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"Soft Subjugation": Chu's Relations with the State of Zeng

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Every expansive polity has confronted the challenge of incorporating remote localities into its sphere of control. How to utilize effectively the material and human resources of outlying territories? How to minimize the costs of control? How to prevent unrest and potential secession? In dealing with these questions, two polar solutions have emerged. One is the relegation of power to local elites who would maintain a high degree of autonomy, usually under the macro-control of the center's appointees. An opposite solution would be the imposition of top-down control by the centralized bureaucracy and sidelining (or even eliminating) autonomous elites altogether. In practice, a variety of hybrid solutions (e.g., centralized control over the polity's core territories and indirect rule of outlying areas) have been practiced.[1]

In China, these polar solutions are often associated with the Western Zhou 西周 (ca. 1046–771 BCE) and the Qin 秦 (221–207 BCE) models. The Western Zhou order was idealized from the Warring States (Zhanguo 戰國, 453–221 BCE) onwards as the epitome on non-coercive rule based on virtue and willing compliance with ritual norms. Although reality was less serene, it is true that coercion played a lesser role in the Zhou mega-polity than in later periods. The Zhou divided its realm into the royal domain, which was controlled directly through proto-bureaucratic means, and the vast eastern part, which was ruled by autonomous regional lords under the loose supervision of the royal house. Aside from infrequent intervention in succession struggles in the regional states, and rare but spectacular punitive expeditions, Zhou interference in the affairs of the regional lords remained minuscule.[2]

1 See the case studies discussed in Johannes Preiser-Kapeller et al., eds., *Empires and their Elites* (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming) and the discussion in that volume's Introduction.

2 For the Western Zhou system, see Li Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China: The Crisis and Fall of the Western Zhou 1045–771 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006). The Zhou

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Especially after the regime's military power had begun to weaken, the Zhou's ability to maintain allegiance of the regional lords with minimal degree of coercion may be explained by several factors that are curiously reminiscent of what Joseph S. Nye (1937–2025) termed "soft power," to wit, the combination of "intangible power resources such as culture, ideology and institutions."[3] Zhou's superiority was first of all ideological (or religious): the dynasty had successfully projected itself as the sole possessor of "Heaven's Mandate" (*tianming* 天命), which granted its kings—the "Sons of Heaven" (*tianzi* 天子)—an exclusive right to rule the entire realm.[4] Zhou's legitimacy was further bolstered by its cultural prestige, and its preeminence as the originator and custodian of ritual norms and other "regulations" or "institutions" (*zhi* 制) that served as foundations of sociopolitical order.[5] The kings furthermore benefitted from their position as the heads of the Ji 姬 clan, which made them superior to leaders of other Ji-clan polities (the strongest subgroup of regional lords). This, coupled with an extensive network of marital ties with non-Ji leaders, added a kin-based dimension to Zhou's power.[6] All these elevated the kings' positions vis-à-vis the

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did establish "overseers" (*jian* 監) in some of the regional polities (Li, *Landscape and Power*, 113), but the degree of their impact remains uncertain.

3 Nye, "Soft Power: The Evolution of a Concept," *Journal of Political Power* 14.1 (2021): 200–1. That article summarizes the decades-long evolution of Nye's engagement with the concept of "soft power."

4 For Heaven's Mandate, see Herrlee G. Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China, Vol. 1: The Western Chou Empire* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press 1970), 93–100; for a more recent analysis, see Luo Xinhui 羅新慧, *Zhoudai de xinyang: Tian, di, zuxian* 周代的信仰：天、帝、祖先 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2023), 17–66.

5 Zhou's cultural prestige is reflected in particular in the royal domain's position as the undisputed center of written culture, its dominance of bronze production and impact on aesthetic taste throughout the realm, and its plausible role as the originator of ideologically and culturally important texts, inluding those that would go on to become canonical, such as the *Canon of Poems* (*Shijing* 詩經) and *Canon of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經, or *Shangshu* 尚書). Zhou's position as the determinant of ritual norms is buttressed by its ability to launch a sweeping ritual reform in the ninth century BCE, long after the dynasty's hard power had waned. Notably, the new sumptuary rules, adopted in the reform's aftermath encompassed even polities that were no longer directly subordinate to Zhou, such as Chu 楚. See Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1000–250 BC): The Archaeological Evidence* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, UCLA, 2006), 29–74.

6 For the kinship-based foundations of the Zhou royal authority, see Li, *Landscape and Power*, 112–13; for a broader analysis of the lineage morphology in the Western Zhou and its political implications, see Zhu Fenghan 朱鳳瀚, *Shang Zhou jiazu xingtai yanjiu* 商周家族形態研究 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1990), 304–25; for the relation between kinship terms and the Zhou aristocratic titles, see Paul R. Goldin, "Etymological Notes on Early Chinese Aristocratic Titles," *T'oung Pao* 107.3–4 (2021): 475–80. For the web of cross-marital ties throughout the Zhou realm, see Maria Khayutina, "Marital Alliances and Affinal Relatives (*sheng* 甥 and

regional lords and allowed the dynasty to dominate the realm for centuries with only limited resort to coercion.

Qin represents the opposite model to that of Zhou; it can be considered the paradigmatic "hard power" polity. Before the imperial unification, Qin, much like its peers in the Warring States period, evolved from a loose aristocratic entity into a highly centralized and bureaucratized polity, predicated on the maximal extraction of material and human resources from its subjects. Qin's bureaucracy penetrated society down to remote rural hamlets, eliminating (or at the very least marginalizing) any local elite group that could challenge the state for economic or social power. This mode of direct control was imposed on the entire realm after 221 BCE, albeit at exorbitant administrative cost. As is well known, the subsequent Han 漢 dynasty (206/202 BCE–220 CE) modified Qin's model, allowing newly emergent local elites to fill power vacuums at lower social levels.[7] Nonetheless, the ability to monitor the population through the "hard power" of centralized bureaucratic rule remained a desideratum—if not always achieved—of the Chinese empire for millennia to come.

The importance of centralizing and bureaucratizing tendencies in China's history explains the scholarly focus on identifying the origins of China's bureaucracy in political formations before the Warring States.[8] This orientation, however, inadvertently obscures other, non-bureaucratic means of territorial control that statesmen experimented with throughout much of the Western Zhou and Springs-and-Autumns (Chunqiu 春秋, 770–453 BCE) periods. To illustrate the importance of these alternatives, I will examine an example from the history of Chu 楚, a singularly successful expansive polity of the Springs-and-Autumns period. Much has been written about Chu's nascent administrative centralization, as exemplified in particular by the institution of a *xian* 縣 ("county") as a basic administrative unit (see below). My focus will be differ-

hungou 婚購) in the Society and Politics of Zhou China in the Light of Bronze Inscriptions." *Early China* 37 (2014): 39–99; and Lin Xiaoyan 林曉雁, *Xi Zhou Chunqiu shiqi de nüxing, lianyin yu zhengzhi geju yanjin yanjiu* 西周春秋時期的女性、聯姻與政治格局演進研究 (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2021).

7 For the peculiarity of the Qin's model and its subsequent modification, see Yuri Pines, "Costs of Suppression and Costs of Cooptation: Empire and Elites in Early China" in *Empires and their Elites*; for the challenges it faced, see, e.g., Chun Fung Tong, *State Power and Governance in Early Imperial China: The Collapse of the Qin Empire, 221–207 BCE* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2024), particularly chapter 2.

8 Examples abound, such as Zhao Boxiong 趙伯雄, *Zhoudai guojia xingtai yanjiu* 周代國家形態研究 (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu, 1990); Matsui Yoshinori 松井嘉徳, *Shūdai kokusen no kenkyū* 周代国制の研究 (Tokyo: Kyuko shoin, 2002); Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China: Governing the Western Zhou* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

ent though. By exploring Chu's relations with the state of Zeng 曾, I hope to demonstrate that, much like the early Zhou, Chu was impressively successful in attracting subjugated elites to its cause with only limited resort to direct coercion.

The case of Zeng (also known as Sui 隨) is illuminating for three reasons. First, this relatively obscure polity (the name Zeng, for example, is absent from transmitted texts) has come to light in recent decades through a series of remarkable archeological discoveries, which enable a reasonably detailed reconstruction of its history. Second, the new materials, particularly the lengthy inscriptions on the bronze ritual vessels commissioned by Zeng's leaders, are exceptionally informative about the ebb and flow in Zeng's relations with Chu, its rival-turned-patron. Third, these relations can be examined, unusually, "from below," that is, from the perspective of Zeng rather than Chu. The opportunity to analyze Chu's dominance through the eyes of a subjugated polity makes Zeng an excellent case-study for exploring the modes of indirect control during the early age of territorial expansion in the Chinese world.

I will begin with a brief outline of peculiar strategies of territorial control employed by Chu's state-builders. I will then introduce the major discoveries relating to Zeng, sketch Zeng's early history, and trace the trajectory of Zeng-Chu relations throughout the Springs-and-Autumns period. I will conclude with a brief consideration of why Chu ultimately abandoned its ostensibly successful soft-subjugation methods and opted for the annexation of its former satellites.

Patterns of Territorial Control in the Zhou World

The collapse of the Western Zhou in 771 BCE and the subsequent crisis, at the height of which "Zhou was without a king for nine years (749–741 BCE), and the rulers of the states and regional lords ceased attending the Zhou court for the first time" 周亡王九年，邦君諸侯焉始不朝于周,[9] changed the Zhou world forever. The weakened dynasty could no longer control its formal subordinates, the regional lords, who acted thenceforth as independent political actors engaged in war and diplomacy with their peers. Many regional polities

9 Section 2 of the bamboo manuscript *Xinian* 繫年 cited from Yuri Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed: The Bamboo Manuscript Xinian and Early Chinese Historiography* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2020), 157. See, further, Chen Minzhen and Yuri Pines, "Where is King Ping? The History and Historiography of the Zhou Dynasty's Eastward Relocation," *Asia Major* (Third Series) 31.1 (2018): 1–27.

started expanding at the expense of weaker neighbors, seizing their settlements or annexing them altogether. Two were particularly successful in their expansionist endeavor: Jin 晉 in the north and Chu in the south. Both maintained direct control over what they viewed as their core territories, and projected their power further primarily through the system of alliances, in which Jin and Chu acted as rival "masters of the covenants" (*mengzhu* 盟主). Similarities aside, however, the two polities adopted very different strategies concerning territorial control.[10]

Jin was determined to annex any polity in what it viewed as its core territory, namely the broad swath of land within the curve of the Yellow River (the current provinces of Shanxi, northern Henan and western Hebei).[11] However, having annexed its rivals, Jin granted the newly acquired lands as appanages (or allotments, *caiyi* 采邑) to its meritorious ministers. The allotment's new master controlled its material and human resources and ruled it as a mini-state. As time passed, allotments became hereditary possessions of ministerial lineages; and the same system of hereditary control eventually encompassed even those territorial units that were defined either as *xian* 縣 or as "the lord's settlements" (*gongyi* 公邑).[12] The resultant parceling of the state's lands into autonomous appanages was similar to the policy adopted by the Western Zhou kings within their domain, which Li Feng aptly termed the "'suicide' method of government."[13] As could only be expected, by the end of the sixth century BCE, Jin entered into a terminal crisis caused by the ever-escalating rivalry among powerful ministerial houses, whose territorial possessions and military power matched those of the Jin rulers. Three of these houses—Wei 魏, Han 韓, and Zhao 趙—eventually divided the state among themselves between 453 and 403 BCE.

Chu's method of incorporating newly acquired territories differed from that of Jin. The rise of Chu began with King Wu 楚武王 (r. 740–690 BCE), who consolidated Chu's control over the fertile flatlands west of the Han River. His son, King Wen 楚文王 (r. 689–675 BCE), further accelerated expansion, occupying the Nanyang 南陽 Basin, which became Chu's protective shield from the north, and advancing into the middle reaches of the Huai 淮 River (map

10 The discussion in this section is based on Yuri Pines, *China's Aristocratic Age: Politics and Power in the Springs-and-Autumns Period* (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, forthcoming; see also Yuri Pines, "Too Big to Succeed: Costs of Expansionism during the Springs-and-Autumns Period." *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* 47 (2024): 81–108.

11 Recall that the Yellow River entered the Bohai Gulf during the period under discussion near modern Tianjin, i.e., much to the north of its current route.

