

Zeitschrift: Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft
Band: 63 (2009)
Heft: 4: The genius loci of Chinese manuscripts

Artikel: Is the Chuu Silk Manuscript a Chuu manuscript?
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147833>

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IS THE CHUU SILK MANUSCRIPT A CHUU MANUSCRIPT?

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Abstract

The Chuu Silk Manuscript, known to the scholarly community since the 1950s, was until the manuscript discoveries of the past three decades one of the few extant exemplars of pre-Hann Chinese manuscripts. Because it was found in the area of the ancient state of Chuu and is in its physical appearance and contents very distinctive, incorporating both text and illustrated quasi-human figures, it has traditionally been regarded as characteristic of the exotic cultural world of the Warring States period south, in contrast with the more conservative, orthodox and staid north. From the evidence of other manuscripts now known from the same general area of Chuu it is clear that neither the language nor the script of the Chuu Silk Manuscript are distinctively or unambiguously “Chuu”. And the unique physical appearance of the Chuu Silk Manuscript, precisely because it is unique, cannot be used as a basis for identifying it as “Chuu”. There is at present no objective evidence for identifying a distinct Chuu culture in the first place, and thus no basis for seeing the Chuu Silk Manuscript as in any meaningful sense a “Chuu manuscript”, except as a simple reference to its place of origin.

1. Delineating the Criteria

Prior to the rich finds of early Chinese manuscripts in recent years the so-called Chuu Silk Manuscript (hereafter CSM) was more or less in a class by itself as an extant exemplar of Warring States period Chinese manuscripts. The understanding that scholars had before the 1970s about the nature of Warring States and early Hann manuscripts, Chuu or otherwise, was singularly limited compared with what we now know thanks to three decades worth of silk and bamboo strip manuscript discoveries. When in the mid-twentieth century the CSM first came to the attention of the scholarly community and was made available for serious study it was seen to be constituted of an unfamiliar and strikingly unusual mix of text and illustrations.¹ The feature beyond all others that accounts for an unceasing fascination with the CSM is certainly its physical appearance,

1 The classic early work on the CSM in English is BARNARD, 1972–1973.

in particular its curious assortment of bizarre teratomorphic and quasi-humaniform figures arrayed on the manuscript's periphery.² (For representative examples see Figures 1–4.) As is now well known, the CSM is a kind of calendrical document consisting of three textual parts: two central passages written inversely with respect to each other and a series of twelve short passages, each associated with one of the twelve months of the year, written around the periphery of the manuscript such that one monthly passage is adjacent to one of the figures just mentioned.³ (See Figures 5-top and 5-bottom.)

The physical layout of the CSM overall takes a form reminiscent of the Hann period astronomical/astrological instrument known as the *shyh* 式, the so-called 'cosmic divination board' or 'cosmograph', and seems to require the user to rotate the document in a clockwise motion when using it.⁴ Lii Ling has called it a *twu shyh* 圖式, by which term he intends to reflect both the manuscript's similarity to the *shyh* proper and the co-occurrence of text and pictures on the same document.⁵ And indeed this is one of the most important features of the CSM; it is not just a text secondarily decorated with figures and pictures, but a single written document constituted of these two distinct, but linked, parts. Understanding the import of the manuscript depends on recognizing how the figures and the text implicate and complement each other. At present there is no way to know how the figures of the CSM might have been described or what they might have been called in contemporaneous texts, but calling them generically *twu* seems exactly right, given the specific understanding of the word *twu* not simply as 'diagram' or 'picture', but as 'proper position or array in a defined space', as Wolfgang Behr has recently proposed.⁶ This understanding of the word *twu* fits precisely with the highly structured visual layout of the CSM, which in turn suggests its comparability with the *shyh* 'cosmograph'.

2 Other illustrated manuscripts are known, to be sure, but none on the order of the CSM. Lii Ling points out that such works, combining text and illustrations, though now rarely extant, seem to have been widespread in pre-Hann and early Hann times. See Lii Ling, 1993:179–180; see also DOROFEEVA-LICHTMANN, 2004.

3 Among five decades worth of voluminous scholarship on the CSM Lii Ling, 1985, remains the best overall study of the text and its import. For an English translation (by Lii Ling and Constance A. Cook) and brief description of the textual parts of the CSM see the Appendix in COOK, 1999.

4 See DOROFEEVA-LICHTMANN, 2007:245.

5 Lii Ling, 1993:180.

6 BEHR, 2007.

1.1 *Locale and Date*

The CSM has come to be called the “Chuu Silk Manuscript” in English, and *Chuu bor shu* 楚帛書 in Chinese, for two reasons, one objectively simple and one subjectively traditional.⁷ It was discovered in a locale that was a part of the ancient state of Chuu and its physical material is silk; this is the objectively simple reason for calling it by the name “Chuu Silk Manuscript”. Beyond this, the CSM was, as we have said, unusual in its composition to the point of appearing in some respects “bizarre”. And the traditional cultural distinction between “North” and “South” in classical times shaped itself around a predisposition to treat the North, consisting chiefly of the geographically central states, known collectively as *Zhong gwo* 中國, as orthodox in contrast with a heterodox South, nominally identified chiefly with the ancient state of Chuu. Objects as “bizarre” as the CSM fell indisputably into the heterodox category and were thus associated with the South and in particular with the state of Chuu. This has led to a frequent inclination not only to identify the CSM as a “Chuu manuscript”, but also to invoke it as a distinctive textual (and pictorial) token of “Chuu culture”. The question that arises is to what extent, beyond the apparent place and date of its composition, is the CSM really a Chuu manuscript in any objective sense that contributes to an understanding of Warring States period Chuu language, literature, beliefs or any other aspect of what is generally called Chuu culture.

