III.4 Tomb Texts

The earliest evidence of burying texts in tombs can be seen in the southern region of China from the Warring State period (475–221 BCE). Enno Giele has summarized six possible motives for entombing texts: (1) to benefit the deceased directly and personally based on the belief that the deceased will continue their life in the netherworld as in the real world; (2) to address others in the netherworld either to enlist their help and protection or to ward off their evil influences; (3) to demonstrate an attitude, a status, an achievement, a will, etc., to the living and future generations, hoping for their reverence, praise, compliance, or eventual emulation; (4) to store away or hide texts that should no longer circulate among the living but that were also cherished enough not to be destroyed altogether; (5) to fill in unused, empty space inside the coffin; and (6) as accidentally present objects, which is to say manuscripts that had been converted into parts of funerary objects.⁴⁷ Examining the literary elements of a legal case book from the Zhangjiashan Han tomb, Anthony J. Barbieri-Low and Robin D. S. Yates recently argued that such a text could have provided personal enjoyment in the tomb occupant's afterlife, which appears to be in line with the first motive summarized by Giele.⁴⁸

The tomb occupants range from regional lords (e.g. Lord of Haihun 海昏侯, owner of tomb no. 1 at Guodunshan 鄱墩山, Jiangxi Province) to local officials (e.g. Scribe [*shi* 史] Xi 喜, owner of tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi, Hubei Province) to commoners (e.g. Zhu Ling 朱凌 and her husband, owners of tomb no. 101 at Xupu 胥浦, Jiangsu Province). Noticeably, the texts found from the tombs of the local legal and administrative officials are similar in nature. In most cases, legal or administrative texts constitute the majority of the entire corpus. These texts could be ones that the tomb owners had used in the course of their careers during their life, or ones modeled thereafter. Other genres of texts found in these tombs, such as calendars, mathematical and medical texts, are believed to be related to their official duties as well (tab. 1).⁴⁹ For the purpose of this chapter, we will look at those tomb texts that shed light on the economic history of the early Chinese empires.

⁴⁷ Giele 2003, 428–434.

⁴⁸ Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015, 107–110.

⁴⁹ Yates 2014, 144.

Tab. 1: Genres of texts excavated from the tombs of local legal and administrative officials.⁵⁰

Genres of texts	Shuihudi Tomb 11	Longgang Tomb 6	Zhangjiashan Tomb 247	Shuihudi Tomb 77	Fenghuangshan Tomb 10	Songbai Tomb 1	Tianchang Tomb 19	Yinwan Tomb 6
Administrative				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Calendrical	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓
Divination	✓		✓	✓				✓
Economic					✓			
Educational	✓							
Funeral		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Legal	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Literary			✓	✓				✓
Mathematical			✓	✓				
Medical			✓					
Social ⁵¹				✓			✓	✓

⁵⁰ The selection of these tombs is confined to those that have clear evidence showing the identity of the tomb occupants. For brief introductions to the texts excavated from these tombs, see Hu and Li 2004.

⁵¹ By social texts, I mean those which can illuminate the social connections of the tomb owners, such as private letters and greeting tablets. For studies on these texts, see Giele 2015; Korolkov 2012.

III.5 Legal Texts on Economic Policies and Activities

The two most important and richest legal text collections with a clear archaeological context are those found in tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi and tomb no. 247 at Zhangjiashan 張家山, both in Hubei Province.⁵² The Shuihudi legal texts are composed of a selection of 18 categories of Qin laws, a selection of Qin legal model forms (*shi* 式), and a selection of commentaries on the Qin laws. The year of the final compilation of the legal collection was after 217 BCE, but some of the entries could be dated back to the time before the Qin unification. The Zhangjiashan legal texts contain a selection of statutes and ordinances compiled in 186 BCE, titled *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year* (*Ernian lüling* 二年律令), and a legal case book, titled *Book of Submitted Doubtful Cases* (*Zouyan shu* 奏讞書). Similarly, these two texts also contain entries which could be dated back to an earlier period.⁵³ The third significant group of texts is held by the Yuelu Academy in mainland China.⁵⁴ The collection contains Qin statutes and ordinances and legal cases dated to the reign of the First Emperor of Qin (r. 220–210 BCE), also known as Qin King of Zheng (r. 247–220 BCE) before the Qin unification, which were believed originally to have been stored in a tomb in Hubei Province.⁵⁵ Scholars believe that the owners of these tombs were scribes or low-ranking legal officials who had worked in local administration and that the texts buried in their tombs were related to their legal duties during their life.⁵⁶

