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## **Conquer and govern: early Chinese military texts from the Yi Zhou shu by Robin McNeal [Book review]**

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Conquer and Govern: Early Chinese Military Texts from the *Yi Zhou shu*. By Robin McNeal. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012. Pp. viii, 246. \$48.00.)

A handful of early Chinese texts – among them Sunzi’s *Art of War* and the *Analects* of Confucius – are frequently translated and have attracted much attention from non-specialist audiences in the West. The subject of this book, the *Yi Zhou shu* (or “Remainder of the Zhou Documents”), does not belong to this select group. On the contrary, it is a work little studied even by specialists in the history of ancient Chinese thought. The *Yi Zhou shu* purports to be a collection of documents crafted by the sagely founders of the Zhou dynasty (active around 1045 BCE), but modern scholarship holds that all but a few of its 71 chapters were produced by unknown authors during the Warring States period (roughly 500 to 200 BCE). The general neglect of this text is not a recent development, but began centuries ago when traditional Confucian scholars, troubled by the mismatch between the virtuous reputation of the Zhou founders and the underhanded schemes that abound in the *Yi Zhou shu*, branded it a forgery.

McNeal’s aim is not to offer a comprehensive study of the *Yi Zhou shu*. Instead, he provides thoroughly annotated translations and focused analyses of its “military” chapters (6-10) in the hope of showing that the book’s contents shed light on important problems in early Chinese political thought and thus deserve more attention than they have received. Specifically, he is concerned with two issues: (1) the conceptualization of the *wen-wu* (“civil” and “military”) dyad, and (2) the Chinese idea of righteous war – that is, war waged to eliminate vicious or tyrannical rulers. Each of these is the subject of an introductory chapter that summarizes what is known about the development of the

concept from other sources, without reference to the *Yi Zhou shu*. Only then, in the second half of his book, does McNeal move on to present his translations and the conclusions that he draws from them. Through a highly technical analysis of their language (including pronouns, particles, and rhyme schemes), he concludes that these chapters date from the fourth or even the fifth century BCE and represent a relatively early stage in the development of thinking about righteous war and the civil-military dyad. At this point, he argues, they had not yet become part of a philosophical or textual tradition divorced from actual military practice, but may record oral formulas that were used in military training. The lesson these texts hammered home to their ancient audience was that both righteous war and the turn from armed force (*wu*) to conciliatory measures (*wen*) could serve the pragmatic purpose of facilitating conquest – and then consolidate it by winning the hearts and minds of the conquered.

McNeal's arguments about the date, purpose, and message of these chapters from the *Yi Zhou shu* are convincing, and he has done an important service by calling the attention of students of the intellectual and military history of early China to these long-neglected texts.

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