

DIDACTIC NARRATIVE AND THE ART
OF SELF-STRENGTHENING: READING
THE BAMBOO MANUSCRIPT *YUE GONG*
QI SHI 越公其事*

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Abstract

Yue gong qi shi 越公其事 is a recently published manuscript from the Tsinghua University collection. The manuscript provides a new version of the well-known story of King Goujian of Yue 越王句踐 (r. 496–464 B.C.E.), who turned defeat into victory and overcame Yue's formidable rival, the state of Wu 吳. My exploration of this text focuses on its two most notable aspects. First, the story about the policy of self-strengthening allegedly adopted by Goujian offers new insights into the evolution of political thought in the Warring States period. Second, the text allows deeper insight into the genre of didactic historical narratives that became prominent at a certain point of time between the Springs-and-Autumns (Chunqiu 春秋, 770–453 B.C.E.) and the Warring States (Zhanguo 戰國, 453–221 B.C.E.) periods.

The ongoing publication of recently unearthed manuscripts from pre-imperial (pre-221 B.C.E.) and early imperial China constantly opens new research horizons. Read in tandem with transmitted texts, these manuscripts allow us to ask new questions and to re-chart our understanding of political, social, and intellectual trajectories of the Chinese world during the formative age of traditional Chinese civilization. In what follows I want to demonstrate some of these new possibilities by focusing on the bamboo manuscript *Yue gong qi shi* 越公其事 (The affairs of the lord of Yue, hereafter *Yue gong*) from the Tsinghua (Qinghua 清華) University collection. I was attracted to this manuscript because it is related to the two topics closest to my fields of exploration—early Chinese historiography and early Chinese political thought. The text provides a new version of the well-known story of King Goujian of Yue 越王句踐 (r. 496–464 B.C.E.), who turned defeat into victory and overcame Yue's formidable rival, the state of Wu 吳. This new version is interesting not because it is factually more accurate than alternative stories (it is not), but because it allows deeper insight into the genre of

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didactic historical narratives that became prominent at a certain point between the Springs-and-Autumns (Chunqiu 春秋, 770–453 B.C.E.) and the Warring States (Zhanguo 戰國, 453–221 B.C.E.) periods. In addition, the *Yue gong* story about the policy of self-strengthening allegedly adopted by Goujian offers new insights into the evolution of political thought in the Warring States period.

This article was almost ready for publication when another exciting announcement came from China. The excavation of the Warring States-period Tomb 46 at Zaolinpu Paper Mill 棗林鋪造紙廠, Jingzhou (Hubei) yielded a cache of 535 bamboo slips. One of the newly discovered manuscripts, named by the editors *Wu wang Fuchai qishi fa Yue* 吳王夫差起師伐越 (King Fuchai of Wu rose an army and invaded Yue, hereafter *Wu wang*) closely parallels the text of *Yue gong*. Although the full text of *Wu wang* had not yet been published by the time of revising my article (November 2021), the preliminary publication allowed certain corrections and amendments in my translation cum analysis.¹

Background: The Manuscript and the Wu–Yue saga

Yue gong qi shi is written on 75 slips of 41.6 cm length; each slip contains 31 to 33 characters. The text is divided into eleven sections (commonly identified as *zhang* 章) separated by blank spaces on the slips. The title derives from the last four characters of the text, which are not visually separated from the preceding text. The editors considered these characters as the manuscript's title because in their eyes they were not logically connected to the preceding sentence; but as the discovery of *Wu wang* manuscript has shown, this conclusion was premature.² Judging from the handwriting, the manuscript was written by a single hand, probably the same that wrote several other historical anecdotes from the Tsinghua University collection.³ The text is relatively well preserved; only the first

1. For the Zaolinpu discovery, see Zhao Xiaobin 趙曉斌, "Hubei Jingzhou Zaolinpu Zhanguo Chu mu" 湖北荊州棗林鋪戰國楚墓, 2020 *Zhongguo zhongyao kaogu faxian 2020* 中國重要考古發現, ed. State Administration for Cultural Relics 國家文物局, 72–75 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2021). For the preliminary publication of parts of the *Wu wang* manuscript and its comparison to *Yue gong*, see Zhao Xiaobin, "Jingzhou Zaozhi jian *Wu wang Fuchai qishi fa Yue* yu Qinghua jian *Yue gong qi shi*" 荊州棗紙簡《吳王夫差起師伐越》與清華簡《越公其事》, paper presented at the conference "Warring States-period Chu bamboo manuscripts from the Tsinghua collection" 清華戰國楚簡, November 19–20, 2021.