12 See details in Pines, *China's Aristocratic Age*, especially chapters 2.2 and 8.2.

13 Li Feng, *Landscape and Power*, 92.

1). In contradistinction to Jin, King Wen and his descendants did not allow ministerial allotments to grow into sizeable territorial units.[14] Instead, major annexed polities—most notably Shen 申 in the Nanyang Basin and Xi 息 in the middle reaches of the Huai—were turned into military counties (*xian*) under centralized rule. These counties were governed by the king's personal appointees holding the title of "dukes" (*gong* 公).[15] The appointments were neither hereditary nor even lifelong; and the county's resources were not the governor's personal possession but were allocated to support its standing army. Whether these norms were applied in all Chu's counties or only in a selected few, such as Shen, is an open question; but that Chu was more successful in exercising centralized control over subjugated localities than its peer states is undeniable.[16]

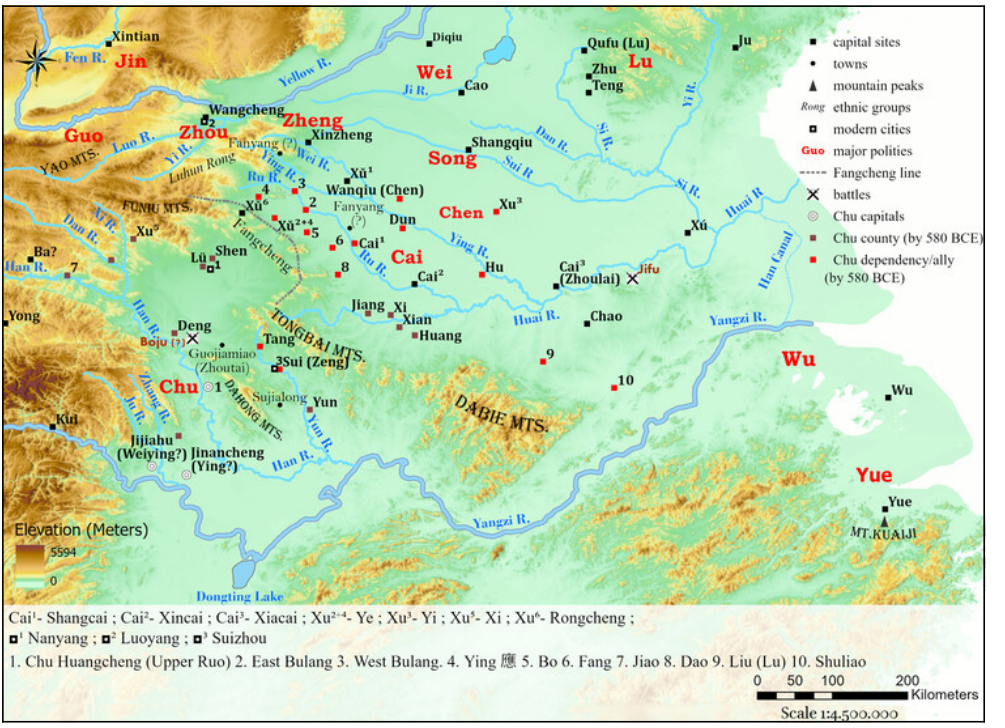
Until recently, Chu's centralizing tendencies attracted overwhelming scholarly interest, whereas other means of territorial control were barely noted. This change is due to new archeological and paleographic data, which shed light on several patterns of indirect control adopted by Chu. Those included tiny dependencies granted as "compensation statelets" to the ruling houses of subjugated polities; larger satellite polities, which were allowed to maintain domestic autonomy but were subordinate to Chu in the matters of interstate relations; and yet larger allied polities, who maintained limited autonomy even in the diplomatic field.[17] The above classification is tentative (in particular

14 Li Shijia 李世佳, *Chunqiu Chuguo gongzu shehui yanjiu* 春秋楚國公族社會研究 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2021), 109–31.

15 Translating *xian* as "counties" is therefore appropriate for Chu (consider a county in France [*comté*], which was originally governed by a count). This, however, does not apply to *xian* elsewhere: for instance, in Jin they were for all practical means undistinguishable from ministerial allotments, whereas in Qi, the term *xian* referred to a tiny territorial unit, perhaps a single settlement (see more in Pines, *China's Aristocratic Age*, chapter 8).

16 For *xian* governance and Chu's centralization, see e.g., Herrlee G. Creel, "The Beginnings of Bureaucracy in China: The Origin of the *Hsien*," *Journal of Asian Studies* 23.2 (1964): 155–84; Yang Kuan 楊寬, "Chunqiu shidai Chuguo xianzhi de xingzhi wenti" 春秋時代楚國縣制的性質問題, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 4 (1980): 19–30; and more in Pines, *China's Aristocratic Age*, chapter 8.1, q.v. for further references.

17 For a preliminary attempt to distinguish Chu's dependencies (*fuyong* 附庸), satellites (*shuguo* 屬國), and allies (*yuguo* 與國), see Zhao Bingqing 趙炳清, "Fuyong yu zhixian: Chunqiu shiqi Chuguo de zhengzhi dili jiegou yu jiangyu bianhua" 附庸與置縣：春秋時期楚國的政治地理結構與疆域變化, in *Chu wenhua yu Changjiang zhongyou zaoqi kaifa guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 楚文化與長江中游早期開發國際學術研討會論文集, ed. Xu Shaohua 徐少華, Taniguchi Mitsuru 谷口滿, and Luo Tai 羅泰 (Lothar von Falkenhausen) (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2021), 575–91. For "compensation statelets," see, e.g., Xu Shaohua 徐少華, "Cong Shu Jiang-*fu* xi gu Shenguo lishi yu wen-



MAP 1 Chu's sphere of influence
AFTER PINES, *CHINA'S ARISTOCRATIC AGE*

the distinctions between satellites and allies were often blurred; but see also note 98 below), but it is heuristically useful insofar as it highlights different degrees of Chu's dominance. In what follows, by analyzing the case of Zeng, I hope to highlight aspects of Chu's indirect control and its methods of "soft" subjugation of the satellite polities.

Zeng Rediscovered

A polity named "Zeng" was first noted in inscriptions on a few bronze vessels discovered in Hubei at the end of the Northern Song dynasty 北宋 (960–1127). One of these bore the dedication, "Yin (=Xiong 熊) Zhang, the King of Chu, made this ancestral vessel for Yi, the Marquis of Zeng" 楚王畬章作曾侯乙宗彝. Another inscription mentioned that the donor, Zhong 中, who took part in the

hua youguan wenti" 從叔姜簋析古申國歷史與文化的有關問題, *Wenwu* 文物 2005.3: 66–68, 80.

southern campaign of King Zhao of Zhou 周昭王 ca. 959 BCE, "stayed in Zeng" 居在曾.[18] More vessels bearing the name Zeng resurfaced in the twentieth century, prompting numerous speculations about the state's identity.[19] During the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), construction projects led to the discovery of several tombs whose occupants were identified as Zeng leaders or officials; additionally, Zeng vessels were collected by various museums. The time was still not ripe, however, for a systematic analysis of what Li Xueqin 李學勤 called "the enigma of Zeng."[20] This changed in 1978 with the spectacular discovery of Tomb 1 at Leigudun 擂鼓墩 (Suizhou, Hubei), the burial place of Marquis *Yi[21] of Zeng (d. 433 BCE). The tomb is renowned for its set of chime bells, which prompted major revisions in the study of early Chinese bronze technology and music theory.[22] Its discovery spurred an outburst of interest in Zeng and its history.

The primary question facing scholars was why this apparently powerful and rich polity is absent from transmitted texts. Li Xueqin was evidently the first to suggest that Zeng was an alternative designation of Sui 隨, a polity mentioned, albeit sketchily, in *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo Tradition*) and other received texts.[23] This identification sparked vigorous debate, which was resolved in 2020 fol-

18 For the first of these inscriptions (Chu wang Xiong Zhang *zhong* 楚王酓章鐘), see Huang Xiquan 黃錫全, *Hubei chutu Shang Zhou wenzi jizheng* 湖北出土商周文字輯證 (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 1992), 30–32; for the second (Zhong *yan* 中甗), see Constance A. Cook and Paul R. Goldin, *A Source Book of Ancient Chinese Bronze Inscriptions* (Berkeley: The Society for Study of Early China, rev. ed., 2020, hereafter *Inscriptions*), #18.

19 Scholars starting with Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) tended to identify Zeng 曾 in the bronze inscriptions with one of two eponymous statelets: Zeng 鄫/繒 in southern Shandong or another Zeng 繒/鄫 in Shaanxi. See Chen Minzhen 陳民鎮, "Lishi jiyi de duanlie yu chonggou: Yi Zengguo lishi de shuxie wei li" 歷史記憶的斷裂與重構——以曾國歷史的書寫為例, *Zhengda zhongwen xuebao* 政大中文學報 42 (2024): 81–82.

20 Li Xueqin, "Zengguo zhi mi" 曾國之謎 (1978), rpt. in idem, *Xinchu qingtongqi yanjiu* 新出青銅器研究 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), 146–50. For a brief list of early Zeng discoveries, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Suspended Music: Chime-Bells in the Culture of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 6 n18.

21 Hereafter I differentiate between personal and posthumous names of Zeng rulers by placing an asterisk before the personal name during its first appearance. When the name is mentioned in the inscription, I place it before the ruler's title.

22 See Falkenhausen, *Suspended Music* and Jessica Rawson, *Life and Afterlife in Ancient China* (London: Allen Lane, 2023), 233–68.

23 Li, "Zengguo zhi mi." For a summary of earlier debates about Zeng/Sui identity, see Olivier Venture, "Zeng: The Rediscovery of a Forgotten Regional State," in: *China across the Centuries: Papers from a Lecture Series in Budapest*, ed. Gábor Kósa (Budapest: Department of East Asian Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, 2017), 1–32.

lowing discoveries at the Zaoshulin 棗樹林 cemetery of Zeng nobles. In one case, the spouse of a Zeng ruler (Mi Jia 嬭加; see below) was identified as a Sui lady. In another instance, a vessel belonging to a spouse of another Zeng ruler bore an inscription dedicating it to "the Marquis of Sui" 隨侯. These findings, in conjunction with earlier evidence, allow us to consider the debate settled. It is now widely accepted that Sui was another name for Zeng, possibly the name of Zeng's capital.[24] We can now correlate the rich material and inscriptional record of Zeng with the (admittedly meager) textual evidence about Sui.

The resolution of "the enigma of Zeng" is just one of many breakthroughs in Zeng studies facilitated by new discoveries. Excavations of Zeng sites have accelerated dramatically in the twenty-first century. There are now five noteworthy burial sites (each containing dozens of excavated elite and sub-elite tombs): Yejiashan 葉家山 (ca. eleventh-tenth century BCE); Guojiamiao 郭家廟 (eighth to early seventh century BCE); Sujialong 蘇家壟 (roughly contemporaneous with or slightly later than Guojiamiao); the Yidigang 義地崗 cluster, which contains, among other sites, the Zaoshulin (seventh to sixth century BCE) and Wenfengta 文峰塔 (sixth to fifth and again fourth century BCE) cemeteries; and the still insufficiently explored Leigudun cluster (fifth-fourth centuries BCE). These, in addition to smaller mortuary clusters and data from Zeng settlements, allow us to reconstruct the history of Zeng from its founding to its final generations.[25]

This archeological record (notwithstanding the sad fact that many tombs have been looted, either in antiquity or more recently, or damaged by construction workers before intervention by professional archaeologists) is complemented by exceptionally rich paleographic evidence. Among the approximately five hundred inscribed bronze vessels from Zeng discovered to date, over a dozen feature lengthy inscriptions (exceeding fifty graphs), which address Zeng's history, self-image, foreign policy, and even evolving cultural orientation.[26] This confluence of material, paleographic, and textual evidence not

24 See Wuhan daxue lishi xueyuan 武漢大學歷史學院 et al., "Hubei Suizhou Zaoshulin mudi M168 (Mi Jia mu) fajue jianbao" 湖北隨州棗樹林墓地M169（芈加墓）發掘簡報, *Jiang Han kaogu* 江漢考古 2025.2: 56–57; Hubei Sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 湖北省文物考古研究所 et al., "Hubei Suizhou Zaoshulin Chunqiu Zengguo guizu mudi" 湖北隨州棗樹林春秋曾國貴族墓地, *Kaogu* 2020.7: 84 and 89; for more evidence, see Pines, *Zhou History*, 85–88 and Chen Minzhen, "Lishi jiyi," 86–87.

25 The best summary of major Zeng-related discoveries (current to 2017), is Fang Qin 方勤, *Zengguo lishi yu wenhua yanjiu: Cong "zuoyou Wen Wu" dao "zuoyou Chuwang"* 曾國歷史與文化研究：從「左右文武」到「左右楚王」(Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2019).

26 See the partial summary in Huang Tingqi 黃庭頎, *Beige nanfeng: Jinchu Zengguo qing-*

only permits a reassessment of Zeng's history, but also sheds new light on power configurations and cultural dynamics on the southern periphery of the Zhou world.