The label “Warring States period Chuu manuscript” has been applied to large numbers of bamboo strip and silk manuscripts that are known or thought to have been found in Warring States period tombs in the area around modern Charnghsha, no more than about 200 km south of *Yiing* 郢, the capital of the ancient state of Chuu. The first question at issue is whether having been found in a tomb dating from the Warring States period, in an area associated historically with the state of Chuu, is sufficient to justify the label “Chuu manuscript”. Clearly the answer could be considered no more than a matter of definition. We could simply define a “Chuu manuscript” as one that is found in a Warring States period Chuu site. And in fact we need not restrict the definition to manuscripts of the Warring States period; we could include the Hann or any other period when the state or region of Chuu was perceived as identifiably significant in some political, social or cultural sense. In the simplest terms, then, this is an entirely reasonable way to define a Chuu manuscript. As a starting point, we

7 The full name, often used in the Chinese literature for the CSM, is “Charnghsha Tzyy-dannkuh Janngwo Chuu borshu” 長沙子彈庫戰國楚帛書, reflecting the locale where the manuscript is said to have been found and the approximate date of its composition.

shall establish these two criteria, *locale* and *date* of composition, as the fundamental criteria for identifying a Chuu manuscript. By these criteria alone, we would say that to be a Chuu manuscript a manuscript must (a) come from the region or state of Chuu, specifically (b) from a time when Chuu was a meaningful political or cultural designation, not just the name of a particular geographical area. Clearly the CSM qualifies as a Chuu manuscript on the basis of these two criteria.

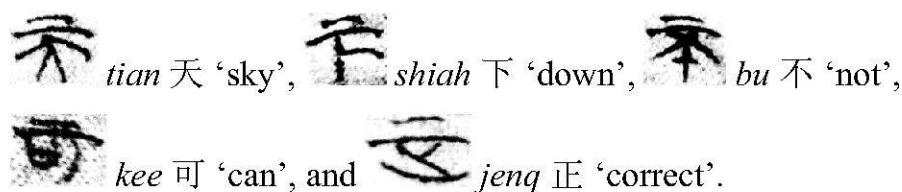
The requirement that a Chuu manuscript must come from Chuu would seem to be a *tertium non datur* criterion. A given manuscript either is or is not from Chuu; there is no third possibility.⁸ The second requirement, that it must originate from a time when Chuu was politically or culturally significant, is in a sense subordinate to the first and is somewhat subjective. Its pertinence to the definition of a Chuu manuscript will vary according to the ultimate focus or purpose of the study in question. Beyond these two basic criteria of locale and time of composition, the definition becomes a function of the purpose or focus at issue. If we are interested, for example, in the extent of manuscript production in Chuu, without any regard for what kind of manuscripts are included, then the locale and date criteria are likely sufficient. But when we ask further how a particular manuscript bears on our understanding of Chuu cultural history specifically, the locale and date alone are not very revealing. There would seem to be two additional sorts of criteria to which we might want to appeal in assessing a given manuscript, in this case the CSM, as a Chuu manuscript, viz., a second pair of criteria consisting in the pertinent philological data, i.e., the *language* and *script* of the manuscript, and a third central criterion, the manuscript's *content*. Beyond the twin criteria of locale and date the presumption is that to be meaningfully classed as a Chuu manuscript, a manuscript will be identifiable as such either by its language and script or by its content, or, ideally, by both.

8 It may not always be possible to determine with certainty whether or not a given manuscript is from Chuu, but that does not change the fact that the manuscript either is or is not, with no middle possibility. One could, of course, invent circumstances to contrive a kind of "middle possibility", for example, a native of Chuu writing in the north but remaining faithful to a Chuu literary or linguistic "style", but such artificial possibilities do not seem to me to alter the picture significantly, especially inasmuch as we as yet have no objective description of a Chuu literary or linguistic style in the first place.

1.2 Script

The language and script criteria are inherently less precisely determinable than the time and place criteria. Inevitably, we encounter an element of subjectivity in assessing these features as markers of a Chuu manuscript that we did not have to consider with the first two criteria. There is no doubt, of course, that the language and script of the CSM are both Chinese, but is the language distinctively a Chuu dialect, and is the script distinctively a Chuu orthography? These are not ‘black-and-white’, ‘yes-or-no’ questions.

The script of the CSM at first glance seems to share some of what have come to be identified as Chuu regional orthographic characteristics. For example, we find numerous examples of the distinctive “additional horizontal stroke” in characters such as



We also find some of the so-called “Chuu character variants” with which we have become familiar from the many Chuu bamboo strip manuscripts discovered and published in the last decade, for example 𠂔 for *jiang* 將 ‘lead, take’, 𠂔 for *pyng* 平 ‘even’ and 𠂔 for *suey* 歲 ‘year’. On the other hand, we find in the same CSM some cases of “common form” characters, i.e., non-Chuu characters, where other Chuu manuscripts have a distinctive “Chuu variant”, such as 命 (not 𠂔) for *minq* ‘fate’. These data in the aggregate suggest that the proper description of the CSM orthography would be “partly” or “to some extent” Chuu-like, but not in all respects conforming to what has been identified as Chuu writing elsewhere.