2. Wang Hui 王輝 was the first to note that the last four characters are part of the text rather than its title; see his "Shuo 'Yue gong qi shi' fei pianji qi shidu" 說“越公其事”非篇題及其釋讀, *Chutu wenxian* 出土文獻 11 (2017), 239–41. Indeed, in *Wu wang* manuscript these last characters clearly belong to the text, as is emphasized by the final *ye* 也 and the section terminator sign 一 placed after them. I retain the original (even if wrong) title of the manuscript due to heuristic convenience: it is under this name that the manuscript is referred to in all other studies.

3. Li Xueqin 李學勤, ed., *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian*, 清華大學藏戰國竹簡, vol. 7 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 2017), 112.

and the last sections are considerably damaged, and the missing characters can be tentatively reconstructed thanks to parallels in transmitted texts and in *Wu wang* manuscript. Only in a very few cases have scholars pointed at minor inaccuracies in the slips' arrangement by the Tsinghua editorial team (see below). Overall, the manuscript's contents are relatively clear.

The manuscript can be conveniently divided into three parts. The first three sections (slips 1–25) deal with Goujian's defeat by Wu in 494 B.C.E. and the subsequent negotiations that allowed Goujian to preserve his polity, even if in a crippled state. The second part comprises sections 4 to 9 (slips 26–59) and deals with the policies adopted by Goujian in the aftermath of his defeat. The third part (sections 10–11, slips 59–75) deals with the renewed Yue war against Wu and Wu's ultimate defeat. Of the three parts, the second has no observable parallels in transmitted texts, and will be the focus of the current study. Parts 1 and 3 will be addressed only when their information departs radically from that in the transmitted texts.

Yue gong belongs to a large cache of unprovenanced manuscripts that were allegedly looted from a Chu 楚 tomb, smuggled to Hong Kong, and acquired there by the Tsinghua University donor in 2008.⁴ Dealing with looted materials poses a series of ethical and practical problems. Elsewhere, I have explained why, despite ethical objections of colleagues such as Paul R. Goldin, I consider working with these materials legitimate.⁵ Yet ethics aside, serious questions can be raised about the authenticity of the illicitly obtained documents. Is it possible that some of the recently acquired manuscripts—the acquisition and authentication of which is insufficiently transparent—come from the hands of forgers?

Luckily, in the case of *Yue gong*, this problem can be resolved by the 2020 discovery of the *Wu wang* manuscript, the content of which

4. For details, see Liu Guozhong, *Introduction to the Tsinghua Bamboo-Strip Manuscripts*, trans. Christopher J. Foster and William N. French (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

5. Paul R. Goldin, "Heng xian and the Problem of Studying Looted Artifacts," *Dao* 13 (2013), 153–60, caused many scholars to address the ethical problems of dealing with unprovenanced manuscripts. For a sample of views, see Christopher J. Foster, "Introduction to the Peking University Han Bamboo Strips: On the Authentication and Study of Purchased Manuscripts," *Early China* 40 (2017), 233–39; Martin Kern, "'Xi Shuai' 蟋蟀 ('Cricket') and Its Consequences: Issues in Early Chinese Poetry and Textual Studies," *Early China* 42 (2019), 45–49; Yuri Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed: The Bamboo Manuscript "Xinian" and Early Chinese Historiography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 43–44; Michael Friedrich, "Producing and Identifying Forgeries of Chinese Manuscripts," in *Fakes and Forgeries of Written Artefacts from Ancient Mesopotamia to Modern China*, ed. Cécile Michel and Michael Friedrich, *Studies in Manuscript Cultures* 20 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 329–30; Edward L. Shaughnessy, "Dao mu wenwu yanjiu de daode wenti" 盗墓文物研究的道德问题, paper presented at the conference "Warring States-period Chu bamboo manuscripts from the Tsinghua collection," November 19–20, 2021.

