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## Tradition and History: Quebei, Sunshu Ao, and The Persistence of a Narrative

History is born as tradition, not  
built up from source materials.

*Paul Veyne*

**I**n October of 1984 the People's Government of Shouxian 壽縣 requested that Anfengtang 安豐塘, a reservoir south of the city of Shouxian, Anhui, and the adjacent Sunshu Ao 孫叔敖 Shrine (Sun Gong ci 孫公祠), be designated important provincial cultural-protection sites. The justification offered for this was that the reservoir, anciently known as Quebei 芍陂, had existed nearly 3,000 years and over the centuries had been celebrated by many eminent scholars such as Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086). Archeologists had discovered remnants of Later Han head gates and tools used by officials responsible for the reservoir. The request noted that the shrines and other historical structures associated with the reservoir had fallen into disrepair and been appropriated for other uses. In the interest of “continuation of the national cultural heritage, the collection and organization of Anfengtang relics, compilation of a history of Anfengtang, restoration of the Sunshu Ao Shrine, establishment of an Anfengtang water resources exhibit hall, responding to the policy of opening to the outside, and good management of the

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needs of tourism,” this report requested that the reservoir and shrine be placed under provincial and local cultural authorities.<sup>1</sup>

Designating a shrine as a cultural site and marking it for restoration and preservation is understandable, but according such a designation to a reservoir seems unusual. It differs from such sites as the Great Wall, Mogao Grottos at Dunhuang, or even the Dujiangyan irrigation complex in Sichuan, where remnants of the original system are visible. With Anfengtang, little inherent in the original reservoir remains. Dikes built to form the reservoir were constructed from earth that was carried away and replenished over the centuries; for that matter, the present dikes likely no longer occupy the sites of the original ones.<sup>2</sup> The answer to the question of why such designation was given this reservoir lies not in what the reservoir *is*, for in reality it is a modern reservoir sitting atop the probable site of an ancient predecessor. Rather, the answer lies in what Anfengtang was, and is, *thought to be*. The key then is not the physical substance of the reservoir but the founding narrative and the subnarratives that developed out of it.<sup>3</sup> It was those narratives more than any ancient physical ruins that earned Anfengtang its status as a National Important Cultural Property.

From at least the first century AD the reservoir has been thought to have been built by the eminent sixth century BC statesman Sunshu Ao near where the Fei 肥河 and Pi 涘河 Rivers entered the Huai and not far from the future site of Shouchun 壽春, the last capital of the state of Chu. But nothing is known about Quebei until near the end of the Former Han (206 BC–9 AD). Because of its strategic location, in the fighting attending the fall of the Later Han (25 AD–220 AD) and the subsequent tripartite division into the Three States, Quebei became a significant and contested source of logistic support, particularly for southern armies. Similarly, when China was divided between the Northern and Southern

<sup>1</sup> Shouxian renmin zhengfu 壽縣人民政府, “Anfengtang fucha baogao” 安豐塘復查報告, *Shouzheng* 壽政 184 (October 9, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> On the construction of the Quebei dikes, see William Gordon Crowell, “History and Tradition: The Origins of the Quebei Reservoir,” *TP* 98 (2012), pp. 349–84.

<sup>3</sup> Terms such as tradition, history, and narrative as used in this article can often overlap. Thus, it will be useful here to distinguish, to the extent possible, how these terms are employed in the following discussion. “Tradition” as used in the designation “Old Tradition” refers to the historically accepted view that attributes the origins of Quebei to Sunshu Ao. Terms such as “story” or “legend” refer to oral or written anecdotes from which the Old Tradition narrative has been constructed. “Narrative” is intended here to be a neutral term that should be understood in its more limited conventional sense of a coherent story rather than in the more technical manner in which it has been studied by such scholars as Hayden White. A particular narrative in one context might be a “tradition” to which people of differing backgrounds could share an emotional and cultural attachment, while in another context it might become an “historical account” that carries scholarly validation (whether or not it is accurate).

Dynasties from the third to the sixth centuries, Quebei and Shouchun assumed great strategic importance.<sup>4</sup> Little is known about Quebei under the Tang (618–906, but during the Southern Song (1129–1279) – when China was once more divided North and South – it and Shouchun again occupied positions of strategic consequence. With reunification of the empire under the Yuan (1291–1368), mention of the reservoir in the historical record became more frequent. With the Ming (1368–1644), locally produced records in the form of gazetteers and stela inscriptions appeared that recorded a struggle of another sort – that between “good officials” and aggrandizing locals over control of the reservoir and its associated resources. Rich and long as this history is, the crux of the reservoir’s designation as an important cultural site is the narrative of its creation. The traditional account of Quebei’s origins exists in several forms, but all are elaborations of a basic narrative founded on limited and doubtful sources. Contrary to what might be expected, this dearth of sources has facilitated development of the narrative, and there has always been a ready willingness to interpret extant sources to reinforce it. A close examination of these processes can offer insight into how the Chinese understand their past and how that past might have been employed in meeting social, political and psychological needs. What then are the nature and content of that narrative?

## THE OLD TRADITION

It will be convenient to begin with a summary of the traditionally recounted narrative – the “Old Tradition”<sup>5</sup> – that attributes creation of the Quebei reservoir to the noted Chu official Sunshu Ao<sup>6</sup> during the Spring and Autumn period (722–481 BC), and describes the history of the narrative’s development up through the Tang. While Quebei

<sup>4</sup> See Kong Weilian 孔為廉, “Bingjia bi zheng de Shouchun: lishi xingxiang de xingcheng yu zhuanbian” 兵家必爭的壽春，歷史形象的形成與轉變, *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 30.1 (2012.3), pp. 93–130.

<sup>15</sup> The distinction between “Old” and “New” traditions is by Sun Jianming 孫劍鳴, “Guanyu Quebei (Anfengtang) shijian shiqi de wenti” 關於芍陂(安豐塘)始建的問題, in Zhongguo shuili xuehui shuilishi yanjiuhui 中國水利學會水利史研究會, *Shuili dianli bu zhi Huai weiyuanhui* 水利電力部治淮委員會, *Anhuisheng shuili shizhi yanjiuhui* 安徽省水利史志研究會, eds., *Quebei shuilishi lunwenji* 芍陂水利史論文集 ([Hefei, Anhui]: [Anhui shuili ting], 1988; hereafter, *QBSLSLWJ*), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Although he is referred to as “Sunshu Ao” 孫叔敖, some sources say his surname (*shi* 氏) was 雋, his given name was Ao, and his appellation (*zi* 字) was Sunshu. There are other variations: see Xu Shaohua 徐少華, “Sunshu Ao guli fengdi kaoshu: jian lun ‘Chuxiang Sunshu Ao bei’ de zhenwei wenben shidai” 孫叔敖故里封地考述, 兼論“楚相孫叔敖碑”的真偽與文本時代, in idem, *Jing Chu lishi dili yu kaogu tanyan* 荆楚歷史地理與考古探研 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2010), pp. 165–80.

continued to play important economic and strategic roles down into modern times, by the Tang the basic elements of a narrative were in place. There is little information on its evolution after the Tang until the Ming dynasty, by which time the Old Tradition narrative of Sunshu Ao's connection to Quebei had become integrated with the traditional historiographical topoi of the "good official" (*liang li* 良吏), a development discussed in detail below. The Old Tradition narrative additionally was now playing a role in the struggle between officials and local elites, and its validity was affirmed by stelae erected at Quebei, by its inclusion in officially produced gazetteers for the Shouzhou region, and by the *Quebei Chronicle* 芍陂紀事 compiled by Xia Shangzhong 夏尙忠 in 1801. Devoted to Quebei, Xia's work gathered together the more important sources pertaining to the reservoir's past and became the fundamental source for later accounts of Quebei's history.<sup>7</sup>

The earliest sources for the Old Tradition narrative come from the Han dynasty and the following centuries. The earliest mention of Quebei by name is found in the Monograph on Geography of the *History of the Former Han*, where it is mentioned in two places. Both simply refer to it in connection with the Bi River 沘水: "Mt. Bi is the source of the Bi River, which flows north and enters Quebei."<sup>8</sup> "The Rugu River 如谿水 first receives the Bi and then flows northeast to Shouchun and enters Quebei."<sup>9</sup> Neither refers to Sunshu Ao in any capacity. He is first mentioned in connection with Quebei in the biography of the hydraulic expert Wang Jing 王景 in the *Han Chronicle of the Eastern Pavilion*, the compilation of which occurred over several periods during the Later Han.<sup>10</sup> There we read, "Wang Jing...was transferred to be

<sup>7</sup> Little is known about Xia, other than that he was probably from Shouzhou; his work *Quebei jishi* has received little critical examination; see Xia's preface, Xia Shangzhong 夏尙忠, *Quebei jishi* 芍陂紀事. (n.p.: Guangxu 3 (*ding chou*) [1877]; hereafter, *QBS*). For modern studies on Xia and *Quebei jishi*, see Li Sanmou 李三謀, "Quebei yu *Quebei jishi*" 芍陂與芍陂紀事, *Nongye kaogu* 農業考古 (2001.3), pp. 170-77, and Niu Zhongxun 鈕仲勳, "Xia Shangzhong di *Quebei jishi*" 夏尙忠的芍陂紀事, in *QBSLSWJ*, pp. 7-9.

Most important of the Shouzhou gazetteers produced during Ming and Qing were Li Yonglu 栗永祿, comp., *Jiajing Shouzhou zhi* 嘉靖壽州志 (n.p.: 1550; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai guji shudian, 1963); Xi Qi 席芑, Zhang Zhaoyang 張肇揚 et al. (Qing), comp., *Qianlong Shouzhou zhi* 乾隆壽州志 (n.p.: Qianlong 32 [1767]; rpt. Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1983); Zeng Dao-wei 曾道唯 et al. (Qing), comp., *Guangxu Shouzhou zhi* 光緒壽州志 (n.p., Guangxu 16 [1890], rpt. Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962; hereafter, *HS*) 28A, p. 1568.

<sup>9</sup> *HS* 28B, p. 1638.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Bielenstein and Michael Loewe, "Tung kuan Han ji," in Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), pp. 471-72. Wang's biography probably dates from the first half of the second century.

administrator of Lujiang 廬江. The people did not know how to plow with oxen. In the east [of the commandery] was the Quebei of Sunshu Ao.” This episode is also recorded in Wang’s biography in the *History of the Later Han* that was compiled by Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445):

The following year (83 AD) [Wang Jing] was transferred to be administrator of Lujiang. Previously the people did not know how to plow with oxen, resulting in the land’s not being fully exploited and food often being insufficient. On the commandery boundary were the Quebei rice fields.<sup>11</sup>

There is a passage in one earlier source, the *Huainanzi*, that has been understood as describing Sunshu Ao’s building of the Quebei reservoir:

Sunshu Ao breached the Qisi River, and watered the fields of Yulou. King Zhuang [of Chu] knew that he could be made chief minister. 孫叔敖決期思之水，而灌雩婁之野。莊王知其可以爲令尹也<sup>12</sup>

As we shall see, this passage is rather problematical, not least because it requires modifying 期思之水 “Qisi River” to Qisibei 期思陂 (“the Qisi reservoir”) and changing the verb in order to support the Old Tradition narrative.

The narrative is also found in later texts, some of which are known only from excerpts in collectanea compiled during the Tang and Song (960–1279) dynasties. Often they are simply a repetition or a variation of material from the *Huainanzi* and the *History of the Later Han*.<sup>13</sup> These later versions are particularly interesting because the modifications are evidence of the narrative’s influence on later understandings of the earliest texts. That is, possessed of an *idée fixe* that Sunshu Ao was responsible for Quebei, later writers were then led to interpret texts and passages to support – rather than evaluate – the traditional narrative. What follows is a conspectus of the essential traditional narrative; it

<sup>11</sup> Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965; hereafter, *HHS*) 76, p. 2466.

<sup>12</sup> *Huainan honglie jie* 淮南鴻烈解 (SKQS edn.; hereafter, *HHJ*) 18, pp. 19b–20a. The character translated here as “to water” 灌 in later times meant “to irrigate.” I am intentionally using a more neutral rendering for reasons that will be made clear, below. The possibility that the phrase 期思之水 might refer to more than one river in the Qisi area does not seem to have been considered by any of the participants in the debate. In any case, it probably would not have led any of them to alter their positions. I thank Howard L. Goodman for suggesting this possibility.

<sup>13</sup> *HHJ* 18, pp. 19b–20a; “Wang Jing zhuan” 王景傳, in *HHS* 76, p. 2466. Cf. Cho-yun Hsu, *Han Agriculture: The Formation of Early Chinese Agrarian Economy, 206 BC–AD 220*, ed. Jack L. Dull (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980), p. 254.

is drawn from the sources that are normally cited by the supporters of the Old Tradition narrative.<sup>14</sup>

Sunshu Ao lived in the state of Chu during the seventh century BC and hailed from Qisi 期思 in modern Huaibin 淮濱 county in the middle course of the Huai River. This had been the territory of the Western Zhou state of Jiang, which was absorbed by Chu in 617 BC. Sunshu Ao lived during the reign of King Zhuang 莊王 (r. 613–591 BC), a period that saw Chu's eastward expansion and internal power struggles. In the course of one such struggle, the revolt of the chief minister (*ling yin* 令尹) Dou Ziyue 鬬子越, Sunshu Ao's father Wei Jia 蔿賈 was killed. Sunshu Ao took his mother and fled the Chu capital. He went into hiding, where he supported himself by farming, an occupation that earned him the sobriquet "the rustic" (*biren* 鄙人). When he was about twenty-five or thirty, he undertook construction of China's earliest large reservoir. The reservoir was 224 *li* 里 in circumference and 100 *li* across, and it irrigated 10,000 *qing* 頃 (=46,000 hectares). The people greatly benefited from Sunshu Ao's reservoir, and his achievement gained him the attention of King Zhuang of Chu, who could see that Sun was qualified to be chief minister, the highest position in the Chu government. (According to some, Sun constructed the reservoir *after* he became chief minister.) As chief minister, he advised his king wisely and oversaw a sagely administration.