The larger problem is that, as far as I know, there has not yet been set out any objective, precise basis that is not circular on which to distinguish Chuu orthography from Warring States script overall. There are numerous good studies by first-rate palaeographers attempting to describe and delineate the Chuu writing system. Among the most important are those by Lii Yunn-fuh 李運富, Terng Ren-sheng 滕壬生, Lii Ling 李零, Hwang Shi-chyuan 黃錫全 and the late Her Lin-yih 何琳儀.⁹ Each of these in its own way tries to identify dis-

9 TERNG, 1995 (for “reading notes” [i.e., corrections] to this work see LII Ling, 1999:139–162); LII Yunn-fuh, 1997; HWANG, 1999:345–356; HER, 2003 (esp. 148–178).

tinctive features of Chuu script found in Chuu manuscripts, focusing on whole characters and on character components equally. And all of them are successful in providing valuable inventories of these features. But each is also to some extent circular in the following way: an orthographic feature found in a manuscript already classified as Chuu on the basis of locale that is different from what we are familiar with in the received orthography becomes *ipso facto* a marker of Chuu writing. This means in a nutshell that Chuu orthography is simply the orthography that we find in Chuu manuscripts that happens to be different from the common character forms of the received writing system. This is not an entirely unreasonable premise, but if we adopt it without any further qualifications or scrutiny, we cannot use the script of a manuscript itself as a criterion for deciding whether that manuscript is Chuu or not. The most that we can say in such cases is that the manuscript in question has non-standard orthographic features, but the criterion ‘non-standard’ refers to the received orthography of several centuries later and therefore does not constitute a meaningful basis for drawing any conclusion about the “Chuu-like” nature of the script. There is no recognized Warring States period standard against which to measure Chuu orthography or for that matter against which to judge the orthography of manuscripts from any other locale. In fact, what seems to be the case based on the empirical evidence of currently known excavated manuscripts is that the script of each of the five regions typically recognized for Warring States period writing (Yann 燕, Chyi 齊, Jinn 晉, Chyn 秦, and Chuu) was in some respects distinctive from the others, embodying both common and regional features, but the distinctions were never systematically or exclusively adhered to.¹⁰

1.3 Language

By the same token, exactly the same thing can be said *mutatis mutandis* for language that we said about the way script may or may not provide a meaningful criterion for identifying a Chuu manuscript. If we claim that a linguistic feature

10 The identification of these five regions as a basis for classifying Warring States period scripts, in particular the scripts of bronze inscriptions, we owe to Lii Shyue-chyn (Lii Shyue-chyn, 1959a, b, c). One anonymous reviewer of this paper has mentioned the possibility that the orthography seen in stone and bronze inscriptions (including coins) known independently by their content and archaeological provenience to be from Chuu might furnish a set of characteristic features that could change this picture somewhat. To be sure, this is an important further area for investigation much deserving of attention, but given the time and space limits of the present paper, it will have to be postponed.

found in a Chuu manuscript different from what we are familiar with in the standard form of the language is *ipso facto* a marker of the Chuu dialect, we again introduce the risk of circularity and end up not being able to use language or dialect as a criterion for determining whether a manuscript is or is not Chuu. Beyond this, as Wolfgang Behr showed in his paper presented at the workshop (“Dialects, diachrony, diglossia or all three? Tomb text glimpses into the language(s) of Chu”),¹¹ there are hardly any words that can be safely identified as Chuu (by glosses or explicit statements in received texts) in any event. This means that at our present state of knowledge there is very little basis for identifying any lexical items in any text as specifically Chuu, still less for identifying a presumed Chuu language. It is possible that the relative ease with which virtually all early manuscript texts so far discovered can be read “as Chinese” means that these texts were, for whatever reason, written in a kind of general sinitic *lingua franca* and that whatever genuinely Chuu language might have existed remains hidden from us.¹² There is no hard evidence to suggest this possibility, but should it prove to be the case, it will reduce the significance of the language criterion as I have invoked it here.

Each of the twelve short passages written around the periphery of the CSM comments on the lore associated with one of the months of the year and is matched to one of the twelve unusual figures. The names used in these passages for the months of the year are given in the left column of the following table. The right column gives the names of the months as registered in the *Eel yea* 爾雅, “Shyh tian” 釋天 section:

11 See the summaries of the workshop papers in the “Introduction” to the present volume by GASSMANN, p. 782 (fn. 5).

12 I owe this suggestion to an anonymous reviewer of this paper.

	CSM	爾雅, 月名
01	取	正月為陬
02	女	二月為如
03	秉	三月為病
04	余	四月為余
05	𪛗	五月為皋
06	虞	六月為且
07	倉	七月為相
08	臧	八月為壯
09	玄	九月為玄
10	易	十月為陽
11	姑	十一月為辜
12	𪛗 ¹³	十二月為涂