In these collections, ‘statutes’ (*lü* 律) such as those under the titles “Granaries” (*Cang* 倉), “Cash” (*Qian* 錢), “Agriculture” (*Tian* 田), “Abscondence” (*Wang* 亡), “Passes and Markets” (*Guan shi* 關市), “Households” (*Hu* 戶), “Enrollment” (*Fu* 傅), “Levies” (*Xing* 興), “Government Service” (*Yao* 徭), and “Finance” (*Jinbu* 金布) and ‘ordinances’ (*ling* 令) under the title “Fords and Passes” (*Jinguan* 津關) provide direct insight into issues like the Qin and early Han economic policies, management of land and labor resources, taxation and household systems, government control of currencies, and the restriction of population movements. The following will use the

⁵² For the complete translations of the legal texts from these two tombs, see Hulsewé 1985; Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015.

⁵³ Ma 2017, 298–299, n. 4.

⁵⁴ Chen 2009.

⁵⁵ For an English translation of the Yuelu legal case, see Lau and Staack 2016. The Yuelu manuscripts were purchased on the antiquities market in Hong Kong in 2007. Despite their undeniable value as primary sources, Western scholars have different opinions on the use of such unprovenanced texts in scholarly research, Goldin 2013; Lau and Staack 2016, 12–14; Foster 2017. In addition, a smaller Qin legal collection was archaeologically excavated from tomb no. 6 at Longgang 龍崗, Hubei, Hu and Li 2004, 287–293. Two other groups of Han legal texts, which were found in tomb no. 336 at Zhangjiashan and tomb no. 77 at Shuihudi, have not been fully published yet, Jingzhou diqu bowuguan 1992; Xiong, Chen, and Cai 2018. Note that earlier archaeological reports usually refer Zhangjiashan tomb no. 336 to no. 136.

⁵⁶ Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015, 98–110. For more on scribes in the Qin and early Han periods, see Ma 2017.

example of resource management to illustrate the value of these legal texts as sources for economic history.

The Qin and Han governments placed a consistently strong emphasis on agricultural production. The “Statutes on Agriculture” in the Shuihudi and Zhangjiashan collections demonstrate a strong influence of the tradition of ‘monthly ordinances’ (*yueling* 月令), which consists of monthly requirements, prohibitions, and taboos based on the agricultural calendar.⁵⁷ The “Statutes on Agriculture” also suggest that the Qin and early Han rulers had maintained a system of distributing government-owned land to their subjects.⁵⁸ The “Statutes on Households” in the Zhangjiashan collection preserves detailed regulations on a ‘named-field’ (*mingtian* 名田) system in the early Han period, under which commoners, nobles, and even former convicts and mutilated persons were supposed to be granted land for homesteads and agricultural fields according to their rank.⁵⁹

Apart from the land resources, the Qin and Han government intentionally extracted usable human resources. The detailed legal regulations on hard labor punishment throughout these collections show us the ways in which the early Chinese empires turned convicts into usable human resources for the functioning of the state.⁶⁰ Besides, as mentioned earlier, adult males in Han China were obligated to enroll for government service and military conscription. The Zhangjiashan legal texts preserve the details of an early Han conscription system. The “Statutes on Enrollment” stipulates that, depending on the rank of their fathers and the rank they might hold, young men would have to enroll for service at the ages of 20, 22, or 24. With a formal request for retirement, they would be released from service between the ages of 58 and 66 according to the rank they held. The conscripted laborers were a significant portion of the human resources of the Han Empire, even though the system which provided these conscripted laborers had undergone several changes over the Han period.⁶¹ As seen in the frontier documents introduced above, the soldiers conscripted from this system were the major military force defending against invasions by the Xiongnu on the Han northern frontier.

III.6 Taxation and Population Records

In addition to the legal texts, archaeologists found a number of account books and registers on taxation and population in the tombs of local officials. Among these, a

⁵⁷ Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015, 693. An actual example of monthly ordinances dated to 5 CE was inscribed on the southern wall of room F26 in the Xuanquan station, Sanft 2008–2009.

