

## 1.2 HAN QI VISITS THE STATE OF ZHENG

Throughout online readings, information about early China will be conveyed, as much as possible, through selected translations from ancient texts. These texts allow us to look at early China directly and will put you in touch with the basic data historians use to construct analytic models of China's past. It will be easy to read the texts as narratives, poems, and so forth, but to learn about history from them you will need to ask interpretive questions: "What does this story tell us about early political structures or social customs?" "Why would a poem like this be regarded as sacred?" "How can myths and legends be of historical value to us?" Part of the work of raising (and sometimes of answering) these questions will be done for you in inserted comments that interrupt the texts to explain certain issues or provide background information. But much of the work is left up to you and will be the basis of class discussions.

Our first narrative is a relatively obscure section of the very large historical text, the *Zuo zhuan*, which covers the period 722-468 (it is described in more detail in the "Sources" section linked under [Supplements](#)). These years are traditionally known as the "Spring and Autumn Period," named after a text, *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, which is a terse chronicle of the era. The *Zuo zhuan* is a narrative commentary on that chronicle. The story of the patrician-diplomat Han Qi, which follows, plants you right in the middle of ancient Chinese society. A number of explanatory comments will interrupt the tale in order to orient you to your surroundings, but you still might feel a bit lost at a few points. This particular story has been chosen as our starting point because it happens to illustrate an unusually broad variety of ancient patrician social patterns.

Note: In this and some subsequent readings, short titled "sidebars" on topical issues are inserted at appropriate points in the text in shaded boxes such as this one. The titled sections include important basic information, and you should pay close attention to them. The topics covered in this reading include the following (in the order they appear):

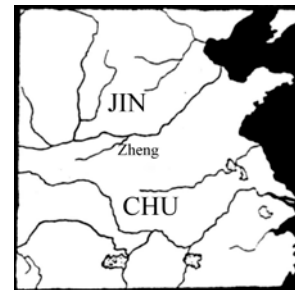
- Retainers
- Inheritance and political succession
- Clan religious practice
- Social control methods: virtue vs. law
- Zhou social classes
- The design of ancient cities
- Canonical texts: the *Book of Poetry*
- The richness of ancient Chinese

## Background

During the Spring and Autumn Period, which constitutes the early years of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (771-221), the region of the Chinese cultural sphere, which had been under the relatively strong control of the royal Zhou house during the Western Zhou period (1045-771), was in the process of separating into distinct political units, joined by ties of language, history, and culture, but ruled independently by local patrician clans. These politically independent states continued to acknowledge the Zhou as the legitimate royal house, but in fact the Zhou rulers were merely the powerless princes of a small homeland, and the rulers of the largest of the patrician states competed to succeed to the actual power that had slipped from the hands of the Zhou. Later in the Eastern Zhou, these local patrician houses styled their leaders as “*kings*,” and openly aimed to succeed to the throne occupied by the Zhou and, in theory, bestowed by Heaven. But in the era from which this text is drawn, the great goal was for the ruler of a state to be acknowledged as “*hegemon*” of all the patrician states, an informal designation which signified an overlord whose force of personality, political organization, and military alliances made him the most powerful man among the states, and whose powers were nominally exercised on behalf of the figurehead ruler of the Zhou royal house.

The patrician states were the descendants of what are sometimes called “*fiefs*”: grants of land and people provided by the Zhou ruling house to its junior lineage branches and the clans of its loyal lieutenants. These grants were sometimes small, but in some cases they constituted huge regions with large numbers of indigenous peoples living on them. They were intended both as rewards and honors, and also as military outposts by means of which the central government could, through the loyalty of the families settled as rulers on these estates, maintain control over the vast area of China. This system is sometimes referred to as “*Zhou feudalism*,” but because the term feudalism is in many ways very misleading we will avoid it whenever possible, speaking of these lands not as “*fiefs*,” but as “*estates*” or, as they became increasingly independent, “*states*.”