The CSM characters for numbers 04 and 09 are identical, and we can therefore presume so also are the intended month names; *yu* < ***la** and *shyuan* < ***gg^win**.¹⁴ The CSM-*Eel yea* pairs for 01, 02, 06, 10, 11 and 12 share what appear to be common phonophoric elements (取, 女, 且, 易, 古 and 余 respectively), and we can again safely presume that the intended month names are the same, but in these cases we cannot always say with certainty what the actual pronunciation of the name should be.¹⁵ The name for the eleventh month, for example, on the basis of the words written in the received writing system by the characters in these lists would be either *gu* < ***kka** (CSM) or *guu* < **kka-q** (*Eel yea*). The first month name might have been read *tzou* < ***ttso** or *jiu* < ***tso**, both attested readings for the graph 陬, but probably not *cheu* < ***tsho-q**, the reading for 取, because the conventions of the pre-Hann writing system would have allowed the character 取 to stand for any of these three readings, but we would not expect to see the less familiar, graphically marked character 陬 standing for the common

13 The name of the twelfth month occurs also written as 𪛗 elsewhere in the CSM.

14 Old Chinese forms are given according to the scheme set out in GASSMANN/BEHR, 2005.

15 The standard Middle Chinese rime dictionaries give transmitted readings for all of the characters in the *Eel yea* list, of course, but these readings are associated with the words that the characters stand for in general, rather than specifically with their use as month names. If we had no graphic variants for these names, we could simply adopt the transmitted readings by default, but the variants we find in the CSM mean that the precise readings of the characters as month names remain uncertain.

word *cheu* < ***tsho-q** ‘take’. On the same orthographic basis we might say that the second month name could in principle have been either *ru* < ***na** (如) or *neu* < ***nra-q** (女). But in this case we know from a large body of empirical data that the word *ru* < ***na** ‘to resemble’ is frequently written with the character 女, whereas the converse, writing the word *neu* < ***nra-q** ‘woman’ with the character 如 (here again, the graphically marked variant) is unknown. It seems reasonable therefore to conclude that the name of the second month is likelier to have been *ru* < ***na** than *neu* < ***nra-q**.

The characters for 03, 05, 07 and 08 are different from those of the *Eel yea* list. Of these, only 05 is unfamiliar; the others when looked at phonetically are easily understood as graphic variants of their counterparts in the *Eel yea* list:

- 03 秉 *biing* < ***prang-q** ‘handful’ 病 *binq* < ***prang-s** ‘to fall suddenly ill’,
 07 倉 *tsang* < ***s-hhrang** ‘granary’¹⁶ 相 *shiang* < ***s-tang** ‘respective(ly)’¹⁷
 08 臧 *tzang* < ***ddzang-s** ‘storehouse’¹⁸ 壯 *juang* < ***dzrang-s** ‘able-bodied’.

For these three cases we cannot determine the precise pronunciations of the month names in question from these data alone. The readings given in the list are for the various words that these characters typically write, unrelated to their use to write the names of the month. For the month names either of the two (or more) reading possibilities for each pair is in principle equally possible. In the commentary to this section of the *Eel yea* that is transmitted under the name of Guo Pwu 郭璞 (276–324) we find the following phonetic notes: (i) 病乎栢切, implying a MC *phrak*, the aspirated entering tone counterpart to *binq*, (ii) 相息

- 16 CSM 倉 *tsang* < ***s-hhrang** does not at first seem a particularly good phonetic match to the *Eel yea* 相 *shiang* < ***s-tang**. One possible explanation is that the OC ***s-hhrang** had already devolved to a late OC ***ttshang** (> Middle Chinese *tshang*) pronunciation, making the initial closer to that of ***s-tang** than the OC form suggests. A second possibility is that the OC for 相 *shiang* needs to be reconsidered.
- 17 The character 相 has a second reading, *shiang* < ***s-tang-s** ‘to inspect’. Based on phonetic similarity I have opted to match the CSM item with *shiang* < ***s-tang**, but this is uncertain. The *Eel yea* note attributed to Guo Pwu (cited below) gives a Middle Chinese reading that presupposes ***s-tang-s**.
- 18 The character 臧 stands for at least three different words, *tzang* < ***tsang** ‘good’, *tsarng* < ***ddzang** ‘to store’, and *tzang* < ***ddzang-s** ‘storehouse’. The last two are derivationally related ([verb] + *-s > [noun].) I have given *tzang* < ***ddzang-s** ‘storehouse’ as the preferred correspondence to the *Eel yea* character because it is phonetically the closest match.

亮反, i.e., MC *sjangH*. These additional phonetic data do not help a great deal in determining the actual pronunciation of the month names.¹⁹

The CSM name for month 05 is written 𪛗, a character not known in the standard, received writing system.²⁰ The corresponding character in the *Eel yea* list is 皋, which has two readings, *gau* < ***kku** and *jiow* < ***N-ku-q**, both in the *iou* 幽 *Shy jing* rime group. Phonetically this is a good match to the unfamiliar 𪛗 if we suppose that the 九 *jeou* < ***ku-q** component is its phonophoric. All the same, we are again unable to know with certainty from these data alone which of the two readings, *gau* < ***kku** or *jiow* < ***N-ku-q**, is proper for the name of month 05.²¹

The CSM (and *Eel yea*) month names probably appear to most of us as uncommon, perhaps unrecognized from our past reading experience, and we may suspect therefore that they may constitute distinctive lexical marks of a Chuu dialect. This by extension might justify labeling the CSM a Chuu manuscript on the basis of objective linguistic, in this case lexical, evidence. But, while these month names are, to be sure, uncommon terms, the fact that they are all registered in the *Eel yea*, one of the thirteen received classics, where they are never identified or associated explicitly with Chuu, coupled with the fact that most of them have at least one or two viable lexical attestations in such standard transmitted texts as the *Jou lii* 周禮, the *Shyy jih* 史記, the *Goan tzyy* 管子 and the *Gwo yeu* 國語, means that they cannot be regarded unambiguously as distinctly Chuu names. The first, 𪛗, is attested in the *Li sau*, a text that is traditionally associated with the state of Chuu. And the ninth, 𪛗, is found in a passage in the “Yueh yeu” 越語 section of the *Gwo yeu*. The ancient state of Yueh 越 is second only to Chuu as being representative of the “exotic South,” and the fact that this month name occurs in that section of the *Gwo yeu* is suggestive,