⁵⁸ Hulsewé 1985, 23; Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015, 696–697.

⁵⁹ Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015, 792–793.

⁶⁰ For the development of hard labor punishment, see Tu 1990, 261–316.

⁶¹ The influence of rank in the conscription system disappeared as time went by. After the reform implemented during the reign of Emperor Jing, all young men were supposed to enroll at the age

famous collection was found in tomb no. 9 at Fenghuangshan 鳳凰山. Archaeologists excavated six wooden tablets and around 170 bamboo slips dated to the early Han period (160s–150s BCE).⁶² The owner of the tomb is believed to be a district- (*xiang* 鄉) level official, named Zhang Yan 張偃, who was supposed to be responsible for tax collection.⁶³

In Zhang Yan's tomb, archaeologists found tax records of three villages (*li* 里) – Shiyang 市陽, Zheng 鄭, and Dangli 當利 – which were in Xi 西 District of Jiangling 江陵 County, Nan 南 Commandery (in modern Hubei Province). The types of tax include poll tax (*suanfu* 算賦), hay and straw tax (*chugao* 芻藁), land tax (*tianzu* 田租), and labor service, which show the composition of the tax burden of a household in the early Han society.⁶⁴ Even more interestingly, the collection includes a multi-bamboo-slip document, titled *Account book of the disbursement of grain of Zheng Village (Zheng Li linbu 鄭里廩簿)*, which lists the heads of 25 households, the number of persons in each household, the number of persons who are “capable of fieldwork” in each household, the amount of land held by each household, and the amount of grain loaned to each household. An entry is translated as follows: “Head of household: Pian; capable of fieldwork: 4 persons; household members: 5 persons; fields: 30 *mu* (1.38 hectares) + 卅 loan: 3 *shi* (60 liters).” 戶人駢能田四人口五人 田卅畝 + 卅 貸三石.⁶⁵ With these records, we can calculate that there was a high ratio of 2.78 capable field workers per household. We can also find out that the average number of household members was between 4.48 and 4.60, which is in line with the number of a typical Han household – ‘family of five’ (*wukou zhi jia* 五口之家) – described in transmitted texts.⁶⁶ The surprisingly low average area of fields (24.68 *mu* [1.14 hectares]) held by each household suggests that the early Han government, at least in the Jiangling region, did not strictly implement the laws of land distribution as specified in the Zhangjiashan Han legal statutes introduced earlier.⁶⁷

It is not accidental that these tax records were found in the tomb of a district-level official. Each year, the local governments were supposed to report to the central government about the overall performance of the administration for annual evaluation. This administrative process was called “the forwarding of accounts” (*shangji* 上計). The tax records of Xi District were the primary sources for drafting an annual account book of Jiangling County, which would be included in the ac-

of 23 regardless of what rank their father or they might have held (Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015, 833–835).

⁶² Qiu 1974.

⁶³ Hsing 2014.

⁶⁴ Von Glahn 2017, 109.

⁶⁵ Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2012, 111. Note that the marks on the slip were probably to verify the receipt of loan.

⁶⁶ For the size of Han families, see Lai 1995.

⁶⁷ For the calculation of these numbers, see Hsing 2014, 169–170; von Glahn 2017, 111.

count book of Nan Commandery submitted to the central government. In the tombs of other local officials, such as tomb no. 1 at Songbai 松柏 in Hubei Province and tomb no. 19 at Tianchang 天長 in Anhui Province, archaeologists have also found a number of taxation or population documents. These documents, since they represent different levels of local administration, would help reconstruct a hierarchy of documents corresponding to the bureaucratic hierarchy.⁶⁸

III.7 Economic Documents on Property Inheritance

The ‘tomb text’ category also includes economic documents showing the financial situation of a household or an individual. A notable one is a will (*xianling quanshu* 先令券書) written on 16 bamboo slips found in a joint burial in Xupu, Jiangsu Province. According to Li Jieman 李解民, the owner of coffin A is a woman named Zhu Ling 朱凌 who was the head of the household, while the owner of coffin B is Zhu Ling’s husband who had passed away long before Zhu Ling.⁶⁹

