

1.7 SPRING AND AUTUMN CHINA (771-453)

The history of the Spring and Autumn period was traditionally pictured as a narrative in which the major actors were states, their rulers, and certain high ministers and colorful figures. The narrative generally was shaped by writers to convey ethical points. It was, on the largest scale, a “true” story, but its drama was guided by a moral rationale.

In these pages, we will survey the events of this long period. Our narrative will combine a selective recounting of major events with an attempt to illustrate the political variety that developed among the patrician states of the time. It embeds also certain stories from traditional sources, which are intended to help you picture more vividly and so recall more easily major turning points. These tales (which appear in *italics*) are retold here in a way that eliminates the profusion of personal and place names that characterize the original accounts. There are four such stories and each focuses on a single individual (although the last and longest has a larger cast of characters). The first two stories, those of Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin, highlight certain central features of Spring and Autumn political structures. The third tale, concerning King Ling of Chu, illustrates the nature of many early historical accounts as cautionary tales. The last, the story of Wu Zixu, is one of the great “historical romances” of the traditional annals.

It is important to bear in mind that the tales recounted here are parts of a “master narrative” of early China, crafted by literary historians. The flow of the account makes overall sense as a story, and the moral drama of each episode is easy to detect. This is not the way life is lived, and in a time before newspapers and other information media, it took intellectual imagination and effort to represent events over such vast stretches of time and space coherently. We may be certain that at many points “facts” have been distorted to accomplish narrative and moral coherence, sometimes dramatically – the more closely academic historians examine historical evidence, the more problems emerge with this traditional narrative. But constructing the “story line” of early China was a project of the era itself, and regardless of the “accuracy” of the story, the voices who are telling it are voices from that time, recreating itself in narrative as it progressed.

This narration of events breaks the Spring and Autumn into six smaller periods, with some gaps between them (some dates in this list are approximate).

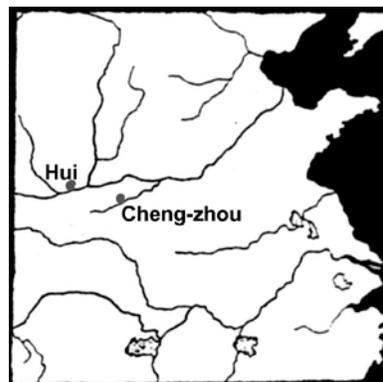
- I. The Zhou schism and the dominance of Zheng, 770-700**
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PERIOD I: The Zhou Schism and the Dominance of Zheng (770-700)

The Zhou flight to Luoyang

In 771, the homeland of the Zhou was invaded by nomads from the West. The capital was sacked, the king was killed, and the Zhou royal clan driven away. The last king of the Western Zhou was, according to traditional accounts, a typical “evil last ruler,” depraved and controlled by beautiful women.

The heir to the throne was taken eastward and installed in new capital precincts by a group of patrician lords. The new capital was located in Cheng-Zhou (later renamed Luoyang), which had been established on the banks of the Luo River, a tributary of the Yellow River, by the Duke of Zhou as a military garrison centuries earlier. The lords who had protected the new king either possessed patrimonial estates in the regions near the Luo River valley, or were given new estates there. These states in the middle reaches of the Yellow River valley, along with the area surrounding the capital (which was called the state of Zhou and was ruled directly by the king), may be called collectively the **Central States**. During these first years of the Eastern Zhou, the rulers of the major Central States also served as the chief ministers of the Zhou king, who was greatly in their debt, and they thereby possessed great power and prestige. The most prominent among them was the ruler of the state of **Zheng**; the rulers of Zheng were granted hereditary rights to the office of Chief Minister.



At the time of the fall of the Western capital, another son of the murdered king fled under the protection of great lords. This other son was installed as the new Zhou king in a city called Hui, west of the bend of the Yellow River. During the period 770-750, these two brothers competed for the allegiance of the patrician lords, each along with his backers hoping to become the sole legitimate ruler of China. The hopes of the pretender in Hui were much diminished by the actions of the rulers of the state of **Qin**. The Qin were a semi-nomadic people in the far west. After the old capital was sacked, it was the troops of Qin that drove the nomadic invaders away, restored order, and occupied the old clan territories of Zhou. The Qin were anxious to be recognized by the rulers of Zhou culture, and although they were located to the west of Hui, they gave their loyalty and lent their armies to the royal claimant in Luoyang. The behavior of Qin ultimately won it the recognition it sought, as a member of the Chinese cultural sphere.

In 750, the ruler of the northernmost central state of **Jin** led an army against the pretender in Hui and succeeded in conquering him. China once again had only one king, but during these decades, his position had been reduced to that of a pawn of the Central States, and the Zhou ruling house never again achieved more than nominal suzerainty over the patrician lords.

From this time to the close of the Eastern Zhou, China should be thought of not as a single state, but as a cultural sphere comprised of a great variety of politically independent states, much like Europe in the millennium after the fall of Rome.

The ascendance of Zheng

The rulers of the state of Zheng possessed both the greatest political prestige and the strongest armies of the newly organized Eastern Zhou state. At this time, the numerous states of Central China were, with the exception of Jin, relatively small and powerless, and Jin was, as we shall see, divided by painful civil war. Zheng took advantage of this situation to begin a program of state expansion, seizing from its neighbors lands that bordered upon its own and openly attacking those states that resisted. In 707 an allied force of armies from among the Central States launched a campaign to suppress Zheng, and the Zhou king himself led the attack, giving it great legitimacy. However, the king's conglomerate army was no match for the well coordinated forces of Zheng, which defeated the allies decisively, ending for good any possibility of the Zhou throne regaining its lost powers.



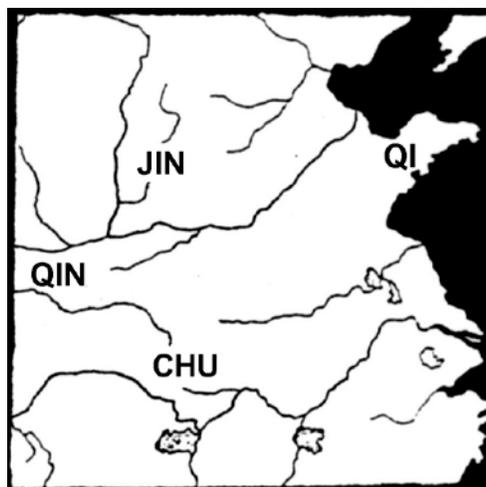
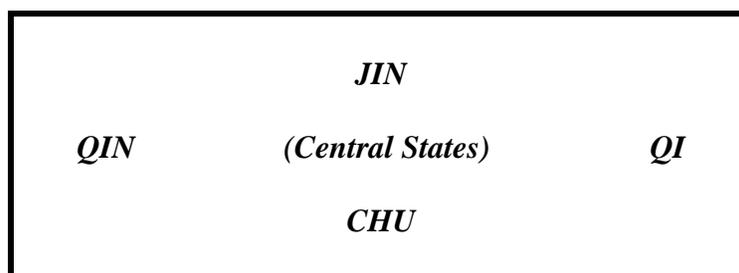
Over the next decade, a type of balance was achieved among the Central States. Zheng gobbled up many of its neighbors until its borders reached those of two quite different states, Wey* and Song. These were states of the old Shang homelands with moderately large territories. Their rulers had not been involved in the patrician cabal at the capital and they had not worn themselves out in the infighting of the previous decades. They were better able to resist Zheng. Towards the end of the eighth century, a balance of power emerged among the Central States, with Zheng, Song, and Wey evenly matched.

The Four Great Powers

In later times, Zheng, Wey, and especially Song would occasionally play major political and military roles in the contests for supremacy of China. However, generally speaking, after 700 the area of the smaller Central States becomes less and less important except as a region of contested influence among several much larger “**Regional States.**” Of these, the most important both initially and in the long run were the following four: **Jin, Qin, Chu, and Qi.**

From 700 until the end of the Spring and Autumn period in 464, China may be geographically pictured as a central region of many states, surrounded by four great powers, one in each of the cardinal directions:

* There were two states named Wei in ancient China. We distinguish this earlier state from a later, more powerful one, by using the variant spelling “Wey.”



In the sixth and fifth centuries, we will need to add to this picture two short-lived states in the southeast, Wu and Yue. In addition, an old Zhou state of great size, Yan, existed in the northeast throughout this period, but remained passive and peripheral until Warring States times.

The four great powers were, in fact, regional cultures quite distinct from one another in background and culture. Before proceeding with this narrative account, we will characterize each one briefly, beginning with the eastern state of Qi.

QI

The state of Qi occupied a broad spit of land extending to the Pacific Ocean, known today as the Shandong Peninsula (Shandong, “East of the Mountains,” is an ancient name for this peninsula). The land is a mix of broad and fertile plains upon which appear in places low but precipitous mountains. The capital city of Qi lay in the northern portion of the peninsula, not far east from the lower reaches of the Yellow River.

Qi was the only one of the four great powers that was originally a patrimonial estate bestowed on a Zhou founder. It was awarded to the Grand Duke Wang, who was not a member of the



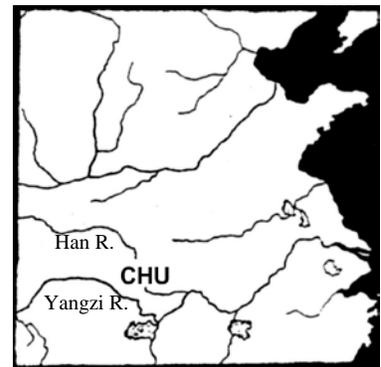
Zhou royal lineage but who was the chief military advisor to King Wu. His descendants ruled as Dukes of Qi until the throne was usurped by another clan in the fourth century.

The estate of Qi was founded to help the Zhou “pacify” lands far to the east of its original homeland. The original occupants of these Shandong lands appear to have been a mix of Chinese and non-Chinese groups. After initially establishing the power of his presence through military means, the Grand Duke is said to have adopted a policy of accommodation with his non-Chinese neighbors. Perhaps as a result, the state of Qi ultimately yielded a rich and many-faceted cultural tradition. Throughout the late Warring States period it was home to the intellectual vanguard of China.

During the Spring and Autumn period, Qi is principally distinguished by the enormous influence of the hegemony of its duke, Huan, over China during the years 680-643.

CHU

Chu appears abruptly in the historical record as a rapidly expanding political force along the middle reaches of the Yangzi River, a region to which its people had migrated from an earlier base northwest, in the valley of the Han River. By conquering or coercing smaller states and tribes in the south of China, Chu came to dominate over an enormous area, characterized by an abundance of rivers, lakes, and marshes, fertile soil, and a temperate climate. The capital stood near the banks of the Yangzi, and was remote from the other states and well insulated against attack (ironically, it became the only great-power capital to be sacked during the Spring and Autumn years).