The court visit reported in the following narrative occurred late in the Spring and Autumn Period. In 526 B.C., a patrician of the state of **Jin**, Han Qi, traveled to the capital city of the neighboring state of **Zheng**. Jin, a large state located in the north-central region of the Chinese cultural sphere as it then extended, was a powerful political force. From 632-628, the ruler of Jin had acted as the hegemon of the patrician lords. The power of Jin had continued to dominate China through the early sixth century B.C., but had subsequently fallen, and through the middle of that century, the massive state of **Chu** to the south, only partially “*sinicized*” (assimilated to Chinese culture), was the leading power. At the time of this narrative, the power of Chu was newly broken, and the state of Jin was cultivating its alliances with the goal of regaining its former eminence. Han Qi’s visit to Zheng was apparently a part of this diplomatic process.



Zheng was a far smaller state just to the south of Jin. At the beginning of the Eastern Zhou in 771, the ruler of Zheng had helped preserve the Zhou dynasty by leading a group of patricians who carried an infant king away from the original Zhou capital in the west, where his father had been murdered in the sack of his city by non-Chinese nomads. The house of Zheng, along with

others, had settled the young king in a new capital to the east and for some time the state of Zheng had enjoyed great power among the other patrician clans. (The two capital sites are indicated by “x” on the map above.) But as the central power of the king failed to return to the levels of the Western Zhou and as the outlying states, rich in lands and relatively free from central control, took the lead in developing independent economic, military, and political traditions, the influence of the smaller, central state of Zheng waned. Its traditions were hallowed, however, and during the latter days when the following narrative takes place, the moral influence of Zheng was enhanced by the stature of **Zichan**, the chief minister to the ruling house of Zheng, whose diplomatic skills, knowledge of history and the realm of the spirits, and high moral sense made him eminent throughout sixth century B.C. China.

Before and during your reading of the following pages, it may help you focus on the major points if from time to time you refer to the “Study Questions” which appear at the end.

### The Narrative

In the third month of the year (roughly, mid-April to mid-May), Han Qi of Jin paid a state visit to Zheng. The Earl of Zheng arranged to have him received at a banquet entertainment. Prior to the banquet, Zichan warned the patricians, “All of you who will take your places at the court ceremony must behave with the utmost respect!” However, the patrician Kong Zhang arrived late and simply stood among the ranks of retainers. The director of the ceremony made him move and he walked back to stand behind the ranks of retainers. The director chased him away again, and this time he went to stand with the musicians among the racks of hanging chimes as all the guests laughed at him.

Retainers. Patrician strongmen, such as Han Qi and the Earl of Zheng, commonly had their own home guard of swordsmen and other usefully skilled men, whom they housed, fed, and treated with some respect. These men were known as “retainers,” and a wealthy and well placed patrician might have scores of such men in his service. Retainers could be the descendants of patrician families – younger sons who did not inherit the lands and titles of their ancestors – or they could be men of uncertain birth. In this case, it is likely that the retainers mentioned were the followers of Han Qi, who had traveled with him to Zheng. Kong Zhang, as a member of the ruling group of Zheng, appeared ridiculous when he stood with such men rather than at his ceremonial place, and even sillier when he hid among the musicians, men of no rank whatever.

After the banquet, the patrician Fuzi reproved Zichan. “When dealing with the officers of a great state,” he said, “one must be careful! If we give them occasions to laugh at us they will treat us with contempt. Even were we to observe all the points of ritual ceremony they would treat us as bumpkins, and if we appear to be a state that has lost its ritual, what chance do we have of seeking favored treatment from their states? My lord, Kong Zhang’s conduct was a disgrace to you!”

In ancient China, the greatest political demarcation lay between states that possessed or had adopted the patterns of Zhou patrician conduct (“ritual,” or, to use the Chinese term, *li*) and those which did not. The latter were viewed as “barbarian,” and their people were seen as midway between humans and animals. Fuzi was concerned that were Han Qi’s entourage to return to Jin with tales of the disrupted state banquet, the patricians of Jin would cease to take Zheng seriously as a valued ally. Zichan, however, takes Fuzi’s comment as an attempt to undermine his own authority.