This, in brief, is the story of Sunshu Ao's role in the creation of the Quebei reservoir, much as it was known up into the mid-twentieth century and which is still widely believed.<sup>15</sup> Until the mid-1970s, it was

<sup>14</sup> HHJ 18, pp. 19b–20a; "Wang Jing zhuan" 王景傳, in Wu Shuping 吳樹平, annot., *Dong-guan Hanji jiaozhu* 東觀漢記校注 ([Zhengzhou shi]: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1987) 18, p. 774; HHS 76, p. 2466; Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (d. 527), *Shuijing zhu* 水經注, coll. Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805) (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1959 [?]) 32, p. 7a; Cui Shi 崔寔 (ca. 103–170), *Simin yueling* 四民月令, as cited in Du You 杜佑 (734–812), *Tong dian* 通典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988; hereafter, *TD*) 181, p. 4807; *Yilin* 意林 as cited in Chen Wenzhu 陳文燭 (*jinsi* 1550), *Tianzhong ji* 天中記 (Taipei: Wenyuan shuju, 1964) 10.50a; *Hua-Yi duijing tu* 華彝對境圖 as cited by Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230–1302), in Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956) 74, p. 2351; *Shouchun tujing* 壽春圖經 as cited in Li Fang 李昉 (925–996), *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1968; hereafter, *TPYL*) 72, pp. 7b–8a. This list of course does not exhaust sources mentioning Sunshu Ao, Quebei or even Sunshu Ao and Quebei, but these are the most commonly cited.

<sup>15</sup> Because of his putative role in constructing Quebei reservoir, Joseph Needham proclaimed, "Sunshu Ao therefore ranks as the most ancient historical figure among all the hydraulic engineers of China"; Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 4.3 *Civil Engineering and Nautics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 271. Needham gave the irrigated area as "eventually no less than 6,000,000 acres." Chi Ch'ao-ting wrote that the reservoir irrigated 40,000 *qing*, which would be about 2.25 million acres; Chi Ch'ao-ting, *Key Economic Areas in Chinese History* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936), pp. 66–67.

accepted pretty much without question. Then, in the autumn of 1974 the Minister of Water Resources and Electricity declared that each jurisdiction from the province down to the county level was to compile a history of a watershed, a reservoir and an irrigation system. In response, Anhui organized a team to research the history of Anfengtang (hereafter referred to as the “AFT history study group”).<sup>16</sup> For about two years this team conducted a thorough examination of the textual record and made field studies of the topography of the Anfengtang area and nearby places thought relevant to the question of Sunshu Ao’s role in the history of Quebei. Similar studies were undertaken by other jurisdictions; important for the present study was the one undertaken in nearby Gushi county 固始縣 by the Henan Provincial Water Resources Bureau’s Water Resources Development History Materials Group (hereafter, “the Henan group”). The ensuing reexamination of the sources raised questions about Sunshu Ao’s role and resulted in the appearance of a “new” interpretation of the origin of the Quebei reservoir.<sup>17</sup>

#### THE “NEW TRADITION” CHALLENGE

Although dubbed the “New Tradition” by Sun Jianming, unlike the “Old Tradition” this should not be considered a unified narrative but rather a set of alternative interpretations of the origins of Quebei. These interpretations derived from two sources. First was the work of the Henan group. They questioned the passage from the second century BC text of *Huainanzi* that proponents of the Old Tradition narrative had considered to be the oldest source supporting Sunshu Ao’s association with Quebei. But, as noted, the passage in question in fact does not mention Quebei. It merely states that Sunshu Ao had “breached the Qisi River and watered the fields of Yulou.” By the Tang, through a couple of permutations the excerpts were revised to say Sunshu Ao “made the Qisi reservoir” 作期思陂, and Qisibei was determined to be simply another name for Quebei.<sup>18</sup> The Henan group concluded

<sup>16</sup> Sun Jianming 孫劍鳴, “Fangwen Anhuisheng Shouxian Sun Jianming tongzhi guanyu Quebei wenti” 訪問安徽省壽縣孫劍鳴同志關於芍陂問題 (May 1, 1980). This a summary by the Revolutionary Committee of Shouxian of the author’s interview with Sun Jianming, who was a member of the team that included two persons from the faculties of Hefei gongye daxue and Huaiyuan shuili xuexiao, two from local bureaux of water resources and electric power, and two from Shouxian. I am grateful to the Shouxian Revolutionary Committee for arranging this interview and providing a detailed summary of Sun’s comments.

<sup>17</sup> This view has also been referred to as the “Warring States interpretation” in contrast to the Old Tradition narrative’s being the “Spring and Autumn interpretation.”

<sup>18</sup> *HHJ* 18, pp. 19b–20a; *TD* 181, p. 4807; Zhou, *Yilin yiwen*, p. 1a; Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 100), *Lun heng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, annot. Huang Hui 黃暉 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990; hereafter, *LH*) 13, p. 609. On the identification of these two reservoirs, see Xu Yisheng

that the identification was wrong and that the Qisi River referred to was in modern Gushi county, where ancient Qisi and Yulou had been. They eliminated – at least to their satisfaction – a topographical difficulty arising from Yulou’s being fifty meters higher than the Qisi River by excising the connective particle “*er* 而” and declaring that the passage described two distinct and separate actions: 1) breaching the river, and 2) watering the Yulou wilds.<sup>19</sup> This emendation, which is also found in quoted versions of this passage from the Tang and Song dynasties, seemed to solve the problem.<sup>20</sup> It was criticized by others, however, including the AFT history study group and was rejected by another proponent of the New Tradition, Professor Shi Quan 石泉,<sup>21</sup> a respected member of the history faculty at Wuhan University who had long studied the historical geography of Chu.<sup>22</sup>

Conflation of Quebei and Qisibei putatively began with the Later Han writer Cui Shi’s 崔寔 (ca. 103–170) *Monthly Ordinances of the Four Classes of People*, which is no longer extant but fragments of which are preserved in Du You’s 杜佑 (735–812) *Comprehensive Archive*.<sup>23</sup> Shi Quan

徐義生, “Guanyu Chu xiang Sunshu Ao de Qisibei he Quebei” 關於楚相孫叔敖的期思陂和芍陂, *Anhui daxue xuebao* 安徽大學學報 (1979.4), pp. 83–85; Wu Hairuo 吳海若, “Qisibei kao: Anfengtang de lilai” 期思陂考, 安豐塘的歷來, *Jiang Huai luntan* 江淮論壇 (1980.1), pp. 119–20; Guo Dewei 郭德維, “Ye tan Qisibei yu Quebei: jian yu Xu Yisheng, Wu Hairuo tongzhi shangque” 也談期思陂與芍陂, 兼與徐義生, 吳海若商榷, *Jiang Huai luntan* 江淮論壇 (1981.5), pp. 120–21; He Hao 何浩, *Chuguo de liang da shuili gongcheng: Qisibei yu Quebei kaolue* 楚國的兩大水利工程, 期思陂與芍陂考略, in idem, *Chu wenhua xintan* 楚文化新探 (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1981), pp. 122–25; Liu Yutang 劉玉堂, *Chuguo jingjishi* 楚國經濟史 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995), p. 68; Shi Quan 石泉, “Guanyu Quebei (Anfeng tang) han Qisi: Yulou guanqu (Qisibei) shijian wenti de yixie kanfa” 關於芍陂(安豐塘)和期思, 雩婁灌區(期思陂)始建問題的一些看法, in *QBSLSLWJ*, pp. 67–85; Yu Dehong 余德鴻, “Guanyu ‘Qisibei’zhi wo jian” 關於期思陂之我見, in *QBSLSLWJ*, pp. 44–53; and Zhu Gengyang 朱更揚, “Cong Qisibei shuoqi” 從期思陂說起, in *QBSLSLWJ*, pp. 50–53.

<sup>19</sup> *HHJ* 18, pp. 19b–20.

<sup>20</sup> *TD* 181, p. 4807; *TPYL* 72, pp. 7b–8a; Yue Shi 樂史 (930–1007), *Taiping huanyu ji* 太平寰宇記 (SKQS edn.) 129, pp. 7a–b.

<sup>21</sup> Sun, “Fangwen Anhuisheng Shouxian Sun Jianming tongzhi,” p. 2; Sun, “Guanyu Quebei (Anfengtang) shijian shiqi de wenti,” p. 13; Shi, “Guanyu Quebei (Anfeng tang) han Qisi,” pp. 68–70. The two reservoirs are distinguished by Liu Yutang 劉玉堂, “Chuguo shuili sheshi yu jianshe gaishuo” 楚國水利設施與建設概說, *Jingzhou shizhuan xuebao* 荊州師專學報 (1997.1), p. 68. Liu believes Qisibei to be China’s earliest example of a “societal” 社會性 hydraulic project. He distinguishes it from smaller water projects by individual families and says that Sunshu Ao adapted the technique from non-Han peoples of the South, who he says dammed up water to form paddies for rice.

<sup>22</sup> In 1976, Shi prepared two articles on the relationship between Qisibei and Quebei in response to the burgeoning debate. These were later variously reprinted, largely unrevised, in *QBSLSLWJ*, pp. 68–70, and in Shi Quan 石泉, *Gudai Jing-Chu dili xintan, xu ji* 古代荆楚地理新探, 續集 (Wuchang: Wuhandaxue chubanshe, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> *TD* 181, p. 4807. Attribution of this passage to the *Monthly Ordinances* is questionable since it does not conform to the form and content of that work. Eminent agricultural historian Shi Shenghan 石聲漢 did not include it in his reconstruction of the work; Shi Shenghan 石聲漢, *Simin yueling jiaozhu* 四民月令校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965).

offered a convincing description of how this conflation was likely caused by shifts in administrative boundaries that resulted in confusion over the location of Qisibei. The details of his argument need not concern us here other than to note that as a result Shi concluded the materials relating to Qisibei were irrelevant to the history of Quebei and determined that the two ought be disassociated.<sup>24</sup> Of greater importance to Shi for determining when and by whom Quebei might first have been constructed were the historical context of the Quebei area at the time Sunshu Ao was active, as well as a passage from a lost third-century AD compendium titled *Imperial Review* 皇覽. First, we consider the passage, and then turn to historical context.

The *Imperial Review* passage was excerpted in the commentary of Liu Zhao 劉昭 (fl. sixth century) to the Monograph on Administrative Geography included in Sima Biao's 司馬彪 (ca. 237–306) *Treatises on the Continued Han* 續漢志, which was subsequently appended to Fan Ye's *History of the Later Han*. The excerpt states, “The *Imperial Review* says, ‘The tomb of the Chu grandee Zisi 子思 is in the west of Shan district.... Zisi established the Quebei reservoir.’”<sup>25</sup> This has caused some consternation among those who believe that Quebei was the work of Sunshu Ao. Concerned to preserve the historicity of the traditional narrative, they have sought to explain it away by either asserting that “Zisi” is Sunshu Ao's appellative 字,<sup>26</sup> or by denigrating Liu Zhao's competence as a scholar and the *Imperial Review's* value as a source. Shi Quan, however, cautioned against simply rejecting the passage while acknowledging there are questions surrounding it. (For example, why was it not mentioned by Fan Ye in his *History of the Later Han* or, especially, in Li Daoyuan's 酈道元 [ca. 470–527] *Annotated Classic of Rivers*,

<sup>24</sup> Shi, “Guanyu Quebei (Anfeng tang) han Qisi,” p. 68, and “Gu Qisi: Yulou guan qu (Qisibei) zai jin Henansheng Gushi xian dongnanjing kaobian” 古期思, 雩婁灌區(期思陂)在今河南固始縣東南境考辨, in Shi, *Gudai Jing-Chu dili xintan*, pp. 32–49. This is also the position of Liu Yutang, who believes that Sunshu Ao was responsible for the Qisibei–Yulou project (though he does not explain what that might have been) and that he could not have built Quebei. Liu, “Chuguo shuili sheshi yu jianshe gaishuo,” pp. 67–72. See also, Xu Yisheng, “Guanyu Chuxiang Sunshu Ao de Qisibei he Quebei,” p. 85. More recently it has been suggested that Sunshu Ao undertook the Qisi/Yulou projects when he was a minor official in Qisi; these gave him the experience and recognition to become chief minister and undertake construction of Quebei. Li Keke 李可可, Wang Youku 王友奎, “Quebei chuangjian wenti zaitan” 芍陂創建問題再談, *Zhongguo shuili* 中國水利 (2011.10), p. 68.

<sup>25</sup> HHS 92, p. 3486.