A Zhou Stronghold

The state of Zeng was situated in the middle of what is now called the Sui-Zao Corridor 隨棗走廊, a broad flatland nestled between the Dahong Mountains 大紅山 to the west and the Tongbai Mountains 桐柏山 to the east (map 1). The Yun 涢 River and its tributaries provided routes of communication to the Han 漢 River Basin in the west, the Huai in the north, and the Yangzi in the south. This, coupled with convenient overland access to the Nanyang Basin to the northwest, rendered the Sui-Zao Corridor an important transportation hub, facilitating access from the Zhou capitals to major mining and smelting sites in the Yangzi Basin to the southeast. This strategic significance explains its importance to the Zhou founders.[27]

The state of Zeng was established early in the Western Zhou. Its name possibly derives from that of a Shang-era polity, transcribed 曾. This, coupled with the presence of certain Shang-related mortuary habits in the earliest Zeng burials in Yejiashan—such as the east-west orientation of the burials, the presence of waist-pits (*yaokeng* 要坑), and sacrificial dogs beneath some tombs—led several scholars to suggest that early Zhou-era Zeng was not a Ji-clan polity, as these traits are uncommon among Ji-clan burials.[28] However, the prevailing view is now that Zeng was ruled by Zhou clansmen from the outset of the Western Zhou, possibly imposed upon a pre-existing Shang-related population.[29]

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tongqi mingwen zonghe yanjiu 北歌南風：近出曾國青銅器銘文綜合研究 (Taipei: Zhengzhi daxue chuabnshe, 2024) (for an [incomplete] list of Zeng-related inscriptions, see ibid., 259–97).

27 Chen Beichen, *Cultural Interactions during the Zhou Period (c. 1000–350 BC): A Study of Networks from the Suizao Corridor* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2019), 15–16 and 58–59; Fang Qin, *Zengguo lishi*, 172–84.

28 See the brief summary in Chen Beichen, *Cultural Interactions*, 38–44; cf. Huang Tingqi, *Beige nanfeng*, 23–64.

29 For the mention of pre-Zhou Zeng as Shang's ally in oracle-bone inscriptions, and for the Zhou practice of imposing its clansmen on the inhabitants of Shang-related polities, see Huang Fengchun 黃鳳春 and Jiang Bin 蔣斌, "Cong xinjian Tangguo tongqi mingwen zaitan Zengguo zhi mi: Jian tan Ji xing Tangguo de diwang wenti" 從新見唐國銅器銘文再談曾國之謎——兼談姬姓唐國的地望問題, *Chu wenhua yu Changjiang*, 458–65, esp. p. 463. In a fascinating (even if somewhat speculative) study, Han Wei 韓巍 suggests that Zeng's progenitor, Patriarch Nan 南公, was not originally a Zhou clansman, as is com-

Zeng's founding ruler, Marquis *Li 㦰 (the graph was originally misread as Kang 犺), the occupant of Tomb 111 at the Yejiashan cemetery, identified himself as the son of "Patriarch Nan" 南公. This identification spurred a heated debate, now largely resolved, thanks in part to the later Zeng inscriptions discussed in the next two sections. Patriarch Nan is Nangong Kuo 南宮括, an important associate (and purportedly a relative) of the Zhou founders.[30] The tomb itself is remarkable for its size and furnishings. Its burial chamber measures ca. 13 by 10 m on the surface, is over 9 m deep, and is accompanied by a short sloping ramp of 5 m in length. As noted by the excavators, this scale is unparalleled among previously excavated early Zhou tombs. The tomb's opulence dazzles: no fewer than 2,867 burial objects were unearthed, including 20 *ding* 鼎 cauldrons, 72 bronze musical instruments, and the like. Many of the mortuary goods—such as an extremely rare bronze dagger-axe (*ge* 戈) with an iron blade—were plundered from the Shang and distributed among the Zhou victors. Overall, this tomb alone illustrates the importance of Zeng to the Zhou dynasts.[31]

The Yejiashan cemetery contains only three tombs of Zeng rulers, which means that its use ceased approximately during the reign of King Zhao of Zhou.

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monly assumed, but a Shang subordinate who transferred his allegiance to the Zhou and was granted the Ji clan-name at the dawn of the Zhou era. This would explain persistence of Shang traits, uncharacteristic of other Ji-clan cemeteries, among the Yejiashan elite burials. See Han's *Qingtongqi yu Zhoushi luncong* 青銅器與周史論叢 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2022), 284–310.

30 The dating of Tomb 111 has caused heated controversies. The excavation team opined that several bronze vessels discovered at the tomb were produced relatively late, during the era of King Zhao of Zhou (r. ca. 995 or 977/975–957 BCE), which led them to conclude that the occupant was the last of the Zeng rulers buried in the Yejiashan cemetery; see Hubei Sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 湖北省文物考古研究所 and Suizhou Shi bowuguan 隨州市博物館, "Hubei Suizhou Yejiashan M111 fajue jianbao" 湖北隨州葉家山M111發掘簡報, *Jiang Han kaogu* 江漢考古 2020.2: 3–86, esp. pp. 69–74. This conclusion was criticized because the tomb's location within the cemetery, its size, the nature of its assemblage, and its inscriptions all imply that it belongs to the Zeng founder. See Gao Xisheng 高西省, "Suizhou Yejiashan M111 niandai zaitan" 隨州葉家山M111年代再探討, *Qingtongqi yu mingwen* 青銅器與銘文 7 (2022): 121–35, and Huang Tingqi, *Beige Nanfeng*, 72–79. For the identity of Patriarch Nan and Nangong Kuo, see Huang Tingqi, *Beige Nanfeng*, 65–86, and Chen Minzhen 陳民鎮, "Cong Chunqiu shuzu mingwen de tili kan Nangong de shenfen" 從春秋述祖銘文的體例看南公的身份, *Qingtongqi yu mingwen* 青銅器與銘文 7 (2022): 75–83. See also Han Wei's discussion referenced in the previous note.

31 See the details in Hubei Sheng and Suizhou Shi, "Hubei Suizhou Yejiashan M111." For the iron-bladed dagger-axe (one of the three known Shang examples), see Beijing daxue kaogu wenbo xueyuan 北京大學考古文博學院 and Hubei Sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, "Yejiashan M111 chutu de Shangdai tieyuan tongge" 葉家山M111出土的商代鐵援銅戈, *Jiang Han kaogu* 2020.2: 110–15 and 123.

Several inscriptions indicate that Zeng participated in King Zhao's southern campaigns, the last of which, ca. 957 BCE, ended disastrously: the royal armies were eliminated and King Zhao himself perished.[32] The impact of this defeat on Zeng remains unknown. Possibly, Zeng underperformed in comparison to its close neighbor, the state of E 鄂, another early Zhou stronghold ruled by the allied Jí clan 姞, whose capital was established just ca. 25 km to the west of Zeng.[33] E, like Zeng, aided King Zhao in his southern campaigns, and the Marquis of E is mentioned a century later as Zhou's major ally in the south, honored with the title of "border protector" (*yufang* 馭方). Soon after receiving this honor, however, the Marquis of E rebelled, precipitating one of the gravest crises of the Zhou dynasty.[34] Following the suppression of this rebellion, Zeng may have occupied the former E capital (the Anju 安居 site), although neither material nor inscriptional evidence provide sufficient details.[35] Overall, the period between ca. 950 to ca. 800 BCE remains a major lacuna in Zeng's history.

By the time of the Western Zhou downfall in 771 BCE, Zeng had reemerged as the dominant power in the Sui-Zao Corridor. Two major Zeng-related centers of that age were located in the northern part of the Corridor, near today's Wudian Township 吳店鎮 in Zaoyang Municipality 棗陽市 (the Guojiamiao cemetery and the adjacent Zhoutai 周臺 site); and in the southern part, near Pingba Township 坪壩 in Jingshan County 京山縣 (the Sujialong cemetery and an adjacent site). Both sites were occupied from the end of the Western Zhou to the early seventh century BCE, although the occupancy of Sujialong may have persisted longer than that of Guojiamiao. It is unclear whether either of these sites served as Zeng's formal capital, but both clearly were major political centers.

Constraints of space preclude a detailed discussion of Zeng history between approximately 800 and 680 BCE (the tentative dates of Guojiamiao and Sujialong clusters). Suffice it to say that during this period we have only two

32 For Zeng's role in these campaigns, see the inscription of Duke *Qiu, discussed in the next section; see also Zhong *yan* inscription (note 18, above). Another inscription on Jing Fang *ding* 靜方鼎 (a vessel stored in the Idemitsu Museum of Arts 出光美術館) tells of a Zhou commander who was ordered by King Zhao to head the Zeng and E armies 司在曾、鄂師, further indicating Zeng's participation in the campaign (see Chen Minzhen, "Lishi jiyi," 83). For King Zhao's campaigns, see Li Feng, *Landscape and Power*, 93–94.

33 For the Yangzishan 羊子山 cemetery of the early E rulers, see Chen Beichen, *Cultural Interactions*, 36–38.

34 Li Feng, *Landscape and Power*, 103–5.

35 For Anju ruins (located in the close vicinity to the E rulers' cemetery at Yangzishan), see Fang Qin, *Zengguo*, 82–83. Only preliminary archeological survey was undertaken in Anju; its occupancy by Zeng dwellers is suggested by the tombs dating from the late Springs-and-Autumns period.

instances of inscribed vessels commissioned by "marquises" (*hou* 侯) of Zeng (none discovered from a tomb);[36] instead, the leaders of the polity are identified by the title "the Zeng elder" (Zeng *bo* 曾伯). Normally, such a title would be fitting for a scion of the ruling lineage before assuming rulership,[37] but this is not the case for Zeng, as some of the Zeng *bo* inscriptions mention the donors' deceased fathers. More likely, *bo* were heads of branches of the ruling house who established independent power bases in the north and south of the Sui-Zao Corridor and they adopted the appellation *bo*, suitable for the heads of minor polities.[38] Their inscriptions display an exceptionally confident tone, befitting the country's leaders. Of these inscriptions, I will focus on the ones associated with Zeng *bo* Qi 曾伯棨. Qi's tomb (M79) is the largest (or, possibly, second-largest) in the Sujialong cemetery. It is a rectangular pit of 5.1 by 3.9 m without a ramp. It yielded not one, but two, sets of status-defining arrayed *ding*: five *ding* and four *gui* tureens in the traditional Zhou style, along with an additional set of three *ding* and four *fu* containers in the evolving separate Zeng style. The excavators noted that this is the earliest known example of two sets of sacrificial vessels in a single tomb.[39] The most noteworthy is the inscription on the *hu* 壺 vessel, which states:[40]

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36 A dagger-axe with the dedication to "Xiangbai, the Marquis of Zeng" 曾侯緗白 was discovered in the vicinity of the looted Tomb CM1 (or M1), the largest in the Caomenwan 曹門灣 section of the Guojiamiao cemetery; the tomb with a 10 m-long sloping ramp should be that of a regional lord. A damaged *ding* tripod with the dedication by the Marquis of Zeng had been discovered by construction workers near the Guojiamiao cemetery; see Fang Qin and Wu Hongtang 吳宏堂, eds., *Mumu Zenghou: Zaoyang Guojiamiao Zengguo mudi* 穆穆曾侯——棗陽郭家廟曾國墓地 (Beijing: Wenwu 2015: 11–13).

37 Han Wei, *Qingtongqi yu Zhoushi*, 205–22.

38 See Wang Baichuan 王百川, "'Zeng bo' tongqi yu Jingshan Sujialong yizhi de xingzhi" "曾伯"銅器與京山蘇家壟遺址的性質, *Kaogu* 考古 2024.4: 82–90. *Bo* (which may refer either to a man's birth sequence ["elder"] or a regional lord's rank [conventionally translated as "earl"]) was a regular appellation of leaders of second-tier polities already in the Western Zhou, as is clear from the case of the state of Peng 倗 in Shanxi (Chen Xiaoyu 陳曉宇 and Xie Yaoting 謝堯亭, "Hengshui mudi Pengbo muzang bianxi ji shixi tuiding" 橫水墓地倗伯墓葬辨析及世襲推定, *Jiang Han kaogu* 2025.2: 127–37 + 144). I plan to explore the "*bo*" era in Zeng in a separate study.

39 Fang Qin et al., "Hubei Jingshan Sujialong yizhi kaogu shouhuo" 湖北京山蘇家壟遺址考古收穫, *Jiang Han kaogu* 江漢考古 2017.6: 5–6. The earliest and possibly largest tomb in the Sujialong cemetery, that of Youfu, the second-born son of the Marquis of Zeng 曾侯仲子斿父, was accidentally destroyed by construction workers in 1966. For the phenomenon of two assemblages of mortuary vessels in the Springs-and-Autumns period Zeng tombs, see Liu Yixin 劉逸鑫, "Chunqiu zaozhongqi Zengguo tong liqi suizang zuhe tansuo" 春秋早中期曾國銅禮器隨葬組合探析, *Jiang Han kaogu* 2025.3: 103–16.