“Have I issued improper commands?” replied Zichan with heat. “Have I lacked faith in giving orders? Have I been partial in meting out legal punishments? Have I allowed legal proceedings to become disorderly? Have I been incautious in assembling the daily court? Have I caused orders to be disobeyed? Have I brought upon us the contempt of great states? Have I wearied the people of the state without any resultant accomplishments or allowed crimes to escape my knowledge? Such things would indeed be my shame.

A number of the values of the patrician state are visible in these formulas: the need for political orderliness and a chain of command are paramount. The state government is responsible for managing a fair legal process, and in exercising powers to command the time and labor of the general population, the government was expected to act rationally and in the interests of the state. Rulers could not legitimately impose their personal whims upon the people of the state.

“Now, Kong Zhang is the descendant of Zikong, who was the elder brother of our former ruler.

Inheritance and political succession. Primogeniture (inheritance of property and title by the first son) was the supposed rule in Zhou China: how, then, could a former ruler have had an elder brother? The designation “first” son was, in fact, a flexible one. Men could marry many women: one only would be designated “principal wife,” the others would be concubines. The principal wife’s son was the heir. However, the designation was not inflexibly fixed and a favored concubine might displace a wife, her son consequently coming to outrank brothers who might be elder to him, or to have initially been of higher rank. These vagaries of patrician clan

practice led, during the Eastern Zhou, to innumerable “civil” wars of succession in the many patrician states, providing a colorful supplement to the endless inter-state wars that characterized the struggles of rulers to become hegemons or kings, enlarge their states, or just avoid the boredom of a reign without slaughter.

“Kong Zhang is the heir of a chief minister and has himself inherited the rank of a great officer. He has been charged with diplomatic visits to all of the great patrician states, he is admired by the men of this state and known to the patrician lords. He has his place at the court and is in charge of the ancestral sacrifices of his house. He possesses the right to the income of the estate he has been granted in Zheng, and he provides levies to the state army in times of war. When the ruling household holds funerals or sacrificial rites, he performs his official functions therein. The ruler sends him a portion of the meats offered at his lineage sacrifices, and Kong Zhang returns to the ruler portions of the sacrificial meats offered by his own lineage branch. When sacrificial rites are performed in the ruler’s temples, he occupies an official place.

Clan religious practice. One pivot of social and political life among the patrician ranks during the Zhou was the system of clan religious practice. Ancient Chinese society is probably better pictured as an interaction among patrician clans than as an interaction among states, rulers, or individuals. The identity of individual patricians was largely governed by their consciousness of their connections to and roles in various clans, all visible periodically within the context of the ceremonies of sacrifice offered to ancestors. Kong Zhang is the senior member of a “cadet” (junior) branch of the ruling clan’s lineage, hence the specific ritual connections described here. By means of this description, Zichan is exculpating himself from any blame concerning Kong Zhang’s conduct -- he is documenting the rituals which show that Kong is a fully integrated member of the governing clan: his conduct is the state’s responsibility (the ruling clan’s responsibility), not Zichan’s.

“The position that Kong Zhang occupies is one that has been settled for several generations, and in each generation those who have held it have performed its functions properly. That he should now forget his place – how is this a shame to me? Were the misconduct of every perverse man to be laid at the door of the chief minister, this would signify that the former kings had given us no code of punishments. You had better find some other matter to fault me by!”