<sup>26</sup> Those who believed that Zisi is Sunshu Ao's appellative include Quan Zuwang 全祖望 (1705–1755), *Quan Zuwang jiao Shuijing zhu gaoben hebian* 全祖望校水經注稿本合編, *Zhongguo gonggong tushuguan guji wenxian zhenben huikan* 中國公共圖書館古籍文獻珍本匯刊 (Beijing: Zhonghua quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 1996) 32, p. 6b; and Xi Chao 嵇超, “Wo guo zuizao de shuiku: Quebei” 我國最早的水庫, 芍陂, *Anhui ribao* 安徽日報, May 12, 1962, rpt. in *QBSLSLWJ*, pp. 61–66, 85.

since Li does cite the *Review* in other instances?) But, Shi also notes that the Sunshu Ao tradition is equally problematical. Although Sunshu Ao's name appears in several pre-Qin texts, not one mentions Quebei. The first works to associate Sunshu Ao definitely with the reservoir are Wang Jing's biographies in the *Han Chronicle of the Eastern Pavilion* and the *History of the Later Han*, but no other source adequately corroborates the assertion.<sup>27</sup> Later texts making the association are based either on Fan's history or are influenced by local tradition and the existence of a Sunshu Ao Shrine at Quebei. For example, the *Annotated Classic of Rivers* mentions the local attribution to Sunshu Ao, though the author Li Daoyuan may have considered it to be unattested.<sup>28</sup> One can find other scattered references suggesting the tradition was well established. In 450/451, when the Northern Wei Prince of Yongchang, Tuoba Ren 拓拔仁, moved out to attack Shouyang 壽陽 (that is, Shouchun), he reportedly garrisoned his army near the Sunshu Ao Shrine at Quebei.<sup>29</sup> A letter from the mid-sixth century mentions Quebei as the legacy of Sunshu Ao in a manner that suggests the story was well known.<sup>30</sup> And, when the late-Tang poet Fan Xun 樊珣 praised the officials who had developed Fengyan Lake 絳巖湖 southwest of Jurong 句容, east of present-day Nanjing, he evoked the name of the chancellor of Chu: "In the past Sunshu Ao's Quebei could expand the state of Chu," and he classed him with such luminaries of water resource development as Shi Qi 史起, Zheng Guo 鄭國, Bai Gong 白公, Shao Xinchun 召信臣 and Du Shi 杜詩.<sup>31</sup>

In Shi Quan's view, however, the Old Tradition narrative of Quebei's origins was seriously open to question. For him, in the absence of

<sup>27</sup> *HHS* 76, p. 2466. The earliest version is that found in Wang's biography in the *Han Chronicle of the Eastern Pavilion* (*Dongguan Hanji jiaozhu* 18, p. 774), which was a basic source for Fan Ye's later *History of the Later Han*. Although the *Han Chronicle* no longer is extant in whole, it has been reconstructed from fragments; the pertinent passage is preserved in Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558–638), comp., *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書鈔 (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1971 [1888]) 74, p. 5b.

<sup>28</sup> The pertinent passage in Li, *Shuijing zhu* 32, p. 7a, reads "[Quebei] is said to have been created by Sunshu Ao" 言楚相孫叔敖所造. Shi Quan understands this to mean that Li Daoyuan did not accept the attribution to Sun as proven. In response, Sun Jianming said that Li used the verb *yan* 言 merely to indicate that he was repeating without judgment what he had heard; Sun, "Guanyu Quebei (Anfengtang) shijian shiqi de wenti," p. 17. It is difficult to know what Li intended.

<sup>29</sup> Wei Shou 魏收 (506–572), *Wei shu* 魏書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 97, pp. 2139, 2156 n. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Li Yanshou 李延壽 (7th c.), *Nan shi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975) 64, p. 1564.

<sup>31</sup> Fan Xun 樊珣 (fl. 777), "Fengyan hu ji" 絳巖湖記, in *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Wuying dian edn., Qing Jiaqing 23 [1818]), 445, pp. 14a–15a. The achievements of Shi Qi, Zheng Guo and Bai Gong are described in *HS* 29, pp. 1677, 1678, 1685–86, Shao Xinchun's in *HS* 89, pp. 3641–42, and Du Shi's in *HHS* 31, p. 1094.

definite proof of Sunshu Ao's role in the founding of Quebei, historical context became crucial. The essential question was: Would conditions at the time have permitted Sunshu Ao's constructing a reservoir of the large dimensions attributed to Quebei? After a meticulous examination, Shi concluded that the historical context argued against the reservoir's being founded during the reign of King Zhuang, when Sunshu Ao was active. Shi – and others – pointed out that the region was still being contested with the state of Wu and that it was racked by uprisings of Shu statelets. Since Chu did not have firm control over the area, it would have been too unsettled for such an undertaking.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, Shi believed historical context did not exclude the Chu grandee Zisi. Although little is known about this person, Shi deduced he must have lived in Warring States times. More specifically, he believed that Zisi was probably active during the reign of King Qingxiang 頃襄王 (r. 299–263 BC), who was also known as King Zhuang. Shi noted that large numbers of people from Chu had moved eastward under this king in 278 BC, which could have provided the labor force necessary for such a project. This timing would have allowed 20–30 years for an increase in food production and improvement of economic circumstances that would have made possible the relocation of the Chu capital to Shouchun in 241. Shi conceded, however, that this interpretation suffered a lack of evidence. Moreover, he admitted his own limitations and said that the question needed to be scientifically examined by a hydraulic specialist. Until then, Shi concluded, both interpretations would remain within the realm of legend.<sup>33</sup>

Shi's second suggestion – the need for someone with water resources expertise to weigh in – was addressed with the publication of

<sup>32</sup> See Shi, "Guanyu Quebei (Anfeng tang) han Qisi," pp. 71–73; Xu, "Guanyu Chu xiang Sunshu Ao," p. 84; He Hao 何浩, "Chuguo shuili gongcheng: Qisibei kaobian" 楚國水利工程, 期思被考辯, *Wuhan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 武漢師範學院學報 (1981.2), pp. 123–25; Liu, "Chuguo shuili sheshi yu jianshe gaishuo," pp. 69; Xu Shichuan 徐士傳, "Sunshu Ao zao Quebei shi fuhui zhi tan" 孫叔敖造芍阪是附會之談, *Nongye kaogu* (1986.2), p. 182.

The argument regarding the uprisings of the Shu statelets is based on Xu Xusheng 徐旭生, *Zhongguo gushi de chuanshuo shidai* 中國古史的傳說時代 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1960) p. 181. Cf. Xu Shaohua, "Lun Chunqiu shiqi Chu ren zai Huai he liuyu ji Jiang Huai diqu de fazhan" 論春秋時期楚人在淮河流域及江淮地區的發展, in idem, *Jing Chu lishi dili yu kaogu tanyan*, pp. 124–54. Xu's study underscores the tenuous hold Chu had on the region between the Huai and the Yangtze and lends credence to Shi Quan's position.

<sup>33</sup> Shi, "Guanyu Quebei (Anfeng tang) han Qisi," p. 80. Shi's view regarding Zisi's role is largely repeated by He Hao 何浩, "Chuguo de liang da shuili gongcheng: Qisibei yu Quebei kaolue" 楚國的兩大水利工程, 期思陂與芍陂考略, in Hubei sheng shehui kexue yuan Lishi yanjiusuo 湖北省社會科學院歷史研究所編, *Chu wenhua xintan* 楚文化新探 (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1981), pp. 125–26.

In a note (pp. 84–85, n. 30), Shi mentions a passage from Zhao Yiqing 趙一清 (1709–1764), *Shuijingzhu shi* 水經注釋 ([Taipei]: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, [1983]) 32, p. 9a, citing Quan,

an article in early 1986 by Xu Shichuan 徐士傳 of the Water Resources Bureau of Huaiyin 淮陰, Jiangsu. Xu raised several objections to the Sunshu Ao narrative. Like Shi and others, he pointed to the paucity of sources, to the lateness of those that did exist, and to the instability of the area during Sunshu Ao's time. More importantly, Xu said, the needed technological level to construct such a reservoir was unavailable as early as the reign of King Zhuang. To store water and use it for irrigation required not only a dam of sufficient height but durable sluice gates to control the distribution. This would not have been easy and would have required knowledge of hydraulic principles plus suitable construction materials, tools and methods. Without these, Xu concluded, reservoir irrigation would not have been possible.<sup>34</sup>

Just when China developed the adjustable sluice gate is not known. While it might have existed as early as Han emperors Wen 文 (r. 179–157 BC) or Jing 景 (r. 156–141 BC), according to Xu its invention cannot be reliably pushed back to the Warring States, much less to the middle Spring and Autumn period. Moreover, had the Quebei reservoir already existed at the beginning of the sixth century BC, it surely would have been replicated elsewhere along the Huai River, where there were many other places suitable for such a project. But there is no evidence of such replication. Finally, Xu questioned other parts of the Sunshu Ao narrative: Would a “rustic” from Qisi have had the wherewithal to undertake such a project and – even more dubious – then have been selected to be chief minister of Chu because of it? Xu thought not.

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*Quan Zuwang jiao Shuijing zhu gaoben hebian* 32, p. 6b: “The *Hua Xia duijing tu* 華夏對境圖 (*sic!*) states, ‘Quebei is 224 *li* in circumference, and with Yangquan and Daye [reservoirs] were built by Zisi.’” 按華夏對境圖曰芍陂周二百二十四里與陽泉、大業並子思作。Quan appears to credit Zisi not only with Quebei but with two other reservoirs as well, which would strengthen the case for Zisi. But Shi Quan noted that the text quoted by Quan differs from the passage cited by Hu Sanxing in *Zizhi tongjian* 74, p. 2351, and said it required further study.

Supporters of the Old Tradition narrative such as noted water resources historian Zheng Zhaojing, on the other hand, criticized Quan Zuwang for not giving his source for the quote and for miscopying the title of the text, which correctly should be 華彝 (or 夷) 對境圖. But, examination of Quan's original text reveals that Quan correctly cited the *Hua Yi duijing tu* (presumably drawing on Hu Sanxing's note) followed by the *Imperial Review* passage from *HHS* 112, p. 3486. Zhao Yiqing apparently abridged Quan's note, or perhaps a copyist's error resulted in a line being dropped. Consequently a fragment from the *Imperial Review* passage about Zisi became attached to the *Hua Yi duijing tu* fragment to make the latter text seem to say that Zisi was responsible for all three reservoirs. Thus, in fact Quan Zuwang offered nothing new; the criticisms of Quan by Old Tradition scholars must be ignored. Ironically, Quan concluded that “Zisi” must have been Sunshu Ao's appellative, thus siding with the Old Tradition proponents. Quan, *Quan Zuwang jiao Shuijing zhu gaoben hebian* 32, p. 6b; Zheng Zhaojing 鄭肇經, *Zhongguo shuili shi* 中國水利史 (Shanghai: Shanghai shu dian, 1992 [1939]), p. 114.

<sup>34</sup> Xu, “Sunshu Ao zao Quebei shi fuhui zhi tan,” pp. 180–84. Cf. He, “Chuguo de liang da shuili gongcheng,” pp. 127–28.

Such an achievement would have provided a dramatic case for the sort of exemplary anecdote so popular in pre-Qin literature. But it is nowhere found there, despite numerous references to Sunshu Ao. The notion that Sunshu Ao began his governmental career as a hydraulic engineer, concludes Xu, is without basis. As for the *Huainanzi* passage often cited as evidence that Sunshu Ao had risen to prominence from building Qisibei/Quebei, Xu rejects the later emendation of the text from “Qisi River” to “Qisi Reservoir.” He claims that the verb *guan* 灌, which in later times meant “to irrigate,” during the Former Han meant simply “to water” or “to flood.” Thus, says Xu, when Sun “breached the Qisi River and flooded the fields of Yulou,” it was not a case of irrigation but, he says, a battle tactic employed against an enemy army; he points to several other clear examples from the Eastern Zhou described in language similar to that of the *Huainanzi*.<sup>35</sup>

Who then was responsible for the Quebei reservoir? Xu Shichuan thought that it may have been the illusive Zisi. He noted it had been suggested (by whom, he does not say) that Zisi lived after 278 BC, the year that Qin took the Chu capital of Ying 郢 in the Han River valley and King Qingxiang fled to Chen in the Huai River valley. Chu had withdrawn eastward, was weak and short of resources, and was focused on preserving itself. With loss of the rice-producing Yangzi River watershed, emphasis was on grain production in the Huai River region. Perhaps by the final years of Chu, Xu suggested, the sluice gate was invented, thus fulfilling the technological requirements for an irrigation project such as Quebei. But because Zisi was not well known and the scope of the irrigated area was limited, he went unmentioned in pre-Qin records.

#### THE “OLD TRADITION” RESPONSE

The appearance of the New Tradition interpretations lent an unanticipated urgency to the work of the AFT history study group. (Xu Shichuan’s article appeared after their work was complete, but they were probably aware of the ideas in it.) What had begun as a straightforward effort to assemble material and write the well-known history of the reservoir along the lines of the accepted tradition now became an effort to affirm that narrative’s validity. Sun Jianming 孫劍鳴, the leading local proponent of the Old Tradition narrative, responded directly to the Henan group’s report and to Shi Quan.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Xu, “Sunshu Ao zao Quebei shi fuhui zhi tan,” pp. 183–84.

<sup>36</sup> Sun, “Chuguo de liang da shuili gongcheng,” pp. 10–20; Sun, “Fangwen Anhuisheng

Regarding the Henan group's assertion (adopted by Shi Quan) that "Qisibei" mentioned in the *Huainanzi* passage was not Quebei but in fact an irrigation project in Gushixian, Sun Jianming said that there is no evidence there ever was a Qisibei. The notion that such a reservoir existed derived from Du You's taking a statement by Cui Shi and applying it to Anfengtang (the Tang name for Quebei).<sup>37</sup> The reason for this identification was that the *Xunzi* and the *Spring and Autumn of Mr. Lü* referred to Sunshu Ao as "a rustic from Qisi," which led some to conclude that Quebei had also been dubbed Qisibei to honor him. But, according to Sun Jianming, Sunshu Ao was not from Qisi, though he does not say where he was from. Moreover, he was not a "rustic" but a member of Chu nobility.<sup>38</sup> The Qisi story is further suspect because the topography would have made it difficult for the Yulou fields to have been irrigated from the Qisi River. (Sun Jianming naturally rejected the textual emendation that allowed the passage to refer to two separate projects.) Finally, Sun argued that the *Huainanzi* passage was in fact fabricated to illustrate the rhetorical point that someone like Sunshu Ao might rise to prominence through sheer merit.<sup>39</sup>

To counter the New Tradition, the AFT group decided it needed to resolve two questions: In which state – Chu, Wu or Cai – was Quebei initially located? This question was obviously important, because if it had not been in Chu, then Sunshu Ao would not have been re-

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Shouxian Sun Jianming tongzhi guanyu Quebei wenti." Judging from the syntax, a historical overview of Quebei attributed to the Anfengtang History Research Group also appears to have been written at least in part by Sun; see Anfengtang lishi yanjiu xiaozu 安豐塘歷史研究小組, "Gu tang Quebei" 古塘芍陂, in *QBSLSLW* 3, pp. 102–11.