The ‘will’ very possibly is an excerpt of the original will. It states that, suffering from a recent illness and considering herself close to death, Zhu Ling requested the elders in the county and district and the district and village officials to make a will for her. Zhu Ling had given birth to six children and been married to three different husbands. As the head of the household, she could decide on the division of her property after her death. The will states that she originally gave a certain number of fields to two of her daughters who suffered from poverty and did not hold any property. Considering now her younger son, named Gongwen 公文, who had moved out from the household for a long time, recently committed a crime of injuring people and was sentenced to hard labor punishment, Zhu Ling (referred to as ‘old woman’ [yu 嫗] in the will) decided to retrieve the fields from the two daughters and give them to Gongwen. Zhu Ling specifically made very clear in the will that Gongwen was not allowed to sell the land to others.

This particular case shows us the economic and social rights a woman (also a widow) could have enjoyed in early imperial China, which appears to be much higher than one could expect in the stereotyped ‘traditional China.’⁷⁰ Moreover, the drafting of the will appears to be highly consistent with that regulated in the Zhangjiahan early Han laws. The “Statutes on Households” states that:

When an ordinary person wishes to make a will, dividing his or her agricultural fields, homestead, male and female slaves, and valuable items, the Bailiff of the District is to listen person-

⁶⁸ Ma 2018b.

⁶⁹ Li 2005. As in the cases of many other excavated texts, the reconstruction and interpretation of the text has been widely debated. For other interpretations, see Chen and Wang 1987; Hinsch 1998.

⁷⁰ For more on women in early imperial China, see Hinsch 2011.

ally to his or her directives and, in every case, is to write it up in a tripartite contract tally and immediately report it up [to the County Court], just as with the household registers.

民欲先令相分田宅、奴婢、財物，鄉部嗇夫身聽其令，皆參辨券書之，輒上如戶籍。⁷¹

The will found in Zhu Ling's tomb shows, on the one hand, that women could enjoy economic rights comparable to men under the imperial laws, and on the other hand, that state power had penetrated into the economic life of a household. The government had to keep track of the changes of the financial situation of a household, which actually was the basic unit of the state taxation system.

IV Well/Storage Documents

The third category of excavated texts is those recovered from wells or storage pits in a local administrative area. The majority of these texts were original documents that were dropped in abandoned wells or storage pits as trash. Archaeological and textual evidence attest that the Qin and Han government would dispose of or discard documents that were considered no longer relevant to current business after a certain period of time. This was mainly due to the mounting pressure that the accumulated documents would put on storage and archiving capacities.⁷² Yet the reason(s) that the local officials chose (or were ordered) to drop the unwanted documents in abandoned wells or storage pits rather than to destroy them by fire, or to recycle them for other purposes, or to simply discard them in trash heaps as the Han soldiers did on the frontier, remain unclear.⁷³ One of the possible reasons might be the fear of causing uncontrollable fire when burning a considerable amount of bamboo or wooden documents. A Qin legal statute from the Shuihudi site states that no one is allowed to enter into archives and storehouses with fire. Other excavated texts also show that scribal officials in local government were ordered to take shifts to inspect the storehouses (possibly including archives) and make sure that there was no fire or water leaking.⁷⁴ Legal and administrative documents both attest that the government was well aware of the possibility of fire in certain areas of

⁷¹ Translation modified from Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015, 801.

⁷² Hsing 2011. By examining the documents excavated from an archive room (F23) at the Pochengzi 破城子 site, Wang Guihai 汪桂海 reasons that the duration of keeping documents in an archive was about 13 years. This number appears to be very close to that suggested by Song Shaohua 宋少華 who argues that the local administration of the Wu 吳 Kingdom (222–280 CE) would have to remove unwanted documents every 10 years (Wang 1999, 227–232; Song 2008, 261).

⁷³ A small number of the documents found in well no. 1 at Liye had apparently been burned. It remains a question why the officials did not burn all of them, but rather dropped them in an abandoned well.