Social control methods: virtue vs. law. Zichan's final point raises a key issue very much alive at the time this *Zuo zhuan* narrative was composed (bear in mind that the authors of the text surely invented the specifics of the dialogue over a century after the fact). The society of the late Zhou gradually evolved away from political structures that emphasized the key role of charismatic individuals -- a faith in the adequacy of cultivated patricians to keep order -- and towards structures that relied on the relatively mechanistic application of punitive law codes. Here, Zichan's speech endorses the modernistic movement towards rule by law. He denies that lapses by members of the state are symptoms of moral failings in the political leaders, and "proves" this by citing the great moral authority of the "former kings" (here denoting the great founding kings of the Zhou). By ascribing to those sages the invention of codes of punishment, he endorses the validity of the rule of law.

The narrative now moves in another direction.

Han Qi possessed a ring of jade, and its mate was the property of a merchant of Zheng. Han Qi begged the Earl of Zheng to have the matching ring given to him. Zichan refused to permit this. "This is not an article stored in the government treasury," he said. "Our ruler has no claim upon it." Zi Taishu and Ziyu spoke to Zichan about this. "This is no great request which Han Qi has made, and we cannot appear to vacillate from our allegiance to the state of Jin. We cannot afford to treat Han Qi poorly. If a man of ill will were to seize this opportunity to slander us to Jin and the spirits chose to assist him, he might thereby arouse the fierce anger of Jin, and then it would be too late for regrets! Why should you grudge a single ring and so incite the hatred of a great state?"

Zichan replied, "I am neither slighting Jin nor do I have any disaffection for it. I wish to live out my days in service to Jin and it is precisely for this reason that I have refused the ring. It is out of loyalty and good faith. I have heard that a *junzi* (gentleman\*) does not find it difficult to endure without wealth, but rather fears that he should occupy an office and fail to establish a good reputation. I have heard that one who acts in government does not find it difficult to serve great states or nurture small ones, but rather fears that he may violate ritual conduct in keeping his position secure. Now, if the officers of large states who are sent on state business to smaller ones could obtain for themselves anything they wish, how would their demands ever be met? And if one were gratified but the next denied, the perceived offence would be enlarged. If one cannot employ appropriate ritual courtesies to repulse the demands

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\*See the notes at the end of this reading.

of a great state like Jin, its demands will be insatiable. We will become no more than a suburban outpost within its territories and so lose our position. Han Qi was sent here as an emissary of state; now he seeks this jade for himself. This is excessive greed – shall we pretend that this man’s greed alone is no offense? This would be yielding up one jade and committing two crimes by both sacrificing our own position and encouraging his greed. How can we accept such a course of action? Exchanging one jade for two crimes, wouldn’t this be a poor bargain?”

Zichan here articulates some of the sophisticated political values that evolved during the centuries of political struggle of the Eastern Zhou. In particular, note that he expresses a willingness to come to terms with political realities and fulfill the amoral function of surviving through subservience to the strong, but he clearly holds that within such submission to power politics there remains significant leeway for moral action, so long as the independent legitimacy of ritual codes are acknowledged by all. While patrician codes of behavior, *li*, are not strong enough to regulate the greater balance of power, Zichan is optimistic that they can provide political actors with sufficient leverage to allow them to live an ethical life within the context of chaotic times.

When encountering a passage such as this, in which a major political actor describes his goals and reasons in moralistic terms, it is always appropriate to wonder whether it is the historical actor or the historian author who is the source of the ethical sentiments.

Subsequently, Han Qi went to purchase the ring directly from the merchant. When the price had been settled, the merchant said, “I must inform the ruler and his officers of the sale.” Han Qi then made his request to Zichan. “Formerly, I asked for this ring and your honor would not permit it; I dared not repeat my request. Now I have purchased it directly from the merchant, who has told me it must be reported, so I presume to ask again.”

Zichan replied, “Long ago, at the time when the Zhou fled to the east, our former ruler came to this place along with the ancestors of this merchant. Shoulder to shoulder they took up scythe and plough and cleared the fields, cutting down the tangled brambles and tumbleweeds.