19 The *faan-chie* forms given in the Guo Pwu commentary (*juh* 注) may not have actually originated with Guo Pwu. While it is not impossible to find *faan-chie* data from as early as ca. AD 300, David Branner (personal communication, 25 December 2008) suggested that the mixing of X-Y 反 and X-Y 切 expressions of the basic formula in the same set of notes raises some doubt about their date. As early as Guo Pwu’s time, we would expect only the X-Y 反 formula.

The *Goang yunn* enters the character 𪛗 identified as the name of the third month as given in the *Eel yea* (爾雅云三月為𪛗) and lists it as homophonous with *biing* 秉 (廣韻 38, 梗韻). This would suggest that the transmitted *Eel yea* variant 𪛗 was also to be read as *biing*, i.e., *shaang sheng* 上聲, when it wrote the month name.

20 See LI Ling, 1985:102 and LI Shouu-kwei, 2003:532.

21 The reading *jeou* < ***ku-q** for 𪛗 is unlikely, since that would presuppose a third reading *jeou* < ***ku-q** for 皋, an implication for which there is no evidence.

just as the appearance of the name 陬 in the *Li sau* is. In both cases the texts have a circumstantial association with the south, specifically with the states of Yueh and Chuu. But whatever their origins might have been, in their transmitted versions neither text can be meaningfully identified as “Chuu” on the basis of any objective criteria apart from literary tradition, and we are therefore unable to invoke these slim lexical data as compelling evidence for a Chuu identity.²² Beyond this, based on their various occurrences in Hann period and later texts Rau Tzong-yi has identified the whole set as a record of Jou month names.²³

There is, by contrast, in fact a set of month names that seems to be genuinely Chuu, found to occur in the *Wanqshan* 望山 and *Baushan* 包山 manuscript materials. These same month names are also listed in the *Shueyhuudih* 睡虎地 bamboo strips from Yunmenq 雲夢 in a comparative table that explicitly labels them as the Chuu names of the months, matching them contrastively one-to-one with the Chyn names.²⁴

Shueyhuudih
睡虎地 strips:

七月 楚 十月	四月 楚 七月	正月 楚 刑夷	十月 楚 冬夕	秦楚月名對照表
八月 楚 嬰月	五月 楚 八月	二月 楚 夏尿	十一月 楚 屈夕	
九月 楚 獻馬	六月 楚 九月	三月 楚 紡月	十二月 楚 援夕	

22 The eighth, 壯, is attested in an eighth-century Tarnq stele, the *Ashyynah jong bei* 阿史那忠碑, dating from the time of the An Luh-shan rebellion. See BHH, 1935:21. Interesting as this is in its own right, it does not bear on the question of a Chuu origin for the name.

23 RAU, 1985.

24 TZENG, 1993.

Except for the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth Chuu months (which correspond to the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh Chyn months, respectively), these can reasonably be taken as specifically Chuu month names, and each is clearly distinct from the matching one identified in the table as the Chyn name. When a linguistic feature of a text is internally identified explicitly as “Chuu” in contrast either to a standard form known from received texts or to a form in a manuscript from another locale the problem of circularity that we mentioned earlier disappears. The curious fact here is that none of the names identified in this table as Chuu occurs in the CSM. While the presence in the CSM of such a set of lexical items as these month names, explicitly identified in a roughly contemporaneous manuscript as specifically Chuu terminology, would not be sufficient to demonstrate that the language of the manuscript was a Chuu dialect overall, it would certainly serve to show that the manuscript had a distinctively Chuu lexical flavor. As it happens, these Chuu month names do not appear in the CSM in spite of their apparent pertinence to the primary calendrical nature of the CSM itself, and their Chyn / *Eel yea* counterparts do. The general absence of identifiable Chuu words in a given manuscript may mean, as Behr suggested in his paper, that we simply do not yet know enough to spot Chuu vocabulary readily. But the specific absence of seemingly pertinent Chuu words, which we know from other sources to exist, is a mark of a very different and more compelling kind. If the CSM were a fundamentally Chuu manuscript, we might reasonably expect it to use known Chuu calendrical vocabulary ... and it does not.

1.4 Content

Dr. Dorofeeva-Lichtmann in her recent study of the “mapless mapping” of the *Shan hai jing* 山海經 has given for comparative purposes an excellent description of the CSM:

The spirits depicted on the manuscript represent a sort of zodiacal cycle [...]. Each spirit represents a month, and the accompanying textual passages elucidate the permitted or forbidden activities during the respective month. The spirits are arranged into groups of three – three spirits at each side of the frame. The spirit to the left on each side, according to the accompanying elucidation, “controls” (*si* 司) one of the four seasons [...]. Therefore a side of the manuscript [...] represents a season. Since the seasons correlate with the four cardinal points [of the compass, WGB], the arrangement of spirits and [...] the entire layout of the manuscript, are implicitly cardinally oriented. The arrangement of the twelve pictures of spirits is complemented by pictures of four trees, which [...] are not accompanied by textual passages. These four pictures are placed at the corners [...] as “separators” between

the seasons [...]. The set of pictures delineates a tempo-spatial scheme – [a] correlated structuring of time and space.