<sup>37</sup> *TD* 181, p. 4807.

<sup>38</sup> Sun Jianming's interpretation is supported by Xu Shaohua's plausible explanation of the term *biren* as referring not to someone of lower social standing but to a person from an outlying place – i.e., not from the capital. Xu understands Qisi to be Sunshu Ao's father's appanage (*fengdi* 封地) some distance from the capital of Ying and considers the term to be a rhetorical indication that though Sunshu Ao rose to high office, he was not proud; Xu, "Sunshu Ao guli fengdi kaoshu," pp. 165–80.

<sup>39</sup> Sun's point is supported by a passage in Wang Chong's *Balanced Discussions* (*LH* 13, p. 609) that seems heretofore to have escaped notice. There, the anecdote is paired with another example of how an individual's early achievements could foreshadow later greatness. Wang was closely familiar with the *Huainanzi* and no doubt understood the original purpose of the reference; Harold D. Roth, *The Textual History of the Huai-nan Tzu* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Association for Asian Studies, 1992), p. 57. More recently, three scholars from Northwest Agricultural and Forest University in Xianyang, Shaanxi, have argued that the passage describes two distinct projects undertaken by Sunshu Ao, the first of which involved building dikes against flooding. Part of their argument is based on a low technological level that would not have permitted construction of a reservoir, especially given the amount of manpower required. Other than creative imaginations, they bring little new to the discussion; Wu Changcheng 吳長城, Qin Huajie 秦華杰, Guo Fengping 郭風平, "Sunshu Ao jue Qisi zhi shui er guan Yulou zhi ye zhengyi" 孫叔敖決期思之水而灌鄧婁之野爭議, *Nongye kaogu* (2009.4).

sponsible for it. Second, had Sunshu Ao indeed built the reservoir, as widely believed? As noted earlier, the revisionist view developed by the Henan Group had argued that the *Huainanzi* passage could not be construed to corroborate the conclusion that Sunshu Ao had the Quebei reservoir built.

An important argument against this assertion was that Chu had not controlled the Huainan region during Sunshu Ao's lifetime and would not for some time. But Sun Jianming countered this argument. First, he asserted that the Quebei area was not affected by the Shu rebellions that spread over most of the Huainan region at the end of the seventh century or by any threat from the state of Wu farther south. In any case, he says, the rebellions ended in 601 BC, and it was not until 594 that Wu moved into the area, which left an opening for construction of the reservoir. Even then, Wu was not strong enough to contest the area with Chu, and most of the fighting between them occurred farther south along the Yangtze. Sun's counter-argument, however, did not settle the matter, and subsequent supporters of the case for Sunshu Ao have worked hard to demonstrate that the region was under Chu's control during Sunshu Ao's time as though that were sufficient to prove his role.<sup>40</sup>

To counter those who claimed that the lull between the Shu rebellions and the intrusion of Wu (601–594 BC) offered too brief a window to have constructed Quebei reservoir, Sun Jianming argued that the work could have been completed fairly quickly. Anticipating Xu Shichuan's arguments on the lack of the necessary level of technological development, he asserted that because the reservoir took advantage of a

<sup>40</sup> In making this assertion, Sun Jianming also based himself on Xu Xusheng; see n. 32, above. Sun's position has subsequently been undercut by Xu Shaohua, who shows that Chu-Wu conflicts occurred much farther north than Sun thought; Xu, "Lun Chunqiu shiqi Chu ren zai Huai he liuyu," pp. 124–54. Examples of those who more recently have argued for the region's having been under Chu control during Sunshu Ao's time include Li and Wang, "Quebei chuangjian wenti zaitan," pp. 68–69, and Chen Lizhu 陳立柱, "Jiehe Chu jian chonglun Quebei de chuangshi yu dili wenti" 結合楚簡重論芍陂的創始與地理問題, *Anhui shifan daxue xuebao* 安徽師範大學學報 40.4 (2012.7), pp. 441–49. Chen creatively argues that the "Chiqie fields" 菑蕲之田 mentioned in Baoshan Chu strips of the 4th–3rd centuries BC encompassed Quebei and the surrounding area. He further asserts that the when the sounds of the graphs 菑 *chique* overlap the result is close to *que*, implying that *que* evolved from *chique*. Although the Baoshan strips date from the late Warring States, Chen believes it possible to trace existence of an extensive royal horse pastureland and associated irrigation in the Chiqie fields back to the late Spring and Autumn period. This would bring it close to the time of Sunshu Ao, which leads him to conclude that Sunshu Ao originated Quebei and that the notion it was the work of a late Warring States figure is untenable. His argument and his evidence are more complex than this summary might suggest but they remain circumstantial, speculative, and unconvincing. In fact, the Baoshan strips might just as well be interpreted as lending support to the case for Zisi, who probably lived during the Warring States period; see n. 84, below.

natural depression into which water flowed to form a lake, a high level of technology or expensive implements would not have been required. Still, he did not address the need for adjustable sluice gates and strong dikes to control distribution of the stored water.

To cement Sunshu Ao's connection to Quebei, Sun Jianming further sought to undermine the case made for Zisi described above by discrediting the third-century AD *Imperial Review* and casting doubt on the very existence of the person named Zisi. He approved of the view of a historian of water resources, Zhu Gengling 朱更翎, who declared the *Imperial Review* – the sole source for establishing the existence of Zisi – to be an inferior source to the *History of the Later Han*, which is the primary source for attributing Quebei to Sunshu Ao. Another proponent of the Old Tradition, Liu Hehui 劉和惠 of the Anhui Provincial Museum, rejected the possibility that “Zisi” was Sunshu Ao's appellative and concluded that the two men were not to be conflated.<sup>41</sup> To his credit, Sun Jianming was too erudite and scrupulous a scholar not to admit the weaknesses of his favored narrative. But he remained committed. Until there was more reliable evidence contradicting the accounts in the *History of the Later Han* and the *Annotated Classic of Rivers*, he concluded that “It seems we can only maintain the traditional explanation: ‘Quebei was built by the chief minister of Chu Sunshu Ao.’”<sup>42</sup>

Ultimately, the New Tradition and the debate it engendered had little impact on the Old Tradition narrative. Although the Old Tradition supporters have been able to demonstrate no more than a remote possibility that Sunshu Ao could have constructed Quebei, that narra-

<sup>41</sup> The approach of the proponents of the Old Tradition narrative to the Zisi material reveals much about their commitment to the Sunshu Ao narrative and the effects of that commitment on their methodology. They have sought to undermine the evidence by criticizing Liu Zhao 劉昭 (fl. 6th c. AD), the scholar who cited the Zisi passage from the *Imperial Review* in his commentary to the *Treatises on the Continued Han* or by questioning the value of the *Imperial Review* itself. But they clearly appreciate neither the comprehensiveness of the work nor the erudition of the men who compiled it, and they sometimes misrepresent the comments of premodern writers on the *Imperial Review* in their efforts to dismiss the case for Zisi. For the modern criticisms see Liu Hehui 劉和惠, “Sun Shu’ao shichuang Quebei kao” 孫叔敖始創芍陂考, *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社會科學戰線 2(1982), pp. 173–74; Sun, “Guanyu Quebei (Anfengtang) shijian shiqi de wenti,” p. 16; Zheng, *Zhongguo shuili shi*, p. 114; Zhu Gengling 朱更翎, “Anfengtang (Quebei) shiliao suoyuanji qi gongcheng yanbian” 安豐塘(芍陂)史料溯源及其工程演變, in *QBSLSLWJ*, pp. 86–101. For historian Shi Quan’s response to the criticisms, see Shi, “Guanyu Quebei (Anfengtang) han Qisi,” pp. 74–75. On the compilation and importance of the *Imperial Review*, which was the forerunner of such later compendia as the Song dynasty *Taiping yulan*, consult Lu Yaodong 遼耀東, *Wei Jin shixue di sixiang yu shehui jichu* 魏晉史學的思想與社會基礎 (Taipei: Dongda tushu gufen youxian gongsi, 2000), pp. 61–62.

<sup>42</sup> Sun Jianming, “Guanyu Quebei (Anfengtang) shijian shiqi de wenti,” pp. 15–18. This is also the view of Xu Jianqing, Deputy Director, Shouxian Museum, personal communication, 5/18/09, and Liu, “Sunshu Ao shichuang Quebei kao,” pp. 171–74.

tive remains the accepted version of the area's history. It might even be deemed "orthodox," given its appearance in public informational materials and its inclusion in Shouxian's application for designation as an important provincial cultural site.<sup>43</sup> The basic outline of the narrative, for instance, forms the basis of the Shouxian Museum's introduction to its Quebei exhibition, which states "Quebei...was built under the direction of Sunshu Ao, chief minister under King Zhuang of Chu, in about 605–597 BC."<sup>44</sup> (Strikingly, in an institution normally thought to be devoted to historical accuracy, there is no mention of the debate over the reservoir's origins or the possibility of the reservoir's being the work of someone else. The same is true of the 1995 *Anfengtang Gazetteer*, compiled by the Anhui Provincial Hydraulics Gazetteer Editorial Commission.)<sup>45</sup> And, it is not just in Shouxian or Anhui that the tradition remains accepted. More recent scholars of Chinese agricultural water resources not only have continued to repeat the assertion that Quebei dates from the sixth century BC and to attribute it to Sunshu Ao; they even believe that descriptions as late as Li Daoyuan's can tell us what the reservoir looked like then.<sup>46</sup>

Elsewhere, the traditional narrative has undergone even further elaborations; an example is the illustrated panels recounting Sunshu Ao's life that are found in the shrine dedicated to him beside the Anfengtang reservoir. The explanatory text on the panels expands on Sunshu Ao's biography found in the *Grand Scribe's Records* and other sources to describe his rise to chief minister under King Zhuang. Included are such details as the king's putative praise for Sunshu Ao's brilliance and – more importantly for us – Sunshu Ao's personal involvement in the planning and construction of the Quebei reservoir. Those two elements, however, are not found in any extant source. The version in the panels

<sup>43</sup> Shouxian renmin zhengfu, "Anfengtang fucha baogao," pp. 1–8.

<sup>44</sup> "Qianzai Quebei" 千載芍陂; the information plaque for the exhibit on Quebei in the Shouxian Museum, Shouxian, Anhui.

<sup>45</sup> The *Gazetteer* does list titles of papers presented at the 1984 conference on Quebei, including those supporting New Tradition interpretations, but it says nothing about the theory itself; Anhui sheng shuili zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 安徽省水利志編纂委員會, *Anfengtang zhi* 安豐塘志 (Hefei shi: Huangshan shushe, 1995; hereafter, *AFTZ*), pp. 125–26.

<sup>46</sup> Chen Shaohua 陳少華, "Chunqiu-Zhanguo shiqi jingcheng xizuo jishu de fasheng" 春秋戰國時期精耕細作的發生, in Zhang Fang 張芳 and Wang Siming 王思明, eds., *Zhongguo nongye kejishi* 中國農業科技史 (Beijing: Zhongguo nongye keji chubanshe, 2001) p. 88; Wang Jialun 汪家倫 and Zhang Fang 張芳, *Zhongguo nongtian shuili shi* 中國農田水利史 (Beijing: Nongye chubanshe, 1990) pp. 58–61; Li and Wang, "Quebei chuangujian wenti zaitan," pp. 67–70. The latter epitomizes the sloppy scholarship that has appeared on this subject. The authors attribute the text of the Later Han stela by Duan Guang (see nn. 90, 91, below) to Sima Qian's *Shiji*, and they consider descriptions in the *Zhouli* (3d c. BC) to reliably reflect the level of irrigation infrastructure from the Western Zhou through the Spring and Autumn period.

is pure fabrication, a work of hagiography well within the tradition of the development of the Sunshu Ao narrative.<sup>47</sup> Meager evidence has been creatively massaged and lacunae filled to further embellish a narrative already accepted by scholars and citizens.

#### THE “GOOD OFFICIAL” TRADITION

Fundamental to the Old Tradition narrative is the belief that the reservoir existed since Spring and Autumn times. But there is no proof of this, and indeed as I have shown elsewhere, there is a good case for dating Quebei, as a man-made reservoir, to no earlier than late Former Han.<sup>48</sup> This conclusion is based on a careful consideration of the state of hydraulic technology, political context, and the meager textual evidence that suggests that while Quebei may have existed earlier as a natural wetland or kettle lake, most likely it was not developed into a large reservoir until the mania for waterworks that followed the breach in the Yellow River dikes at a place called Huzi 瓠子 in 132 BC that was described by Sima Qian.<sup>49</sup> But if this is indeed the case, why did the Sunshu Ao narrative not only go unchallenged but continue to be accepted and repeated even by scholars and in official texts?

Whatever the reality of the creation of Quebei, by the middle of the Later Han it was deemed the work of Sunshu Ao. Some may have considered the narrative to belong to the realm of legend, but no one really questioned it until the 1970s. One reason, surely, was that as the reservoir grew in importance for the agricultural and economic fabric of the area, the Sunshu Ao tradition became a complement to another, later, set of narratives. Whereas the original Sunshu Ao narrative was largely legend, based on little evidence and focused on a heroic individual, the later narratives were well substantiated by historical sources and arose from the daily lives of the local residents. One of these, which can be termed the “strategic narrative,” was only tangentially linked to the Old Tradition narrative. It was concerned primarily with the strategic role of Shouchun, with which Quebei was closely associated. I have discussed this narrative elsewhere.<sup>50</sup> More important for the present study was the development of a narrative around various officials associated with Quebei over the course of its history.