⁷⁴ Ma 2018a.

buildings. In fact, the burning of a considerable amount of wooden documents resulting in a serious disaster is a not uncommon occurrence in history.⁷⁵

Regardless of the reason(s) for dropping unwanted documents in unused wells or storage pits, this practice appears to be a particular feature of the southern region, possibly due to ground water levels that allowed the opening of plenty of wells.⁷⁶ So far, almost all of the ‘well/storage documents’ have been found in Hunan Province.⁷⁷ In the city of Changsha, at least six groups of official documents, covering the periods from the Western Han to the Three Kingdoms (second century BCE–third century CE), were found in wells or storage pits in the office of Linxiang 臨湘 County.⁷⁸ Other discoveries in Hunan Province include the famous Qin archive found in well no. 1 at Liye; several groups of documents, dated from the late Warring States to the Three Kingdoms periods (third century BCE–third century CE), found in 11 wells at Tuzishan 兔子山;⁷⁹ and two groups of documents, separately dated to the Three Kingdoms and Western Jin (late third–early fourth century CE) periods, found in wells no. 4 and no. 10 at Suxianqiao 蘇仙橋.⁸⁰ The total number of texts in this category now amounts to more than 150,000 pieces (including the uninscribed slips and boards), possibly making it the largest of the three categories introduced in this chapter. The following will focus on introducing the local archives excavated from Liye and Changsha.

IV.1 Administering a Newly Conquered Qin Area: Evidence from the Liye Archive

As many scholars would admit, although the Qin (221–207 BCE) only lasted for 15 years in Chinese history, its influence is profound and incomparable. It created an

⁷⁵ In England in 1834, due to the pressure caused by the large quantity of wooden tally sticks accumulated in the tally room at the exchequer, the Lords of Treasury decided to have most of the tallies destroyed. The workers were supposed to burn the tallies in an iron stove in the House of Lords. However, eventually, the fire not only destroyed all the tallies as expected but also burned the House of Lords and nearby buildings to the ground (Baxter 1989, 81–2).

⁷⁶ According to Song Shaohua, the major excavator of the Zoumalou material, because of the sufficient ground water in the city of Changsha, even today, the residents will choose to open a new well rather than clear the dirt when the well water gets polluted. Yet he also added that archaeologists did not survey the level of ground water in Changsha. Personal communication with Song on August 10, 2011 at the Changsha Bamboo Slips Museum.

⁷⁷ The only exception is a group of about a hundred wooden slips excavated from well no. 264 in the palace of the Nanyue 南越 Kingdom, in the city of Guangzhou 廣州. Unlike those excavated from Hunan Province, the ‘well’ is actually a manhole (*shajing* 沙井) within a drainage system in the palace, Guangzhou shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al. 2006.

⁷⁸ Changsha shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2016, 5–7.

⁷⁹ The documents found in well no. 9 at Tuzishan have recently been announced in Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2016.

⁸⁰ Zheng et al. 2013.

unprecedented imperial system that was succeeded and modified by the following dynasties, which lasted until the early twentieth century. The 30,000 pieces of wooden slips and boards (about 17,000 inscribed with Chinese characters) excavated from well no. 1 at Liye, Hunan Province, open a window for us to look at how the Qin enforced their legal regulations in a newly conquered area (*xindi* 新地). Liye was under the control of the State of Chu 楚 during the Warring States period. One year before the Qin final unification, the Qin army conquered this area. During the Qin period, it was under the administration of Qianling County. The dating of the Liye documents (222–208 BCE) basically coincides with Qin rule in the area until the fall of the empire.⁸¹

The southwestern frontier of the Qin was not any safer than the northwestern frontier of the Han. Despite lacking a strong enemy such as Xiongnu, the old Chu area in southern China was always an unsecured area under Qin rule.⁸² This is attested by the mentions of ‘rebels’ (*fankou* 反寇) in the Liye documents.⁸³ In brief, these documents reveal the difficulties and problems that the Qin encountered while ruling Qianling County, which actually was an under-cultivated area and constantly struggled with the shortage of human resources.

As discussed earlier, the Qin intentionally prioritized agricultural production over other types of economic activities. Local officials were ordered to regularly report on the amount of land that had been cleared for farming to the higher authority.⁸⁴ However, a multi-slip document found at Liye reveals that while Qianling became a Qin county in 222 BCE, it was only in 218 BCE that responsible officials ordered ‘laborer-servants’ (*tuli* 徒隸) to cultivate the land:

Now, Qianling was made a county in the 25th year [of the reign of the First Emperor of Qin] (222 BCE) and its agricultural fields [started to be] cultivated in the 29th year (218 BCE). These fields should have been cultivated from the 26th year (221 BCE) through the 28th year (219 BCE), [Bailiff of] Convict Labor Yan and the others mistakenly did not order [laborer-servants] to cultivate them.