parallels that of *Yue gong*. Yet even before this discovery, there were two strong indicators in favor of its authenticity. First is the existence of continuous lines cut by a knife on the verso of the slips to indicate their original position as part of the bamboo culm segment from which the manuscript was produced. *Yue gong* is divided into two sets of slips as indicated by those lines (a few slips, most notably those of the last section, do not have the verso lines, and may have been brought by a scribe from a different set). Since the verso lines phenomenon was noticed by paleographers only in 2011, it could not have been known to a forger back in c. 2007 (the date when the Tsinghua slips transpired in Hong Kong); hence it strongly indicates that *Yue gong* is not a forgery.⁶ Second, as noted by Kim Tak 金卓 (Jin Zhuo), there is marked difference between part 2 of the text and the two other parts in their use of locative *yu* 于/於 particles: whereas the more “colloquial” 於 dominates parts 1 and 3 (17 於 to 7 于 in part 1, 9 於 to 1 于 in part 3), the second part is dominated by the “solemn” 于 (20 于 to 1 於). I shall address this distribution later; here suffice it to say that although I disagree with Kim’s identification of the second part of *Yue gong* as related to original Yue records, I do accept his conclusion that this part must have originated from a different source from the other two, and this cannot be reasonably assumed to be the forger’s design.⁷ In light of this, even before the *Wu wang* discovery, I came to the conclusion that much like another Tsinghua University manuscript, *Xinian* 繫年 (String of years or Linked years), which was the focus of my previous study, *Yue gong* should be considered an authentic manuscript.⁸

6. For an introduction to the verso lines phenomenon, see Thies Staack, “Identifying Codicological Sub-Units in Bamboo Manuscripts: Verso Lines Revisited,” *Manuscript Cultures* 8 (2015), 157–86 and Foster, “Introduction to the Peking University Han Bamboo Strips.” For the *Yue gong* case, see Takeda Kenji 竹田健二, “Seikakan *Etsukō soji* no chikukan hairitsu to kakukon” 清華簡『越公其事』の竹簡排列と劃痕, *Chugoku kenkyū shūkan* 中国研究集刊 64 (2018), 49–67, and Kim Tak 金卓 (Jin Zhuo), “Qinghua jian *Yue gong qi shi* wenxian xingcheng chutan” 清華簡《越公其事》文獻形成初探, March 19, 2019, www.bsm.org.cn/?chujian/8056.html, accessed March 27, 2022.

7. See Kim, “Qinghua” (I slightly update Kim’s statistics for part 3 of the text). Of course, we cannot rule out an exceptionally shrewd forger (Friedrich, “Producing and Identifying Forgeries”), but to assume that one would be so sophisticated as to introduce barely noticeable linguistic difference into the text seems to me beyond limits of reasonable suspicion.

8. For my analysis of *Xinian*, see Pines, *Zhou History*, 43–48. There is another similarity between *Yue gong* and *Xinian*, namely the phenomenon of different transcriptions for the same character. This could have been another indication of the scribe’s utilization of different sources, but I concur with Li Songru’s 李松儒 suggestion that in the case of *Yue gong* the discrepancy reflects an individual scribe’s habit to produce variants of the same character for esthetic reasons. See her “Qinghua qi *Yue gong qi shi*

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The story of the Wu–Yue conflict, which is the focus of *Yue gong* manuscript, is one of the most famous episodes in China’s pre-imperial history. Its earliest version is outlined in *Zuo zhuan* 左傳. In 494 B.C.E., King Fuchai of Wu 吳王夫差 (r. 495–473 B.C.E.) inflicted a crushing defeat on King Goujian of Yue, thereby avenging Yue’s defeat of Wu two years earlier. However, Fuchai did not heed the loyal advice of his major aide, Wu Zixu 伍子胥 (d. 484 B.C.E.), and did not extinguish Yue. Thereafter, Wu became absorbed in expansion northward, allowing Yue to recover and eventually to assault Wu from behind. After a series of attacks starting in 482 B.C.E., Yue defeated Wu in 473 B.C.E., with Goujian refusing to spare Fuchai.⁹

The story as narrated in *Zuo zhuan* represents a blend of informative and interpretive history that I have identified elsewhere as the hallmark of the *Zuo zhuan* style.¹⁰ It provides a lot of minute details, including dates, locations of the battles, names of military and civilian leaders, and the like. It also contains several important predictions and analytical speeches that integrate the narrative and allow the reader to glean proper historical lessons. Of particular importance are the speeches by Wu Zixu that highlight Fuchai’s strategic folly and predict the resurrection of Yue’s power. One prediction, attributed to Wu Zixu, is specifically noteworthy in the context of the current study. Back in 494 B.C.E., Wu Zixu allegedly said, “For ten years Yue will multiply its masses, and for ten years it will indoctrinate them,” after which it will turn Wu into “a bog” (越十年生聚，而十年教訓，二十年之外，吳其為沼乎!).¹¹ It may be plausibly assumed that whoever put this prediction in Wu Zixu’s mouth knew something about Yue’s domestic policies under Goujian. Yet oddly, these policies are never discussed in *Zuo zhuan*, which focuses exclusively on Yue’s military and diplomatic activities and does not address its ways of self-strengthening. Overall, the interpretative layer of *Zuo zhuan*’s story—how exactly Goujian effected his unbelievable comeback from an utterly defeated leader to the new hegemon of the