The ancestor to whom Zichan refers was known as Duke Huan. At the time of the flight eastward, Duke Huan, whose forbears had long before been granted by the Western Zhou throne the prerogative to rule over a large estate known as the land of Zheng in the west, had “moved” his estate to a new area in the east. Such removals of patrician ruling houses, which entailed the forced migration of all the people of the patrician state – artisans and merchants of the central walled town and the peasantry from the surrounding countryside whose crops represented the basic income of their lords – were not uncommon during the early centuries of the Zhou. Such migrations highlight the high status of the patrician lords and their personal control over large masses of common people. Later, these migrations ceased, and we may see in this change a transition from a *clan*-based concept of the estate (or state) to a more familiar *territory*-based concept.

“They dwelt here all together, and our ruler made a covenant of mutual faith with these merchants saying, ‘Let you not rebel from my rule, and I shall not violate your commerce. I shall not beg goods of you or seize them. Should you profit with the treasures of the market trade, I shall have no claim upon them.’ Through the faith of this covenant, the merchants and our rulers have protected one another to this day.

Zhou social classes. Such a covenant would have been most unusual in the context of ancient China. By the latter centuries of the Zhou, a conventional view of society had emerged which conceived of four classes of people, ranked according to their ethical worth: the patrician elite, who did not labor with their hands, followed by peasants, artisans, and, least worthy, merchants. Throughout Chinese history there has been a strong bias against merchants (much as in medieval Europe): they were often viewed as social parasites – despite the fact that wealthy merchants often exercised great social influence. The attitude of the patricians of Zheng should be recalled as an exception to a very strong rule.

“Now you, sir, have kindly deigned to come to us on a mission of friendship. Yet you ask that our poor city coerce this merchant, which is to ask that we betray this covenant. Is this not improper? You, sir, would surely not wish your own state to lose the respect of the patrician lords for the sake of a ring. Yet if, when your state representatives make a demand, we must fulfill it without recourse to what is proper, then Zheng will have been reduced to a suburban outpost of your state. I could never be a party to such a thing. Were I to present you with this jade, I cannot say what this may lead to, hence I venture to lay the matter before you privately.”

Jin was at this time attempting to regain the position of hegemon over the lords of the various patrician states (the “patrician lords”). Gaining such recognition seems to have been, according to the historical accounts, a matter of combining both military and moral force. It would be unlikely that states which were not direct military allies of a would-be hegemon would consent to respond to his commands unless he and his state had demonstrated a certain degree of even-handedness and self-restraint in conducting affairs among its allies. Here, Zichan notes that were Zheng forced to abandon a distinctive feature of its own political character – the cooperative alliance between rulers and merchants – to provide an emissary with a coveted bauble, it would send a message to the patrician lords that Jin was likely to be arbitrary in its use of power. This would make it much harder for Jin to achieve its overall aims.

Han Qi thereupon declined the jade. “I have acted stupidly,” he said. How would I dare to occasion two crimes in pursuit of a jade? Let me now presume to decline it.”

The “two crimes” refers to a point Zichan made in conversation with others earlier. That the authors of the text have planted the notion in Han Qi’s mind reminds us that we are reading a romantic reconstruction of history. How much of what we read here was actually said? We have very few clues.

**In the summer, during the fourth month** (roughly mid-May to mid-June) **the six high ministers of Zheng staged a parting banquet in honor of Han Qi, given in the suburbs outside the city.**

The design of ancient cities. In patrician states, the ruler resided within the precincts of a walled fortress-palace within an urban center. Outside the palace walls was the capital city. Within various city neighborhoods lived artisans, who produced goods for the lord’s extended household and retainers, merchants, whose commerce connected the capital to other towns and cities throughout China and who traded at a the city marketplace, and at least some peasants, whose fields were adjacent to the city. Most of the patrician capitals, and all the major ones, were themselves surrounded by thick, high, earthen walls, penetrated by tall wooden gates on each side. Outside these outer walls there were also communities of peasants who worked fields somewhat more distant from the city. Here, also, were graves of patrician ancestors and graveside shrines, pavilions, hunting preserves, and other areas designated for the use of the privileged elite. The term “suburb” refers principally to these patrician preserves, rather than to any residential use of the lands beyond the outer walls (archaeology has uncovered no lawnmowers, gas grills, or station wagons in ancient Chinese suburbs). Certain sacrificial rites and rituals of court took place in the more spacious environs of these suburbs.