The main text placed in the center of the manuscript also deals with calendrical matters – the longer section concerns the year, the shorter the four seasons – considered in an astrological and cosmological context.²⁵

In discussing the ‘cosmic divination board’ or ‘cosmographic’ aspect of the CSM Dr. Dorofeeva-Lichtmann emphasizes that we should think of the manuscript as functional document, a kind of instrument, and as having had *users* rather than readers.

In the case of the Chu Silk Manuscript we have a rare example of a text that bears the clear stamp of a certain operational function. This text is characterized by an attribute that demands a certain action while reading it – rotating the manuscript or a circular movement by the reader or user around it, or a combination of these actions.²⁶

Two of the most important points that she underscores here are, first, the exegetic implications of the combination of text and figures as equal components of a single manuscript, and second, the related suggestion that the manuscript should be seen as a device calling for a certain action in connection with reading it, making the reader also a user.

As interesting and important as these considerations of the functions of the manuscript are, they are particular to the CSM as a unique document, and precisely because they tend to emphasize its unique characteristics, they do not bear on the question of whether it is a Chuu manuscript or not. For our purposes, we must ask to what extent the content conforms to anything we know independently to represent Chuu manuscripts, or more broadly, Chuu culture, in some meaningful way contrasted with other Warring States period manuscripts and Warring States period cultures, specifically or in general. For this we start with the observation that for all of its idiosyncratic and tantalizingly distinctive features, the CSM as a whole has a discernible twofold identity, neither part of which is exclusively associated with the ancient state or region of Chuu. The monthly admonitions portion of the text that appears written in evenly spaced blocks around the periphery of the manuscript puts it into the category that has come to be known generically as a *yueh ling* 月令 “monthly ordinances” type of document. As is well known, this is a widespread kind of text, having no appa-

25 DOROFEEVA-LICHTMANN, 2007:244.

26 DOROFEEVA-LICHTMANN, 2007:246.

rent special association with Chuu. It is well represented in transmitted texts, primarily by the “Yueh linq” section of the *Lii jih* 禮記 and its textual affines in the *Shyuntz* 荀子, the *Leu shyh chuen chiou* 呂氏春秋 and the *Goantz* 管子.²⁷ And the cosmic board or cosmographic structure of the manuscript is similarly a genre known widely from Hann period examples.²⁸ Because calendrical texts in general and cosmographs in particular are known from many locales and are not distinctively associated with Chuu, to the extent that the CSM can be classed as a kind of early cosmograph, it is not a manuscript peculiar to Chuu.

2. Summary

To sum up the nature of the CSM relative to the various criteria that we have set out, we find that on the basis of the simplest and most fundamental criteria, locale and date of composition, the CSM can legitimately be called a Chuu manuscript. Beyond this, one salient question remains, *viz.*, do Warring States period manuscripts found in the area of Chuu show as a group any set of features that might serve to define a manuscript as “Chuu” in useful contradistinction to other contemporaneous manuscripts from non-Chuu sites? In other words, are what we have come to call “Chuu manuscripts” representative or characteristic of anything about the ancient state of Chuu other than that they come from there?²⁹ And if so, is the CSM such a manuscript?

When we judge the CSM against the two philological criteria of language and script, in neither case is it objectively or distinctively identifiable as Chuu.

27 One of the most recently discovered examples of manuscripts representative of this genre is the wall-text titled *Jaw shu syh shyh yueh linq wuu shyh tyau* 詔書四時月令五十條 (“Proclamation of monthly ordinances for the four seasons in fifty articles”) written on the inside wall of what appears to have been an administrative building at a place called Shyuan-chyuanjyh 懸泉置, a Han period administrative outpost near Duenhwang in Gansuh province. A couple of the fifty articles of this text actually match admonitions registered in the monthly ordinances part of the CSM, such as in the summer months “do not initiate major tasks that will interfere with agricultural pursuits”, though this similarity is due to the fact that both texts reflect the same genre, not because of any direct textual affiliation. I am grateful to Dr. Charles Sanft (Institut für Sinologie, Universität Münster) for apprising me of this “wall manuscript” and its typical *yueh linq* form. See SANFT, forthcoming.

28 HARPER, 1978–1979.

29 The same thing applies *mutatis mutandis* to manuscripts from other locales and times, of course.

In fact, in a manuscript that deals in large part with calendrical matters, the absence of what are explicitly known from other manuscripts as Chuu names for the months gives rise to a strong disinclination to see this as a Chuu manuscript. And finally, when we look at it from the perspective of content we find that both its calendrical, *yueh ling*-like content and its cosmograph form alike are well known from many texts of widely disparate provenances. These features also fail to mark the CSM as distinctively Chuu in any unambiguous way. Looking from the opposite direction, so to speak, at those visual and layout features of the CSM that capture the greatest attention, we are compelled to see them as unique. And, as unique features, they cannot by definition define or indicate a type. To be sure, the CSM is an extraordinarily interesting and important manuscript, and it may well reveal much valuable information about Warring States period culture, in the South or otherwise. But at this point we are obliged to acknowledge that there is no objective basis for claiming that the CSM is representative of “Chuu culture” in any specific or precise way that contributes to our overall understanding of the ancient state of Chuu or that it can be usefully invoked in an effort to “define Chu”.