The origins of the Chu people is a mystery. They appear to have emerged during the late ninth century as a distinctly non-Chinese people who represented a major threat to the Central States and the Zhou order. The earliest of the powerful Chu rulers, who reigned 740-690, adopted the title of “King,” rather than “Duke,” thus clearly indicating that he did not recognize himself as a subject of the Zhou. However, later in his rule, he adopted a conciliatory policy and sued for peace, submitting to Zhou suzerainty while nevertheless retaining the title of King for himself and his descendants. Nevertheless, the culture of Chu was sharply distinct from that of other Chinese states. It is clear that the Chu people did not initially speak Chinese and Chinese was probably only gradually adopted in Chu, from the top down, over the centuries. The religion, art, and eventually the Chinese-language literature of Chu were flamboyant and very different from more restrained “metropolitan” culture to the north. (The study of Chu culture is a very popular topic in modern scholarship.)

QIN

The state of Qin occupied the old Zhou homelands in the Wei River valley, west of the bend in the Yellow River. This region is relatively dry, but rivers and the rich loess soil deposited by winds coming from the western deserts make it a fertile area. The Qin territories formed a basin surrounded by mountain ranges of middling height, making the entire state a virtual fortress. Access to the North China Plain in the east was provided by the Hangu pass, just south of the bend in the Yellow River, and the region of Qin was called The Land Within the Pass. Qin's geographical situation was of enormous military value.

The Qin people were initially a non-Chinese tribe at the western edge of the original Zhou polity. We have already seen how the eighth century rulers of Qin provided great service to the kings and lords who founded the Eastern Zhou in Luoyang. These actions earned the Qin rulers an official designation within the Chinese patrician system, and they were "adopted" as Chinese, although the patricians of the Central States actually viewed them as little more Chinese than the people of Chu or the various nomad tribes which harried the external and internal borders of the Zhou states.



The internal politics of Qin during the Spring and Autumn period are not known in great detail. However, it appears that the Qin engaged less in the division of their domestic territories into patrimonial estates than did most of the purely Chinese states and so developed a relatively centralized pattern of government. This political tradition may underlie the dramatic centralization of Qin that dates from the fourth century and led to its conquest of all China in 221.

JIN

Jin extended east and north from the bend of the Yellow River, covering the plateaus and gullies of the loess deposits in its western half onto the broad and fertile reaches of the North China Plain at its eastern edge. Its land was fertile, but crops were dependent on the weather as normal rainfall was low. The eroded topography of sharp hills and abrupt valleys cut the region of Jin into relatively isolated settlement pockets. Transportation and communications were consequently slow, which hindered political organization.



Jin was the only one of the great powers with a ruling family from the Zhou royal clan of the Ji. The histories tell us that about 1040 the original estate of Jin was playfully bestowed by the boy King Cheng to his younger brother as part of a make-believe game. The game was overheard by a scribe who insisted that such a royal act could not be taken as a jest; consequently, the grant was recorded in earnest. Jin relocated northward when the Zhou house fled east in order to cede its original territories, which were adjacent to Luoyang, to the Zhou ruler.

The culture of Jin was the most “Zhou-like” of all the great powers. It exemplified the mainstream, or “metropolitan” culture of Zhou China. Its relatively insular sub-regions were ruled by powerful warlord clans, each in service to the duke of Jin, but also in good position to resist or threaten the duke’s power.

During the Spring and Autumn period, Jin was more often than not preeminent among the patrician states. Nevertheless, it was also most subject to internal strife. In the end, it was the only one of the four great powers to suffer dismemberment – not by “foreign” armies, but through civil war.

The splitting of Jin into the three states of Zhao, Wei, and Han in 453 signals the close of the Spring and Autumn period.

PERIOD II: The Hegemony of Duke Huan of Qi (680-643)

The eighth century was a chaotic period when the royal structure of the Western Zhou dissolved into a multi-state polity and no stable new structure emerged; the seventh century was a period when the states of China came to terms with the dissolution of Zhou unity and developed coherent patterns of interaction. It was the policies and actions of the ruler of the state of Qi, Duke Huan (r. 685-643), which effected this new order, and the career of Duke Huan and his brilliant Prime Minister, Guan Zhong (also known as Guan Yiwu and Guanzi), became a focal point of the narrative history of ancient China.

The Career of Duke Huan of Qi

Prologue

The predecessor of Duke Huan, Duke Hsiang (r. 697-686), was not an exemplary individual. As a youth, he had maintained an incestuous relationship with his sister. Later, this sister was given in marriage to the duke of the smaller neighboring state of Lu. In 693 she accompanied her husband on a state visit to Qi, and Duke Xiang welcomed her in the manner to which they had formerly been accustomed. The duke of Lu learned of this and impetuously confronted his wife while they were still in Qi. She sent word to her brother that their secret was discovered and Duke Xiang thereupon held a magnificent state banquet in honor of the delegation from Lu. He made sure that his brother-in-law was toasted until he was thoroughly drunk and defenseless, and then had him killed as he made his way back to his camp. When the members of the party from Lu objected to this form of diplomacy, Duke Xiang expressed his remorse by executing his own hired assassin, a man named Peng Sheng.

Several years after his execution, Peng Sheng took his revenge. In the form of a large boar, he attacked Duke Xiang while he was leading a royal hunting party. The duke's followers realized that the boar was Peng Sheng and warned the duke. Furious, Duke Xiang shot an arrow at the boar, but the boar only reared upon its hind legs like a man and shouted. The terrified duke toppled his chariot, injuring his foot and losing a sandal. When he returned to his palace, he ordered that the sandal master, a man named Fu, be whipped. Fu left the palace nursing his wounds and a grudge, and joined with a pretender to the throne to plot against the duke's life. Fu returned to his office as sandal master, but only as an agent for the plotters, who gathered an insurgent band and stormed the palace. The duke, true to character, faced this crisis by hiding behind an open door. But once again, he was tripped up by his feet; an insurgent spotted them under the door, and the duke met his end. The pretender proclaimed himself duke, but was himself assassinated shortly thereafter.

The succession struggle

Two men were in a position to bid for the vacant throne. Both were younger brothers of Duke Xiang who had gone into exile years earlier. The elder was Prince Jiu. He had fled to Lu, where he had been treated well. Two patricians had accompanied him into exile: Guan Zhong and Shao Hu. These were men of high birth who, by standing with the prince, were in line to become his chief ministers were he to take power in Qi. The younger brother was named Xiaobo. He was living in the small state of Ju south of Qi with his chief-of-staff, a patrician named Bao Shuya.

After the death of Duke Xiang and his assassin, the leaders of several powerful clans in Qi met to arrange a succession to their liking. Xiaobo had excellent connections among these men and they sent an invitation to him to return from Ju and take the throne. Messengers friendly to Prince Jiu sped to Lu to warn him, and the governing lords in Lu, anxious to have their own candidate placed on the throne of Qi, sent an army to attack Xiaobo as he proceeded north towards the Qi capital. The army was led by Guan Zhong.

The forces of Lu fell upon Xiaobo's entourage and routed them. Guan Zhong himself shot Xiaobo in the belly, and seeing his master's rival fall dead, he whipped his chariot back towards Lu to report his victory. But Xiaobo was not dead. The arrow had struck the buckle of his belt and he had merely feigned death. He reassembled the scattered remnants of his party and proceeded to rush north to the capital, while Prince Jiu, certain that his rival was dead, dawdled along at a stately pace, accompanied by forces from Lu who expected to coerce the patrician leaders of Qi into installing Jiu as duke. Xiaobo arrived at the capital first and was instantly enthroned by his supporters in the capital. They dispatched an army to fall upon Prince Jiu's forces. The prince and his two henchmen retreated to Lu.

Now that Xiaobo was securely installed as Duke Huan of Qi, he sent an ultimatum to Lu demanding that Prince Jiu be killed and that Guan Zhong and Shao Hu be flayed, diced, and pickled. Lu, eager to please, murdered Prince Jiu. Shao Hu did what was required of a patrician warrior whose lord has been slain: he committed suicide. Guan Zhong, however, proved to be no gentleman. He requested that he be imprisoned rather than pickled and Lu temporarily complied with his wish.

Duke Huan now sent a force against Lu with the aim of capturing and killing his enemy, Guan Zhong. But Bao Shuya, his advisor and confidant, advised him otherwise. "If it is your wish merely to rule Qi," he said, "then my aid will be sufficient. If, however, you wish to rule as a hegemon or a king, then you must have Guan Zhong!"

After hesitating to rescue the man who had almost killed him, the duke decided to follow this advice. Rather than invading Lu, his forces reached the border area between Lu

and Qi and sent a demand that Guan Zhong be delivered up to them for execution. Some within Lu, recognizing Guan Zhong's exceptional abilities and fearful of the consequences to Lu if he were to join the court in Qi, suspected the truth and advised the duke of Lu to execute him on the spot. But most could not believe that Duke Huan could put away his personal grudge against Guan Zhong, and so he was sent in shackles to the border.

As soon as Guan Zhong was escorted into the ranks of the Qi troops, Bao Shuya himself appeared and removed the shackles. He informed Guan Zhong that the duke had decided that rather than execute him, he would make him Prime Minister. Guan Zhong was pleased.

The path to the hegemony: the covenant at Ke

All historical sources agree that under Duke Huan, the state of Qi became enormously strong domestically and powerful in war. The strength of Qi became so great, and Duke Huan came to command such respect among the patrician lords of the various states, that he came close to becoming the *de facto* ruler of China. The lords of almost all of the states came to acknowledge him, explicitly and in assembly, as chief among them. This prestigious role was denoted by a new title, "Hegemon." Although the title was unofficial, the "office" of hegemon became the pivot around which multi-state politics revolved during the remainder of the Spring and Autumn period.

The basis of Qi's success was an extensive reorganization of the administration of Qi that was chiefly engineered by Guan Zhong. Guan Zhong was a man with many innovative ideas. Among the new and original policies that he is said to have implemented in Qi were the registration of all households into neighborhood units, which became the basis of military conscription, the standardization of coinage, regulation of fishing and of salt production, welfare policies to protect the poor and disabled, and the recruitment of talented men into state offices that provided regular salaries. Guan Zhong is also credited with being the first to develop a set of laws that were publicly announced in writing for all to know (and beware of).

Guan Zhong's reforms resulted in dramatic increases in agricultural production, commerce, and in the strengthening of the armies of Qi. With such resources at his back, Duke Huan was able to accomplish most of his "international" goals.

Up until Duke Huan, Qi had been no more than a regional power: the strongest state in the east. Early in his reign, the duke continued along these lines by raiding Lu and extracting from it the regions of several border cities. Having by military force coerced this concession, Duke Huan demanded that the duke of Lu attend a meeting at the town of Ke and perform the blood rituals of a covenant to confirm the land transfer. Traditional

historians identify this meeting as the turning point of the duke's career and of Spring and Autumn politics.