zhong de yici duoxing xianxiang” 清華柒《越公其事》中的一詞多形現象, *Chutu wenxian yanjiu* 出土文獻研究 17 (2018), 73–96.

9. For the relevant passages from *Zuo zhuan*, see *Zuo zhuan*, Ding 14.5, Ai 1.2; Ai 11.4; Ai 13.3; Ai 13.5; Ai 17.2; Ai 20.2; Ai 22.2. All references to *Zuo zhuan* follow the division adopted in Yang Bojun’s 楊伯峻 edition, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, rev. ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1991) and employed in the translation by Stephen W. Durrant, Li Wai-ye, and David Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition / Zuozhuan Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals”* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016) (the latter translation I follow with minor modifications).

10. Pines, *Zhou History*, 23–34.

11. *Zuo zhuan*, Ai 1.2.

eastern part of the Zhou world—remains wanting. This may explain proliferation of manifold later narratives that tried to fill in the gap.

The *Discourses of the States* (*Guo yu* 國語) presents three radically different versions of the Wu–Yue conflict, each of which provides an alternative explanation of Yue’s success. The “Discourses of Wu” (“Wu yu” 吳語) chapter squarely blames Fuchai for his hubris, intemperance, and silencing of the loyal remonstrator, Wu Zixu. Goujian, in contrast, is hailed precisely for his ability to heed loyal advice and delegate tasks to meritorious aides. He is furthermore credited with manifest concern for his people. His thrift, proximity to his subjects and awareness of their economic needs, skillful diplomacy, and the combination of lenient treatment of conscripts with strict military discipline—all contributed to his success. Some of these policies are outlined in greater detail in the “Discourses of Yue A” (“Yue yu shang” 越語上) chapter. Here Goujian is the real hero. Having heeded the loyal advice of Grandee Zhong 大夫種, the king mended his ways and focused on attaining the people’s support. His manifest care for the people won their hearts and led Yue to an easy victory over Wu. By contrast, the “Discourses of Yue B” (“Yue yu xia” 越語下) chapter argues that the architect of Yue’s victory was not Goujian but rather his sagacious minister, Fan Li 范蠡, whose military cum diplomatic acumen allowed him to restore Yue’s fortunes and defeat Wu. Whereas all three versions share the common factual framework starting with Yue’s defeat by Wu and ending with the elimination of Wu by Yue, their views of the reasons for Yue’s success differ dramatically.

Narratives from *Zuo zhuan* and *Discourses of the States* were integrated by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145–90 B.C.E.) in the chapters “The Hereditary House of Wu Taibo” (“Wu Taibo shijia” 吳太伯世家) and “The Hereditary House of King Goujian of Yue” (“Yue wang Guojian shijia” 越王勾踐世家). The latter borrows considerably from the “Discourses of Yue B” version, which makes it one of the most literarily engaging pieces in the “Hereditary Houses” section of Sima Qian’s *Records of the Historian* (*Shi ji* 史記).¹² The literary appeal of the Wu–Yue drama inspired proliferation of other narratives, starting from short vignettes in the Warring States-period texts and ending with longer and largely fanciful accounts in the Han 漢 (206/202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) literary works, the *Springs and Autumns of Wu and Yue* (*Wu Yue chunqiu* 吳越春秋) and the *Glory of Yue*

12. See Wang Chunhong 汪春泓, “*Shi ji* ‘Yue wang Goujian shijia’ shuzheng: jianlun *Shi ji* ‘shilu’ yu ‘shangqi’ zhi maodun” 《史記·越王勾踐世家》疏證——兼論《史記》“實錄”與“尚奇”之矛盾, *Huadong shifan daxue xuebao* (zhexue shehui kexue ban) 華東師範大學學報(哲學社會科學版) 2018.1, 79–88.