今遷陵廿五年為縣，廿九年田。廿六年盡廿八年當田，司空厭等失弗令田。

‘Laborer-servant’ is a general term that can refer to several types of forced laborers. The Liye archive preserves a number of documents titled ‘Account Book of Laborers’ (*tubu* 徒簿 or *zuotubu* 作徒簿) which show the assignments of various manual tasks to these laborer-servants.⁸⁵ One of the tasks was to be sent to the Office of the Agri-

⁸¹ For a brief introduction to the Liye material, see Yates 2012. For the Qin enforcement of laws in Qianling County, see Yates 2018.

⁸² The anti-Qin rebellions during the fall of the empire were mostly generated in the Chu area, Dull 1983.

⁸³ Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2017, for example, board no. 9–2287.

⁸⁴ Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2017, board no. 9–40.

⁸⁵ For the ‘Account Book of Laborers’ from Liye, see Korolkov 2015.

cultural Fields (*tianguan* 田官) to engage in agricultural production. This particular document shows that the land in Qianling County was still under-cultivated even though it had already been incorporated into Qin territory four years earlier.⁸⁶

Since more than half of the Liye material remains unpublished, we do not know if Qianling County maintained a system of agricultural garrisons or colonies like the one described in the Han frontier documents, but it clearly engaged soldiers in agricultural production. The Liye archive includes an enormous number of tallies (*quan* 券), which record the transfers of grain, money, and commodities between two or more parties.⁸⁷ Several of them record that garrison conscripts (*tunshu* 屯戍) received grain rations from the Office of the Agricultural Fields, which was the agency in charge of agricultural production in Qianling County.⁸⁸ Moreover, by submitting a formal request, local residents would be permitted to clear land for farming. A newly published Liye slip, however, suggests that the land in Qianling was not only under-cultivated but also underpopulated. The slip shows that a district in Qianling County lacked sufficient black-headed ones to cultivate its land.⁸⁹ This situation matches exactly the description that “the people are not sufficient for its land” (*ren bu cheng tu* 人不稱土) in the *Book of Lord Shang*, a collection of essays attributed to the reformer of the Qin State, Shang Yang 商鞅, during the reign of Duke Xiao 孝 (r. 361–338 BCE).⁹⁰

IV.2 Records on the Economic Development of Changsha

The documents excavated from the wells or storage pits in the city of Changsha can help reconstruct a historical chronology of the city's development. According to transmitted records, the jurisdiction of Changsha had undergone several changes from the third century BCE to the third century CE, but the location of the office of Linxiang County appears to be quite consistent throughout that period.⁹¹ Archaeological evidence also attests that the present Wuyi Square 五一廣場 and nearby area was probably the office of Linxiang County, where six groups of documents dated to different periods were found.⁹² Although there are gaps between the dating of these excavated texts, they represent the changes of the city from the mid-Western Han to the late Eastern Han to the Three Kingdoms period (tab. 2).

⁸⁶ For a translation and interpretation of this document, see Ma 2015.

⁸⁷ For a discussion on these tallies, see Ma 2017.

⁸⁸ Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2017, for example, slip no. 9–761.

⁸⁹ Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2017, slip no. 9–2119.

⁹⁰ Pines 2017, 266. For the management of human resources in Qianling County, see Ma 2015.

⁹¹ *Shiji* 6.239–40; *Hanshu* 1b.53; 5.141; 28b.1639; *Sanguozhi* 47.1119; 48.1177.

⁹² He 1998.

Tab. 2: Timeline of the historical changes of Changsha with the dating of excavated texts from Changsha.