When the meeting at Ke had convened, at a point in the ritual when Duke Huan stood with the duke of Lu upon the ceremonial dais, a minister of Lu assaulted him and held him at swordpoint, demanding that he swear to return the border lands to Lu. Duke Huan's followers were helpless, and he was forced to take an oath. When he was released, he immediately announced to Guan Zhong that he would not fulfill this coerced agreement. Guan Zhong, however, counseled otherwise. The lands, he argued, were a minor affair, something of consequence only to a small state. If the duke were to consider a broader picture, he said, he would see that demonstrating that he would abide by an oath, regardless of the circumstances surrounding it or the cost to him, might purchase him something much greater than a few towns. It might gain him the trust of the patrician lords.

Whether or not the events at Ke took place as they are described, the story expresses an essential feature of what made the ministry of Guan Zhong so significant in Chinese history. Since the fall of the Western Zhou and the unplanned dissolution of China into a multi-state cultural sphere, the only political vision that had developed was territorial expansion through border wars. This had been the policy of the rulers of Zheng in the eighth century, and while it had gained them much, it was a fatally limited approach. The China of this period was a huge area – traveling from one end of it to the other could require months, and there were literally hundreds of patrician states, major and minor, spread out over the area. While one's territories might be enlarged or diminished through wars with one's neighbors, no lasting changes could be effected in the political map on the basis of such limited warfare, or even through ad hoc alliances. Force alone could not create the conditions for political change. What was required was strategy: economic strategy to strengthen the state; military strategy to strengthen the armies; and, most of all, diplomatic strategies that could create stable power structures among several states, under a single center of control. This seems a straightforward idea from our perspective, but it was a brilliant and original idea in seventh century B.C. China.

For the traditional historians who crafted whatever bare facts were available to them into a narrative with dramatic and cultural meaning, the essential matter was not that the events reflected a new strategic consciousness, but that the pivot of that strategy was use of moral behavior as a tool of political policy. By all accounts, the real Guan Zhong was a man who tempered honor with expediency. But the achievements of his regime could be presented as reflecting an underlying strategy that honorable government was expedient, and that is what they meant to later Confucian historians.

Duke Huan creates the hegemony

At the time that Duke Huan emerged, the state of Chu was making steady progress campaigning against minor lords on the southern periphery of the Central States, either removing them from their thrones and incorporating their territories into Chu or coercing them into alliance. The Central States were looking for a protector, and Qi seemed the most viable.

In 680, one year after the meeting at Ke, Duke Huan issued a call to the patrician lords to travel to the town of Juan in Lu and confer on the balance of power in China. At this meeting, which was attended by a great number of rulers and also by an envoy from the Zhou king at Luoyang, Duke Huan was acknowledged as occupying a foremost role as overlord, qualified to issue orders to other lords in the enterprise of stabilizing the political balance. Although the rulers of the other three great states were not present at the Juan convocation, the cooperation of so great a number of rulers was unprecedented, and the presence of a royal envoy, who confirmed Duke Huan's role, gave legitimacy to the proceedings. Duke Huan's position as hegemon, leader of the allied patrician lords, protector of the Zhou royal house and the entire territory of the Eastern Zhou "dynasty," dates from the meeting at Juan.

The meeting at Juan initiated a new political practice, sometimes referred to as the "alliance system," although it was something short of a system. Henceforth for the remainder of the Spring and Autumn centuries, the patrician lords of China ruled in the expectation that there should exist a hegemon who would periodically summon them all to meetings at which, ranked according to strict order of precedence, they would join in covenants aimed at maintaining a balance of power among the states of China. While rulers who were severely disaffected with the hegemon might decline to participate, they always did so at the risk that armies levied by the allies could be directed against them in consequence.

The alliance system not only granted to the hegemon the implicit right to coordinate efforts to curb states outside the alliance, it was also the case that the hegemon frequently became the arbiter of conflicts between alliance members. The precedent was set for this only two years after the meeting at Juan, when Zheng attacked the state of Song, both being alliance members. Duke Huan, judging Zheng the aggressor and assuming his role as protector of the peace, led troops in aid of Song and so forced Zheng to withdraw.

Duke Huan as a political ideal

Duke Huan's many acts as hegemon may all be validly interpreted as acts of self-interest. However, a rich body of tradition grew up around the figures of the duke and his prime minister that celebrated their identification of self-interest with honorable, ritual-governed

behavior. One particularly good example concerns the following tale concerning the state of Yan, the large but relatively unimportant peripheral state north of Qi.

Yan was attacked from the far north by a raiding party of the nomad Di tribes. Yan applied to Qi for aid, and Duke Huan himself came, accompanying a rescuing army which easily routed the Di. Afterwards, the grateful duke of Yan personally escorted Duke Huan's entourage as it returned home. Presently, Duke Huan became aware that the party had long since crossed the borders into Qi, and he went to Guan Zhong to ask whether it was consistent with ritual propriety for the ruler of Yan to accompany them so far. No, replied Guan Zhong, only the Zhou king, the Son of Heaven, is permitted to cross a border when escorting a fellow ruler. It is he alone for whom there are no boundaries. Duke Huan was concerned that far from having helped Yan, he would now have disgraced it by permitting its ruler to commit so grave a breach of etiquette. He stopped the entourage of the duke of Yan and, on the spot, made a gift to Yan of all the lands that they had crossed, ordering that a ditch be dug to mark the new boundary. Accounts of the tale invariably add that once this act was known, the loyalty of all the other lords was secured.

Duke Huan's death and the decline of Qi

In all, Duke Huan convened the patrician lords in assembly seven times during the period of his hegemony. In time, even Chu submitted to his ascendancy, but grudgingly, and its continued provocations eventually led Duke Huan to lead an invasion force against it in 656. The outcome was a standoff – no battle was fought and Qi withdrew. Nevertheless, Duke Huan's influence did not wane, and five years later, at a subsequent assembly of the lords, a messenger from the Zhou king signaled the high point of Huan's prestige when he brought gifts from the king: dried sacrificial meats, a carriage, and a crimson bow with arrows. These were accompanied by a pointed message that Duke Huan need not bow when receiving them. This was an unsought honor of the highest order, one which implied that Duke Huan was now the equal rather than the subject of the Zhou king. The duke was delighted, but Guan Zhong, it is said, sharply cautioned him to decline the honor and to make the usual prostrations. The duke, long accustomed to disciplining himself with his minister's admonitions, did as Guan Zhong counseled.

The historical accounts of Duke Huan's reign agree in dating the effective end of his personal success to the death of Guan Zhong, which came in 645. Duke Huan, himself now an old man, visited Guan Zhong on his deathbed, and consulted with him about the future: whom should he appoint to succeed Guan Zhong as Prime Minister? Guan Zhong clearly understood well the state of the duke's mind and the Qi court. He made three negative recommendations, cautioning the duke against relying on any of his favorites. Among these was one man who had abandoned his home state of Wey, where he was a prince, and come to Qi to link his fortunes to the hegemon's; a second had castrated himself to please the duke by being able to serve him in the harem; a third had, according to legend, had his

rebellious son boiled in order to please the duke. Guan Zhong warned the duke against the flattery of these sycophants, but after he was dead, the duke's will failed him and he appointed the last of these to succeed Guan Zhong.

The decay of the duke's final years is symbolized by the end of his story. In 643 he died, the most celebrated political leader since the Zhou founders. Yet upon the instant of his death, his sons and ministers burst into a furious battle over the ducal succession, with the toadies against whom Guan Zhong had warned leading factions to the dispute. So intense was the infighting that no one gave a thought to the ritual embalming of the late duke's corpse. He lay in the open of a palace room for 67 days, until it was reported that the maggots had crawled from his body and were streaming out beneath the chamber door. Only once a new ruler was installed were the remains prepared for burial – and then at night – but before the interment could occur, fighting broke out again and the new duke was murdered by his own followers. A permanent successor was not installed until forces from the state of Song entered Qi to place their favorite upon the vacant throne. An ironic end to the reign of the first hegemon! Eight months after his death, after the troops from Song had gone home, Duke Huan was buried.

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PERIOD III: The Ascendance of Jin (636-620)

The endemic weakness of Jin

Our attention has been fixed on the state of Qi. But when we examine the Spring and Autumn period as a whole, it is only during the reign of Duke Huan that Qi was preeminent among the four great powers. Afterwards, it is generally the case that the state of Jin was the foremost of the powers, though occasionally the rulers of Chu dominated for short periods, and in one instance the upstart state of Wu overwhelmed the more established states for a decade or two.

After the death of Duke Huan of Qi, there was immediate competition to see who might succeed him as hegemon. So compelling was the experience of the preceding four decades, that never again were the great powers content to allow a vacuum of authority to remain unattended. Although the major rulers might dream of somehow exerting their will unchecked, the idea of greatest influence continued to picture the order appropriate to those troubled times as an alliance of lords, led by a hegemon, coordinating an acceptable balance of powers owing symbolic allegiance to a figurehead Zhou king.

With the sudden collapse of Qi into a succession war, the first ruler to attempt to succeed him was the duke of Song, a powerful central state whose ruling clan members were the direct descendants of the Shang royal house. He was unable to establish stable authority, and during the decade that ensued, the state of Chu, returning to its former practice of threatening the smaller south-central rulers, made considerable headway towards coercing an acknowledgment of its hegemony. However, the rise of a charismatic ruler in the state of Jin put a stop to Chu's adventures and established a true second hegemony, though a brief one lasting only four years (632-628). This was the rule of Duke Wen of Jin, whose story is one of the great historical romances of ancient China. His story also allows us to illustrate the distinctive character of the political dynamic of Jin, which, among the four powers, was probably most representative of the patterns of Eastern Zhou patrician states.

In the retelling below, the dry facts of Jin politics are intermixed with a literary atmosphere of romance. There is some justification for this. When we explore the literary history of ancient China, we generally find that the most developed form of literature was historical narrative; it was around a factual core that early Chinese authors seemed most able to express their imaginative powers. If the history of the legendary past was an interweaving of myths with a touch of fact, the written history of the more recent past combined facts and romance to make history a stage for the examination of human character, near supernatural coincidence, and the evaluation of right and wrong.

The tale of Chong'er, Duke Wen of Jin

The unstable structure of Jin

The state of Jin began the Spring and Autumn period with greater advantages than any other state. It was the only great power located in the traditional heartland of the Zhou cultural sphere. It was a branch lineage of the Zhou royal house. It commanded a long and strategic stretch of the left bank of the Yellow River. And it early on earned the favor of the royal house by sending armies to destroy the competing Zhou house in Hui in 750. But in 745, the ruler of Jin made a fatal mistake. He granted his powerful uncle a patrimonial estate in a river valley only twenty-five miles distant from his own capital of Yi – a river valley that possessed a walled settlement, Quwo, of greater size than the capital itself. For generations, the hereditary lords of Quwo, greedy to displace the established line in Yi, arranged the assassination of duke after duke. Each time a duke was killed, the lord of Quwo would lead a force to seize the capital and install himself as duke of Jin, and each time the citizenry of the walled capital would raise a force sufficient to forestall an effective siege and repel the insurgent.