<sup>47</sup> Sun Gong ci 孫公祠 (Sunshu Ao Shrine), illustrated panels nos. 7 and 8.

<sup>48</sup> Crowell, “History and Tradition.”

<sup>49</sup> Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BC), *Shi ji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972); hereafter, *SJ* 29, p. 1414; *HS* 29, p. 1684; Crowell, “History and Tradition,” p. 365.

<sup>50</sup> Kong, “Bingjia bi zheng de Shouchun,” pp. 93–130.

In the standard histories covering the Six Dynasties from the end of the Han to the beginning of the Sui (221 to 581 AD), mention of Quebei appears most often in connection with the almost constant warfare occurring among the Three States and subsequently during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Throughout this period the reservoir was difficult to maintain. Beginning with Liu Fu 劉馥, inspector of Yang province who was ordered by Cao Cao 曹操 in 209 to expand agricultural colonies (*tuntian* 屯田) and develop and operate Quebei and several nearby irrigation complexes,<sup>51</sup> a series of officers under succeeding dynasties were charged with restoring the reservoir and establishing agricultural colonies, to support campaigns to retake the north or defend against an invasion of the south. Wei official Deng Ai 鄧艾 in 243 repaired Quebei and established agricultural colonies to supply the campaigns against Wu.<sup>52</sup> For a campaign against the Later Yan state that took place in 410, General of Chariots and Cavalry Liu Yu 劉裕 dispatched Mao Xiuzhi 毛脩之 to “restore” Quebei; as a result, the reservoir reportedly irrigated “several thousand *qing*.”<sup>53</sup> Mao’s repairs to the irrigation complex apparently did not last much beyond Liu Yu’s immediate needs. By 430, the regional inspector of Yu province, General Liu Yixin 劉義欣, whose seat was at Shouyang (Shouchun), reported that the dikes were in disrepair and the feeder canals had become blocked by silt and trees.<sup>54</sup> In 480 Southern Qi emperor Gaodi 高帝 (r. 479–482) ordered Huan Chongzu 桓崇祖 to rebuild Quebei.<sup>55</sup> In Autumn 523, an illustrious official of the Liang dynasty (502–557), Pei Sui 裴邃, initiated repair work on Quebei in preparation for a major campaign against the north the following year.<sup>56</sup>

While the foregoing efforts were driven largely by military considerations, a somewhat different purpose motivated the efforts of Liu Song 劉頌 during the Western Jin and Zhao Gui 趙軌 of the Sui. When

<sup>51</sup> Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–297), *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959) 1, p. 32; 15, p. 463; Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578–648), *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 26, p. 784; *Zizhi tongjian* 58, p. 2098; Jin Jianian 金家年, “Lun Cao Wei Jiang-Huai tuntian yu shuili jianshe” 論曹魏江淮屯田與水利建設 (1994.4), p. 87; Han Guopan 韓國磐, “Wei Jin Nan-Bei chao shi de Quebei tun he Shibie tun” 魏晉南北朝時的芍陂屯和石陂屯, *Anhui shixue tongxun* 安徽史學通訊 11 (1959.3), p. 55.

<sup>52</sup> *Sanguo zhi* 28, pp. 775–76; *Jin shu* 26, pp. 785–86; Lien-sheng Yang, “Notes on the Economic History of the Chin Dynasty,” in idem, *Studies in Chinese Institutional History*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies 20 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 167–70.

<sup>53</sup> Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513), *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 48, p. 1429.

<sup>54</sup> *Song shu* 51, p. 1465; *TD* 12, p. 38.

<sup>55</sup> Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 (489–537), *Nan Qi shu* 南齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 2, p. 36, 25, pp. 463, 476.

<sup>56</sup> Yao Silian 姚思廉 (557–637), *Liang shu* 梁書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973) 28, p. 415.

Liu Song was appointed chancellor of Huainan late in the 3rd century AD, he found that past maintenance of Quebei had annually involved “several tens of thousands of people” and powerful families had been monopolizing the land while the poor lost their livelihoods. Liu caused wealthy and poor to work together in maintaining the irrigation complex and compensated them according to what they had accomplished.<sup>57</sup> Then in 590, following unification of the empire and establishment of the Sui dynasty, the reservoir had once again declined and its original five sluice gates had fallen into disrepair. When Zhao Gui was newly appointed Aide to the Shouzhou Area Commander, he organized local residents and opened thirty-six sluice gates, irrigating some 5000 *qing*.<sup>58</sup> Liu and Zhao, both of whose work was aimed at promoting local welfare and agriculture, would be joined with those who had developed the reservoir for strategic purposes to form a pantheon of great men in the history of Quebei.

Over time, the examples of these officials became integrated with the Old Tradition narrative about Sunshu Ao to reflect the traditional historiographical topos of the “good official.” This topos incorporates two elements that are particularly relevant here: the official who helps a starving or underfed population by distributing relief and increasing production, and the official who counters the efforts of local magnates to monopolize productive resources, including land and water. These are part of a well-worn theme found throughout Chinese history describing the competition between central government officials and local magnates for control of the productive power of the land and the peasantry. Famine-struck peasants were easily taken advantage of by powerful neighbors, who might seize their land and force them into an exploitive relationship. For the government, this meant a loss of revenue and manpower. Government officers who combatted such developments by helping the peasantry in times of distress and defending them against the depredations of aggrandizing local elites could be held up as models. To recognize these men and to promote them as exemplars, beginning with the *Grand Scribe’s Records* of Sima Qian, the standard histories collected biographies of the more outstanding men into chapters devoted to those deemed “reasonable officials” *xun li* 循吏 or “good officials.” Significantly, Sima Qian placed Sunshu Ao at the head of his “Biographies of Reasonable Officials.”<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Jin shu* 46, p. 1294.

<sup>58</sup> Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643), *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973) 73, p. 1678; Li Yanshou 李延壽 (7th c.), *Bei shi* 北史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 58, p. 2418.

<sup>59</sup> *SJ* 119, p. 3099–100; trans. Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dy-*

At Quebei, the struggle between the peasantry and the powerful and wealthy local families was over the resources deriving from the reservoir.<sup>60</sup> In this competition, officials representing the central government sided with the peasantry.<sup>61</sup> For them, the issue was simple: If the reservoir and the associated irrigation complex were operating at full capacity, the surrounding countryside and its population would be settled and productive, providing stable sources of tax revenue and manpower for the government. But this of course meant sharing the water, which in periods of drought not everyone wanted to do – especially those who had the capacity to monopolize it. Moreover, the reservoir waters covered some very rich soil that had been deposited by the silt-laden streams and feeder canals. The reservoir, particularly the southern end of it, was comparatively shallow and local magnates would partially drain it to expose land to be cultivated.<sup>62</sup> It is not surprising that they would take advantage of any weakening of government control over Quebei to arrogate water and land for themselves.

Although we have no Han-era accounts of powerful families monopolizing the Quebei reservoir, given what we know of the general prevalence of social conflict at that time, the problem surely existed. From the last years of the Han to the Tang, the regular presence of military and civilian agricultural colonies at Quebei probably discouraged such aggrandizement. But it could happen. For example, Pei Zhiheng 裴之橫, nephew of Pei Sui, led several hundred of his thralls to Quebei, where he developed fields and villas on a large scale and amassed great wealth.<sup>63</sup>

During the late Tang, when famine struck the region, powerful families reportedly cut off water to the reservoir, and occupied and

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*nasty II*, rev. edn. (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), pp. 373–75; William H. Nienhauser, Jr., “A Re-Examination of ‘The Biographies of Reasonable Officials’ in the *Records of the Grand Historian*,” *Early China* 16 (1991), pp. 216–22. Many of the standard histories – including *Shi ji*, *Han shu*, and *Hou Han shu* – had chapters for “reasonable officials” while some, such as *Jin shu* and others, had chapters for “good officials.”

<sup>60</sup> The core elements of this general narrative are aptly summarized for another reservoir in Eduard B. Vermeer, “The Rise and Fall of a Man-Made Lake: Training Lake in Jiangnan China, 300–2000 AD,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 51 (2008), pp. 210–11.

<sup>61</sup> Functionaries and officials drawn from the local elite of course often worked in the interests of local magnates.

<sup>62</sup> See Christian Lamaroux, “Les contradictions d’un système hydraulique: L’exemple du bassin de la Huai sous les Song du Nord,” *TP* 75 (1989), pp. 156–58.

<sup>63</sup> *Liang shu* 28, p. 417. I understand “thralls” 僮屬 to refer to 僮客 and 僮隸; see Tang Changru, “Clients and Bound Retainers in the Six Dynasties Period,” in Albert E. Dien, ed., *State and Society in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), pp. 112–13, 126.

tilled the exposed land.<sup>64</sup> Early in the reign of Song emperor Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1023–1063), local magnates appropriated fertile land within the reservoir to cultivate. Whenever heavy rains threatened to raise the water level and flood their fields, they would breach the dikes.<sup>65</sup> Although a dedicated official put an end to the practice and restored the dikes, a few years later they once more had to be repaired. An official named Zhang Zhi 張旨 had been appointed prefect of Anfeng to deal with a severe famine in 1032–33. In addition to distributing relief grain obtained from the wealthy, he repaired the Quebei dikes.<sup>66</sup> When he visited Quebei some years later, Wang Anshi 王安石 was inspired to commemorate Zhang's efforts in a poem in which he made a link to Sunshu Ao.<sup>67</sup> About midway through the subsequent Yuan dynasty, an imperial order of 1305 declared that local magnates who had seized agricultural-colony fields would be allowed to pay rent rather than be expelled, an indication that effective control was in their hands.<sup>68</sup>

It was not until the Ming that the Quebei good-official narrative really began to assume its full dimensions. It is recorded primarily in local sources, especially on stelae erected beside the reservoir by the very officials who struggled to spare it the depredations of the powerful. The earliest of the surviving stelae date from the Ming, and some are now found at the Sunshu Ao Shrine at Anfengtang, while the texts of others are preserved in the Shouzhou gazetteers. Typically, these stelae contain several of the following elements:

- 1) formulaic references to Sunshu Ao's contributions;
- 2) description of the state into which the reservoir had fallen prior to the official whose efforts are commemorated;
- 3) efforts of prior officials, and how they had failed;
- 4) identification of the local families or notables who had drained the reservoir and cultivated or built on the land;
- 5) delineation of the measures adopted by the stela's subject to correct the situation and to repair the dikes and sluices, clear the canals and restore the irrigation complex;
- 6) in a few cases, a map demarcating the bounds of the reservoir and

<sup>64</sup> *Guangxu Shouzhou zhi* 16, pp. 11a–b.

<sup>65</sup> Tuo Tuo 脫脫 (1313–1355) et al., *Song shi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977) 291, p. 9739. On Quebei during the Song, see Lamouroux, "Les contradictions d'un système hydraulique," pp. 127–62, esp. 154–61.

<sup>66</sup> *Song shi* 301, p. 10004.

<sup>67</sup> Wang Anshi (1021–1068), "Anfeng Zhang ling xiu Quebei" 安豐張令修芍陂, in *Linchuan wenji* 臨川文集 (SKQS edn.) 24, p. 7a.

<sup>68</sup> Song Lian 宋濂 (1310–1381), *Yuan shi* 元史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976) 21, p. 466. Whether this included land within the reservoir bounds is not stated.

the areas off limits to settlement or construction.

There were also stelae dealing specifically with matters such as the repair of the Sunshu Ao Shrine, prohibitions on misuse of the reservoir and its environs, and improvements to the complex's infrastructure.<sup>69</sup> Most of these elements can be seen in the earliest of the remaining monuments, which is dated 1485:<sup>70</sup>

Quebei was constructed by Chancellor of Chu Sunshu Ao in Spring and Autumn times. It is in the southern part of Shouzhou. Because the water passed Baique 白芍 canton and collected to form a lake, it was referred to as Baique reservoir. Of old, it belonged to Qisi county, so it was also called Qisi reservoir. Later it was in the now abolished Anfeng county, so the gazetteers refer to it as Anfeng reservoir. At its head, it takes in Pi River. In the West from Zouyu Rock 騶虞石 in Lu'an 六安, in the Southeast from Longchi Mountain 龍池山, and in the East from Haozhou 豪州 the water all flows into the reservoir. Anciently there were five head gates. Zhang Gui of the Sui changed this by opening thirty-six gates. Now there are four sluices to lower the water. The thirty-six gates still exist. It is 100 *li* in diameter and irrigates more than 40,000 *mu* [=4000 *qing*]. Annual harvests are thus bountiful, and the people's stocks are abundant. There was a pavilion in the midst of the reservoir named Qingfeng; it is now gone. This is the overview.

Wang Jing, Liu Fu and Deng Ai of the Han, Liu Song of the Jin, Huan Chongzu of the Qi, Liu Yixin of the [Liu] Song, and Kuang Ye 鄺桮 of our dynasty all regularly maintained the structure. Generations changed and matters evolved. No one had specific responsibilities, so the streams lost their ancient channels and the dikes daily fell into disrepair. Local residents took advantage of this and managed daily to encroach and monthly to occupy land and secure it as the private property of a single family. In Chenghua 成化 *guimao* 癸卯 (1483–84), Investigating Censor, Excellency Wei Zhang 魏璋 of Yanling 鄢陵, came to the various counties of Jiangbei 江北 and was stationed at Shouzhou. He unstintingly considered restoration [of the reservoir] to be his duty. Seizing encroachers on the reservoir, he razed their dwellings and completely restored

<sup>69</sup> Texts of the known stelae, both those still found at the Sunshu Ao Shrine and those now lost but recorded in texts, can be found in *AFTZ*, pp. 84–97. In cases where the stela is lost or is illegible, the text is likely taken from Xia Shangzhong's *QBJS*.