Han Qi addressed them: “I request that you gentlemen each recite from the *Book of Poetry*. In this way, I will learn of the will of Zheng.”

Canonical texts: the *Book of Poetry*. The *Book of Poetry*, which became one of the half-dozen most sacrosanct works in the Confucian canon (books of sage wisdom), was an anthology of about three hundred poems probably edited into a collection sometime in the eighth or seventh centuries B.C., but including many poems much older. The collection was, from an early date, believed to represent not only the finest poetry of China (set to the finest melodies, now long lost), but was also thought to hold within

it the subtle sentiments of its sagely authors. Young patricians were, from perhaps the sixth century on, expected both to memorize the entire *Poetry* and also to know how to cite it in order to convey, with an unmatched elegance and moral authority, their most subtle intentions. It was not uncommon for the *Poetry* to be employed by skilled envoys as a powerful diplomatic tool, whereby a sometimes unwelcome message from one patrician lord could be skillfully transmitted to another through the aesthetic veil of shared erudition. Here, the narrators wish to illustrate for readers the marvelous cultural powers of the Spring and Autumn period. All the poems cited here are selected from the twenty-one that comprise the section titled “Airs of Zheng.” These are supposed to have been folk songs collected in the area of Zheng by the anthologists who edited the *Poetry*.

Zichi then intoned “Wild Grasses on the Plains.” “Excellent, young man,” said Han Qi. “I, too, have this wish.”

“Wild Grasses on the Plain” reads as follows:

Wild grasses on the plain,  
The dewdrops lie round;  
There is one beauty,  
Bright eyes so lovely;  
A meeting by chance  
Would so fit my longings.

Wild grasses on the plain,  
The dewdrops lie thick;  
There is one beauty,  
Lovely, her bright eyes;  
A meeting by chance,  
Together content.

What, we may wonder, would ever lead a patrician minister to intone this poem to a visiting envoy at a diplomatic banquet? How would this express the “will of the state of Zheng?” And does Han Qi’s response signify a mid-life crisis?

“Wild Grasses on the Plain” was clearly composed as a simple love poem. But once it took its place within the culturally sanctified anthology of the *Poetry*, its meaning began to be understood on a metaphorical plane. A canonical commentary from about the second century B.C. suggests the background interpretation which Han Qi may have been reading from Zichi’s recitation: “‘*Wild Grasses On the Plain*’ is about encountering an auspicious era. The beneficence of the ruler is not being carried to those below; the people are impoverished by incessant warfare. Young men and women can no longer find their mates at the proper season of life,

*and so they dream of a meeting by chance.*” It is likely, then, that the authors of the *Zuo zhuan* (who, like all early writers sympathetic with Confucianism are, if not prudish, at least rather dry when it comes to romance) meant us to understand that Zichi’s selection conveyed his longing that society no longer be disrupted by warfare, and that a beneficent ruler arise. Han Qi, by endorsing that wish, appears in a positive light.

Zichan then intoned “The Kidskin Jacket.” “I am not equal to this!” responded Han Qi.

A kidskin jacket was the official robe of certain high ministers:

Glossy the sheen of the kidskin jacket;  
 Beautiful! the fur so smooth.  
 And the one who wears it  
 Would give his life, unwavering.

The leopard skin cuffs of the kidskin jacket;  
 So martial, so strong!  
 And the one who wears it  
 Advises the state with utter frankness.

Warm is the kidskin jacket;  
 Three furry bands gleam on each sleeve,  
 And the one who wears it  
 Is the pillar of the state.

