The Zhou concept of Mandate of Heaven as seen in the Chengwu (程寤) manuscript from the Qinghua bamboo slips collection

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Attainment of the Mandate of Heaven was a very important issue for the Zhou (周) people particularly during the transition period when they started the campaign against the Shang (商). But how did the Zhou get the Mandate? Both the bronze inscriptions and the transmitted texts such as sections of Shang Shu (尚书) and Shi Jing (诗经), repeatedly eulogize King Wen and King Wu’s merits and military achievements, which suggests that the Zhou people considered King Wen and King Wu’s virtue and military success as the primary reason for the attainment of the Mandate. But was it the only explanation? A recently discovered Chu bamboo text, “Cheng Wu”(程寤) from the Qinghua University collection sheds a new light on the Zhou people’s idea of the reasons for receiving the Mandate. The “Cheng Wu” chapter emphasizes the importance of the auspicious dream of King Wen’s wife, Taisi (太姒), the dream which predicted King Wen’s attainment of the Mandate. The account in “Cheng Wu” is unique, since no other transmitted text makes such specific emphasis on Taisi’s dream. Undoubtedly this account provides new insights in the formation of the concept of the attainment of Mandate by the Zhou.