<sup>70</sup> *QBJS* B, pp. 15a–16b; *AFTZ*, pp. 84–85. This stela is currently found in the shrine to Sunshu Ao at Anfengtang. The *QBJS* transcription omits the line in the fourth paragraph about great affairs requiring great men, and the text beginning at 事爾 and ending at 豈少哉.

the former site. He ordered Sub-prefectural Magistrate Chen Yi 陳鎰 and Commander Deng Yong 鄧永 to undertake a major renovation of the dikes, to dredge upstream, to clear the head gates, to construct stone sluices, to cover them with roofs to store lift ropes for shutting off the water, and to be attentive to opening and closing them. Moreover, he ordered renovation of the old Shu'ao [i.e., Sunshu Ao] shrine.

That work had not reached completion when it happened that Excellency Wei was returned to the court, and Honorable Chen was selected to inspect Nanyang. The work was halted midstream, and the covetous feelings of the local residents reemerged. In *jia-chen* 甲辰 (1484), Inspecting Censor Excellency Zhang Nai 張鼎 of Licheng 歷城 continued looking into the matter and was going to bring it before the law. The recalcitrant individuals all regretted the error of their ways and voluntarily confessed. [Zhang] gave stern orders to Commander Ge Du 戈都 to oversee the work; he reported completion according to schedule.

Until then revival of Quebei truly could not have been undertaken. Excellency Chen Xian 陳銑 of Hefei heard of it and was pleased. He declared the achievements of the two excellencies in restoring the reservoir to be no less than that of Shu'ao and charged me to record the matter. I believe that such extensive irrigation of fields by Quebei will profit a hundred generations. The great governance of the state and the great affairs of providing for the livelihood of the people require persons whose abilities surpass others before they can be undertaken – as when lifting a cauldron weighing 1000 *jun* 鈞, only a Wuhuo 烏獲 [a legendary strong man] will do. Once there was encroachment by the residents, and the poor had no way to register a complaint. Only Excellency Wei could restore the deterioration; only Excellency Zhang could complete its splendor. How could I not write about these events? If in the major affairs of great government all their ambitions are fulfilled, how could this be a small contribution to civilizing government? Xian gave the command that this be recorded.

Stone erected Chenghua 21, the year was in *yisi*, autumn, 7th month, first day, dawn.

During the Qing, many of the sources – textual and epigraphical – were brought together and the Sunshu Ao narrative given its classical expression in Xia Shangzhong's 夏尙忠 *Quebei Chronicle* 芍陂記事. Xia's work was compiled in Jiaqing 6 (1801) and revised and published in

Guangxu 3 (1877).<sup>71</sup> Its primary focus is the good official narrative; nothing is said of such great events of the area's history as the Fei River battle (383), and there is little reference to the military agricultural colonies that made Quebei strategically important during the Six Dynasties and later. Although the standard history for the Yuan contains more references to Quebei than any other history, Xia does not mention the Yuan at all.<sup>72</sup> The *Chronicle* shares many of the features of the familiar gazetteer – maps and charts, biographies of illustrious officials, name lists of local residents important to the reservoir, temples and shrines, epigraphical texts, and historical sites. At the end, Xia appended his own analysis of Quebei's problems and possible solutions. Interestingly, his first priority was to revive observances to Sunshu Ao and the reservoir's origins.<sup>73</sup>

Typical of gazetteers, the *Chronicle* includes a section of epigraphical transcriptions. Altogether ten stelae are listed, of which nine have been transcribed. The tenth – that composed by Yan Boxun 顏伯珣 to describe his restoration of the reservoir during the Kangxi era – was included in the Shouzhou gazetteer, so Xia did not repeat it. Although Xia also gave the subject of each stela a biography in the “Notable Officials (*mingchen* 名臣)” chapter, he believed that the stelae offered the greatest detail and were models for later officials overseeing Quebei. They profoundly influenced Xia's own perspective on the problems and history of the reservoir. Reflecting a sentiment expressed toward the end of the 1485 stela, Xia opined, “It has always been that the success of a matter hinges on there being the extraordinary capabilities of one man in order that a great enterprise endure for posterity; the failure of a matter likewise turns on a single man's correcting corruption and favoritism in order to continue abundant achievements so they not be lost.”<sup>74</sup> Every one of the epigraphical texts, including the omitted one, refers to Sunshu Ao's role in Quebei.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> *QBJS*, “Xu” 序; Li, “Quebei yu Quebei jishi,” pp. 170–74; Niu, “Quebei shuili de lishi yanjiu,” pp. 7–9.

<sup>72</sup> There are thirty-one mostly brief references to Quebei in the standard history for the Yuan. An overview history of the reservoir by the Anfengtang history study group accords just one brief paragraph to the Yuan and does not cite the standard history at all; Anfengtang lishi yanjiu xiaozu, “Gu tang Quebei,” p. 107. Yuan-time *tuntian* in the Liang Huai region generally and Quebei specifically are discussed in Wu Wenwu 吳文武, “Yuandai liang Huai tuntian kao” 元代兩淮屯田考, *Shixue yuekan* (2005.8), pp. 118–20.

<sup>73</sup> *QBJS* B, pp. 29a–b.

<sup>74</sup> *QBJS* A, p. 1a.

<sup>75</sup> *QBJS* B, pp. 15a–25a.

The central vehicles for presenting Xia's narrative were the two biographical sections of the *Chronicle*. Following familiar gazetteer format, Xia included a chapter of biographies of noted officials who had been important in Quebei's history and who, said Xia, could not forget that Sunshu Ao was the ancestor of hydraulic experts. Among them were the familiar pre-Tang figures Wang Jing (fl. 80 AD), Liu Fu (d. 208), Deng Ai (d. 264), Liu Song (d. 300), Liu Yixin (404–439), and Zhao Gui (fl. 590) – all mentioned above. The core of their stories differed from the stela narratives, since – excepting Wang, Liu Song and Zhao – their contributions had been to build up the Quebei complex as an agricultural colony to feed armies. Wang, Liu and Zhao's concern had been to restore agricultural production by improving the reservoir.

The three biographies of officials from the Song dynasty (960–1279) mark a clear shift from officials who restored Quebei for strategic purposes to those concerned with ensuring the reservoir could meet the needs of the local populace. Of the three (all taken from the *Song History*), two are men who repaired or improved the complex. The third is an eleventh-century magistrate who dealt with the local magnates mentioned earlier who breached the dikes to lower the water level so they might cultivate the exposed ground. These are followed by biographies of twenty Ming and nineteen early Qing officials, some of whom are among those commemorated in the stelae. Xia includes no biographies for the Tang or the Yuan.

To drive home his point about the importance of heroic figures in Quebei's history, Xia gave Sunshu Ao a special place in a separate section preceding "Notable Officials." Xia noted that although Sunshu Ao had created the reservoir, the Shouzhou local gazetteers merely listed his name; there was no biography.<sup>76</sup> Xia sought to rectify this omission with a comparatively long biography that de-emphasized the significance of Sima Qian's failure to mention Sunshu Ao's achievement in constructing Quebei. Immediately following Sunshu Ao are entries for Ming official Huang Kezuan 黃克纘, and Qing official Yan

<sup>76</sup> Xia Shangzhong's response to the absence of a biography for Sunshu Ao in either of the Shouzhou gazetteers that were extant in his time is instructive. *Jiajing Shouzhou zhi* and the *Qianlong Shouzhou zhi* (see above, n. 7) were both compiled by men who came from other parts of China. Author of the Jiajing gazetteer Li Yonglu was from Luzhou 潞州, Shanxi, while the authors of the Qianlong gazetteer, Xi Qi and Zhang Zhaoyang, were respectively from Wu county 吳縣, Jiangsu and Lüzhou 呂州, Shandong. Unlike Xia, they lacked a personal attachment to Shouzhou and Quebei, and they would not have felt impelled to bolster Sunshu Ao's tenuous connection to the area. In the absence of strong evidence connecting Sunshu Ao with Quebei, Xia clearly felt the need to fortify his biography.

Boxun. These two, he said, were included with Sunshu Ao ahead of all the others because of their own exceptional contributions.<sup>77</sup>

The aggrandizement problem, Xia believed, began with the Ming and resulted from the abolition of Anfeng county, which occurred during the Hongwu reign period (1368–1398). With no official directly responsible for Quebei, miscreants began to occupy Quebei land beginning in the Chenghua period (1465–1488).<sup>78</sup> But, Xia's narrative contains nothing new. Examples of the struggle between good officials and the aggrandizing powerful at Quebei date back 1,500 years, though the problem seems not to have become pronounced until the Ming or perhaps the late Yuan. As suggested, the presence of military agricultural colonies may have constrained local elites from arrogating Quebei to their own purposes. With the Ming, these colonies ceased to be a factor, and powerful families would have found it easier to monopolize the reservoir, the waters that fed it, and the surrounding lands.<sup>79</sup>

Another factor in the narrative's development was the powerful depiction of its elements in the stelae. Such stela texts were more compelling because they emphasized the accomplishments of particular officials. Their influence on Xia Shangzhong is clear, both as the basic stuff from which he molded his narrative and as the prototype for his underlying heroic motif. While his method is unexceptionable, his approach does raise an important historiographical question. Xia's – and our own – information on the aggrandizement problem during the Ming derives largely from epigraphic material prepared locally, while that for earlier periods stems from the standard histories that were compiled centrally. This begs the question: To what extent might there have been aggrandizement occurring in earlier periods that was not captured in the standard histories and which, in the absence of any local record, remains unknown to us?<sup>80</sup> Were the problems of curbing such activity and maintaining the reservoir as serious earlier as they were to become during the Ming? Perhaps more than we might expect.

Although Xia's work was not published until 1877, it became the principal source for the history of Quebei for the next 100 years. Its

<sup>77</sup> *QBJS* A, p. 22a. An interesting feature of Xia's biography of Sunshu Ao is that appended to it is an examination of the sources for his life that is longer than the biography itself; *QBJS* A, pp. 23a–24b.

<sup>78</sup> *QBJS* A, "Quebei lun 2," pp. 3b–4a.

<sup>79</sup> The *Guangxu Shouzhou Gazetteer* does not mention any *tuntian* at Shouzhou after the Yuan, and I have been unable to find mention of any in the *Ming shi*; *Guangxu Shouzhou zhi*, j. 10.

<sup>80</sup> A case in point is the instance mentioned earlier during the Tang when powerful families cut off water to the reservoir during a famine, which is recorded in a tomb stela and reported in a gazetteer; see n. 64, above.

basic narrative would exercise a significant influence on historical accounts, both scholarly and popular.

#### REASSESSMENT

It is certain that Quebei was not the work of Sunshu Ao, and there is a strong case to be made for the reservoir and irrigation complex not having been built in the pre-Han era – in any case, not in the form and size later described by Li Daoyuan. Yet, the discussion of the past thirty-odd years has characteristically been less about seeking the reservoir's true origins than shoring up the bona fides of a particular narrative. The process has borne witness to F. R. Ankersmit's apposite analogy, "Like a dike covered with ice-floes at the end of winter, the past has been covered with a thick crust of narrative interpretations; and historical debate is as much about the components of this crust as about the past hidden beneath it."<sup>81</sup> The Sunshu Ao debate has focused on the components of the narrative while overlooking the reservoir itself. But as one digs through that crust, the underlying layers of the past reveal something different from and more intriguing than what the surface suggested.

What does this mean for Sunshu Ao and his rival Zisi? Did they after all play no role in the history of Quebei? While they surely did, those roles may not have been as claimed. To take Zisi first, his connection to Quebei – or even who he was – is not known. We have but a single reference to him, and the statement that he built Quebei is really parenthetical.<sup>82</sup> Still, the possibility that such a person might have played a role in Quebei's history should not be blithely dismissed. First, the assertions of the keepers of the Old Tradition narrative notwithstanding, the evidence for Zisi's role in Quebei is about as good as that for Sunshu Ao, which after all derives from a local tradition and the existence of a shrine to him at Quebei, mention of which comes only some 700 years after his death. Second, the suggestion of some that "Zisi" is Sunshu Ao's appellative is problematical. While the appellatives of many Chu figures took the form of 子+X, the *Imperial Review* is cited elsewhere as stating that Sunshu Ao's tomb was at Baitu village 白土里 in the ancient city of Jiangling 江陵 in Nan commandery 南郡.<sup>83</sup> On the

<sup>81</sup> F. R. Ankersmit, "The Dilemma of Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Philosophy of History," *History and Theory Beiheft* 25 (1986), p. 26.

<sup>82</sup> *Huanglan*, cited in *HHS* 92, p. 3486.

<sup>83</sup> *Huanglan*, cited in *SJ* 119, p. 3100. Jiangling was near modern Jiangling in Hubei province; Shan district was in Dangtu county in Jiujiang commandery, northeast of Huainan city

other hand, Zisi's tomb was in Shan district 山鄉 in the east of Dangtu county 當塗縣. Third, in the discussions of who Zisi might have been and when he might have lived, the possible significance of his title, "grandee" (*dafu* 大夫), has been overlooked. While in the central states in the Spring and Autumn/Warring States period, "grandee" denoted a second tier of exalted officials just below minister (*qing* 卿), this may not have been the case in Warring States Chu. There, "grandee" denoted an official who headed a county (*xian* 縣).<sup>84</sup> He thus would have been similar to the Han-time commandery administrator *taishou* 太守 (the position held by Wang Jing), and as such would have been responsible for such matters as the promotion of agriculture. Zisi's being merely a local official would also explain why his name does not appear elsewhere. There is no evidence to suggest that in Chu the administrative office of grandee had existed earlier, and the location of the man's tomb in an area that came under Chu control only in the third century suggests Zisi was a Warring States figure. There are uncertainties with this explanation, including no clear idea of just what he might have done to create Quebei. In any event, given the weakness of the evidence for Sunshu Ao, one cannot ignore Zisi's candidacy, though not much can be done with it. If the *Imperial Review* can be credited, it is entirely possible for Quebei to trace its origins to Zisi. For reasons discussed elsewhere, we can imagine that it would have begun as a small-scale aquacultural site, growing in size and importance as water resource management developed and construction techniques improved. As I have suggested, it was probably not until about the beginning of the first century BC that conditions – technological level, political stability, official commitment – were ripe for Quebei to develop the capacity to support a major irrigation complex.<sup>85</sup>

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in Anhui province. By the Six Dynasties, however, it was widely believed that Sunshu Ao's tomb was at Quebei. *Song shu* 95, p. 2351; *Wei shu* 97, pp. 2139, 2156 n. 16.