It is hard to avoid the impression that this is the author’s assessment of Zichan, rather than a record of Zichan’s poetic choice.

Zi Taishu intoned “Lift Your Skirts.” “I am here!” replied Han Qi. “Would I presume to trouble you to seek out another?” Zi Taishu bowed. “How well you do to recite this poem,” continued Han Qi. “If there were not such a conclusion, how could this affair be settled?”

“Lift Your Skirts” reads:

If you long for me,  
 Lift your skirts and cross the River Zhen!  
 If you don’t long for me,  
 Will I lack for other men?  
 Oh, the foolishness of a foolish boy!

If you long for me,  
 Lift your skirts and cross the River Wei!  
 If you don’t long for me,

Will I lack for other *shì*?\*  
 Oh, the foolishness of a foolish boy!

While Han Qi's reply might raise contemporary eyebrows, what he is really saying could be said by a Southern Indiana congressional candidate at a fundraising barbeque. He takes Zi Taishu to be reminding him that Zheng can find allies in other great states if Jin is not willing to "court" its loyalty. His hearty reply is the equivalent of a slap on the back and a toothy smile – perhaps with a mental note to contact a hit man upon his return to Jin.

Ziyu intoned "Wind and Rain." Ziqi intoned "A Woman in the Chariot With Me." Ziliu intoned "Withering." Han Qi said with delight, "Zheng is surely near perfection! You gentlemen have all bestowed upon me such gifts of song in accordance with the orders of your ruler. Your poems have all reflected the will of Zheng and have all met with the warm feelings of these festivities."

The richness of ancient Chinese. Ancient Chinese was a language of great subtlety, enhanced by resonances which related written characters could produce. Han Qi's comment about the "will of Zheng" employs two such resonances. The word for "poetry" in Chinese (*shi* 詩) sounds like and uses a graphic element in common with the word for "will" (*zhi* 志: "will" in the sense of "intent" or "purpose"). There was, in fact, a saying current about the time that this narrative was composed to the effect that, "Poems speak one's will." The sense of the saying not only concerned the function of poetry, but also served as a gloss for the written character for "poetry," which is composed of two graphs, one meaning "to speak," and the other close to and homophonous with the graph for "will." This notion of the "original" sense and function of poetry, as expressed by the written character, lay behind Han Qi's initial request to learn the "will" of Zheng by hearing poetic recitations. Now, when Han Qi notes that the poems "have all reflected the will of Zheng," yet another pun is involved. Because the word for "will" is written with the same character as a homophonous word meaning "record," his statement is an elegant observation that both praises the way in which the ministers have conveyed the intent of their ruler, and equally points out that all of the poems selected by the ministers for this purpose are to be found among the recorded "Airs of Zheng."

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\*See the notes at the end of the reading.

“You gentlemen are all heads of clans which, you may have no fear, shall continue for generations.” Han Qi then presented each with a horse and intoned “I Offer Up.”

Han Qi chooses to intone a *Poetry* selection from the ritual odes of the Western Zhou rulers. Its tone is far more grandiose than that of the *Airs of Zheng*. The poem is cast as a ritual song sung by the Zhou founder, King Wu, on the occasion of sacrifices offered to his father, King Wen.

I offer up, I feast my forbears,  
 With sheep, with oxen;  
 May Heaven bless me.  
 I follow the patterns of King Wen  
 And day by day settle the four quarters.  
 Oh, great King Wen,  
 He aids us and we feast him.  
 Day and night,  
 In fear of the awesomeness of Heaven  
 I guard these lands.

Han Qi’s selection may suggest Jin’s ambitious goal to serve as hegemon and so approach the power and grace of the Zhou founders. Zichan’s reply picks up on the theme of bringing peace to the world, and clearly refers to the role of Jin, rather than to the personal service of Han Qi.

Zichan bowed in acknowledgment and had the other five ministers do likewise. “You have yourself settled chaos; dare we not bow to your virtue?”