(*Yue jue shu* 越絕書).¹³ Interestingly, though, none of the transmitted texts seems to share the perspective of *Yue gong*. The latter's version of the events—focused as it is on systematic policies of self-strengthening allegedly adopted by Goujian—is not paralleled elsewhere, except for the newly discovered “sister manuscript,” *Wu wang*. This novel interpretation of the backdrop for Yue's victory is fascinating both in terms of its political message and in terms of the light it sheds on the art of didactic narrative in the Warring States-period China.

Fuchai Spares Yue

The first few slips of the text are among the most damaged, but parallels with other variants of the story and with *Wu wang* manuscript allow relatively easy reconstruction of their content. The story starts with its standard beginning: King Fuchai of Wu assaults Yue; King Goujian is defeated, retreats with eight thousand armored soldiers to Mt. Kuaiji (or Guiji) 會稽山 and dispatches Grandee Zhong to sue for peace. Zhong suggests to victorious Fuchai that Yue become a faithful servant of Wu; if the request is not granted, though, “then, my lord, please, arrange the armored soldiers of Wu, [prepare bells and drums, set] flags and banners, and personally sound the drum [to attack]. Thus you will see Goujian leading these eight thousand men to death.” (君乃陳吳甲，〔備鐘鼓，建〕【7】旃旌，王親鼓之，以觀句踐之以此八千人者死也。【8】).¹⁴

This beginning closely parallels Zhong's speech in the “Discourses of Yue A” narrative. Zhong was polite and submissive, but also warned that if Fuchai should persist in his desire to eliminate Yue altogether, he would face decisive battle by Yue soldiers. In most accounts of the Wu–Yue conflict, Fuchai is portrayed as ready to accept this offer, which

13. For translations and studies of these texts, see Jianjun He, *Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue: An Annotated Translation of “Wu Yue Chunqiu”* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021) and Olivia Milburn, trans., *The Glory of Yue: An Annotated Translation of the “Yuejue shu”* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

14. All the citations follow the edition in Li, *Qinghua daxue*, vol. 7, using the normalized *kaishu* 楷書 transcription and the normalized variant of the character (e.g. immediately putting 敗 instead of the original 北), unless the character's precise meaning is contested. Numbers in bold square brackets in Chinese indicate the slip's number. The addition in white square brackets in Chinese and in figure brackets in English follows the editors' tentative reconstruction of the missing characters on the basis of parallels with the received texts (as for November 2021, parallel slips from *Wu wang* manuscript had not been published yet). In preparing the translation, I have benefitted enormously, in addition to the Tsinghua team's annotations, from Ziju's detailed discussion of the text (Ziju 子居, “Qinghua jian qi Yue gong qi shi jiexi” 清華簡七《越公其事》解析, 7 parts, 2017–2018, www.xianqin.tk, accessed September 4, 2020, and from suggestions by other colleagues, as specified in subsequent footnotes.

aroused strong opposition from Wu Zixu. In *Yue gong* this line is followed, but the content of Fuchai's dialogue with Wu Zixu differs dramatically from other versions of the story. Once Fuchai informs Wu Zixu (who is named Shen Xu 申胥 in the manuscript)¹⁵ of his decision to spare Yue, the latter remonstrates:

申胥曰：「王其勿許【9】。天不仍賜吳於越邦之利，且彼既大敗於平原以潰，去其邦，君臣父子其未相得，今越【10】公其胡有帶甲八千以辜（鈍）刃偕死？」【11】

Shen Xu said, "Your Majesty, please do not approve. Heaven will not grant Wu another advantage over Yue. Moreover, they were greatly defeated on the plain and dispersed, leaving their capital city; the ruler and the ministers, fathers and sons still cannot get in touch with each other. Now, does the lord of Yue really possess eight thousand armored men who are ready to die with him carrying their blunted¹⁶ weapons?"

Wu Zixu's arguments are much weaker than those attributed to him in *Zuo zhuan*, "Discourses of Wu," and "Discourses of Yue A" versions. There, Wu Zixu invariably reminds Fuchai that Wu and Yue cannot coexist peacefully; one of them is bound to exterminate another. In light of this, seizing the opportunity to exterminate the enemy is the only reasonable course of action. This crucial part of the argument is conspicuously absent from Wu Zixu's speech in *Yue gong* except for a hint that Heaven will not grant Wu another opportunity to exterminate Yue.¹⁷ Instead Wu Zixu focuses on a minor issue, namely whether or not Grandee Zhong is bluffing when he promises tough resistance. This argument is duly countered by Fuchai:

吳王曰：「大夫其良圖此。昔吾先王盍（闔）慮所以克入郢邦【11】，唯彼雞父之遠荆。天賜衷于吳，右我先王。荆師走，吾先王逐之走，遠夫用殘，吾先【12】王用克入于郢。今我道路修險，天命反側，豈庸可知自得？吾始踐越地，以至於今，凡吳之【13】善士將中半死矣。今彼新去其邦而篤，毋乃豕鬪，吾於胡取八千人以會彼死？」【14】

15. This appellation appears also in "Discourses of Wu." Wu Zixu held a land grant at Shen 申.

16. Reading 辜 as *dun* 敦, standing for 頓 or more accurately 鈍, "blunt," following Xiao Xu 蕭旭, "Qinghua jian (qi) jiaobu (er)" 清華簡 (七) 校補 (二), June 5, 2017, www.gwz.fudan.edu.cn/Web/Show/3061, accessed September 7, 2021.

17. Note that in *Wu wang*, the point of seizing the opportune moment granted by Heaven is stressed more strongly: Wu Zixu states, "if now we do not follow and seize them, we shall repent this" 今弗遂取，後必悔之【14】. All the citations from *Wu wang* follow Zhao Xiaobin, "Jingzhou Zaozhi jian."

The King of Wu said, "My grandee, please think this through. In the past, when our former king Helu was able to overcome [Chu] and occupy their capital, Ying, this was only because Jifu is far away from Jing [Chu].¹⁸ Heaven was favorable to Wu and supported our former king. The Chu army fled, and our former king chased and followed them. [The Chu soldiers] were exhausted by the lengthy flight, and therefore our former king overpowered them and occupied Ying. Now, our roads are distant and dangerous, Heaven's decree is unstable, and how can it be known that I have got it? From the moment I first set foot in Yue's territory till now, almost half of the good Wu soldiers have died. Now, [the Yue soldiers] have just left their capital, and are steadfast, will not they fight like boars? Whence shall I get eight thousand men to meet his ready-to-die [soldiers]?"

In his counterarguments, Fuchai displays superior knowledge of both past and present. Yet whereas his depiction of the difficulties faced by the Wu armies in the Yue territory may well be accurate, the invocation of the past is flawed. When Fuchai discusses the major achievement of his father, Helu, who led the victorious Wu army to the momentous success against Chu, occupying Chu's capital in 506 B.C.E., he goes astray. If Ziju's interpretation on which I base my understanding of the text is correct, then Fuchai conflates two different Wu campaigns (of 519 and 506 B.C.E.) into one, so that his explanation of the reasons for Helu's victory is inaccurate. This inaccuracy would remain even if we accepted the editorial team's reading of the text.¹⁹ In any case, it would be very odd for a historical Fuchai to lecture about the 506 B.C.E. campaign to Wu Zixu, who was, after all, that campaign's major architect. That the text's

18. My translation of this passage is heavily indebted to Ziju's ("Qinghua jian") reading. According to Ziju, Fuchai conflates here two campaigns: the Jifu 鷄父 campaign of 519 BCE (for the details of which see Li Shoukui 李守奎, "Qinghua jian zhong de Wu zhi Ji yu lishi shang de Jifu zhi zhan" 清華簡中的伍之鷄父與歷史上的鷄父之戰, *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 中國社會科學 2017.2, 107–115) and the conquest of Chu's capital, Ying in 506 BCE. Both campaigns were highly successful for the Wu armies led by Fuchai's father, Helu (in the first campaign he was not a king and was known as Prince Guang 公子光). By the Warring States period these campaigns became conflated into one; see, e.g., *Liushi chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋, comp. and annot. Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Xuelin, 1995), 1003, "Cha wei" 察微 16.6. Jifu was located approximately 400 km from the Chu capital, Ying. Jing 荊 is an alternate name for the Chu core territory.