At last, in 678, the strongman of Quwo arranged the fifth and last such ducal assassination (the second he had managed personally) and achieved the dream of the lords of Quwo: he became duke of Jin. His joy was lethal – he died a year later, his son succeeding him as Duke Xian (r. 676-651). Duke Xian was the father of Duke Wen.

The future Duke Wen's dysfunctional family

Duke Xian began his reign on a positive note. Correctly convinced that the problems Jin had faced in the past were due to unproductive competition among the various lineage branches of the ducal clan, he resolved to return harmony to the clan and to the state. His method was to murder all the princelings of lineage branches other than his own. Having done so to the best of his ability (a few uncooperative youngsters escaped to other states), he moved the capital to a new site to continue this upbeat tone.

One consequence of this was that Jin thereafter possessed a truncated ruling lineage. Where in other states strong rulers could rely on a vast network of senior clan leaders for economic, military, and political support, rulers of Jin were unusually dependent upon coordination with senior members of clans other than their house of Ji. While this provided a certain strength by diversifying political participation and broadening the base of government, it ultimately brought down the state.

In 672, Duke Xian led an attack against the nomadic Lirong tribe, and took two women from the tribe to be his consorts. One, Liji, became his favorite, although she could not be his principal wife. By Liji the duke had a son, whom he wished to install as his heir.

However, the duke had already begotten seven other sons, many of whose mothers and their families would not be pleased to see their offspring passed over in favor of the younger child of a “barbarian” concubine.

Three of the other sons were grown and politically prominent: the heir apparent, Shensheng, and two brothers, Yiwu and Chong'er (a name which means “double eared”). Only the heir apparent was of good background. He was a grandson of Duke Huan of Qi. The other two were the sons of women of the nomad Di tribe.

The historians' portrait of Liji, the duke's favorite, is not complimentary. They tell us that when the duke first suggested that he might change the line of succession to place her son first, she protested strongly. At the same time, she successfully orchestrated a plot to frame the heir apparent for the crime of trying to poison the duke. Shensheng responded honorably by killing himself. Then Liji slandered Yiwu and Chong'er, who fled. Yiwu fled to the small state of Liang, while Chong'er escaped to the Di nomads in the north. Liji did not protest further when her son was installed as the new heir apparent.

Chong'er in exile

Upon the death of Duke Xian, it was Yiwu, rather than Chong'er, who returned to take the throne. Yiwu was under the protection of Duke Mu of the neighboring great power of Qin, a man whose influence in western China was so great that he is sometimes viewed as a type of counter-hegemon to Duke Huan of Qi. In light of Qin's support for Yiwu, Chong'er prudently declined to struggle for the throne. Yiwu ruled for over a decade (650-638), and he is handled roughly by the historians. He is known for the impolitic ingratitude he repeatedly displayed towards Qin, against the advice of his highest advisor. This ultimately led to a disastrous battle in which Yiwu was captured by Qin, having been abandoned in the field by his virtuous high advisor, whose eloquent parting words could best be translated as, “Nyah, nyah, na-nyah.”

Where had Chong'er, the hero of this story, been during the years of his brother's ill rule? Throughout this period, Chong'er had wandered in exile, accompanied by a small group of loyal followers, including a man named Hu Yan, who became to him what Guan Zhong was to Duke Huan of Qi. It is this portion of his story, which includes the romantic theme of exile followed by return and triumph, that inspired the wealth of legends that came to be associated with Chong'er. Many of these tales are variations on a popular theme: the recognition of exceptional charisma in a person whose position is below his abilities. In the records of Chong'er's career, as Chong'er wanders from state to state, the qualities of those states and their rulers is revealed by their ability or inability to detect in this refugee the signs of future greatness.

In many of these stories, the sign of a patrician lord's sensitivity to Chong'er's virtue is his willingness to add to Chong'er's traveling harem one of his own daughters, and both Duke Huan of Qi, whom Chong'er visited after Guan Zhong's death, and Duke Mu of Qin responded in this way. The chief of the Di nomads among whom Chong'er lived for twelve years provided him with his first wife. He left her behind when he returned to China, but instructed her, "Wait for me for twenty-five years and if I have not returned, you may remarry." "Remarry!" she laughed. "In twenty-five years tall trees will stand on my grave! Still, I'll wait for you." She later rejoined him in Jin.

It was in the state of Qi that Chong'er almost lost his chance at greatness. There he fell in love with a woman of Qi and refused to travel further. Hu Yan and another of his followers plotted beneath a mulberry tree, trying to figure out a way to coax Chong'er from Qi. A serving maid of the woman Chong'er loved was eavesdropping in the branches of the tree, and when the men left, she rushed off to report to her mistress. The woman was furious at the actions of her maid, and had her killed. Then she went to Chong'er and urged him to be on his way.

"If in life one finds peace and happiness," replied Chong'er, "what more could one wish for? A man lives only once and I will die here. I could not bear to go on."

"You are a prince of Jin," said the woman. "You have come here with neither office nor wealth, but with a group of men who have staked their lives on you. If for the love of a woman you fail to hurry back to your home and reward these men who labored on your behalf, I will be ashamed for you. If you don't strive for achievements, when will they ever come?"

She then plotted with Chong'er's followers to get him drunk and send him off asleep in a carriage. When Chong'er awoke, they were already far along. He drew his sword in a rage and moved to kill Hu Yan.

"If by killing me you will attain your destiny," said the quick witted Hu Yan, "you will have fulfilled my deepest wish."

Chong'er paused. "Uncle, if things don't turn out well, I'll eat your flesh!"

"If things don't turn out," answered Hu Yan, "my flesh will be left out to rot anyway. Not worth eating!"

And so Chong'er continued on the journeys that led him to the Jin throne.

Duke Wen reorganizes the structure of Jin

Eventually, Chong'er became Duke Wen of Jin. His final return was engineered with the aid of Duke Mu of Qin, who had been treated so disrespectfully by Yiwu.

The newly installed Duke Wen faced a double problem. The internal politics of the state of Jin, which had for so long crippled Jin's ability to play a leading role among the patrician states, had once again dissolved into civil war. In addition, the state of Chu, now that Duke Huan of Qi was dead, had resumed its policy of expansion into the Central States. If left unchecked, Chu would eventually force even those states closest to Jin to form alliances with it, leaving Jin without an effective buffer region to the south.

Jin, of course, no longer had an extensive ruling clan upon which Duke Wen might rely in strengthening the state: his father had wiped out all collateral branches. And the many other patrician warrior clans with estates and armed retainers in various valleys of Jin's hilly terrain had thus far proved a disintegrating force in Jin politics.

Duke Wen's major achievement in Jin was to invent a device by means of which Jin's intrinsic political structure could become a constructive force. Focusing on outward threats to effect internal changes, the duke set in motion orders to build a new style army for the inevitable conflict with Chu. He structured this army in a unique fashion. Instead of creating two or three divisions and appointing generals to each, as was the custom at the time, he sorted his army into six divisions, each with a major general and lieutenant general. The twelve available commands were skillfully distributed among the warlord clan leaders, along with the right of hereditary succession to these military offices. In this way, each major clan found its fortunes linked to those of the others. Moreover, in practical terms, each general found himself in charge of what was effectively a private army, but with personnel that had been raised by the duke and which was charged with service to the Jin state, rather with a duty to be loyal to the general.

The way in which these armies were deployed in battle and the ways in which the various generals were ranked, along with the relation between military and civil titles and duties – all these were left at the discretion of the duke. In this way, Duke Wen turned the nature of Jin as a decentralized warlord state to the benefit of his central rule. This model successfully mediated between centrifugal and centripetal tendencies in the clan-based societies of later Zhou states, and allowed Jin to become the dominant military power of the later Spring and Autumn period.

As time went on, however, the system began to work increasingly against Jin. By the mid-sixth century, the role of the duke had diminished so far that both the armies and the state itself were largely in the control of the generals and their clans. Over the following century, an endemic struggle for power developed among these groups which grew so

intense that at last, in 453, the greatest of them simply divided Jin into separate states under their direct control, and Jin ceased to exist.

Duke Wen as hegemon

In 632, Duke Wen engaged the troops of Chu near the city of Chengpu in Lu in one of the great battles of ancient China. Two of Jin's generals employed an innovative strategy. They led detachments of troops in a pre-planned retreat, and when the Chu armies fell into the disorder that was characteristic of hot pursuit, they suddenly found themselves lured into the midst of the main body of the Jin army. The result was a resounding Jin victory. The commander of the Chu armies, whose success of the preceding years had thrown the Central States into a panic, committed suicide upon receiving a message of severe rebuke from his king, and the military might of Chu was crippled.

The Jin victory was most welcome to the lords of the Central States. That it had earned Duke Wen the hegemon's role was made clear at once, when no less a personage than the Zhou king himself journeyed to the duke's field camp to present congratulations. The king presented Duke Wen with various gifts, including 300 members of his personal bodyguard, and charged him with the following words: "Uncle! Obey the orders of the king and bring peace to the states of the four quarters. Drive away all who are ill-disposed towards the king." Several days later, the duke called an assembly of the patrician lords, thus formally reviving the office of hegemon.

Like Duke Huan of Qi, Duke Wen achieved the office of hegemon only after undertaking a major reorganization of his state which provided him with a much strengthened power base. However, the reforms of the two hegemons were dramatically different in structure. Whereas Duke Huan, with the guidance of Guan Zhong, had strengthened the centralized structures of Qi and encouraged the growth of commerce, Duke Wen had made the best of Jin's centrifugal tendencies and devised a system that would allow decentralized power to bring out the contributions of a highly militaristic warlord elite. Jin and Qi represented alternative models for the other states, and when political theory emerged in China during the Warring States period, most schools of thought reflected different admixtures of these two approaches.

During the four years that he was hegemon, Duke Wen followed the example of Duke Huan of Qi and used his powers to adjust the balance of influence among the Central States. After Chengpu, there was no need to launch a major battle against a great power, and the duke's initiatives were all successful and not particularly demanding. In effect, Chong'er's installation as hegemon represents the dramatic end to his story. He died peacefully in 628 at the height of his prestige, and his son succeeded him without incident.

A year after the death of Duke Wen, the long-reigning Duke Mu of Qin, determined to seize what would surely be his own last opportunity to attain supreme power, marched his troops into Jin. However, Jin was able to mount an effective defense, and the troops of Duke Mu retreated in defeat. From this point on, a triangular balance of power emerged in the western portion of China. Qin and Jin, which shared borders near the bend of the Yellow River, engaged in repeated periodic war. Qin, however, was never able to devote itself wholeheartedly to the defeat of Jin because of the ever present threat of Chu, which lay on Qin's southeast border. On the other hand, Jin was hampered by the gradual re-emergence of civil strife, and so could not gain the upper hand against Qin. At the same time, Jin was able to retain a great deal of its influence over the central states and effectively fulfill a hegemon role, thus preventing Chu from coercing a critical mass of the Central States into its sphere of influence. This situation persisted for forty years, until the sudden rise of the state of Wu introduced a dramatic destabilizing element.