Later, Han Qi sought out Zichan privately and presented him with a jade piece and a horse. “You ordered me to give up that piece of jade,” he said. “In doing so, you saved me from committing an offense worthy of death, and this was really a jade-like gift. Dare I not acknowledge this by means of these gifts in my hand?”

(*Zuo zhuan*, Zhao 16)

**Additional note: The terms *junzi* 君子 and *shi* 士, and late Zhou social classes**

Two key terms, which we will ultimately choose to leave untranslated, occur in this selection: *junzi* and *shi*. These two terms both apply to members of the Zhou patrician elite.

*Junzi* literally means “the son of a ruler.” It is occasionally employed in this sense, but it came to be used as an honorific denoting a cultivated man of both social refinements and moral sensitivity. Confucians extended the meaning to a more intense plane and sometimes used the term to denote a man of near-perfect ethical character and skills, close to what we sometimes term a “sage,” but the term kept its less ambitious meaning as well. Nevertheless, to one degree or another, it is nearly always a “prescriptive” term, that is, one which suggests a social ideal.

*Shi* is often used to denote any member of the Zhou patrician class. In some cases, it seems to suggest the military skills – swordsmanship, archery -- that were basic to the training of all well-bred youths. With this meaning in mind, it is sometimes translated “knight.” But the class of *shi* also included those patricians who made their mark through skills in the literary arts, and with this in mind the term is sometimes rendered “scholar.” The term may be used prescriptively as a social ideal, but its force is generally less than that of *junzi*, and it is much more encountered in a simple descriptive sense, often being used simply to refer to “hired gun” type bravos whom many warlords kept as retainers for their personal guard.

Both the terms *junzi* and *shi* have a special theoretical importance in the late Zhou. Throughout this period, the importance of hereditary membership in the greatest lineages of the nobility declined, and increasingly we find political actors being drawn from cadet branches of lineages, or even from among self-educated commoners. This broadened class of political actors, regardless of ancestry, came to be known as *shi*, and the qualities that fit them for important social roles were their abilities and attitudes. The transition of the term *junzi* from designation of a patrician patrimony to ethical qualities reflects this sea change in Zhou society, and we sometimes speak of the late Zhou as an era where social power was passing from the narrow ranks of an aristocracy to a much broader class: the *shi* (though it is good to bear in mind that *shi* and their families probably never exceeded a few percent of the total population).

## KEY NAMES AND TERMS

Zichan	<i>junzi</i>	<i>shi</i>
retainers	<i>li</i>	<i>Book of Poetry</i>

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What seem to you the three most significant things that we learn from this narrative about Classical patrician culture?
2. What aspects of patrician clan society do we see illustrated?
3. How “historical” does this account seem to you, based on your present understanding? How confident would you be in citing its contents as factual?
4. Make a list of ways in which we see *li* (ritual) behavior illustrated here.
5. List the ways in which Zichan is pictured as a moral exemplar.
6. On the basis of this reading, list four major features of the government system of the state of Zheng.
7. Why would anyone pursue diplomacy through poetic recitation?

## Sources and Further Readings

The major source for this reading, the *Zuo zhuan*, is an enormous and wonderful book that is quite challenging to understand. Fortunately, detailed commentaries on the text have been written and preserved since the third century A.D., when the statesman and general Du Yu found spare time between military campaigns to prepare the first of these, one which scholar still rely on. Modern editions generally incorporate explanations from scores of commentaries, and some include helpful translations into modern Chinese. Complete English translations are few (see the “Sources” reading, 1a), but a new translation by a team of outstanding scholars is, as of early 2010, complete and nearing publication. The story in this reading appears as an entry under the events of the third calendar month in the sixteenth year of the reign of Duke Zhou of the state of Lu (the text is organized according to the reigns of the Lu ducal house).

(Commentary editions consulted in preparing this translation include Takezoe Shinichirō, *Saden kaisen* [Tokyo: 1916] and Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* [Beijing: 1981].)