19. The editors opine that Jifu 雞父 stands for Wu Ji 伍雞, an alleged brother of Wu Zixu, who is mentioned in *Xinian* 15 manuscript; see more in Li Shoukui, "Qinghua jian". This interpretation is convincingly refuted by Ziju, "Qinghua jian," but even should it be correct, we should be reminded that the Wu Ji mentioned in *Xinian* is an invented personality; see more in Pines, *Zhou History*, 59.

authors seem to be unaware of this indicates that *Yue gong* was composed generations after the depicted events (a point to which I shall return later). Fuchai's reply successfully quells Wu Zixu's opposition. The section ends with the statement: "Thereupon Shen Xu became scared and promised [to support Fuchai's plans]" (申胥乃【14】懼，許諾。【15上】)。

This is a very surprising twist of the story. Any other version of these events invariably blames Fuchai's stubbornness and narrow-mindedness, which prevented him from heeding Wu Zixu's loyal remonstrance. In *Yue gong*, in contradistinction, Fuchai has the upper hand because his arguments, based on superior understanding of historical precedents and of current state of affairs, are more convincing than those of Wu Zixu. The latter becomes fearful not because he is intimidated by Fuchai (as in the "Discourses of Wu" version) but because he is convinced: an assault on Goujian may end disastrously. The reader knows well, of course, that ultimately Fuchai was wrong, but his choice of action appears to be justifiable in light of the situation on the ground. This presentation of the king's exchange with his aide effectively eliminates the trope of the benighted ruler and the wise advisor, which is the major bottom line of the Wu Zixu story from *Zuo zhuan* to *Records of the Historian*. In contrast, *Yue gong* restores the ruler's agency and his intellectual authority. As we shall see below, this is the consistent feature of *Yue gong*'s markedly ruler-oriented stance.

Goujian's Self-Strengthening

I shall skip section three, which narrates the details of Fuchai's response to Goujian's plea for peace, and shall move to section four, which starts the narrative of Yue's resurrection:

吳人既襲越邦，越王句踐將碁復吳。既建宗廟，修崇位，乃大薦攻，以祈民之寧。王作【26】安邦，乃因司襲常。王乃不咎不碁，不戮不罰；蔑弃怨罪，不稱民惡；縱經遊民，不稱【27】貸役、泐（坳）塗、溝塘之功。王並無好攸于民三工之堵（功？），茲（使）民暇自相（將），農功得時，邦乃暇【28】安，民乃蕃滋。至于三年，越王句踐焉始作起五政之律。【29】

After the Wu leaders had assaulted the state of Yue, King Goujian of Yue planned²⁰ to settle the score with Wu. He established the ancestral

20. Reading 碁 as "to plan" following Xiao Xu, "Qinghua jian." Since 碁 normally means "to harm" (as on the next slip), the sentence can be read also: Goujian prepared to harm and settle scores with Wu.

temple,²¹ erected an evil-averting shrine,²² and then performed great *jian* and *gong* sacrifices²³ to pray for the peace to the people. The king built up and pacified the country. He then relied on officials to follow constant norms.²⁴ The king then neither condemned nor harmed [the people], neither executed nor penalized; he disregarded grudges and crimes, and did not speak ill of the people. He softened regulations and let the people rest.²⁵ He demanded neither forced labor from debtors,²⁶ nor the construction of dams and waterworks.²⁷ Moreover, the king

21. Ziju (“Qinghua jian”) opines that the establishment rather than reconstruction of the ancestral temple indicates that Yue had to relocate to a new capital after the disastrous Wu invasion.

22. For this interpretation of the two characters 崇位, see Ziju, “Qinghua jian.”

23. In all likelihood, *jian* 薦 refers to the sacrificial offering at the ancestral temple; *gong* 攻 is identified in the “Grand Invocator” (“Da zhu” 大祝) section of *Zhou li* 周禮 as one of the six evil-averting prayers. It is likely that this prayer was conducted in the second shrine erected by Goujian.

24. The precise meaning of the four characters 因司襲常 is hotly debated; my reading follows the suggestions of Jiang Qiuzhen 江秋貞, “Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian (qi)—*Yue gong qi shi kaoshi*” 《清華大學藏戰國竹簡(柒)·越公其事》考釋, Ph.D. dissertation (National Taiwan Normal University, 2019), 291–97.

25. *You min* 游民 usually means “drifting people,” a broad category that may refer to different groups of population—from vagabonds to merchants and artisans, and even to peripatetic scholars; see, e.g., the *Book of Lord Shang*, trans. and ed. Yuri Pines, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 3.6 and 22.2. In *Yue gong*, Ziju (“Qinghua jian”) reads *you min* as a verb and the object, “to let the people be relaxed [or rest].” I adopt this interpretation because it fits perfectly the usage of *you min* in the first sentence of section 5. For a different view, see Wang Qing 王青, “Shilun xian Qin shiqi de ‘you min’ ji qi shehui yingxiang—Qinghua jian *Yue gong qi shi bushi*” 試論先秦時期的“游民”及其社會影響——清華簡《越公其事》補釋, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 2021.1, 35–47.