40 The text appears identically on four *hu* vessels: two unearthed from tomb 79 of Zeng *bo* Qi, and two from tomb 88 occupied by his spouse, Mi Ke 芈克; it is recorded both on the

> 唯王八月，初吉庚午，曾伯黍神聖孔武，孔武舒遲，克逖淮夷。余溫恭且忌，余為民父母。惟此壺漿，先民之常。余是抒是則，允顯允異。用其鑄鐐，唯玄其良，自作尊壺，用孝用享于我皇祖及我文考，用賜匄眉壽，子孫永寶。
>
> It was in the eighth month, early auspiciousness, on *gengwu* day. [I], Zeng *bo* Qi, am numinous and sagacious, am greatly martial; I am greatly martial but peaceful and tranquil. [I] have overpowered and repelled the Huai Yi. I am mild, respectful, and reverent; I am acting as a parent to the people. This *hu* drinking vessel is used for ale, as was constant among the ancients. I ladle out [this ale] according to the patterns, but it is truly distinctive, truly different. I used this white tin and yellow bronze, and the best dark [lead], and made for myself this drinking vessel. It will be used in filial offerings and mortuary feasts for my august ancestor and my refined deceased father. I use this to pray for extended longevity, letting sons and grandsons forever treasure it.

Qi's self-praise is common in bronze inscriptions, but two points are unusual and deserve attention. The first is Qi's self-identification as a "parent to the people." This designation may be borrowed from the *Canon of Poems* (*Shijing* 詩經), which states, "Joyous and easy is the noble man; he is a parent to the people" 凱弟君子民之父母.[41] In the *Canon of Poems*, it is widely assumed, the term "noble man" (*junzi* 君子) refers to the ruler, and being "a parent to the people" is an attribute of the ruler. Similarly, in the earliest known appearance of this formula in a bronze inscription (the mid-Western Zhou Bin gong *xu* 豳公盨), it is applied to the supreme sovereign, Yu 禹 the Great.[42] By the late Springs-and-Autumns period, however, being the "parent to the people" was no longer conceived as a designation to be applied exclusively to the ruler,[43] a shift that

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vessel's body and its lid (Huang Jinqian 黃錦前, "Xinchu Zengbo Qi *hu* mingwen suo jian Chunqiu zaoqi Zengguo lishi yu sixiang" 新出曾伯黍壺銘文所見春秋早期曾國歷史與思想, *Renwen luncong* 人文論叢 2023.2: 40). My translation is based on the glosses of Yu Jianzhai 御簡齋, "Zengbo Qi-hu ming jianshi" 曾伯黍壺銘簡釋 2018 (http://www.fdgwz.org.cn/Web/Show/4209), downloaded Feb 15, 2025.

41 This phrase recurs in the odes "Jiong zhuo" 泂酌 and "Nanshan you tai" 南山有臺 (Mao 251 and 172, respectively).

42 Wu Zhenfeng 吳鎮烽, ed., *Shangzhou qingtongqi mingwen ji tuxiang jicheng* 商周青銅器銘文暨圖像集成 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012; hereafter *Mingtu*), # 5677; *Inscriptions* # 53.

43 The self-identification as a "parent of the people" appears in the late Springs-and-Autumns inscription on Song jun furen *ding* 宋君夫人鼎 (*Mingtu*, # 02222); for Warring States

may have already been underway during Qi's lifetime. In any case, the phrase possesses an undeniable aura of rulership.

The second notable point in Qi's inscription is his statement, "[I] have overpowered and repelled the Huai Yi." Huai Yi (the Yi of the Huai River) was a broad designation of non-Sinitic groups in the Huai River basin. To judge from Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, the Huai Yi were intermittently submissive or defiant.[44] As will be seen in the next sections, the participation of Zeng's founding fathers in the expeditions against the Huai Yi was a point of pride for Zeng's rulers. Likewise, for Zeng *bo* Qi, it was a manifestation of his prowess. In a parallel inscription on the *fu* 簠 container, discovered in the nineteenth century, Qi elaborates:

> 克逖淮夷，抑燮繁陽，金導錫行，具既俾方。
>
> [I] have overpowered and repelled the Huai Yi, subjugated and pacified Fanyang, allowing bronze to be transferred and tin to be transmitted. I have completely quelled the rivals there.[45]

Fanyang (or Fantang 繁湯) was an important military stronghold, a center of bronze production, and, to judge from the above inscription, a transportation hub. It was located either north of the state of Cai 蔡, in the Ru 汝 River Valley, or, according to another interpretation, further northwest, near the upper reaches of the Ying 潁 River (Map 1).[46] Reaching Fanyang would undoubtedly have represented a significant achievement for Qi, particularly when we consider that his operational base at Sujialong was in the south of Zeng, the area farthest removed from Fanyang. While Qi's real achievements might have been

usage, see, e.g., Matthias L. Richter, *The Embodied Text: Establishing Textual Identity in Early Chinese Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 127–70.

44 For the Huai Yi as tributaries of the Zhou, see, e.g., the Xi Jia *pan* 兮甲盤 and Ju Fu *xugai* 駒父盨蓋 inscriptions (*Jicheng*, ## 10174 and 4464; *Inscriptions*, ## 48 and 52); for wars against them, see Li Feng, *Landscape and Power*, chapter 2.

45 The inscription is inscribed on both the body of the container and its lid (*Jicheng* 04631 and 04632). The container was lost during the Taiping 太平天國 Rebellion (1850–1864); the lid is now in China's National Museum 中國國家博物館, Beijing. See Chen Fei 陳飛, "Zeng bo Qi *fu* ji xiangguan wenti de zai renshi" 曾伯黍簠及相關問題的再認識, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 考古與文物 2024.9: 59–65.

46 Compare Jae-hoon Shim 沈載勳, "The Early Development of the State of Jin from its Enfeoffment to the Hegemony of Wen Gong (r. 636–628 B.C.)," (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 1998), 166–68, and Yi Desheng 易德生, "Zhoudai qingtong yuanliao jisan zhongxin 'Fantang' bulun" 周代青銅原料集散中心"繁湯"補論, in *Chu wenhua yu Changjiang*, 36–41.

more modest—for instance, he may have simply been a member of a larger coalition that wrested Fanyang from the Huai Yi[47]—his participation in a campaign against the distant Fanyang attests to the magnitude of Zeng's power during Zeng *bo* Qi's time (ca. late eighth century BCE).

That Zeng was a major regional power is supported not just by Zeng *bo* Qi's inscriptions, but also by the archeologically verifiable territorial extent of Zeng between ca. 800 and 690 BCE (as reflected by the aforementioned major Zeng-related sites in the far north and south of the Sui-Zao corridor). This is further corroborated in *Zuozhuan*: during Zeng's initial appearance in this text (under the name Sui) in 706 BCE, a Chu commander mentions that "among all the states to the east of the Han River, Sui is the largest" 漢東之國，隨為大.[48] It is therefore reasonable to conclude that Zeng/Sui was a leading regional polity at the time.

Then everything changed. As *Zuozhuan* makes clear, Sui's (Zeng's) power made it a prime target of pressure from Chu. Chu's first appearance in *Zuozhuan* focuses on its (inconclusive) campaign against Sui in 706 BCE, which was soon followed by further campaigns. Sui was utterly defeated in 704 BCE, but Chu preferred to end the war with a covenant rather than conquest. In 701 BCE, war was averted once Chu had defeated Sui's ally, the state of Yun 鄖, located in the southernmost section of the Sui-Zao Corridor. Chu launched another campaign against Sui in 690 BCE, and although King Wu expired during the campaign, his commanders successfully cowed Sui. The Chu army bridged the Zha River 澨, behind which the Zeng/Sui capital was protected, erected a camp near the city's gates, and withdrew only after enforcing a humiliating covenant between the Chu commander and the ruler of Sui—either within the Sui capital precincts or beneath the city walls.[49]

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47 Shortly after 735 BCE, Fanyang was an object of Jin's campaigns (see the inscriptions on Jin Jiang *ding* 晉姜鼎 and Rong Sheng *bianzhong* 戎生編鐘 both of which boast of seizing "auspicious metal" in Fanyang; see Khayutina, "Marital Alliances," 79–82 and *Inscriptions*, ##67–68). The precise date of Zeng *bo* Qi's burial is debatable, but it is perhaps closer to ca. 690 BCE, in which case his participation in Jin's campaigns is unlikely.

48 See *Zuozhuan*, Huan 6.2a. *Chunqiu* and *Zuozhuan* are cited according to the regnal year of the Lord of Lu and the number of the item in that year, following the divisions in Stephen W. Durrant, Wai-yee Li, and David Schaberg, trans., Zuo Tradition / Zuozhuan 左傳*: Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals"* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2016), whose translations I borrow, with slight modifications.

49 See *Zuozhuan*, Huan 6.2; Huan 8.2; Huan 11.2; Zhuang 4.1; the last entry mentions that the Chu military commander, "citing the king's command, entered Sui and swore a covenant with the Marquis of Sui" 以王命入盟隨侯. It would have been humiliating if the covenant was sworn near Chu's encampment, i.e., beneath Sui's city walls (see *Zuozhuan*, Huan 12.3; Wen 15.7; Ai 8.2), and doubly so if it happened within the capital precincts.

That Chu opted twice to end the conflict with Sui with covenants rather than conquest laid the groundwork for subsequent amicable ties between the two. This does not mean, however, that Chu was entirely lenient. Chu annexed some of Zeng's territories. For example, the Zhoutai site near the Guojiamiao cemetery was abandoned by its Zeng inhabitants and soon occupied by Chu settlers, depriving Zeng of its northern marches.[50] The fate of Sujialong is less clear; it appears to have persisted as a center of bronze production, but its political significance, and its relation to Zeng after the time of Zeng *bo* Qi, remain unverifiable.[51] Notably, Zeng *bo* Qi appears to be the earliest Zeng leader to marry a lady from the Mi 羋 clan, probably connected to the Chu royal family.[52] If this true, this is the earliest known instance of a Zeng-Chu marital alliance. Before this, marital partners of Zeng nobles came from among the ruling houses of other neighboring polities, such as Deng 鄧, Huang 黃, and Jiang 江. Soon after Zeng *bo* Qi, intermarriage with Chu became commonplace.[53] As we shall see, Chu ladies played a significant role in cementing the Zeng-Chu alliance.

Reorientation toward Chu

In 2018, archeologists excavated the Zaoshulin cemetery part of the Yidigang cluster located in the city of Suizhou. Among the 86 excavated tombs, five—characterized by sloping ramps—were identified as those of the Zeng rulers and their consorts; additionally, 19 medium-sized and 62 small tombs were excavated. Although many tombs have been partly looted or otherwise dam-

50 Fang Qin, *Zengguo*, 52–53; Fang Qin even suggests that Chu settlers looted the Guojiamiao tombs, such as Tomb #3. See also Wang Xianfu 王先福, "Zaoyang Zhoutai yizhi wei Zengguo du, Chu fengyi kao" 棗陽周臺遺址為曾國都、楚封邑考, *Hubei wenli xueyuan xuebao* 湖北文理學院學報 2024.9: 16–20.

51 See Wu Dongming, "The Rediscovery of Zeng and the Interregional Networks in late Bronze Age China," *Early China* (forthcoming).

52 This is lady Mi Ke 羋克 (note 40, above). The Zeng Hou ding 曾侯鼎 discovered in the vicinity of the Guojiamiao cemetery (note 36) was prepared as a dowry by the marquis of Zeng to Lady Tang of the Mi clan 湯嬭 (Mi 嬭 is usually transcribed as Mi 羋). Some scholars (e.g., Fang and Wu, *Mumu Zenghou*, 11–13) consider this the earliest instance of the Zeng-Chu marital alliance, but this conclusion is premature: first, because a dowry is normally not prepared for a spouse, and second, because Lady Tang could be from another Mi-clan neighboring polity, such as Qiong 邛. See Zeng Pan 曾攀, "Qianxi 'Zenghou zuo Ji Tang Mi ying ding' mingwen" 淺析"曾侯作季唐嬭媵鼎"銘文, *Jiang Han kaogu* 2019.6: 140–42. The latter observation may apply to Mi Ke as well.

53 See details in Huang Tingqi, *Beige nanfeng*, 87–121; she does not discuss the examples cited in the previous note.

aged, archaeologists recovered over 2,000 bronze vessels, including approximately 600 musical instruments, most notably chime bells (*bianzhong* 編鐘). Many of these vessels bear inscriptions, the total length of which exceeds 6,000 characters. These inscriptions recount the story of Zeng's initial resistance to, and subsequent acceptance of, Chu's dominance.