PERIOD IV: The Era of the Jin-Wu Alliance (584-520)

The dominating role of Jin through the greater part of the sixth century was not uniform and required frequent maintenance. Chu, in particular, was periodically able to challenge the hegemonic position of the Jin dukes. In 597 Qi crippled the forces of Jin in one of the greatest battles of the Spring and Autumn period, and for several years thereafter, the king of Chu was acknowledged as hegemon. However, Jin revived, and by 589 its duke once again occupied pride of place among the assembly of patrician lords.

The alliance between Jin and Wu

In 584, a patrician refugee from Chu named Qu Wuchen, who had become a court advisor in Jin, suggested a bold plan to the duke of Jin. Over the preceding century, a new political force had gradually become significant in the area surrounding the delta of the Yangzi River in the southeast. This state was known as Wu.



The rulers of Wu traced their lineage to the pre-dynastic clan of the Zhou. They considered themselves the descendants of Taibo, the eldest son of the Old Duke, ruler of the Zhou tribe. Taibo, the legend went, had abdicated in order to ensure that the Zhou throne would pass to his nephew, the future King Wen, and by this act he ensured the greatness of the Zhou and the conquest of the Shang. The rulers of Wu, who by virtue of this claim of descent shared with the state of Jin the surname of Ji, thus pictured themselves as a distant colony of the Zhou people who had been engaged for centuries in civilizing the wild coastal regions of the southeast.

The people of these regions were, indeed, very different from those of the central plains of China. They were closely related to a group of advanced hunter-gatherers known as the “Yi” tribes, which occupied large regions of the Huai River valley and coastal plains. Their culture was sharply distinct from others in China. Unlike Chinese men, who wore long hair elaborately dressed, the people of Wu cut their hair short. They also tattooed their bodies, a custom unknown to the Chinese.

Whether Wu was in fact a Chinese state ruling over a non-Chinese population, or instead a non-Chinese people which had laid claim to Chinese descent in order to gain political respect, Wu had become a significant player in the multi-state structure of China during the late seventh century by launching raids on the eastern lands of its neighbor, the state of Chu. Chu itself was considered a newcomer to the Chinese cultural sphere, and it is likely that its military might was more sharply feared and resented by the Central States than was that of Jin, simply because its armies appeared as forces of cultural as well as military invasion. In any event, the actions of Wu were not unwelcome to the states of central China.

In 584, Qu Wuchen proposed to the duke of Jin that his state extend the offer of an alliance to Wu and coordinate further efforts to harry Chu and keep it from focusing its strength upon the

Central states. The duke adopted the plan and sent Qu himself as emissary to the ruler of Wu. Qu's mission was successful, and later that same year, Jin and Wu both sent troops against Chu.

Chu was now facing a war on two fronts. Battlefields on these fronts were up to four or five hundred miles distant and the forces of Wu turned out to be far better at warfare than might have been expected. Wu did not employ the chariot warfare which still dominated the North China Plain. Chariots were useless in the hilly lands of the southeast, divided by innumerable waterways and wetlands. Instead, Wu combined infantry troops with skilled naval forces, which could move rapidly on the rivers of south China.

The alliance of Jin and Wu was a great success. After two years, Chu sued for peace, and even agreed to a formal alliance with Jin and Wu. Wu's territorial domains had now expanded, reaching northward all the way to the lower coast of Shandong, and Qi, seeing that it, like Chu, could be subjected to a war on two fronts, prudently requested to join the alliance.

Jin was now clearly supreme once again. In 578, it defeated armies from Qin, and three years later inflicted a decisive defeat on Chu when the latter disturbed the tranquility of the alliance. The hegemony of Jin appeared stable for generations to come.

The decline of the ducal house in Jin

Paradoxically, however, this rise in the power of the dukes of Jin in interstate relations was paralleled by a decline in their domestic standing. The system of marshaling the centrifugal warlord clans that had been devised by Duke Wen required a skilled man on the throne. The Jin ducal house was itself weak, and the duke needed to co-opt the interests of his hereditary generals and play them off against one another. In 573, the ruling duke was unable to display the ruthlessness required to be successful in such a delicate game. He spared the lives of the leaders of certain rebellious clans, who predictably responded by assassinating him and seizing effective power. Over the next century, although the dukes continued to represent Jin effectively at the assemblies of patrician lords, the actual power in the state rested with shifting coalitions of warlord clans, each dominating certain local territories and a portion of the state army of Jin.

Within a few years of the warlord insurgency in Jin, the battles among the military clans reached the high pitch of a civil war. It became obvious to all who knew of these events that the hegemony of Jin was likely to deteriorate, which would surely lead to the renewed threat of Chu upon its neighbor to the north.

(As a courtesy to all the traditional narratives of ancient Chinese history, this account must note here, in its proper sequence, that in 551, Confucius was born in the state of Lu. Although in terms of ultimate influence on Chinese society, it may be that no event of the Spring and Autumn period was of more importance, in his own day Confucius was known to few outside the northeastern quadrant of the Zhou cultural sphere and was generally perceived as a frustrated political failure.)

The peace of Xiang Xu

In order to forestall an outbreak of renewed fighting between Jin and Chu, which was sure to engulf all the central states in another prolonged war, a minister of the state of Song by the name of Xiang Xu developed a plan. He proposed that an assembly of the patrician lords be called with the goal of arranging a shared hegemony between Jin and Chu. The agreement that Xiang proposed was designed to bind all the states to oaths forswearing offensive warfare in general, and was by far the most idealistic political initiative of the entire Classical period.

The states of Qin and Qi declined to participate in this assembly. But the rulers of Jin and Chu did attend, along with the most powerful lords of the Central States. Wu was not yet eligible to participate in assemblies of the patrician rulers, as it was still considered more barbarian than Chinese. However, by virtue of its alliance with Jin it was effectively represented.

As it turned out, the peace proposed by Xiang Xu fit the practical plans of both Jin, which was in a weak position, and Chu, which was not yet prepared to undertake a major initiative. As a result, in 546 Xiang Xu's plan was adopted, and for the next several years, the usual rhythm of incessant squabbling and border fighting among the states does indeed subside from the record of the historical chronicles.

But by 538, Chu had endured peace long enough. Under a vigorous new king, the armies of Chu prepared to establish a new power balance.

The tale of King Ling of Chu

The disruption of the Peace of Xiang Xu was principally the work of one man, the ambitious King Ling of Chu. His story was generally taken as one of the great cautionary tales of Spring and Autumn history. It revealed for its ancient audience the precariousness of political success dependent upon the character of a ruler without virtue.

The principal wife of King Ling's father had borne the former king no sons, although he had fathered many sons by various favored concubines. Unable to decide which of these to designate as heir, the king determined to leave the choice to the deities who attended to the fate of the state of Chu. He held lavish ceremonies at the major rivers and mountains of his domain, and to the spirits of these places he mounted great sacrifices, displaying in the course of the rituals a disk of jade. He asked the spirits to ensure that when next he commanded his sons to bow before him, the son whom they wished to see installed as the ruler of Chu would fall upon the disk in making his prostrations.

Returning to his capital, the king then buried the disk in the throne room and summoned his sons. As they bowed, the eldest straddled the disk, the second son – Prince Yuan, the future King Ling – passed his elbow over it, and all the others performed their bows at other spots. Only the youngest, too little to walk before the throne unaided, pressed his hands directly over the spot where the disk was buried.

The troubled king sighed that difficult times lay ahead. The spirits had clearly chosen the son least likely to be accepted by the state and by his jealous brothers, and he dared not abide by their decision.

Upon the death of the old king, his eldest son was enthroned as the new king. Prince Yuan was distressed that he had been passed over for the throne and he divined by means of turtle shell as to whether the state would come into his hands. When the divination was negative, he exploded in anger, shouting, "If Heaven will not give me this piddling realm, I will take it for myself!"

Prince Yuan's brother ruled for fifteen years, and upon his death his son was installed as his successor. The young new king was in need of senior advisors, and he naively chose his uncle, Prince Yuan, to be his chief minister. The prince quickly established a reputation for brutality which made him much feared throughout the state.

In the young king's fourth year, Prince Yuan was en route as an emissary to Zheng when a messenger rode up reporting that the king had fallen ill. The worried prince immediately rushed back to the palace to attend to his royal nephew. He found the king in bed and strangled him to death, in this way terminating his illness, and then ensured that the king's two little sons would not grieve overmuch by having them murdered. By this subtle stratagem the prince fulfilled his vow and in 640 was installed as King Ling of Chu.

King Ling's ambitious temperament was not changed by his accession to the throne. He determined to gain sole control over the double hegemony established by the Peace of Xiang Xu. King Ling recognized that Jin was in decline, and that for the states of central and eastern China the state of Wu represented the greatest threat. He determined to cast himself as the protector of the east and attract the allegiance of the Chinese states by guaranteeing protection against Wu, a role which Jin, as Wu's ally, could not offer.

In 538, King Ling notified the duke of Jin that he intended to call an assembly of the patrician lords, thereby using a courteous diplomatic form to convey the message that he now intended to act as sole hegemon. Jin did not at that time have the resources to undertake action against Chu, and in the end, Chu managed to persuade or coerce all the states of eastern China into alliance with it.

The histories recount various conversations that King Ling is said to have had with his ministers. These share the quality of illustrating the grandeur of the king's ambitions, which seem to have outstripped those of any other ruler of this period. King Ling appears to have imagined himself as the successor to the throne of the Zhou kings, and according to the tales he was assured by his sycophant ministers that once his campaigns against Wu were complete, no ruler would dare to refuse his wishes.

In 529, the king launched his long-prepared campaign against Wu. He conceived it on a scale matching his ambitions, and expended so much manpower on constructing encampments and military works as he slowly proceeded that the people of Chu grew restless under the enormous strain he was placing upon them. When the king personally went to join his armies in a distant camp near Wu, senior members of the king's clan – including his youngest brother, who had once knelt on the old king's jade disk – executed a coup d'état. They seized the capital and put to death King Ling's son and heir. Then they prepared to resist the return of the king's massive army.

But the king's response to the coup was as weak as his previous conduct had been vicious. When news was brought to him of the insurgency and the death of his son, he began to wail without restraint.

He threw himself upon the ground and shrieked to his attendants, "Could other men love their sons they way I loved mine?"

"Why, they love them the more," his aides replied. "The poor man knows that when he dies his corpse will be tossed in a ditch unless he has a son to bury him and sacrifice to him."

"I have killed the sons of many men," said the king. "After all, how could I fail to come to this?"