<sup>84</sup> Zuo Yandong 左言東, ed., *Xian Qin zhiguan biao* 先秦職官表 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan), p. 408. Zuo identifies the Chu "grandee" 大夫 as a commandery (*jun*) official based on a passage in *Heguanzi*, a problematical text dating probably from the pre-Qin period. On the grandee as the chief prefectural *xian* official, see also Li Jiahao 李家浩, "Baoshan bushi jian 218–219 hao yanjiu" 包山卜筮簡 218–219 號研究, in *Changsha Sanguo Wu jian ji bainian lai jianbo faxian yu yanjiu guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 長沙三國吳簡暨百年來簡帛發現與研究國際學術研討會論文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), p. 197, and Chen Wei 陳偉, *Baoshan jian chutan* 包山簡初探 (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 1996), p. 92, cited in Wang Ying 王穎, *Baoshan Chujian cihui yanjiu* 包山楚簡詞彙研究 (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 2008), pp. 279–80. Chen Wei considers the title to belong to the Warring States period, which would place it well after Sunshu Ao's time.

<sup>85</sup> This the view of Xu, "Sunshu Ao zao Quebei shi fuhui zhi tan," pp. 180–82. See also Crowell, "History and Tradition," pp. 368–75.

The question of why Quebei came to be attributed to Sunshu Ao is far more interesting than is suggested by the debate over which tradition is correct. Moreover, the most plausible answer provides interesting insight into just how much Sunshu Ao's relationship to Quebei and to hydraulic engineering in general has been misunderstood. In examining this question, it must first be remembered that the attribution begins only with the biography of a first-century official – Wang Jing – that mentions Quebei as built by Sunshu Ao and the associated rice fields.<sup>86</sup> Very early this was understood to mean that Sunshu Ao had constructed Quebei as it existed in Wang Jing's time to irrigate those fields. Consequently, whenever possible, earlier textual references were construed to support this conclusion, as was the case with the passage from the *Huainanzi* discussed earlier. But is this understanding correct?

Proponents of the Old Tradition narrative dating back at least to Xia Shangzhong have been flummoxed by Sima Qian's failure to mention this achievement. But they seem to have been led astray by an *idée fixe*. As is well known, Sunshu Ao was seen as an exemplary civil official, and for this reason he was included in the "Biographies of Reasonable Officials" of the *Grand Scribe's Records*. Curiously, that biography says nothing about Quebei or any irrigation project for that matter. What it does does say is "In autumn and winter he advised the people to go into the mountains to gather wood, and in spring and summer to take advantage of the waters (i.e., rivers and lakes). Each found what he needed, and the people were all content with their lives."<sup>87</sup> Here, Sunshu Ao is instructing the people to utilize naturally available products for fuel and food. This is something of a *topoi* found in references to him, and it helps to understand some of the statements about him. Pei Yin's 裴駟 (Liu Song) commentary to the *Grand Scribe's Records* cites the *Imperial Review*, "According to popular tradition, Sunshu Ao said, 'Bury me at Lujiang Bei 廬江陂, and it will later become an appanage of 10,000 households.' ... Some say that Sunshu Ao diverted the Ju River 沮水 to create the Yunmeng great marsh 雲夢大澤."<sup>88</sup> This last sentence sounds very much like what the *Huainanzi* describes him as doing with the Qisi river.<sup>89</sup> Flooding the Yulou plains could have similarly created a wetland. Such efforts were praised in a stela erected in 160 AD by

<sup>86</sup> HHS 86, p. 2466.

<sup>87</sup> SJ 119, p. 3099.

<sup>88</sup> SJ 117, p. 3004; 119, p. 3099. The date and original source of this passage are unknown.

<sup>89</sup> HHJ 18, p. 19b-20a; LH 13, p. 609.

Duan Guang 段光,<sup>90</sup> prefect of Gushi county, to commemorate repair of a shrine to Sunshu Ao:

Chancellor of Chu Lord Sun, taboo name Rao 饒, appellation Shu'ao, was from this county. ... As chancellor, he governed according to right principles, examined the measure of the heavenly signs, respectfully gave the people the seasons, gathered the riches of the mountains, raised crops in the marshlands, channeled the rivers and valleys, dammed up the sources of water, watered tilled land and wetlands, diked pond shores to make ponds, bringing together the beauty of heaven and earth, reaping the benefits of the wetlands, thereby enriching the state, making families prosperous and people happy."<sup>91</sup>

The implication of this passage is that Sunshu Ao's fame derives not from building irrigation complexes but from leading the people in utilizing the natural resources found particularly in untilled lands such as mountains and wetlands. Taken together with the *Huainanzi* passage, the *Imperial Review* excerpts, Li Daoyuan's ambiguous comment, and the presence of the temple mentioned in the Wang Jing biography, the stela text suggests the existence of a body of lore centered on Sunshu Ao's creation of wetlands as a source of food and raw material. It is this that forms what Paul Veyne deems the "authentic kernel" that is transmitted by tradition and which becomes "overgrown with legends."<sup>92</sup> As I have suggested elsewhere, Quebei was likely just such a wetland prior to becoming a large irrigation reservoir in the Western Han.<sup>93</sup> Even if Sunshu Ao did not create Quebei, as the people of Chu migrated eastward during the Warring States period and settled the region, his name could have easily become associated with it as being similar to what he was believed to have done earlier farther westward. Moreover, for those whose livelihoods and prosperity depended on Quebei, it would have been natural to construct a shrine to a noted historical figure in hopes that he would watch over the site, regardless of any actual con-

<sup>90</sup> Xu Shaohua makes the case that the stela was not erected by Duan Guang during the Later Han but probably dates from sometime between the beginning of the Southern Dynasties and the Sui-Tang reunification of China. See Xu, "Sunshu Ao guli fengdi kaoshu: jian lun 'Chuxiang Sunshu Ao bei' de zhenwei wenben shidai" 孫叔敖故里封地考述, 兼論 "楚相孫叔敖碑" 的真偽與文本時代, in Xu, *Jing Chu lishi dili yu kaogu tanyan*, pp. 176–79. The text nonetheless is evidence of the narrative, which would have had to exist for some time prior to creation of the stela.

<sup>91</sup> Hong Gua 洪适 (1123–1202), *Li shi* 隸釋 (Qiantang Wang shi lou Songshu wu, Tongzhi 10 [1871]) 3, pp. 4b–5a.

<sup>92</sup> Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe Their Myths*, p. 14.

<sup>93</sup> Crowell, "History and Tradition," pp. 368–75.

nection.<sup>94</sup> Sunshu Ao may have been from Gushi or Qisi<sup>95</sup> and not directly involved with Quebei, but he was the most noted minister of Chu, which essentially came to encompass Quebei. It would not have mattered that when he was alive, the area was not yet part of the Chu state.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, given what is recorded about him, he could reasonably have been credited with Quebei when it was still a wetland. In any case, it is clearly erroneous to proclaim him the “most ancient historical figure among all the hydraulic engineers of China.”<sup>97</sup>

As he is portrayed here, Sunshu Ao seems to be a patron of a form of food production based on the harvesting of natural products through hunting, fishing and foraging rather than primarily on grain production. This approach was perhaps characteristic of the south where natural products were easily gathered. The harvesting of tubers may have been more important than the raising of grain, but the latter would have become more prevalent with the southward expansion of the Han empire and the concomitant migration of northerners. In the Huainan area the preference for this sort of extractive agriculture would have been reinforced by the relocation of the Dongyue 東越 peoples to the region under the Former Han in 138 and 110 BC,<sup>98</sup> and perhaps by remnants of the indigenous Yi 夷 peoples. Sima Qian had described the land of the south as

broad and sparsely populated, and the people live on rice and fish soups. They burn off the fields and flood them to kill the weeds, and are able to gather all the fruit, berries, and univalve and bivalve shellfish they want without waiting for merchants to come

<sup>94</sup> A similar sort of apotheosis would later occur with the figure of the Three States hero Guan Yu, who in later times became a god of war and a patron of merchants; see Prasenjit Duara, “Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War,” *JAS* 47.4 (Nov. 1988), pp. 778–95.

<sup>95</sup> Prior to the Southern Dynasties, Gushi county was located *north* of the Huai River near present-day Linquan, Henan. This was the location of Qinqiu, which was granted to Sunshu Ao and his descendants by King Zhuang. Following the loss of the region north of the Huai from the Eastern Jin on, Gushi county was one of the jurisdictions that was reestablished in the south as a “lodged county” (*qiao xian* 僑縣). It remained there, near its present location, once China had been reunified under the Sui-Tang, leading later scholars to believe it had always been south of the Huai; Xu, “Sunshu Ao guli fengdi kaoshu,” pp. 170–75.

<sup>96</sup> Xu, “Sunshu Ao zao Quebei shi fuhui zhi tan,” p. 180.

<sup>97</sup> See n. 15, above.

<sup>98</sup> There were two relocations of Dongyue to the land between the Huai and the Yangtze: The first was in 138 BC after the Dongyue had suffered the repeated depredations of the Minyue and asked to relocate to the center of the empire; *HS* 64A, p. 2776, 95, p. 3860. The second came in 110 BC, after the Dongyue murdered their king and surrendered. Emperor Wu declared the Dongyue to be constantly rebelling and recalcitrant, so to ensure peace for later generations, he ordered they be relocated. The *Han shu* states, “subsequently their land was emptied,” suggesting transportation of a fair body of people; *HS* 6, p. 190.

around selling them. Since the land is so rich in edible products, there is no fear of famine, and therefore the people are content to live along day to day; they do not lay away stores of goods, and many of them are poor. As a result, in the region south of the Yangzte and Huai Rivers no one ever freezes or starves to death, but on the other hand there are no very wealthy families.<sup>99</sup>

The continued pervasiveness of this form of extractive agriculture is suggested by the case of Wang Jing, who found upon arrival in Lujiang, near Quebei, that the people were unfamiliar with plowing with oxen. He reclaimed wasteland and put the people to cultivating the land.<sup>100</sup> In 370 AD the Jin official Fu Tao 伏滔 described Huainan in largely similar terms as Sima Qian's, noting that with the rivers, lakes and marshes being unaffected by flood or drought, it was possible for the populace to gather food during famine years. The major difference in the later account is the addition of some 10,000 *qing* of irrigated land by the "reservoir(s) of Longquan."<sup>101</sup> In sum, it would seem that Sunshu Ao is a cultural icon of a type of extractive agriculture different from the prevalent Han agriculture centered on the cultivation of grain.

With local, regional or even national history, preoccupation with preserving "memory" can sometimes displace objectivity and historical accuracy. Such appears to be the case with the attribution of the Quebei reservoir to Sunshu Ao. It is the sort of connection that one can easily imagine occurring on a "popular" level; attribution to a historical figure of Sunshu Ao's stature would understandably have been preferable to the little known Zisi. Once accepted and ratified by a shrine and stelae to commemorate the event, the narrative became part of the local lore. By that point, there would have been little perceived need to examine what really had happened at the beginning of Quebei. Repeated erection of stelae and the narrative's inclusion in the gazetteers further validated the popular tradition, reinforcing it through a "prevalent proof" and making further research seem unnecessary.<sup>102</sup>

It is unclear what role, if any, the Sunshu Ao narrative might have played during the Republican period, though events during the approxi-

<sup>99</sup> *SJ* 129, p. 3270; trans. Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II*, p. 446.

<sup>100</sup> *Dongguan Hanji jiaozhu* 18, p. 774; *HHS* 76, p. 2466.

<sup>101</sup> *Jin shu* 92, p. 2400.