The earliest Zeng ruler interred in Zaoshulin is the occupant of Tomb 190. His tomb is a vertical wood-chambered earthen pit with an 11 m-long sloped ramp; the burial chamber is an irregularly shaped rectangle (6.1 by 5.8 m on the surface; 7.2 m deep). Despite having been looted in antiquity, it yielded no fewer than 412 grave goods, including five *ding* tripods and four *gui* tureens (from what was originally a larger set). The inscriptions on many of the vessels (totaling approximately 2,400 characters) identify the owner as the Duke *Qiu of Zeng 曾公𣪘.[54] Qiu is a rare example of a Zeng leader who styled himself "Duke" (*gong* 公) rather than "Marquis" (*hou* 侯).[55] Most of his inscriptions are dedicated to "the August Ancestor, Patriarch Nan, up to [Lords] Huan and Zhuang" 皇祖南公至于桓莊; the identity of Lords Huan and Zhuang remains unknown. For the purposes of this discussion, the most significant set of inscriptions appears on the Duke's chime bells (Zeng gong Qiu *bianzhong* 曾公𣪘編鐘). The text was inscribed in full on four large *bo* 鎛 bells, one of which (M 190: 35) retains an intact version in 226 characters; a slightly longer version is preserved on a set of smaller *yong* 甬 bells.[56] The inscription can be conveniently divided into three parts:

54 Wuhan daxue lishi xueyuan 武漢大學歷史學院 et al., "Hubei Suizhou Zaoshulin Chunqiu Zengguo mudi" 湖北隨州棗樹林春秋曾國貴族墓地, *Kaogu* 考古 2020.7: 75–89; idem, "Hubei Suizhou Zaoshulin mudi 190 hao mu fajue baogao" 湖北隨州棗樹林墓地190號墓發掘報告, *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 2023.1: 29–94. The first report notes (76) that the combined length of the inscriptions in Tomb 190 exceeds anything known from any other excavated tomb.

55 Qiu's self-identification as "Duke" is paralleled only in some of the vessels of his grandson, De 得 or 德, the occupant of tomb 129 at Zaoshulin cemetery (but note that other De's vessels identify him as Marquis; see Huang Jinqian, *Zengguo tongqi mingwen tanze* 曾國銅器铭文探賾 [Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2024], 225–27). The reasons behind Qiu's self-elevation are not clear (for some speculations, see Yang Lisheng 楊理勝, "Zeng gong Qiu-bianzhong mingwen suojian Chunqiu Zhou wang ciming zhidu bulun" 曾公求編鐘銘文所見春秋周王賜名制度補論, *Jiang Han kaogu* 2021.2: 116–18).

56 For the variants of the inscription, see Wuhan daxue lishi xueyuan et al. "Hubei Suizhou Zaoshulin mudi 190 hao mu," 46–66. My translation is based on studies by Guo Changjiang 郭長江 et al., "Zeng gong Qiu bianzhong mingwen chubu shidu" 曾公𣪘編鐘铭文的初步釋讀, *Jiang Han kaogu* 2020.1: 3–30; Chen Minzhen, "Zeng gong Qiu bianzhong mingwen bushuo" 曾公𣪘編鐘銘文補說, *Hanzi Hanyu yanjiu* 漢字漢語研究 2020.4: 3–11; Huang Yifei 黃益飛, "Zeng gong zhong suojian Zengguo jianguo shishi kao" 曾公鐘所見曾國建國史實考, *Beijing shifandaxue xuebao* 北京師範大學學報 2023.3: 130–38; Huang Tingqi, *Beige nanfeng*, 134–48. Intriguingly, the inscription contains many inac-

唯王五月吉日丁亥，曾公𣪊曰：昔在辟丕顯高祖，克仇匹周之文武。淑淑伯括，小心有德。召事上帝，聿怀多福。佐佑有周，[illegible]神其聲。受是不寧，丕顯其靈，匍匐祗敬。

It was in the fifth month of the royal calendar, on auspicious day *dinghai*. Qiu, the Duke of Zeng, said: In the past, our resplendent High Ancestor was able to match (or: assist)[57] Kings Wen and Wu of the Zhou. Peaceful and quiet, Bokuo was careful and possessed virtue. He was called upon to serve the Lord on High, and so secured good fortune.[58] He served the Zhou from the left and the right, x (graph unclear) made his voice divine. Yet having received this, he was not lax, but made his numinosity all the more resplendent, and did the utmost to demonstrate reverence.

The inscription starts with a trope that is common in many subsequent Zeng bell inscriptions: praise for the state's progenitor, Bokuo (i.e., Nangong Kuo or Patriarch Nan). This appeal to the glorious past of the polity is then immediately connected to the present:

王客（格？）[59]我于康宫，平（抨）[60]尹氏命皇祖，建于南土，蔽蔡南門，質（鎮）應亳社，屏于漢東。南方無疆。討征淮夷，至于繁陽。曰：昭王南行，豫（舍）命于曾，咸成我事，佐佑有周。賜之用鉞，用征南方。南公之烈，駿聲有聞。陟降上下，保乂子孫。

curacies, such as omitted or inversed characters; the *yong*-bell inscription is particularly confused. For a brilliant analysis of these deficiencies as related to the process of the inscription's production, see Ondřej Škrabal, "Circumventing Illiteracy: Manuscripts and Knowledge in Chinese Bronze Workshops during the Spring and Autumn Period" in *Inscribed Copies: Manuscript Models in Pre-Modern South, Southeast, and East Asian Epigraphy*, ed. Ondřej Škrabal (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

57 For reading *qiupi* 仇匹 (also transcribed as 逑匹) as either "to match" or "to assist," see Chen Zhaofan 陳兆潘, "Zenggong Qiu bianzhong mingwen jishi ji xiangguan Xi Zhou Chunqiu shishi yanjiu" 曾公求編鐘銘文集释及相關西周春秋史實研究 (MA thesis, Hebei Normal University 河北師範大學, 2022), 13.

58 As noted by Škrabal in "Circumventing Illiteracy," the praise of Bokuo in the inscription unmistakably resembles the praise of King Wen of Zhou in the "Da ming" 大明 ("Greatly Radiant") ode of the *Canon of Poems* (Mao 236).

59 Chen Minzhen ("Zeng gong Qiu," 5–6) suggests reading *ke* 客 as *ge* 格 (to arrive, to visit), as is common in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. He claims that, normally, *ge* is an intransitive verb, and adding an object (*wo* 我) makes little sense; Zeng's scribes were not aware of the meaning of *ke* as *ge* and added a redundant object. This interpretation is not followed here.

60 For reading this disputed graph as *ping* 平, standing here for 抨, "to let" or "cause" somebody to act, see Chen Minzhen, "Zeng gong Qiu," 6–7.

> The King hosted us at the temple of King Kang. He let the Chief Officer deliver the decree to [our] august ancestor to establish [our state] in the southern lands, protect the southern gates of Cai, guard the Bo altar in Ying,[61] and shield [the territories] to the east of the Han [River]. The southern territories were without boundary. [We] attacked the Huai Yi, reaching Fanyang. [The King] said: "King Zhao assaulted the south, disseminating the decree to Zeng: 'Complete our affairs, support the Zhou from the left and the right.' [King Zhao] granted [the Zeng ruler] a battle-axe to assault the south." The staunchness of Patriarch Nan—his glorious voice is well heard. He ascends and descends above and below, protecting his progeny.

The archaizing language of this excerpt and its reference to the founding of Zeng and its participation in King Zhao's southern campaign(s) have confused many scholars who have attempted to reconcile the text with other evidence about Zeng's early history.[62] However, interpreting this passage as a straightforward narration of past events is not warranted. Rather, the text depicts a visit of Duke Qiu himself to the King of Zhou, who "hosted us" 王客我.[63] The King's reference to the posthumous name of King Zhao (d. ca. 957 BCE) clearly indicates that the visit took place after both Zeng's enfeoffment and King Zhao's campaigns. Actually, despite its archaisms, the language of the passage clearly reveals that it was composed by Eastern Zhou scribes who were imperfectly conversant with the Western Zhou formulae.[64]

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61 The four graphs transcribed here as 質應亳社 are among the most contested in the inscription. I follow Zhu Fenghan, "Zaoshulin Zenghou bianzhong yu Yejiashan Zenghou mu" 棗樹林曾侯編鐘與葉家山曾侯墓, *Zhongguo guojia bowuguan guankan* 中國國家博物館館刊 2020.11: 11 in reading *zhi* 質 as a substitute for *zhen* 鎮 (to protect). The Bo altar was one of the Shang ritual centers, which, following the destruction of the Shang, was distributed by King Wu of Zhou to Zhou's key allies (see Huang Yifei, "Zeng gong," 133–34 for further details). The King of Zhou refers here to the triangle of the Ji-clan polities in the south: Ying in the upper Ru Valley, Cai in the lower Ru Valley, and Zeng in between the Han and the upper Huai Rivers (map 1).

62 See, e.g., Huang Yifei, "Zeng gong"; Zhu Fenghan, "Zaoshulin." For the criticism of this approach, see Han Wei 韓巍, "Jintian de tongqi duandai yanjiu benzhi shang shi kaoguxue yanjiu: jianlun xin cailiao neng fou tiaozhan 'Kang gong shuo'" 今天的銅器斷代研究本質上是考古學研究——兼論新材料能否挑戰"康宮說", *Zhongguo shi yanjiu dongtai* 中國史研究動態 2022.3: 52–53.

63 Even if "us" was a redundant addition by the Zeng scribes to what originally was an intransitive verb (see note 59, above), they surely would have had in mind a real visit from Duke Qiu to the Zhou king.

64 Han Wei, "Jintian de tongqi," 52–53; see also note 59, above.

In my opinion, the ambiguity between the distant past and the present in the above passage is intentional. Duke Qiu's visit to the King of Zhou was narrated in language deliberately crafted to reaffirm an eternal alliance between Zhou and Zeng. This was achieved by conflating four distinct events: Zeng's enfeoffment, which likely took place under King Cheng of Zhou 周成王 (r. ca. 1042/1035–1021 BCE); its participation in King Zhao's southern campaign(s) more than half a century later; Zeng's assault on Fanyang, which is conveniently dissociated from Zeng *bo* Qi (see the previous section) and transposed from the recent to the more remote past; and, finally, Duke Qiu's visit to the current Zhou King. Why did the Zeng (or Zhou?) scribes engage in such elaborate historical acrobatics?

A possible solution to the puzzle arises from considering the inscription within its political context. The tomb's mortuary settings disclose that Duke Qiu was a contemporary of King Xiang of Zhou 周襄王 (r. 651–619 BCE). This king ascended the throne against the wishes of his father, thanks to the patronage of Lord Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685–643 BCE), but in the waning years of Lord Huan, King Xiang tried to assert his position anew. It is plausible, especially given his negative relations with Chu,[65] that the king tried to incite Zeng/Sui against Chu. To achieve this, he opted for the exceptional act of reinvigorating a centuries-old Zhou-Zeng alliance.[66] This alliance was based on two closely related shared historical memories: first, the enfeoffment of Zeng as Zhou's stronghold in the south, which was then an area "without boundary"; and, second, the southern campaign of King Zhao, the last meaningful Zhou attempt to project power into the lower Han River Valley and up to the Yangzi. Notably, the inscription places the sentence about Zeng's campaigns against the Huai Yi between the accounts of Zeng's enfeoffment and of King Zhao's southern campaign. This allows the inference that the Huai Yi were also the primary target of King Zhao's campaign, conveniently covering up the well known fact that the real target was Chu. These subtle manipulations of the historical memory of Zeng and Zhou are not accidental.[67] Chu was, in effect, "the elephant in the room" during Duke Qiu's visit to King Xiang. Without explicitly stating this, by

65 King Xiang's father, King Hui 周惠王, planned to replace the future King Xiang with another scion, but was prevented by Lord Huan of Qi. Infuriated, King Hui tried to ally with Chu against Qi (*Zuozhuan*, Xi 5.6).