When his advisors urged him to lead his troops back towards the capital and see how things stood, the king was unwilling. "The wrath of the people cannot be opposed. All the cities will be against me now."

As they watched the king's majesty dissolve, his followers slipped away one by one and his great mass of troops dispersed. The king's response to the crisis made no sense to them. At this very time the capital was in turmoil, so accustomed to living in terror of King Ling that a mere rumor of his return had already panicked the people and led the princeling who had been installed as King Ling's successor to commit suicide.

But in the meantime, King Ling found himself utterly alone. He wandered aimlessly among remote hills; none of the people who happened upon him dared to take him in. Finally, the king encountered a former attendant. "Find some food for me!" he pleaded. "I haven't eaten in three days."

"The new king has issued an ordinance," replied the man. "Anyone who dares to feed or to accompany your majesty will be punished by the extermination of his entire clan. Besides, I wouldn't know where to get any food for you."

Night having fallen, the king had no alternative. He lay down with his head pillowed on the knee of his former servant. But once he had fallen asleep, the man slipped a clod of dirt under the king's head and ran off. When the king awoke, he was too weak to climb to his feet, and lay waiting for death.

In the meantime, the son of a former officer of Chu was searching for the king. Years before, his father had twice violated of the laws of Chu, but being a loyal subject who was acting in good faith, the king had pardoned him. "To pardon twice a man who had broached the king's own laws, there could be no kindness greater than this!" With these thoughts, the son had entered the hills where the king was said to be wandering, determined to rescue him.

He found the king on the point of death, and carried him back to his own home. There, the king finally committed suicide. The loyal son buried him, and in order to give the interment the sanctity a king deserved, he killed two of his own daughters and had them buried along with the king, to serve him after death.

In the meantime, the youngest brother of King Ling had ascended the throne of Chu, thus fulfilling the wishes that the spirits of the state had expressed so many years before.

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PERIOD V: The Rise and Fall of the State of Wu (515-473)

The ascendance of Wu

After the death of King Ling of Chu, the Jin-Wu alliance was in full control of the balance of power and the dukes of Jin returned to the role of hegemon which they had played so regularly for a century. However, the state of Jin remained internally unstable, and the fact that the dukes were hegemons did not enhance their power. Rather, the duke served as a figurehead for the warlords of Jin, whose combined might exceeded any other state, but whose domestic squabbles brought into question how that military power could be applied in a sustained campaign, if one were called for.

Consequently, Jin's hegemony, which in appearance lasted from 520-482, was a weak form of leadership, and the rhythm of scattered warfare gradually regained the steady beat that had prevailed prior to the Peace of Xiang Xu.

During the first decade of this period, the state of Chu seemed to be recovering from the disruptions of King Ling's reign. Its armies grew along the middle reaches of the Yangzi River in the vicinity of Ying, the capital city of Chu. The Jin hegemons were not strong enough to form stable alliances to counter the growing threat of Chu, and under the leadership of its new ruler, King Ping, it appeared that Chu would soon be able to resume its campaign to destroy Jin's ally in the Yangzi delta, the state of Wu.

The rise and fall of the state of Wu is one of the most dramatic tales in the Spring and Autumn histories. Its central characters include successive rulers of Wu, who called themselves kings, in the style of the Chu lords. But the most poignant player in this story was a refugee from Chu, named Wu Zixu, who served both kings. (It is an accident of transcription that Wu Zixu's surname appears in English as identical to the name of the state of Wu. The Chinese characters are different, and Wu Zixu's ancestors were all from Chu. To avoid confusion, he is generally referred to here as Zixu, rather than by his surname.)

Wu Zixu and the rise and fall of the state of Wu

How Zixu became an enemy of Chu

The story of Wu Zixu begins in Chu, his family homeland, where his father was appointed tutor to the crown prince by King Ping. The young prince received an estate from the king, and when he went to live there, his tutor accompanied him along with his two sons, Zixu and his elder brother.

In 527, King Ping sent his prime minister to the state of Qin to procure from that ducal house a wife for the prince. However, when the prime minister saw the woman whom the Qin were to promise in marriage, he galloped back to Chu. "This woman of Qin," he told his king, "is the most beautiful in the world. Marry her yourself! You can get another woman for the prince." King Ping, being a man of the world, saw no purpose in wasting

such a woman on his son. He followed his minister's advice and, finding his new bride as stunning as he had been told, he took his minister even closer into his counsels, which had, of course, been the minister's goal from the start.

What the prince thought of all this we do not know, but thereafter the prime minister became watchful of the prince, anticipating that ultimately he would seek revenge against the man who had denied him so beautiful a wife. He came to view the day that King Ping died and the prince succeeded to the throne as his own doom, and began to plant in the king's mind suspicions about his son, hoping that the king would designate a different successor. "It's all because of that woman of Qin," he told the king. "He hates you for it. Your majesty had best defend yourself! The prince is raising troops in his estate and contacting lords outside of Chu. He means to stage a coup d'état."

In time, the king became convinced by these slanders and he summoned to his court the prince's tutor, Zixu's father. Zixu's father maintained the innocence of the prince, which enraged the king. He threw Zixu's father in prison. When courtiers loyal to the prince rushed to the prince's estates to warn him what had transpired at court, the prince recognized the hopelessness of his case and fled to the state of Song.

The prime minister was upset that the prince had escaped, but he was even more concerned that men of ability would follow the prince into exile and plot a future insurgency. He was above all fearful of the two sons of the prince's tutor. "His sons are both clever men," he told the king. "If we do not have them executed, it will spell anxious days for us in the future. Hold the father as hostage and summon the sons to come here."

Accordingly, the king sent a messenger to the prison to speak to Zixu's father. "If you can bring your two sons here the king will let you live; otherwise, you shall die."

"My older boy is obedient," said the tutor. "If I call him he will come. But Zixu is tough and obstinate. He's capable of great things. He'll see that to come is to be captured, and knowing the way things are now he'll never come."

Nevertheless, the king sent a message to the two sons. "If you come, I will set your father free. Otherwise he will die."

The two brothers discussed what to do, and in the end Zixu's older brother said, "I know that if I go I will not be able to carry on my father's destiny and extend the family line, nor will I be able to avenge his disgrace. But I cannot bear to ignore his plea to save his life. You escape and carry out vengeance for our father. I will go die for him."

Zixu followed his brother's wishes, and while his father and brother were being murdered at the capital, Zixu fled to join the prince in Song. When his father learned of the outcome of the king's manoeuver, he said, "Zixu has escaped. Chu is in peril!"

Wu Zixu arrives in Wu

The prince did not remain long in Song, which was in a state of civil war. He moved on to the state of Zheng, where Zichan was prime minister. In 522, the prince incautiously let himself become involved in intrigues of state, selling his services to the state of Jin as its agent in a plot to overthrow the government of Zheng. When Zichan learned of the activities of his guest, he executed him, and Zixu decided it would be good to move on.

He traveled across Chu towards Wu, disguised as a commoner. But he was a wanted man in Chu, and as he neared the Yangzi River crossing to Wu, he was recognized and pursued. Rushing to elude the Chu search party, he came to the river and saw a ferryman waiting by the bank. Although he had no money, he told the ferryman to take him across. The ferryman observed the hurried manner of his passenger and calmly rowed him over to Wu. As he stepped off, Zixu handed his sword to the ferryman.

"This sword is worth its weight in gold. It is my payment."

The ferryman replied, "According to the orders of the king of Chu, the man who captures Wu Zixu will receive lands worth 50,000 piculs of grain and a jade insignia of patrician rank. What is your sword compared to that?" And he rowed back without the sword.

When Zixu finally made his way to the capital of Wu, he sought an audience with the king. At the time, the king's cousin, Prince Guang, was the general-in-chief of the forces of Wu, and Zixu initially presented himself at the prince's compound, offering to serve as his retainer and requesting that the prince arrange a royal audience for him. The king received Zixu with honors, and instructed him to remain in the service of Prince Guang.

Wu Zixu engineers a coup in Wu

Some time later, a border dispute arose between Wu and Chu. Zixu again appeared in court. "Chu can be destroyed," he advised the king. "I request that you appoint Prince Guang to attack."

But Prince Guang spoke in opposition. "This Wu Zixu had both his father and brother murdered by the king of Chu. He only advises attacking Chu in order to achieve his personal vengeance. In fact, it is not yet possible to defeat Chu."

The king followed Prince Guang's advice. But Zixu had observed Prince Guang closely and now understood that the prince's real purpose was to seize the throne of Wu for himself. Shortly before, Zixu had encountered a brash and matchless swordsman who was wandering in Wu, picking fights with any man who crossed him. Now, he introduced this man to Prince Guang and recommended that the prince take him into his service. Then Zixu excused himself from the prince's court and retired to farm in an obscure corner of Wu, awaiting events.

As Zixu had suspected, it did not take long before the prince made use of his new retainer. In 516, King Ping of Chu died, and the king of Wu calculated that an attack on Chu while funeral arrangements were proceeding would take the state by surprise. He sent an army under two of his younger brothers to invade Chu, but the attack was unsuccessful. The Chu army flanked the forces from Wu and cut off their route of escape.

With the king's two brothers trapped in Wu, Prince Guang saw a chance to realize his secret ambition and seize the throne from his cousin's branch of the lineage. He called his new retainer to him. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained!" he said. "I am, in fact, the rightful ruler of this state, and I want to take what belongs to me."

"With the king's brothers stuck in Chu," replied the swordsman, "there is no one to fear at court. Killing the king would be nothing to a man like me!"

The two staged an elaborate dinner for the king, and the prince concealed a group of armed men in a chamber near the banquet hall. At the proper moment, the prince limped away from the hall complaining that his foot was sore and needed attention. As he went to the chamber where his troops were hiding, his retainer approached the king's table carrying the pièce de resistance of the banquet: an enormous steamed fish. As he passed the king's bodyguard, he pulled a sword from the fish's mouth and while he was slicing the king into pieces, the prince's men fell upon the company. Prince Guang was in possession of the state of Wu in time for the dessert course, and took the title of King Helü.

The invasion of Chu

Having seized the throne, King Helü recalled Zixu to his service and made him his chief advisor. Zixu, along with a second refugee from Chu laid plans with the king for a campaign against Chu.

In 506, the armies of Wu struck. The force of their attack was overwhelming and after overrunning the eastern border regions of Chu, they so routed the Chu forces that the way was clear for them to sweep 250 miles up the Yangzi to the capital city of Ying. The ruler of Chu was King Zhao, the son of King Ping. As the Chu troops approached the capital, he concluded that the only hope for the survival of the state and his clan's royal

office was to abandon the city and flee to another state. Once free of immediate danger to himself, he could go begging for troops from other patrician lords afraid of Wu.

The sack of Ying was the first time during the entire Spring and Autumn period that any great power had seen alien troops in its capital city. Not only did the army of Wu occupy the city and the king set up his personal quarters there, but Wu Zixu finally gained his revenge in the most public way possible.