Figures

These figures are reproduced from the hand copies (originally in color) by Ts’ai Hsiu-wan and are taken from BARNARD, 1972–1973. They are much more vivid in their copied form than they are now on the CSM itself, and should be regarded as serving only to give a general approximation of the appearance of the figures in the original manuscript. Figure 5 is Ts’ai Hsiu-wan’s hand copy of the whole manuscript. Considerable progress has been made in transcribing and reading the text since this copy was produced. I am grateful to Dr. Barnard for kindly allowing these reproductions here.

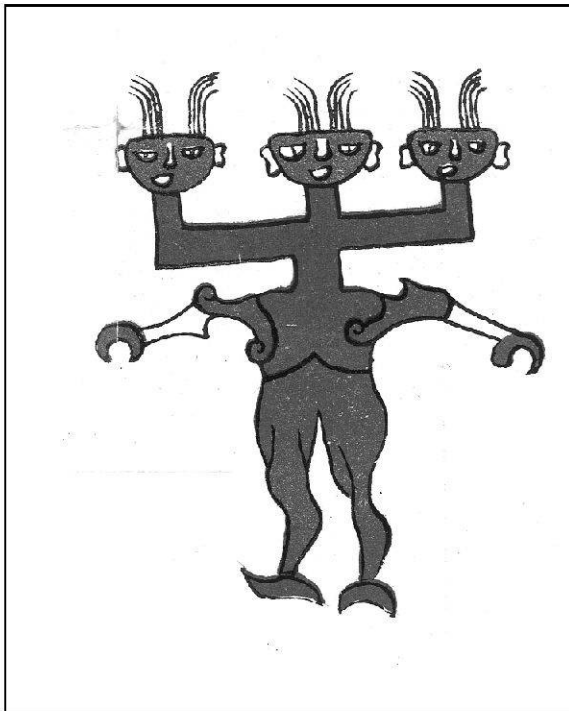


Figure 1: accompanying month five.

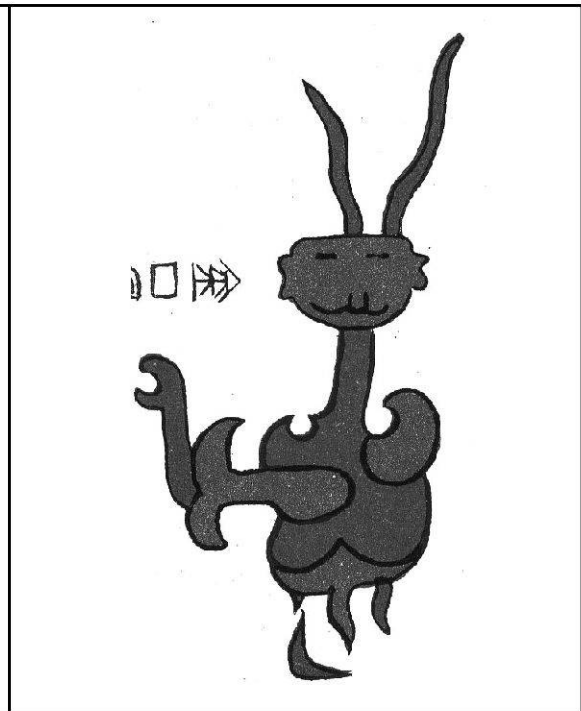


Figure 2: accompanying month seven.

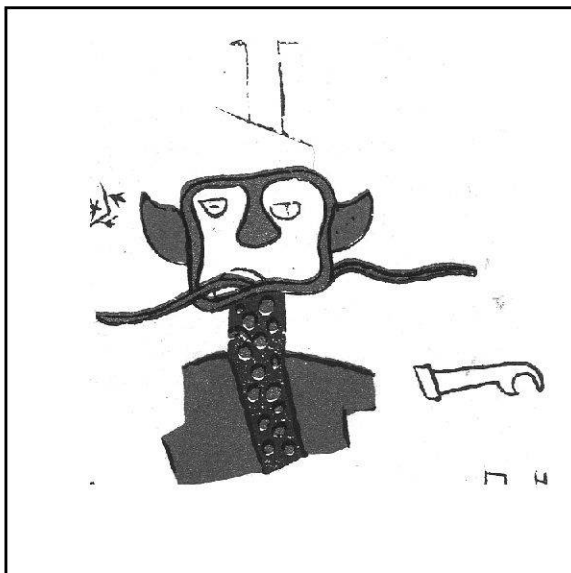


Figure 3: accompanying month twelve.

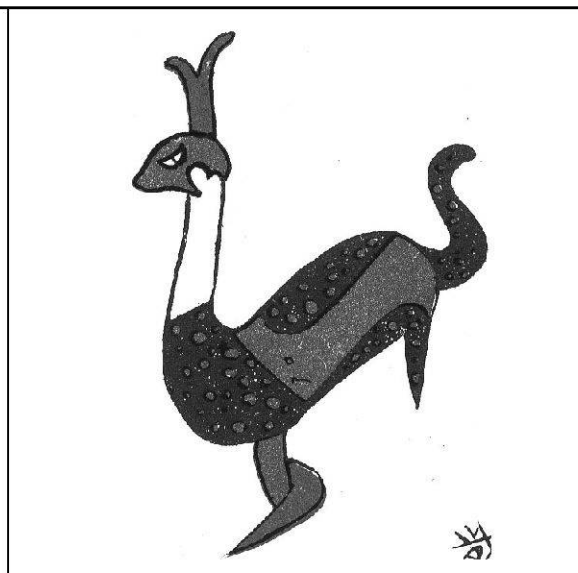


Figure 4: accompanying month ten.