<sup>102</sup> "The fallacy of prevalent proof makes mass opinion into a method of verification"; D. H. Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 51–53. Cheng Taoping curiously asserts that one argument for dismissing Zisi is that neither Xia Shangzhong's *Quebei jishi* nor any of the stelae mentions him; Cheng Taoping 程濤平, "Chu Quebei suoyuan" 楚芍陂溯源, in *QBSLSLWJ*, p. 140.

mately forty years from the founding of the Republic were certainly ripe for the reassurance a cultural hero might offer. The reservoir and associated irrigation complex deteriorated badly in the early Republican period and could supply water for only 30,000 of the 100,000 *mu* of the surrounding fields. There were different efforts to restore the reservoir, and that undertaken in 1937 reportedly increased the irrigated area to 200,000 *mu*. Warfare, flood and drought, however, prevented the reservoir from being fully restored.<sup>103</sup>

The establishment of a communist regime in China and the ideological debates of the ensuing years wrought another change in the narrative. Since Sunshu Ao was a member of the ruling class, to accord him sole credit for Quebei reservoir would have diminished the role of the laboring classes as the moving force of history. The solution of serious scholars such as Xi Chao 嵇超 and Niu Zhongxun 鈕仲勳 in the 1960s was to assert that while the ancient histories gave Sunshu Ao and ruling elites credit for building and restoring the reservoir, in fact it had “depended on the indefatigable efforts of the laboring people.” On the eve of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, when Quebei was being repaired as part of the Shi-Pi-Hang irrigation project 石淠杭灌溉水利工程, Niu deemed the time appropriate “to study the history of how the laboring peoples of ancient times built the Quebei water resources; to absorb that experience will still have a certain practical significance.” Hence, he composed a “preliminary study of this question for the reference of the pertinent authorities.”<sup>104</sup> The “use of the past to serve the present” that was dutiful in Niu became became flagrant in a brief work published in 1974 at the height of the Cultural Revolution and the “Anti-Lin Biao 林彪, Anti-Confucius” campaign. Entitled *The Confucian-Legalist Struggle and the Ancient Development of Our Country’s Water Resources*, the content was highly polemical and ideological, starting from the premise that the “advanced political line and pure materialism viewpoints of the Legalists lent a definite impetus to ancient China’s water resources development” while Confucian idealism and emphasis on the past hindered it. The authors claimed that Lin

<sup>103</sup> Zhou Kuiyi 周魁一, “1935 nian Quebei xiuzhi jishi” 1935 年芍陂修治紀事, in *QBSLSLWJ*, pp. 21–23; Shouxian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 壽縣地方誌編纂委員會, *Shouxian zhi* 壽縣誌 (Anhui sheng difangzhi congshu 安徽省地方誌叢書, Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1996), pp. 495–99; Anhuisheng Shouxian shuili dianli ju 安徽省壽縣水利電力局, *Shouxian shuili zhi* 壽縣水利志, ed. Hu Chenggui 胡承桂 ([Shouxian]: Anhuisheng Shouxian shuili dianli ju, 1993), pp. 3, 69, 153; *AFTZ* 73; Li Song 李松, “Minguo shiqi Quebei zhili shulun” 民國時期芍陂治理述論, *Tongling xueyuan xuebao* 銅陵學院學報 (2011.2), pp. 84–86.

<sup>104</sup> Niu Zhongxun 鈕仲勳, “Quebei shuili de lishi yanjiu 芍陂水利的歷史研究, *Shixue yuekan* (1965.4), pp. 32, 36; Xi, “Wo guo zuizao de shuiku,” p. 61.

Biao had supported the Confucian line in pushing counterrevolutionary revisionism, but study of the Legalist-Confucian struggle as embodied in the development of water resources could be useful in exposing the rightest nature of Lin Biao's revisionism. Quebei was included in this "study" but Sunshu Ao was notably missing. Wang Jing was portrayed as a "minor intellectual" and an outstanding hydraulic engineer who "broke the reactionary bonds of the Confucian denigration of science and technology and led the masses in restoring the long deteriorated famous water resource project Quebei."<sup>105</sup>

*Confucian-Legalist Struggle* appeared the same year the AFT history study group began their work, and part of their charge was to examine the reservoir's history from the standpoint of the Legalist-Confucian struggle. After spending a year on the subject, they concluded that there had been no Legalist-Confucian conflict in connection with Quebei.<sup>106</sup> In the end, however, their goal became to support the Old Tradition narrative and not to combat counterrevolutionary revisionism. Sunshu Ao was restored to his position of eminence but with the "laboring people" still present.

## CONCLUSION

We now come back to the question posed at the outset, What can an examination of the narrative of Sunshu Ao and the origins of Quebei contribute to an appreciation of how the Chinese have understood and used their past? Western studies of the subject have at times been seen as depicting traditional Chinese historiography as unmodern and somehow inferior to that of the West. Uninformed Western historians have indeed made such judgments, causing sensitive Chinese to dismiss Western assessments.<sup>107</sup> But the question should not be, How does traditional Chinese historiography compare to that of the West? Rather,

<sup>105</sup> Wuhan shuili dianli xueyuan bianxie zu 武漢水利電力學院編寫組, *Ru Fa douzheng yu woguo gudai shuili shiye di fazhan* 儒法鬥爭與我國古代水利事業的發展 (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1974), pp. 1, 2, 30.

<sup>106</sup> Sun Jianming personal communication, 6/30/1980.

<sup>107</sup> Du Weiyun 杜維運, *Yu xifang shijia lun Zhongguo shixue* 與西方史家論中國史學 (Taipei: Zhongguo xueshu zhuzuo jiangzhu weiyuanhui, 1966); On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 2005), pp. vii-xxii; Hsu Kwan-san, "The Chinese Critical Tradition," *The Historical Journal* 26, pp. 431-46; Wang Yongzu 汪榮祖, "Xifang shijia dui suowei 'Rujia shixue' de renshi yu wujie" 西方史家對所謂'儒家史學'的認識與誤解, *Taida lishi xuebao* 臺大歷史學報 27, pp. 125-49. Of course, critical judgments were also made by early 20th-c. Chinese historians such as Fu Ssu-nien (Fu Sinian); see Wang Fansen, *Fu Ssu-nien: A Life in Chinese History and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), pp. 55-97.

the point is, How did Chinese traditionally approach their past and how did (do) they apply their knowledge of it? These are huge questions whose answers are beyond the scope of the present effort.<sup>108</sup> Still, the handling of this particular Sunshu Ao narrative can suggest possible avenues for exploration.

In examining the development of the Sunshu Ao/Quebei narrative, it is important to bear in mind that the matter is more complicated than simply the evolution and elaboration of a “tradition.” Broadly speaking, at various times three constituencies have been at work, each producing a variant of the essential narrative, based on their approaches to their sources and their purposes. At a popular or folkloric level, the main sources would have been oral and the event (Sunshu Ao’s construction of Quebei) “imaginary.”<sup>109</sup> But with transmission, the oral tradition would have acquired authority through repetition. With the literate classes – including local officials and men of learning – the authenticity of this narrative was accepted, and an effort was made to give it historicity by reference to textual sources, both primary and secondary. This has been continued into the present day by resident public intellectuals (for example, Xia Shangzhong and Sun Jianming), scholars at local institutions, and local officials. The quality of this work has been very uneven. Finally, there are scholars, largely academics, who do not appear to have a local attachment, and – perhaps as a consequence – whose examination of the sources has been more rigorous and objective. This last has been primarily a contemporary development.

Of the questions to be addressed in examining the stages of the narrative’s history, the most difficult to answer is the most intriguing: Where and how did the story of Sunshu Ao’s creation of Quebei begin? One can only speculate, since there are no sources on which to draw. But it is reasonable to assume the attribution is folkloric, deriving from a popular attempt to explain Quebei’s origins and to give one’s place historicity. In the beginning, Quebei was probably a natural wetland, and its origins were attributed to Sunshu Ao because of a tradition of associating him with creation of the Yunmeng marsh and other wetlands. The timing of this attribution cannot be known in an absolute sense, only developmentally. Most likely it occurred sometime after

<sup>108</sup> An interesting discussion of these questions is to be found in Kai Vogelsang, “Some Notions of Historical Judgment in China and the West,” in *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism, and Ideology: Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a New Comparative Perspective*, ed. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, Achim Mittag, and Jörn Rüsen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 143–75, and esp. the succinct casting of the problem on 149–50.

<sup>109</sup> See Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990), pp. 1–25.

people from Chu began migrating into the area but prior to relocation of the Chu capital to Shouchun.

Once created, a narrative would have evolved in keeping with the contemporary context. During the Former Han, Quebei developed into a reservoir for irrigation, and as time passed that too would have been attributed to Sunshu Ao. One can easily imagine that substantial changes to the wetland would not have been welcomed by a populace accustomed to relying on it for gathering natural foods, medicines and fuels. At this point, it would have been advantageous to give “historicality” to what was basically an imagined event through development of a narrative relying on textual interpretation (the *Huainanzi*, and the like) and construction of a commemorative temple.<sup>110</sup> The historical attribution of the reservoir to Sunshu Ao would have been embraced by the literate classes, who would have benefited most from the irrigation project.<sup>111</sup> With this, Sunshu Ao became not only the creator but the guardian of Quebei. This is the situation that both Wang Jing in the first century AD and Li Daoyuan in the fifth century found when they went there.

When the basic Sunshu Ao narrative finally settled into place, it became the basis for an extension of his perceived role beyond that of guardian of Quebei to an icon of exemplary officials who were also protectors of the people’s interests. This evolution saw the narrative become an orthodox topoi applied to legitimizing official actions during the Ming and Qing, if not earlier. As others have noted, the Chinese past has often been employed as the basis for change and its record an essential referent for decisions; the present case shows that this could be just as true in the local yamen as at the central court.<sup>112</sup> Sunshu Ao became primarily a moral exemplar for local officials, who were responsible for the welfare of the populace. Accounts in local gazetteers and stelae carried a semblance of scholarly foundation, a development that reached its apogee in the work of Xia Shangzhong. But though Xia’s *Quebei Chronicle* might manifest the attributes of scholarship, it began by assuming that Quebei originated with Sunshu Ao, an approach that has also characterized much modern writing on the subject. It was less

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 4–5.

<sup>111</sup> This poses an interesting question: Could the conversion of Quebei from wetland to irrigation reservoir be an indication of the supplanting of a non-Han gathering-based agriculture by a Han rice-based agriculture? One can only speculate.

<sup>112</sup> Al Dien, “Historiography of the Six Dynasties,” *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 2 400–1400* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), p. 508.

a work of investigation than of affirmation, something that can also be said of much of the work on Quebei of the past fifty years.

Once the People's Republic of China was established, the moral message of the narrative became ambiguous, as its content had to be modified to fit a narrative template imposed by the ideological requirements of Chinese Communist dogma. The demands of this ideology were at some points (for example, the Cultural Revolution) so severe that Sunshu Ao was dropped altogether from the account of the creation of Quebei. But he was too deeply imbedded in the local consciousness to be excluded permanently, and means were found to combine local lore and party doctrine into a combined narrative in which one buttressed the other. Ironically, it may have been the injection of ideology that cracked the bonds of tradition and permitted challenges by more rigorous scholars, just at the very point semi-scholarly and more popular writers were reviving and promoting the Old Tradition narrative.

While Sunshu Ao's involvement with Quebei has become increasingly doubtful, in Shouxian the narrative – like the reservoir itself – has persisted and continues to fill important psychological, ideological, and even economic needs. In the minds of local residents Sunshu Ao is still associated with Quebei in reality as well as in legend.<sup>113</sup> For example, the debate over his role notwithstanding, a leading historian of the region – surely motivated by localist feelings – continues to present the Old Tradition narrative as established fact.<sup>114</sup> And it is used as a motif to inspire local cultural and social development. When the Anfeng Middle School decided to publish a school magazine, they entitled it *Quebei Spirit* 芍陂風 with the purpose of “promoting Shouxian's preeminent Chu-Han cultural tradition, renewing without interruption, and allowing the spirit of ‘Quebei’ culture to advance with the times.”<sup>115</sup>

In the meantime, Quebei's economic role has also expanded. The reservoir's primary role is of course the traditional one of supporting agriculture, but the Sunshu Ao narrative has been adapted for the modern needs of attracting attention, travelers and tourists to Shouxian. This potential of the narrative was explicitly acknowledged in Shou-

<sup>113</sup> For example, Meng Kun 孟堃, *Shouzhou gushi chuanshuo* 壽州故事傳說 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1991), p. 1; idem, *Shouzhou gujin renwu* 壽州古今人物 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1992), p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> See Chen Guangzhong 陳廣忠, *Liang Huai wenhua* 兩淮文化 (Shenyang: Liaoning Jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), pp. 200–2; idem, *Huaihe zhuan* 淮河傳 (Baoding: Hebei daxue chubanshe, 2001) pp. 70–76. Chen is originally from Huainan, Anhui, about 25 km east of Shouxian, and taught there prior to joining the faculty at Anhui University.

<sup>115</sup> Shouxian Anfeng zhongxue 壽縣安豐中學, *Quebei feng* 芍陂風 (2010.3) (no. 24), digital issue: [http://www.ahafzx.com/include/list\\_ny.asp?id=5098](http://www.ahafzx.com/include/list_ny.asp?id=5098), retrieved 12/30/2010.

xian's application to have Anfengtang declared an important cultural treasure.<sup>116</sup> The narrative thus has come to signify "both a national past whose memory must be conserved and an item of consumption."<sup>117</sup> Its durability, once sustained by the impulse of local pride and the need for a moral exemplar, now seems assured for the foreseeable future by the drive for economic development.

#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|                 |                                                                                        |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>AFTZ</i>     | Anhui sheng shuili zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 安徽省水利志<br>編纂委員會, <i>Anfengtang zhi</i> 安豐塘志 |
| <i>HHJ</i>      | <i>Huainan honglie jie</i> 淮南鴻烈解                                                       |
| <i>HHS</i>      | Fan Ye 范曄, <i>Hou Han shu</i> 後漢書                                                      |
| <i>HS</i>       | Ban Gu 班固, <i>Han shu</i> 漢書                                                           |
| <i>LH</i>       | Huang Hui 黃暉, annot., <i>Lun heng jiaoshi</i> 論衡校釋                                     |
| <i>QBJŠ</i>     | Xia Shangzhong 夏尙忠, <i>Quebei jishi</i> 芍陂紀事                                           |
| <i>QBSLSLWJ</i> | <i>Quebei shuilishi lunwenji</i> 芍陂水利史論文集                                              |
| <i>SJ</i>       | Sima Qian 司馬遷, <i>Shi ji</i> 史記                                                        |
| <i>TD</i>       | Du You 杜佑, <i>Tong dian</i> 通典                                                         |
| <i>TPYL</i>     | Li Fang 李昉, <i>Taiping yulan</i> 太平御覽                                                  |

<sup>116</sup> Shouxian renmin zhengfu, "Anfengtang fucha baogao," pp. i-ii.

<sup>117</sup> Alex Callinicos deems such a development the "commodification of history" and suggests the dangers for popular understanding of the past; Alex Callinicos, *Theories and Narratives: Reflections on the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 11-12.