The fact that his great enemy, King Ping, had been dead for ten years did not stop him. Zixu ordered the troops of Wu to burst into the burial chambers of the king and drag his coffin into the sun. Then, spilling the king's embalmed corpse out, he ordered that it be whipped with 300 lashes as payment for the death of Zixu's father and brother. Only then was his vengeance against Chu complete and his father's prophecy truly fulfilled.

The conquest of Yue

With the sack of Ying in 506, Wu, which only fifty years before had been a half-barbarian minor power, significant only as a regional ally of Jin, now possessed greater power than had any state since the fall of the Western Zhou. King Helü sat in the capital of Chu, luxuriating in the tyrannical powers of a conquering lord over a people not his own, forgetful of his tasks back in Wu. Throughout China, patrician lords were astounded that the ruling house of a major power could be routed from its homeland, that the great state of Chu could, seemingly, have dissolved overnight.

However, one state saw in this situation only opportunity. The state of Yue on Wu's southern border took advantage of King Helü's absence from his state to send a raiding party into Wu. Yue was a coastal state located south of the Yangzi. Its rulers claimed to be the descendants of the legendary Emperor Yu, who was said to have lived well over a thousand years before. In fact, its history prior to this time is virtually unknown. Its people were almost surely ethnically distinct from heartland Chinese, and no Chinese lord had ever acknowledged Yue to be a state in the Chinese sense.

When King Helü learned of the raiders from Yue, he was not greatly concerned. Unwilling to leave the pleasures of Ying, he sent a detachment of troops back to deal with Yue. The Wu soldiers seem to have had little trouble driving the invaders back south. However, the king's younger brother, observing that the king did not seem anxious to occupy his throne in Wu, determined to seat himself upon it. He issued orders for the troops under his command to steal away from the areas around Ying and slip back into Wu. Once there, he announced to the people of Wu, who may have been wondering what had become



of their absentee king, that he had now been replaced.

King Helü was aroused at last. He quit Ying and rushed his army back to Wu. His frightened brother fled and order was quickly restored. The exiled king of Chu, seeing that his capital was at last free of Wu troops, marched back in just in time to receive Helü's brother as a refugee and make him a lord of Chu. But before he could stabilize his restoration, King Helü ordered a new invasion of Chu, this time under the charge of his son Fuchai. Fuchai once again drove the king of Chu from his capital, and confirmed that the entire south of China remained under the suzerainty of Wu.

For almost ten years, Wu retained its power over the south while its ally, Jin continued to dominate the rest of China and hold the title of hegemon. Then in 496, King Helü learned that the leader of the Yue people had died, and he decided it would be a good time to repay Yue for its troublesome raid nine years earlier. He and his son Fuchai led an army into the wilds of Yue to teach the barbarians a lesson.

The new ruler of Yue went by the title King Goujian. He had succeeded peacefully to the chieftainship of his father, and was not yet tested as a general. Nevertheless, he devised a creative tactical approach. When his army had come within range of the forces of Wu, he sent three of his braves off to challenge the enemy. The three men galloped within sight of the assembled troops of Wu, and then began to shout raucously while repeatedly charging the line of troops. Then they grasped their swords and cut their own throats.

As the soldiers of Wu watched this performance transfixed, Goujian released his main army onto their flank. The Wu forces had no time to redeploy and were routed. In the battle, King Helü was wounded in his hand. Later, infection set in and the king realized that his wound would be mortal. He sent for his son Fuchai.

"When you are king," he said, "will you forget that it was Goujian who killed your father?"

"I will never dare forget," answered his son, and that night the king died.

King Fuchai ignores Zixu's warning

From the day that he became king, Fuchai began a relentless preparation for war to avenge his father's death. King Goujian of Yue, hearing of the mobilization in Wu, determined to attack Wu before it was prepared. His minister of war, a master general named Fan Li, warned him to change his plans.

"I have heard that weapons are ill-omened devices," he said. "Strife is the conduct of last resort. He who secretly plots contrary to virtue, delights in the use of ill-omened

devices, and tests himself through conduct that should only be used as a last resort will be opposed by the Lord on High. There can be no profit in such conduct.”

“I’ve made up my mind,” said the king, and he launched his armies. King Fuchai of Wu turned loose upon them the crack troops he had been drilling day and night, and smashed the invading army.

King Goujian retreated with 5,000 men, but was surrounded by Fuchai’s forces. He turned to his general Fan Li.

“I have come to this pass because I did not heed your advice,” he said. “What can I do now?”

Fan Li, who, judging by the histories, had learned to speak by listening to sage platitudes, replied as follows. “One whose cup runs over may follow the path of heaven; one who has set aright that which was toppling over may follow the path of Man; in facing crises that may come upon you, follow the path of Earth. Offer up words of profound humility and ritual courtesies of the highest degree, and if these are not enough, sell your own person for the best price you can get.”

Goujian did as his minister had said. He groveled before Fuchai and pleaded to be permitted to administer his state in the service of Wu. “I will be your servant,” he said, “and my wife shall be your concubine.”

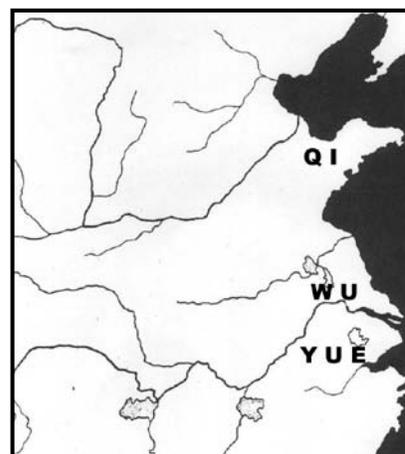
King Fuchai was very pleased, and inclined to grant Goujian his wish. But Wu Zixu was furious. “The king of Yue is a man capable of enduring bitter days. If you do not wipe out the state of Yue now, you will most certainly regret it later.”

Fuchai did not have as much confidence in Zixu as his father, and had long since appointed another man to be prime minister. He did not listen to Zixu, and he concluded a treaty with the state of Yue.

The death of Wu Zixu

In 489, King Fuchai learned that the duke of Qi, his powerful neighbor to the north, had died and civil war broken out among the patrician families of the state. He ordered his armies to prepare for a northern expedition.

Zixu had kept his eye steadily upon the conduct of Yue, and he approached Fuchai at court. “King Goujian of Yue no longer eats sumptuous dishes, but instead travels



about offering condolences to those in mourning and comfort to the sick. He is planning something. If we cannot manage his death Wu will face troubled times. Our possession of Yue is like a man with a tumor in his belly. Yet you foolishly make plots about Qi and ignore Yue!” But the campaign against Qi turned out to be a complete military success, and the king began to treat Zixu with increasing coldness, favoring instead his prime minister, whose words were far more congenial to his ear.

In 485, Fuchai renewed his pressure to the north. He wanted to achieve in Qi what his father had in Chu – the sacking of the capital – and he planned a great naval campaign that would send the ships of Wu around the Shandong peninsula to land on its northern shore, near the ducal city.

Once again Zixu warned the king to attend to Yue instead. “If you conquer Qi,” he said, “it will yield as many riches for you as a field of rocks.” Again the king ignored him, and sent him instead on a mission to Qi in preparation for war.

Zixu took his son to Qi with him. “I have remonstrated with the king over and over,” he told his son, “but he will not listen to me. I see now that Wu is to be destroyed. What use is there in you being destroyed along with it?” While in Qi, Zixu visited a patrician who was a personal friend, and entrusted his son to his care.

In the meantime, King Goujian of Yue had not been idle. While he had become an exemplary ruler at home, in line with the preachings of his minister of war, his diplomatic methods were more traditional. He sent weighty bribes to the Wu prime minister, who looked upon Yue with increasing favor. Now that he was effectively in Yue’s pay, he grew concerned that Zixu’s incessant warnings would finally influence the king. When a member of his entourage informed him that Zixu had left his son in Qi he rushed to the king with the news. “Your majesty has had the sense to ignore Zixu’s prattlings and he has turned against your majesty. He has entrusted his son to Qi; where do his true loyalties lie?”

“What you imply I have long suspected,” replied the king. And he ordered that a runner be sent to Zixu bearing a sword with the message, “Take this and die.”

Zixu grasped the sword and turned to his followers. “When I am dead, pull my eyes from my head and hang them from the eastern tower of the capital wall. Then I will be able to see the bandits from Yue pour in and extinguish the state of Wu.” Then he cut his throat and died.

When King Fuchai was told of Zixu’s last words he flew into a rage. He seized Zixu’s corpse and had it thrown in a bag. Then he ordered that the bag be flung into the Yangzi, where it could float out into the sea. Later, Zixu’s admirers built a shrine on the banks of the river so that his spirit would have a place to receive sustenance.

King Fuchai's short season as hegemon

The naval campaign against Qi was a fiasco, and Wu's wars of conquest were coming to an end. Nevertheless, in the summer of 482, King Fuchai achieved his greatest dream. He assembled the patrician lords of northern China and was acknowledged as hegemon, with the confirmation of the Zhou royal house. The state of Wu had accomplished an astonishing transformation of the Chinese political map, and Fuchai openly reveled in his new role.

But even while he was being toasted by the lords in the north, his kingdom was collapsing at home. King Goujian of Yue seized the opportunity of Fuchai's absence to send a raiding party to ambush and kill the crown prince of Wu. Then he dispatched an invasion force.

When news of these events reached him Fuchai burst into a fury, and when he further found that members of his party had passed word to the other lords of this turn of events, he drew his sword and beheaded seven men right in his tent at the assembly encampment. Four days later, at the formal oath taking ceremony of the assembly, a wrangle developed between Fuchai and the duke of Jin over who would actually be first to smear his lips with the ritual blood of the covenant, the privilege of the hegemon. Though Fuchai appears, in most accounts, to have won out, the recorder of the assembly still listed the duke of Jin's name first in the list of dignitaries. Fuchai's triumph had degenerated into ambiguous bickering.

As soon as the assembly was closed, King Fuchai rushed back home, but as he approached he learned that the situation was all but hopeless. Before the summer of his hegemony had turned to fall, he was forced to sue for peace with Yue, offering gifts and money.

In the end, Wu Zixu's last prophecy came true. In 476, King Goujian of Yue decided to extend his influence into central China, and to do so, he needed to remove Wu and extend his borders north. He dispatched a final campaign to Wu and easily defeated the soldiers that Fuchai was able to assemble. Having taken Fuchai captive, and perhaps recollecting the mercy that he had been shown twenty years earlier, he brought Fuchai before him and offered him a comfortable retirement estate near the sea, with 100 families of attendants to serve him.

"I am an old man," said Fuchai. "I do not have the strength to serve your majesty. How I regret that I did not listen to the words of Wu Zixu. It is I who have brought myself so low." Then he slit his throat, and as he bled to death, he covered his face with his hands and whispered, "I cannot face Zixu!"