Historical changes of Changsha from the third century BCE to third century CE as seen in transmitted records		Dating of the excavated texts from the wells or storage pits in Changsha	
221 BCE	The First Emperor of Qin unified the empire and made Changsha a commandery		
202 BCE	Emperor Gao 高 of Han enfeoffed Wu Rui 吳芮 as the King of Changsha and made Linxiang County the capital of the Kingdom		
157 BCE	Emperor Wen 文 of Han abolished Changsha Kingdom		
156 BCE	Emperor Jing 景 enfeoffed his son Liu Fa 劉發 as the King of Changsha. Linxiang County remained the capital of the Kingdom	125–120 BCE	About 2,000 bamboo and wooden slips and boards found in well no. 8 at Zoumalou 走馬樓
9 CE	Wang Mang 王莽 changed Changsha Kingdom to Tianman Commandery 填蠻郡 and Linxiang County to Fumu County 撫陸縣		
25 CE	Emperor Guangwu 光武 restored the Han Empire and reestablished Changsha Commandery.	90–112 CE	6,862 wooden and bamboo slips and boards found in storage pit no. 1 in Wuyi Square 五一廣場
		c. 106 CE	A few hundred wooden and bamboo slips and boards found in six wells in Kewen Building 科文大廈
		171–184 CE	426 wooden slips and boards found in well no. 7 at Dongpailou 東牌樓
		173–181 CE	257 wooden slips and boards found in nine wells at Shangdejie 尚德街
214 CE	Sun Quan 孫權 occupied Changsha Commandery.		
		220–237 CE	About 100,000 wooden and bamboo slips and boards found in well no. 22 at Zoumalou 走馬樓
229 CE	Sun Quan declared himself Emperor of Wu		
280 CE	The Conquest of the Wu Kingdom by the Western Jin		

As with the Liye material, the documents found in the wells or storage pits in Changsha were local archives before they were discarded and thus reveal the daily operation of the county administration. For example, the Wuyi Square material includes legal cases regarding the registration (*zhan* 占) of the ‘floating population’ (*liumin* 流民). One of these cases shows that, according to an imperial decree, the ‘floating population’ who did not want to return to their registered location were now allowed to reregister at the place where they were currently living, which fits well with the record in the *History of the Later Han* (*Hou Hanshu* 後漢書).⁹³ More intriguing are the Zoumalou Wu documents. Although these documents date to after the fall of the Han Empire, the taxation system recovered from them could be, at least in part, inherited from the southern region of the Eastern Han dynasty.⁹⁴ Scholars also suggest that the legal processes revealed in the Eastern Han excavated materials appear to be closer to those in the Zoumalou documents than in the Qin and early Han materials.⁹⁵ Parts of these six groups of texts are now being published gradually. Their full publication should be able to shed light on many economic issues, such as the financial administration, population, taxation, mobility, and resource management, of Linxiang County from the mid-Western Han to the Three Kingdoms period, which allows for a study of the *longue durée* economic history of Changsha.

V Concluding Remarks: The Materiality of Texts

This brief introduction could not fully explore the great value of the newly excavated texts as sources of economic history. One particular aspect that calls for attention is the materiality of texts. The major writing materials in early imperial China were bamboo and wood, which were made in different shapes, lengths, and widths to accommodate different needs. Treating these bamboo and wooden documents as objects rather than texts can further explore the economic messages recorded and conveyed through the material features of these documents. To name one example, the notches (*kechi* 刻齒) carved on the wooden tallies from Liye and Juyan served a similar function as the writing did.⁹⁶ These notches were shaped in different forms to represent different numbers (fig. 3).

As the tallies were to verify the transfers of money, grain, and commodities, the amount represented by the notches on a pair of tallies must match the one written on them. Therefore, as the producer and reader of these documents, scribes in the Qin and Han Empires needed not only to know how to use a writing brush (*bi* 筆)

⁹³ Changsha shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al. 2015, board no. CWJ1(1):85; *Hou Hanshu* 4.191.

⁹⁴ Ling 2015. So far, the only English introduction to these documents is Lu 2014.

⁹⁵ Xu 2015.

⁹⁶ Momiyama 2015, 17–61; Zhang, Okhawa, and Momiyama 2015, 53–69.

Fig. 3: ‘Notch languages’ (the shapes of notches) as seen on the Liye wooden tallies. (Adapted from Zhang, Okhawa, and Momiyama 2015, 54.) One *shi* = 20 liters; one *dou* = 2 liters.

to write Chinese characters on a wooden or bamboo document, but also to master a writing knife (*shudao* 書刀) to modify the material features, such as shapes, marks, notches and lines, to transmit information for administrative purposes.⁹⁷ In this regard, a thorough investigation of the messages hidden in the material features of the wooden and bamboo texts would certainly contribute to our understanding of the economic history of the early Chinese empires.

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