66 Yang Lisheng, "Zeng gong."

67 For manipulations of historical memory in bronze inscriptions, see, e.g., Maria Khayutina, "The Beginning of Cultural Memory Production in China and the Memory Policy of the Zhou Royal House during the Western Zhou Period," *Early China* 44 (2021): 19–108; see also Chen Minzhen, "Lishi jiyi."

referring to the precedent of King Zhao, Zeng could justify turning against Chu. This intention is also hinted in the final section of the inscription:

> 曰：嗚呼，憂！余孺小子，余無傍受。隶𧗸（余行）以卹，俾辪千僷，溥天孔惠。文武之福，有成有慶。福祿日至，復我土疆。择其吉金鐈鋁，自作龢鎛宗彝。既淑既平，終龢且鳴。以享于其皇祖南公，至于桓莊，以祈永命，眉壽無疆，永保用享。
>
> [Lord Qiu] said: “Wuhu, one should worry! I am just a little child; I have nobody to rely upon. I just want to behave with devotion so that, for a thousand generations, we shall be covered by Heaven’s vast grace. The good fortune of [Kings] Wen and Wu has accomplishments and blessings. [Let] good fortune arrive daily, so that we may recover our lands and borders. I have selected this auspicious metal and made a harmonious *bo* bell for the ancestral rites. It is pure and soothing; forever will it be harmonious and resonant. Therewith shall I sacrifice to the August Ancestor Patriarch Nan, up to [Lords] Huan and Zhuang, to ask for an eternal Mandate, to have boundless longevity, to protect and use it forever.”

Fittingly, the inscription ends with “auspicious words” (*guci* 嘏辭) that request eternal prosperity to the donor’s progeny. However, behind these formulaic expressions lies a significant political statement: Duke Qiu expresses his hope not just to restore the good fortune granted to Zeng by the Zhou dynastic founders, but also “to recover our lands and borders” 復我土疆. Given that Chu had appropriated some of Zeng’s territories (see above), the implicit message is clear. And it was not just a hint. From *Zuozhuan* we know of an abortive attempt by Zeng/Sui to incite polities east of the Han River against Chu in 640 BCE (that is, in all likelihood, during Duke Qiu’s reign). The attempt was quickly thwarted by Chu’s chief minister, who “secured an accord and returned home” 求成而還; the imprudent rebellion was criticized even by *Zuozhuan*’s meta-commentator, “the noble man” (*junzi* 君子).[68] In light of this, it is plausible to see Duke Qiu’s inscription as a sophisticated justification for betraying Zeng’s allegiance with Chu.

Duke Qiu’s tomb is paired with that of his spouse (Tomb 191), whom inscriptions identify as the Chu princess Yu Mi 漁芈 (or Mi Yu).[69] It remains unknown whether Mi Yu attempted to dissuade her husband from rebelling against Chu

68 *Zuozhuan*, Xi 20.4.

69 Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan et al. “Hubei Suizhou Zaoshulin mudi Chunqiu mu M191 de fajue” 湖北隨州棗樹林墓地春秋墓M191的發掘, *Kaogu* 2023.10: 30–50.

or what role she played in Chu's lenient treatment of Duke Qiu after the rebellion. What is clear is that her daughter-in-law—another Chu princess, Jia Mi 加嬭 (or Mi Jia 嬭加; note that Mi 嬭 and Mi 羋 are interchangeable)—who married Qiu's heir, Marquis *Bao of Zeng 曾侯寶, made a major contribution to strengthening the Chu-Zeng alliance.

Mi Jia's tomb (#169) is paired with that of Marquis Bao (#168). Her tomb is slightly smaller than his: its trapezoidal ramp measures 7.9–8.8 m in length, compared to the 11 m of Bao's; her burial chamber measures 6.4 by 5.4 m on the surface and 5.1 m deep; Bao's chamber is 6.7 by 5.7 m at the surface and 5.6 m deep.[70] Both tombs, like many others in the Zaoshulin cemetery, were partially looted, including recently; some of the looted artifacts were subsequently seized by the Public Security Bureau or ended up in private collections. Although Mi Jia's tomb's size is modest compared to those of her husband or mother-in-law,[71] it contained an unusually high number of chime bells (19; at least two more bells were looted). An examination of a lengthy inscription, repeated, with minor variants, on four sets of bells, reveals Mi Jia as an exceptionally powerful and influential figure who steered Zeng to reorient toward Chu. The inscription begins with the following statement:[72]

> 唯王正月初吉乙亥，曰：伯括受命，帥禹之緒，有此南洫。余文王之孫=（子孫），穆之元子，之〈or 出〉邦于曾。余非敢作恥，楚既為忒，吾仇匹之。密藏我猷，大命毋改。
>
> It was in the first month of the royal calendar, "initial auspiciousness," on *yihai* day. I said: "Bokuo received the Mandate, followed Yu's mission, and possessed this southern riverine land. I am a descendent of King Wen, the prime child of Mu. Having departed to (or: married into)[73] the state

70 For both tombs, see Wuhan daxue lishi xueyuan et al., "Hubei Suizhou Zaoshulin mudi M169" (Mi Jia) and Hubei Sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al., "Hubei Suizhou Zaoshulin mudi M168 (Zeng hou Bao) fajue jianbao" 湖北隨州棗樹林墓地M168（曾侯寶）發掘簡報, *Jiang Han kaogu* 2024.1: 22–49 (Bao).

71 Yu Mi's tomb (# 191) has a 9 m-long ramp; its burial chamber is 7.4 by 5.3 m on the surface and 6.3 m deep (Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan et al. "Hubei Suizhou Zaoshulin mudi Chunqiu mu M191," 31).

72 My translation is based on Guo Changjiang et al., "Mi Jia bianzhong mingwen de chubu shidu" 嬭加編鐘铭文的初步釋讀, *Jiang Han kaogu* 2019.3: 9–19; Chen Minzhen, "'Chu bang yu Zeng, yu fei gan zuo chi' jie: Mi Jia bianzhong mingwen xushu zhuti busho" "出邦于曾，余非敢作耻"解——嬭加編鐘銘文敘述主題補說, *Chutu wenxian yu Xian Qin, Qin Han shi yanjiu luncong* 出土文獻與先秦秦漢史研究論叢, ed. Zou Fudu 鄒芙都 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2022), 125–34, and Huang Tingqqi, *Beige Nanfeng*, 209–17.

73 The inscription is repeated in four versions, of which two are complete; in one, the word

> of Zeng, I dare not act disgracefully. Chu has become the model; I shall match (or: assist) it. I calmly succeed in my strategies:[74] may the Great Mandate not change!"

This section has sparked heated debates about the identity of the speaker. Since the second part of the inscription (translated below) identifies the speaker explicitly as Mi Jia, many scholars opined that the words above came from her deceased husband, Lord Bao. This interpretation, in turn, has led to controversies regarding the meaning of some of the graphs. There is, however, one clear statement that identifies the speaker as Mi Jia: for no one else would the term "departure to" (*zhi* 之) or "marriage into" (*chu* 出) the state of Zeng make sense.[75] With this understanding in mind, we can now read the inscription and assess its sophistication.

Like several other inscriptions attributable to Zeng rulers, Mi Jia's begins with a panegyric to Zeng's founder, Bokuo (Nangong Kuo). However, after lavishly praising Bokuo for "following the mission" of the sage Thearch Yu, the donor identifies herself as a descendant of the illustrious King Wen of Chu and the primary child of King Mu 楚穆王 (r. 625–614 BCE).[76] The reference to King Wen, Mi Jia's great-grandfather, allows readers to draw a parallel with King Wen of Zhou, an object of Zeng's adoration. Then comes the crucial point: "Chu has become the model; I shall match it." Note that the phrase for "matching" (or "assisting," *qiupi* 仇匹) echoes the statement in Duke Qiu's bells that Zeng's founder "was able to match Kings Wen and Wu of the Zhou" 克仇匹周之文武. Times have changed, and the focus of cultural *cum* political orientation should change as well. The inscription continues:

> 余孺小子加嬭曰：嗚呼！薨公早陟。余保其疆鄙，行相曾邦，以長辟夏，余典冊厥德，毆民之柢巨，攸=（悠悠）鏘鏘。余為婦為夫，余矗勉下遲，恭畏儔公及我大夫，龔龔預政，作辟邦家。

> I, the small child Jia Mi (=Mi Jia), say: "Wuhu! Lord Gong (i.e., Marquis Bao) ascended [to Heaven] early. I protect his borderlands and preside over the state of Zeng to prolong our Xia. I record his virtue on docu-

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zhi 之 (moved, went to) is replaced by *chu* 出 (meaning here: married to another state). See Guo Changjiang et al., "Mi Jia," 12.

74 For the understanding of 密藏 as "calmly succeed," see Guo Changjiang et al., "Mi Jia," 13.

75 Chen Minzhen, "'Chu bang'" and Huang Tingqi, *Beige nanfeng*, 218–22.

76 From the mentioning of King Mu's posthumous name, we can confidently date the inscription to post-613 BCE.

ments and tablets and govern the people to respect regulations,[77] doing so forever (?). As a wife and a husband, I strive to act calmly.[78] I reverently respect the former rulers and my grandees, manage my governance respectfully, and boost our state and patrimony."

The second part of the inscription is doubly surprising. First, it reveals the extent of Mi Jia's power after her husband's death. She presents herself as presiding over the government of Zeng, acting "as a wife and a husband" 為婦為夫, and regulating the Zeng people. This magnitude of female power is rarely evident in the Springs-and-Autumns period (or it is obscured by our sources).[79] Second, and more pertinent to the current discussion, Mi Jia presents herself as fully integrated into the Zeng polity. She not only "reverently respects the former rulers and my grandees" 恭畏僖公及我大夫, but also pledges to protect Zeng's borderlands, a matter of major concern for her father-in-law, Duke Qiu. Remarkably, she speaks of "prolonging our Xia" 長辟夏. Given that Chu was not typically identified as belonging to the Xia ("Chinese"),[80] Mi Jia's declaration signifies the adoption of her new subjects' identity. Her concluding pledge to "boost our state and patrimony" 作辟邦家 further demonstrates her complete identification with Zeng.

77 The term *yi* 毆 in the context of governing the people appears in two roughly contemporaneous inscriptions from Chu and Zeng (Cook and Goldin, *Inscriptions*, 275n3). For 柢 (or 氐) 巨 as referring to the observance of norms and regulations, see Guo Changjiang et al., "Mi Jia," 14. Note that in the third set of the inscriptions, 巨 is replaced by *wang* 王, but construing the phrase as "respecting the king" 祗王 would not make much sense to me.

78 In translating this extremely challenging sentence, I have relied on Huang Tingqi, *Beige nanfeng*, 214–15. Note that "as a wife" 為婦 appears in only two of four inscription's versions (Guo Changjiang et al., "Mi Jia," 14).

79 As noted by Chen Zhaorong 陳昭容, the only known parallel to Mi Jia's power among the rulers' widows is the case of Lady Jiang of Jin 晉姜, the widow of Marquis Wen of Jin 晉文侯 (r. 781–746 or 771–736 BCE), as reflected in Jin Jiang *ding* 晉姜鼎 (note 47 above). See Chen's "Zenghou furen Mi Jia de shengming guiji: cong Suizhou Zaoshulin M169 Sui Zhong Mi Jia mu peizang tongqi tanqi" 曾侯夫人嬭加的生命軌跡——從隨州棗樹林M169隨仲嬭加墓陪葬銅器談起, *Gujin lunheng* 古今論衡 38 (2022): 82–98, esp. p. 96. Chen also notes the exceptionality of Mi Jia's set of inscribed chime bells, whose size and lengthy inscription are not paralleled in other contemporaneous female tombs (ibid., p. 96).

80 In several Warring States texts, Chu is squarely associated with *manyi* 蠻夷 "savages," but never in *Zuozhuan*, where Chu is, however, differentiated from the Xia polities (see Li Wai-yee, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center 2007], 298–320). In my view, Chu occupied a liminal position in the Zhou cultural sphere, which allowed its elites to emphasize intermittently their belonging to the Zhou civilization and their otherness (Pines, *China's Aristocratic Age*, chapter 2.4).

I shall pass over the third part of Mi Jia's inscription, as it is the least personal and least related to Zeng-Chu relations.[81] What is relevant is that Mi Jia successfully forged a new identity for herself and her subjects. The previous tensions between Chu and Zeng—the major Ji-clan polity in the far south—were glossed over. Prolonging "our Xia" and boosting "our state" meant respecting "Chu's model" and striving to "match" it. The Zhou ancestry of Zeng was not denied, but in a twist of sophisticated appropriation, it became supportive, rather than disruptive, of the new pro-Chu stance. Duke Qiu's invocation of King Zhao of Zhou's southward expedition was expunged from Zeng's history and the irredentist promise to "return" lost territories was subtly replaced with the commitment to "safeguard" Zeng's borderlands. The past and the present were unified, and protecting Zeng now meant supporting Chu.

Mi Jia's reign was also the age when we can observe subtle changes in Zeng's cultural orientation. The excavators of the Zaoshulin cemetery have observed that early mortuary assemblages resemble those of the Central States to the north, whereas the later ones display a clear influence of Chu culture.[82] Notably, the earliest Chu-style objects in the Zaoshulin cemetery, two *fou* 缶 jars, were discovered in the tomb of Mi Jia's husband, Lord Bao and of Mi Jia herself.[83] Chu was gradually becoming not just a political patron, but also a source of cultural inspiration.