King Goujian gave Fuchai a state burial, but he executed his prime minister without ceremony: he had been disloyal to his lord and accepted the bribes of Yue.

King Goujian did indeed go on to effect for Yue a transformation even greater than that which Helü and Fuchai had managed for Wu. He marched his troops north across the Huai River, and the rulers of Jin and Qi sued for peace. The Zhou king sent to him sacrificial meats from his ancestral temples, and Goujian, who just a short time before had been viewed as chief of a distant tribe of tattooed barbarians, was ennobled as a patrician lord. In acts of diplomatic skill, he returned to various states lands that had been seized from them by Wu, and with his troops free to roam anywhere in south, east, or central China, he was ultimately acknowledged as hegemon, the last ruler to truly deserve that title.

But after Goujian's death about 465, little more is heard of Yue. It fades from the histories as suddenly as it appeared, and with it disappear the delicate balances that supported the hegemon system.

PERIOD VI: The Dissolution of Jin (497-453)

There is no consensus among historians concerning the date at which the Spring and Autumn period ends. The actual chronicle after which the period is named, *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, which was a court record of the state of Lu, closes with the year 481. That date is sometimes taken to mark the end of the period; others are Confucius's death (479) and the end of the *Zuo zhuan* commentary to the *Annals* (464). The date that makes the most historical sense, however, is 453, the year that the state of Jin finally fell apart.

The state of Jin had long represented both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Zhou system of clan rule. Since Duke Wen of Jin had reorganized Jin into a type of corporate militarism, with the great warlord clans sharing control of the state armies, the warrior traditions of those clans had ensured that Jin would be fierce in war and a terror to its neighbors, but their internal wrangles also meant that civil disruptions frequently weakened the state's ability to act with resolve in multi-state affairs.

Throughout the sixth century, the more powerful warlord families gradually extinguished the weaker clans. The dukes, increasingly figurehead rulers, lost power every time a consolidation reduced the opportunities to play the clans off of one another. By the beginning of the fifth century, only six major clans remained. Four of these united against the remaining two in a civil war that stretched from 497 to 490, at which time the smaller group perished, leaving only the four allied clans in the field.

The four clans bore the surnames Zhao, Han, Wei, and Zhi. By 458, the leader of the Zhi clan had emerged as the most powerful man in Jin, and he set out to seize the throne for himself, and move the ducal line of succession from the founding Ji clan to his own.

The most powerful of the remaining three clans was the Zhao, which controlled the northeast section of Jin, relatively far removed from the capital area. Seeing the imminent rise of the leader of the Zhi, he fortified Zhao into a stronghold, fearing attack. The leader of the Zhi did indeed organize an army against the Zhao. He coerced the other two great families, Han and Wei, into alliance with him, and the combined forces stormed the clan city of Zhao in 455.

But the defenses of Zhao had been well planned and the city well provisioned. The attack degenerated into a prolonged siege. As they waited for over a year before the Zhao city walls, the leaders of the Han and Wei clan armies became increasingly restive. Their exhausting efforts were, after all, being made on behalf of a man who planned to usurp the throne, and whose gratitude towards their families could not be relied on. In time they initiated contact with the defenders inside the walls and concluded a secret compact.

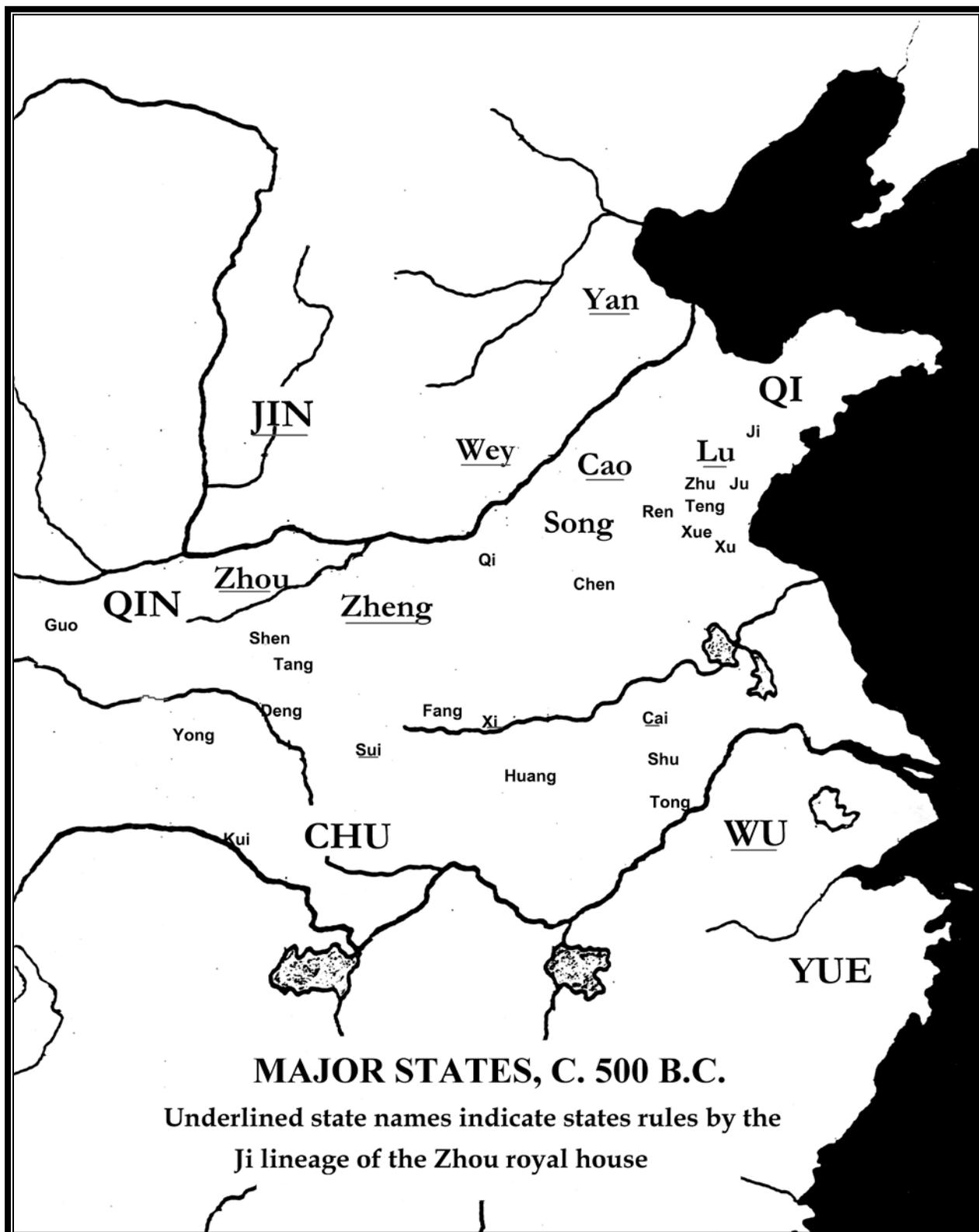
In 453, the armies of Han and Wei turned on the Zhi clan. In one stroke, they eliminated the clan entirely. Once the leaders of the Zhao emerged, the three clans put into effect the pact they had agreed on during the siege. They divided the state of Jin into three separate states. The Zhao family lands in the northeast became the state of Zhao. The lands of the Han family in the south, in the middle reaches of the Yellow River, became the state of Han. The Fen River valley north of the

bend of the Yellow River belonged to the new state of Wei, and its lands stretched awkwardly across the midsection of the region of Jin, flanking Han on the east.

The state of Jin, the most powerful state of the Spring and Autumn period, was no more. It had long been a conglomerate polity rather than a unified ruling house, and now its dukes and the name of Jin itself disappeared. In its place were three very well balanced states of considerable stature. All three would become major actors in the succeeding centuries of the Warring States period.



With the dissolution of Jin, the only remaining powerful branch of the Zhou ruling clan was gone. Throughout the chaos of the Spring and Autumn centuries, Jin had, at least, provided a psychological anchor of semi-legitimacy. No other state had better claim to be protector of the Zhou. Furthermore, its patrician warrior nature had represented better than any other state the cultural character of the Zhou. Its extinction did indeed signal the end of an era. The Warring States years which followed represent a period of transition to an entirely new political culture.



KEY NAMES AND TERMS

Duke Huan of Qi	King Ling of Chu	hegemon
Guan Zhong	King Helü of Wu	Wu Zixu
Duke Wen of Jin	King Fuchai of Wu	
Peace of Xiang Xu	King Goujian of Yue	

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How does the map of political power at the end of the Spring and Autumn Period differ from the beginning?
2. How does the role of the hegemon differ from that of the Western Zhou king?
3. Compare the achievements of the two ministers Guan Zhong and Wu Zixu. List the features that makes each so attractive to traditional historians.
4. Make lists of “good” and “bad” Spring and Autumn rulers, as reflected in the foregoing traditionally value-laden retelling. What features determine your judgments for each?
5. How did the hegemonies of Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin reflect very different responses to the internal issues of their home states?
6. How do religious ideas shape the historians’ narrative of King Ling of Chu?

Sources and Further Readings

This reading reflects a traditional, rather than an academic approach to history, representing the narrative of an extended era in terms of well known anecdotal accounts focused on political protagonists whose actions convey the literary and moral values we look for in stories. Our major sources for the period adopt this approach and it is employed here because such master narratives are effective in helping us form an initial conceptual framework. Once we have a narrative through which we can think about so long a stretch of time, it becomes much easier to find interest in and integrate other types of information (issues of social, economic, intellectual structures and change) which ultimately allow us to question the truth or adequacy of the master narrative itself.

The basic information of these accounts is drawn from the *Zuo zhuan* and *Shiji*, sources we have met before. The original version of this reading, prepared in the early 1990s, recommended for further reading a very readable survey in English that appears in Henri Maspero’s *China in Antiquity* (1927; published in English translation by Frank Kierman, 1978). Maspero, who died in 1945 at the Buchenwald concentration camp towards the end of World War II, was among the greatest scholars of ancient China in the early twentieth century, trained in the academies of French Indo-China. His approach represents the viewpoint of the great French school of *sinologists* (scholars of China), which dominated Western understanding of China until the period after World War II (and which continues to produce excellent scholarship of many different styles today).

Naturally, scholarly knowledge of ancient China has advanced since Maspero's time, and a more current presentation of Spring and Autumn Period political history is offered by Cho-yun Hsu in the *Cambridge History of Ancient China* (Cambridge: 1999), in a chapter entitled simply, "The Spring and Autumn Period" (pp. 545-586). Hsu himself has made important contributions to our understanding of the social dynamic of the entire Eastern Zhou period, and his key ideas are found in *Ancient China in Transition* (Stanford: 1965), a book that explores a range of social changes that distinguish the Spring and Autumn era from the subsequent Warring States Period.