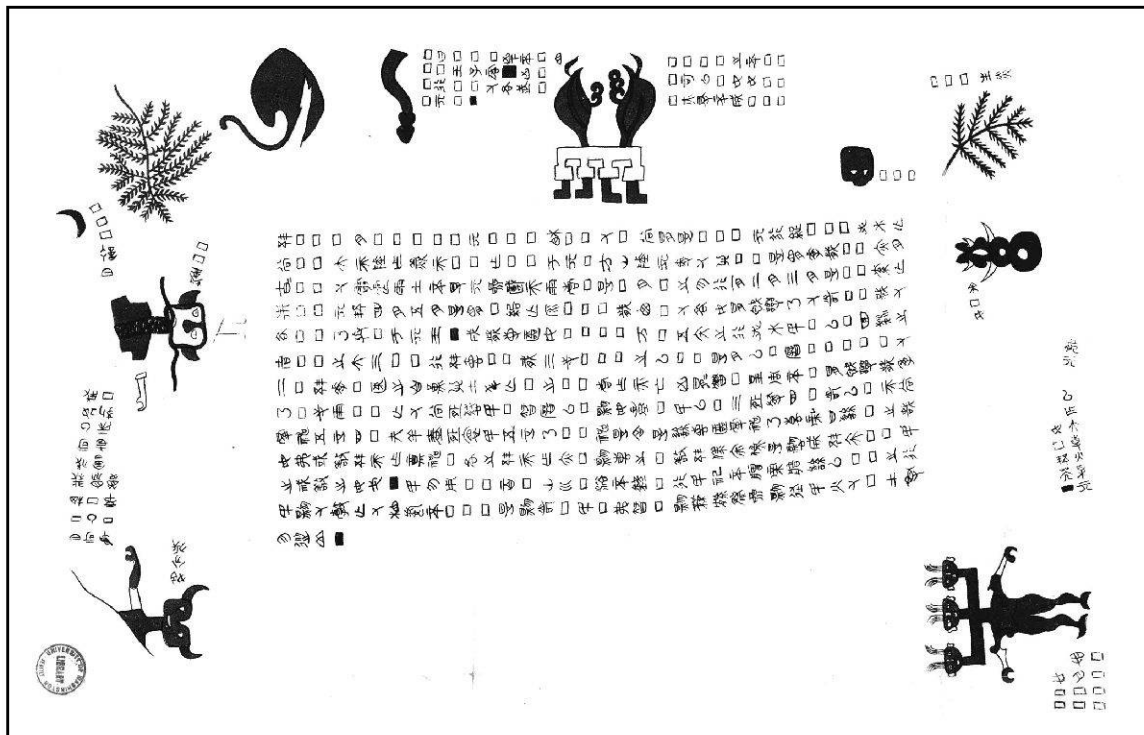


Figure 5: top.

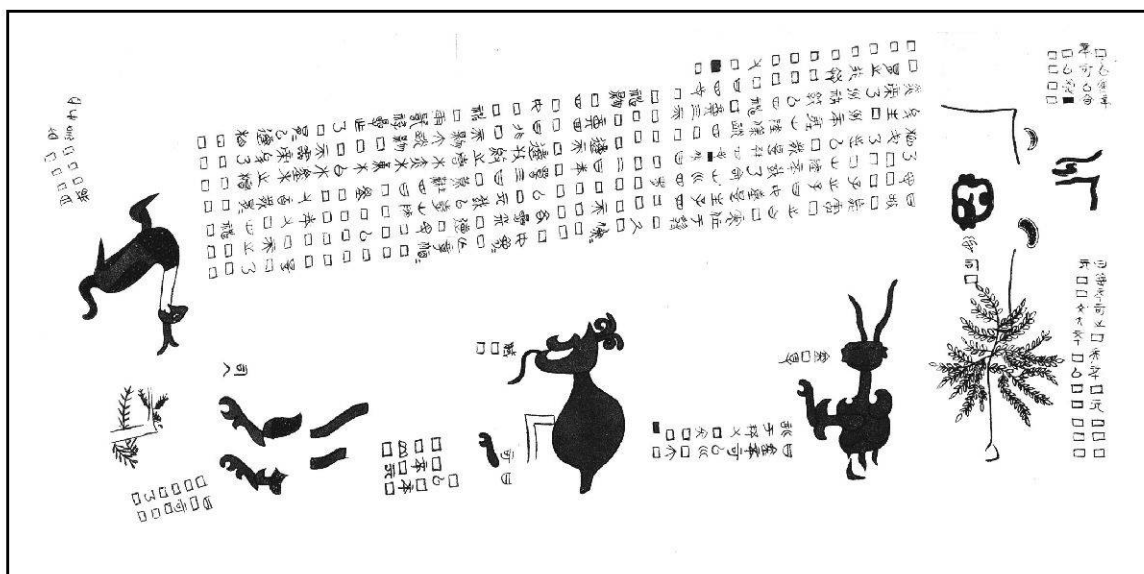


Figure 5: bottom.

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