Zeng/Sui as Chu's Savior

Around the mid-sixth century BCE, the cemetery of the Zeng ruling lineage was relocated from Zaoshulin to the nearby site of Wenfengta (still within the Yidigang cluster). This cemetery underwent excavation during a salvage operation in 2011–2012 prompted by local construction. Although several major tombs had been badly damaged both by looters and construction crews, a few note-

81 The most interesting point of that section is recurring promise to feast and entertain Zeng's grandees (*dafu* 大夫). While such promises are common in several contemporaneous inscriptions, in the case of Mi Jia it may reflect her anxiety to preserve her leadership among the male elites of Zeng.

82 Wuhan daxue lishi xueyuan et al., "Hubei Suizhou Zaoshulin," 88. Note that the proliferation of new, stylistically different types of bronzes began in Chu around the time of the reign of Mi Jia's brother, King Zhuang 楚莊王 (r. 613–591 BCE), when a new local superelite was formed. See Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society*, 293–325.

83 Hubei Sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al., "Hubei Suizhou Zaoshulin mudi M168," 46 and Wuhan daxue lishi xueyuan et al., "Hubei Suizhou Zaoshulin mudi M169," 55.

worthy inscriptions were discovered.[84] Tomb 4, belonging to an unnamed Zeng ruler, was tentatively dated by the excavators to the "early stage of the late Springs-and-Autumns period," that is, the second half of the sixth century BCE (possibly two to three generations after Mi Jia). Among the surviving bronze vessels, a bell from a lost set of chime bells bears a fragment of a longer inscription, including the following phrase:

> 徇驕莊武，左右楚王，弗討是許。穆=（穆穆）曾侯，畏忌溫龔……
>
> Glorious and proud, stalwart and martial, I serve the King of Chu on the left and the right; he has promised not to punish us. Reverent is the Marquis of Zeng; I am cautious and fearful, gentle and respectful. …[85]

Zeng's illustrious ancestor, Nangong Kuo, served the Zhou dynastic founders "on the left and the right," whereas his proud descendant now promises the same service to the King of Chu, who, in turn, is expected to spare Zeng.[86] Soon, this pledge to Chu was tested under very severe circumstances. In 506 BCE, Chu was on the brink of collapse. The armies of its arch-rival, Wu 吳 launched a surprise attack, supported by several of Chu's former satellites and allies, from the lower Huai Valley all the way into Chu's heartland. Chu's capital, Ying 郢, fell, and the Wu army pursued the fleeing King Zhao 楚昭王 (r. 515–489 BCE), who sought refuge in Zeng/Sui. *Zuozhuan* narrates the Wu leaders' appeal to Sui:

> 周之子孫在漢川者，楚實盡之。天誘其衷，致罰於楚，而君又竄之，周室何罪？君若顧報周室，施及寡人，以奬天衷，君之惠也。漢陽之田，君實有之。
>
> Of the Zhou descendants located along the Han River, Chu has, in fact, taken every last one. Heaven's sentiments have been swayed, and it has inflicted punishment on Chu. Yet you, lord, grant [the King of Chu] refuge. What crime has the Zhou house committed? If you should think to avenge the Zhou house, and to be kind also to us in bringing Heaven's sentiments

84 Fang Qin, *Zengguo*, 68–72.

85 Hubei Sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Suizhou shi bowuguan 隨州市博物館, "Hubei Suzihou Wenfengta mudi M4 fajue jianbao" 湖北隨州文峰塔墓地M4發掘簡報, *Jiang Han kaogu* 2015.1: 5–7.

86 The odd phrase "he has promised not to punish us" 弗討是許 may suggest that the inscription was cast during the reign of King Ling of Chu 楚靈王 (r. 540–529 BCE); for his harsh treatment of erstwhile satellites and allies, see Pines, *China's Aristocratic Age*, chapter 2.4.

> to fruition, it would be an act of generosity. The lands to the east of the Han River would then be yours.[87]

To lure Sui (Zeng) to its camp, Wu appealed to their alleged common descent (Wu claimed to belong to the Ji clan), offering Sui a chance to avenge the Ji polities. Additionally, Wu promised to reward Sui lavishly with lands to the east of the Han River, an area which Zeng had dominated two centuries earlier. King Zhao's brother, Ziqi 子期, was fearful that the Marquis of Zeng/Sui might yield to Wu's pressure; hence, he offered himself as substitute to be handed to the Wu army in the place of the King. The Zeng/Sui leaders had different plans though:

> 隨人卜與之，不吉，乃辭吳曰：「以隨之辟小，而密邇於楚，楚實存之。世有盟誓，至于今未改。若難而棄之，何以事君？執事之患不唯一人，若鳩楚竟，敢不聽命？」吳人乃退。
>
> The Sui leaders divined about handing over [the King of Chu], but it was not auspicious, so they declined Wu's offer, saying, "Because Sui is small and remote, and yet close to Chu, it has, in fact, been Chu that has preserved us. For generations, we have made covenants and pledges to Chu, which to this day have not been altered. If, in a time of difficulty, we should abandon them, then, how should we serve you, my lord? The concern of men in charge should not be for this one man. If you bring peace within the borders of Chu, shall we presume not to heed your commands?" The Wu forces then retreated.[88]

The Zeng/Sui leaders imply that they could submit to Wu only if this were to stabilize its rule over the Chu realm. In the interim, they will maintain their allegiance to Chu. While this exchange could be interpreted as literary embellishment or even a fabrication by *Zuozhuan*'s compilers, other inscriptional evidence from the Wenfengta cemetery suggests that the story in *Zuozhuan* contains more than just a kernel of truth. Tomb 1, which had also been badly damaged, yielded more inscribed bronze vessels than Tomb 4. Of these, an inscription on chime bells cast by order of Marquis *Yu of Zeng (Zeng hou Yu *bianzhong* 曾侯𠬜編鐘) is the most remarkable. The inscription, which recurs on four sets of bells, of which one (comprising the two largest bells) is complete, can again be divided into three parts. The first two sections say:[89]

87 *Zuozhuan*, Ding 4.3e.

88 *Zuozhuan*, Ding 4.3e.

89 The initial publication of the inscription in Hubei sheng kaogu yanjiusuo and Suizhou

惟王正月，吉日甲午，曾侯𪏭曰：「伯括上庸，左右文武，達殷之命，撫定天下。王遣命南公，營宅汭土，君庀淮夷，臨有江夏。周室之既卑，吾用燮戚楚。吳恃有眾庶行亂，西征南伐，乃加於楚，荊邦既削，而天命將誤。有嚴曾侯，業業厥聖，親敷武功，楚命是靖。復定楚王，曾侯之靈。」

It was in the first month of the [Zhou] king's calendar, on the auspicious day *jiawu*. Yu, the Marquis of Zeng said, "Bokuo (Nangong Kuo) was enrolled to support [Kings] Wen and Wu on the left and the right. [He helped them] attain the Mandate of Yin (=Shang) and console and pacify All-under-Heaven. The King [of Zhou] then ordered Patriarch Nan to establish his residence at the confluence of the rivers, to rule and govern the Huai Yi and overlook the Yangzi and the Xia (=Han) rivers."

"The Zhou house has already declined. I am harmonious and amicable with Chu. Wu relied on its multitudes to behave calamitously. They invaded westwards, attacked southwards, and thereupon added [turmoil] to Chu.[90] The Jing (=Chu) country had already been decimated and Heaven's Mandate was on the verge of becoming a matter of concern.[91] Stern is the Marquis of Zeng, magnificent in his sagacity; he personally spread military achievements. Thus, Chu's Mandate has been secured. The restoration of the King of Chu is thanks to the numinous power of the Marquis of Zeng."

The inscription, like those of Duke Qiu and Mi Jia, starts with a panegyric to Nangong Kuo, emphasizing his supremacy over the Huai Yi (notably, without connecting the Zeng founders to King Zhao of Zhou's southern expedition). Then the inscription reads as an affirmation of Mi Jia's legacy: Zeng's loyal

shi bowuguan, "Suzihou Wenfengta M1 (Zeng hou Yu mu), M2 fajue jianbao" 隨州文峰塔M1（曾侯與墓）、M2發掘簡報, *Jiang Han kaogu* 2014.4: 3–51, was followed by a series of discussions of its content in the same issue of *Jiang Han kaogu*. My translation of the first part is based on Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed*, 85–88. I have used reconstructions proposed by Qinghua daxue chutu wenxian dushuhui 清華大學出土文獻讀書會, "Zeng Hou Yu bianzhong mingwen bushi" 曾侯與編鐘銘文補釋 (2014), downloaded from the site www.ctwx.tsinghua.edu.cn, 21 February, 2025; Li Xueqin 李學勤, "Zhengyue Zeng Hou Yu bianzhong mingwen qianban xiangjie" 正月曾侯𪏭編鐘铭文前半詳解, *Zhongyuan wenhua yanjiu* 4 (2015): 16–20; and Huang Tingqi, *Beige nanfeng*, 238–48.

90 This was indeed the route of Wu's attack, first along the Huai River westward, and then, after crossing the Han River, southwards toward Chu's capital.

91 Reading 誤 as 虞 (to be concerned, worried) (Pines *Zhou History Unearthed*, 262n67). An alternative reading would be that the Mandate was about to be mistakenly transmitted to Wu.

service to the Zhou in the past is presented as congruent to loyal service to Chu in the present. Marquis Yu is unambiguous: Heaven's Mandate has been transferred to Chu, and it is to Chu only that Zeng owes allegiance. The transformation of Zeng/Sui from a Zhou stronghold in the south to a loyal supporter of Chu has been finalized. The inscription ends with the following statement:

> 穆穆曾侯，壯武畏忌，恭寅齋盟，代武之緒，懷燮四方。余申固楚成，整復曾疆。擇辟吉金，自作宗彝。穌鐘鳴皇，用孝以享于辟皇祖，以祈眉壽，大命之長，其純德降余，萬世是尚。
>
> Grave, so grave, is the Marquis of Zeng, mighty and martial, but cautious and fearful. I am respectful and reverent of the sacred covenant;[92] I have inherited the martial mission[93] and embrace and harmonize the four quarters. I strengthen my accord with Chu, and [will] comprehensively restore Zeng's borderlands. I have selected this auspicious metal, making for myself this ancestral vessel. The harmonious bell sounds *huang*. It will be used in filial offerings and mortuary feasts for my august ancestor to request extended longevity, prolonging my Great Mandate. Let pure virtue descend on me and remain preserved[94] for ten thousand generations.

This section, like the entire inscription, ostensibly addresses the ancestors; however, as I shall try to clarify below, its intended audience was probably the leadership of Chu. Beyond boasting of his martial prowess, Marquis Yu is quick to emphasize his respect for the "sacred covenant," probably referring to the covenant sworn with Chu in the aftermath of the rescue of King Zhao.[95] After declaring that he "strengthens accord" with Chu, Yu promises to "comprehensively restore Zeng's borderlands." This pledge (or request?) shows that the loss of lands to Chu two centuries earlier remained a persistent concern for Zeng's rulers, who sought ways to restore the polity's former territorial extent. Yu then entreats his August Ancestor to prolong Yu's "Great Mandate" 大命, which here signifies the ongoing existence of Zeng.[96] I surmise that the intended recipi-

92 I adopt the translation "sacred" for *zhai* 齋 because the covenant was preceded by fast and purification. See Durrant et al., *Zuo Tradition*, 1308n32.

93 In transcribing and translating these graphs, I follow Huang Tingqi, *Beige nanfeng*, 244.

94 For the interpretation of *shang* 尚 as a loan for *chang* 常, meaning "to preserve," see Huang Tingqi, *Beige nanfeng*, 247.

95 *Zuozhuan*, Ding 4.3e.

96 For this usage of the concept *tianming* 天命 (or its synonymous *da ming* 大命) in Springs-

ents of this request were not only the ancestors but also the Chu rulers, who, by the time of the bell's casting, were aggressively annexing their erstwhile dependencies and allies, punishing them for betraying Chu in 506 BCE (see the next section). Yu was eager to remind the Chu king of the "sacred covenant" between the two countries and of Zeng's meritorious service, which warranted the prolonging of Zeng's Mandate.

The three lengthy inscriptions analyzed above (namely, those of Duke Qiu, Mi Jia, and Marquis Yu) share notable similarities. All adhere to the same tripartite structure: they begin with praise for the Zeng founder, Nangong Kuo, and his contribution to the Zhou cause, and conclude with "auspicious words," which, in two of the three cases, explicitly refer to a desire to restore Zeng's boundaries. (In Mi Jia's case, a commitment to "protect" the borderlands appears in the inscription's second part.) All three also invoke Heaven's Mandate, both in the context of Nangong Kuo's support of Zhou and in the context of preserving the Zeng polity. The primary area of difference among the three is the second part, which is the most individualized and in which the Zeng leaders allude to their current policies, particularly vis-à-vis Chu. (In Mi Jia's inscription, the Chu connection is shifted to the first section, while the second addresses Mi Jia's domestic power.)

These similarities in the structure and content of three inscriptions separated by a century and a half strongly suggest that they were much more than individual expressions by Zeng rulers directed toward their deified ancestors. Rather, these lengthy inscriptions appear to have served as programmatic statements by Zeng leaders. Their content was likely to have been known not only to the scribes who assisted in formulating them in rhyme and aligning them with earlier similar pronouncements, but also to broader segments of Zeng elite, who may have constituted the inscriptions' intended addressees. Surely, they were also known to Chu leaders, who maintained close ties with the Zeng court through intermarriage and frequent diplomatic exchanges. Therefore, when Marquis Yu pronounced, "the restoration of the King of Chu is thanks to the numinous power of the Marquis of Zeng," his true addressee was the Chu king. The same holds true for Yu's "auspicious words."

Marquis Yu's plea succeeded spectacularly. Soon after his rescue of King Zhao, Zeng/Sui was ritually upgraded from a Chu dependency to an ally, meriting Sui's reappearance in the *Chunqiu* 春秋 annals after a hiatus of a century

and-Autumns inscriptions, see Luo Xinhui 羅新慧 and Yuri Pines, "The Elusive Mandate of Heaven: Changing Views of *tianming* 天命 in the Eastern Zhou period," *T'oung Pao* 109 (2023), esp. pp. 6–17.

and a half.[97] Chu's enduring gratitude to Zeng is vividly manifested in lavish presents at the funeral of Marquis Yi, including a magnificent *bo* 鎛 bell donated by King Hui of Chu, a son of King Zhao, who had escaped Wu's captivity thanks to Zeng's loyalty. Bamboo slips discovered in the tomb indicate that Chu leaders—from the King to top nobles—competed to outdo each other in bestowing mortuary gifts.[98]

In parallel with their political alliance, Zeng became more deeply absorbed into Chu's sphere of cultural influence, as evidenced by the widespread adoption of Chu-style bronze vessels in late Springs-and-Autumns Zeng burials, and the proliferation of Chu orthography (sometimes referred to as "Chu script" 楚文字) in Zeng. While this represented a selective borrowing rather than wholesale acceptance of Chu culture, it suffices to demonstrate the increasing cultural influence of Chu.[99] As for Zeng's "Mandate," it was maintained at least until the mid-fourth century BCE, coinciding with the burial of Marquis *Bing of Zeng 曾侯丙, the occupant of Tomb 18 in Wenfengta.[100]

Between "Soft" Subjugation and Annexation: Chu's Dilemma

Chu's ability to control Zeng without resorting excessively to coercive measures is remarkable. There is no evidence that Chu had either maintained a permanent garrison in the vicinity of Zeng or placed supervisory officials there. Its last known use of force against Zeng dates to 640 BCE. Thenceforth, its dominance

97 Sui appears in *Chunqiu* twice: in 640 BCE (Xi 20.6), when it led an anti-Chu rebellion, and then in 494 BCE (Ai 1.2), as Chu's military ally. As is clarified in *Zuozhuan* (most clearly in Cheng 2.8b), a dependency was not allowed to be ranked among the regional lords and was omitted from records of covenants and multistate military campaigns. Previous instances of Sui's assistance to Chu were not reported in *Chunqiu* (compare *Chunqiu*, Zhao 17.6 and *Zuozhuan*, Zhao 17.6).

98 For King Hui's bell, see Falkenhausen, *Suspended Music*, fig. 20; for Chu's investment in the mortuary ceremonies of Marquis Yi, see Luke Habberstad, "Texts, Performance, and Spectacle: The Funeral Procession of Marquis Yi of Zeng, 433 B.C.E.," *Early China* 37 (2014): 181–219.

99 The first point is emphasized repeatedly in Fang Qin, *Zengguo*; for the second, see Huang Yicun 黃一村, "Shilun Chunqiu shidai Zengguo wenzi de yanbian" 試論春秋時代曾國文字的演變, *Qingtongqi yu jinwen* 青銅器與金文 11 (2023): 113–22. Huang Tingqi (*Beige nanfeng*) demonstrates the complexity of this process of Zeng's adaptation to Chu's culture: in certain tombs and certain inscriptions non-Chu vessels and orthography were preserved well into the end of the Springs-and-Autumns period.

100 Fang Qin (*Zengguo*, 160–62) suggested that Zeng survived as an autonomous polity until the conquest of Chu's core areas and of the Sui-Zao Corridor by Qin 秦 in 278 BCE, but this remains speculative.

was apparently not questioned and no further coercion was required. The success of Chu's mildness was proven during the debacle of 506 BCE. Whereas Chu had been betrayed by most of its former dependencies and allies, Zeng remained loyal, and, as we have seen above, was subsequently rewarded. A sympathetic observer of Chu-Zeng relations could recall the statement in *Laozi* 老子:

> 故大國以下{小}國，則取小國；小國以下大國，則取於大國。故或下{以取，或}下而取。故大國者不{過}欲並{=兼}畜人，小國不{過}欲入事人。夫{皆得}其欲，則大者宜為下。
>
> Hence, by placing itself below the small state, the large state takes over the small state; by placing itself below the large state, the small state is taken over by the large state. Therefore, some, by placing themselves below, are taken over; some, by placing themselves below, take over. Thus, the large state desires nothing but to jointly nurture others; the small state desires nothing but to enter and serve others. Since everybody gets what it wants, the large should fittingly be placed below.[101]

It would be an exaggeration to argue that Chu placed itself below Zeng, but otherwise *Laozi*'s depiction of amicable subjugation seems to fit the case discussed in the previous pages. Instead of pure coercion, Chu relied on a variety of "soft" means to ensure Zeng's compliance. Of these, marital ties were particularly important, as can be gleaned from the case of Mi Jia (pp. 570–73 above). Additionally, Chu's ability to appropriate the discourse of "Heaven's Mandate" and place itself as a potential replacement of the Zhou dynasty (pp. 577–78 above) is remarkable. Add to this Chu's ever-growing cultural prestige, manifested by the proliferation of its bronze vessels and adoption of its orthography throughout the areas of its political impact and even beyond its control—including the lower Huai River Basin and even south of the Yangzi—and it becomes clear that Chu cemented its position as the political and cultural leader of the southern part of the Zhou realm.[102] This dominance resembles similar "soft power"

101 *Laozi* 61, based on both Mawangdui 馬王堆 versions (taking version B as the primary text, supplementing missing graphs with parallels {in figure brackets} from Mawangdui A version). Note that Mawangdui A uses *bang* 邦 (tabooed in the Han dynasty) instead of *guo* 國; in the penultimate sentence it uses *jian* 兼 instead of *bing* 並. See Gao Ming 高明, *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 123–25.

102 For the impact of Chu's bronze vessels, e.g., in the lower Huai Basin, see Zhang Zhongyun 張鍾雲, "Huaihe zhongxiayou Chunqiu zhuguo qintongqi yanjiu" 淮河中下游春秋諸國青銅器研究, *Kaoguxue yanjiu* 考古學研究 4 (2000): 140–79. For Chu's impact on the

methods associated with the Western Zhou. These methods were employed parallel to annexation and methods of administrative centralization applied by Chu elsewhere. It may be plausibly assumed that Chu statesmen experimented with different means of maintaining an expansionist polity, learning the pros and cons of direct and indirect control.

Despite the evident success of "soft power" means in the case of Zeng, in the long term, Chu moved toward direct control of subjugated entities. The backdrop for this change is readily understandable. Unlike the Western Zhou, whose dominance of the realm was not questioned well until its downfall (or even immediately thereafter), Chu had to compete with peer polities—first Qi, then Jin, and, from the sixth century BCE onwards, also Wu—which tried to entice Chu's satellites and allies into their camp. The outcome of the competition was determined primarily by military rather than cultural, ideological, or kin-based considerations. Zeng, as the most distant from either Jin or Wu, could not rely on their help, and prudently remained loyal to Chu. Many other Chu satellites and allies cast their lot with Wu once it became clear that Wu's armies could match those of Chu.[103] This resulted in Chu's disastrous underperformance in 506 BCE, when, abandoned by many long-standing allies, the country suddenly became vulnerable to massive assault from afar.

The Chu leaders learned their lesson. Having recovered from Wu's brief occupation, Chu turned toward the annexation of former dependencies and satellites.[104] In the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, further experiments were undertaken to strengthen centralized control over the newly formed counties.[105] Pliable satellites such as Zeng were allowed to maintain their autonomous existence, but they were perhaps viewed as vestiges of the past, like the remnants of the feudal-era privileges in early modern Europe. The road ahead was that of administrative centralization, and on this road Chu was eventually outperformed by its ally-turned-rival, Qin. This topic, however, belongs to another study.

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bronze vessels of Wu (Chu's major rival, and never subjugated by Chu), see, e.g., Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society*, 278.

103 In retrospect, Wu's defeat of Chu and six of its satellites at the Battle of Jifu 鷄父 (519 BCE), became the turning point, leading to an accelerating unraveling of the Chu alliance.

104 This turn in Chu's policy is neatly summarized in section 19 of the bamboo manuscript *Xinian*, for which see Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed*, 220–22.

105 For these experiments and the new forms of territorial control in the fifth to fourth century BCE, see Zheng Wei 鄭威, *Chuguo fengjun yanjiu* 楚國封君研究 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2012) and You Yifei 游逸飛, *Zhizao 'difang zhengfu': Zhanguo zhi Han chu junzhi xinkao* 製造"地方政府"——戰國至漢初郡制新考 (Taipei: Taida chuban zhongxin, 2022), 93–134.

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Abstract

Political centralization and the annexation of rival polities are commonly viewed as the dominant patterns of territorial expansion in preimperial China. This article draws attention to an alternative mode of expansion, in which the defeated state was allowed to continue as a dependency or a satellite of the major power. Through an analysis of the political trajectory of the state of Zeng 曾/Sui 隨 from a Zhou stronghold to a faithful satellite of Chu, I argue that Chu's success was not solely attributable to its overwhelming military power, but also to other factors—such as reliance on Chu consorts in Zeng's court as agents of influence, and even successfully positioning Chu as a potential replacer of the Zhou house. By exploring Zeng-Chu relations from the perspective of the weaker ally, I aim to elucidate the surprising appeal of Chu's "soft" methods of subjugation. However, the article also demonstrates the limitations of "soft" methods in ensuring Chu's lasting dominance.

Résumé

La centralisation politique et l'annexion des entités politiques rivales sont généralement considérées comme les modèles dominants d'expansion territoriale dans la Chine pré-impériale. Cet article attire l'attention sur un autre mode d'expansion, dans lequel l'État vaincu était autorisé à continuer d'exister en tant que dépendance de la grande puissance. À travers une analyse de la trajectoire politique de l'État de Zeng 曾/Sui 隨, qui est passé du statut de bastion des Zhou à celui de fidèle satellite de Chu, je soutiens que le succès de Chu n'est pas uniquement attribuable à sa puissance militaire écrasante, mais également à d'autres facteurs, tels que le recours à des concubines de Chu à la cour de Zeng comme agents d'influence, et même le positionnement réussi de Chu comme remplaçant potentiel de la maison des Zhou. En explorant les relations entre Zeng et Chu du point de vue de l'allié le plus faible, je cherche à élucider l'attrait surprenant des méthodes «douces» de soumission utilisées par Chu. Cependant, cet article démontre également les limites des méthodes «douces» pour assurer la domination durable de Chu.

提要

兼並敵對小國並"縣之"，通常被視為先秦時代各國領土擴張的主要模式。本文旨在關注另一種擴張模式——戰敗國被允許作為大國的附屬國繼續存在。通過分析曾國（又稱隨國）從周室的支柱轉變為楚國忠實附庸的政治軌跡，筆者認為楚國的成功不僅源於其壓倒性的軍事實力，還輔以其他因素，比如，以嫁入曾國公室的楚國公主作為影響力代理人，以及成功將楚國定位為周室潛在替代者、新興"受天命"的國家等。通過從弱勢盟友的視角考察曾楚關系，本文試圖闡釋楚國"軟性"征服手段的驚人吸引力。然而，本文也揭示了這種"軟性"手段在確保楚國持久霸權方面存在著局限性。

Keywords

Chu – expansion – "soft power" – Zeng – Zhou