26. This is my understanding of 貸役: persons who had to borrow money and, unable to return it to the lender, had to undergo involuntary service to repay the debt. This service is well documented in Qin archives from Liye 里耶 (Charles Sanft, “Population Records from Liye: Ideology in Practice,” in Yuri Pines, Paul R. Goldin, and Martin Kern, *Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 249–69), although in that case the debtors were sent to military service to repay fines rather than private debts. Ziju (“Qinghua jian”) suggests reading *dai* 貸 as *li* 力; *liyi* 力役 referring to any obligatory labor service to the state. Alternatively, Luo Zhenyi 駱珍伊 opines that the text refers to employing the drifting population in the government-led public works, allowing therewith relaxation for regular peasants; see “*Qinghua qi—Yue gong qi shi bushi*” 《清華柒·越公其事》補釋, in *Di 29 jie Zhongguo wenzixue guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 第 29 屆中國文字學國際學術研討會論文集 (Taoyuan: Guoli Zhongyang daxue and Zhongguo wenzi xuehui, 2018), 523–33. I think this interpretation runs against the logic of the passage that clearly speaks of consistent adoption of the government’s minimalist and laissez-faire policies.

27. There is no satisfactory explanation of the exact nature of public works that should have been demanded of the people; but in all likelihood they were related to waterworks. Teng Shenglin 滕勝霖 opines that the first compound may be read as 幽塗

footnote continued on next page

took no pleasure in tallying the people's many labors, but let them be at ease and self-sufficient.²⁸ Agricultural work was done in the proper seasons; and the country was thus at ease and peaceful. Thereupon the people multiplied. By the third year, King Goujian of Yue for the first time promoted the standards of the five policies.

The policies of relaxation, lenience, laissez faire, and peace outlined in this section resemble in the atmosphere they create—albeit not necessarily in details—those outlined in “Discourses of Yue A” section and hinted at in “Discourses of Wu.”²⁹ Yet the *Yue gong* discussion is more detailed and systematic than the one preserved in the *Discourses of the States*. Goujian starts with restoring the ritual cum cultic centers of the state—the ancestral temple and the evil-averting shrine that allows him to “pray for the peace to the people.”³⁰ The second set of policies focuses on judicial lenience, so that the people were “neither executed nor penalized”; as we shall see, this was designed as a temporary measure, to be abandoned later. Economic relaxation—discontinuing public works and letting the people focus on agricultural activities without distractions of warfare—comes third. After three years of relaxation, which allowed the battered populace to recover from the disastrous war, Goujian found it appropriate to initiate his “five policies,” which are the crux of the *Yue gong* narrative.

referring to roadworks; see “Qinghua jian *Yue gong qi shi* ‘youmang,’ ‘youtu’ kao” 清華簡《越公其事》“幽芒”“幽塗”考, May 28, 2018, www.bsm.org.cn/?chujian/7872.html, accessed March 27, 2022. The chapter “Records of the Lands of Yue” (“*Ji di zhuan*” 記地傳) in *The Glory of Yue*, which records Han reminiscences of Goujian-related sites in the vicinity of his capital, Kuaiji 會稽, mentions “Riches Great Embankment” (富中大塘), which “was built by Goujian in order to create fields dedicated to famine-relief”; see *Yue jue shu jiaozhu* 越絕書校注, annot. Zhang Zhongqing 張仲清 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan, 2009), 217 (8.10); Milburn, *The Glory of Yue*, 234.

28. The reconstruction of this sentence is very tentative. Neither the Tsinghua editorial team, nor any other study which I have consulted, came with any good solution to this sentence. But the bottom line is clear: the king's laissez faire policy allowed economic recuperation. For reading 自相 as 自將 in the meaning of “self-sufficient,” or able to satisfy their own needs, see Wang Lei 王磊, “Qinghua qi *Yue gong qi shi* zhaji liu ze” 清華七《越公其事》札記六則, 17 May 2017, www.bsm.org.cn/?chujian/7544.html, accessed March 27, 2022.

29. The *Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue* also record the same policy, including relaxation of judicial pressure on the populace; there, however, the policy is adopted by Goujian in response to the recommendation of Grandee Zhong; see *Wu Yue Chunqiu jijiao huikao* 吳越春秋輯校匯考, annot. Zhou Shengchun 周生春 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1997), 136 (8, “Goujian gui guo” 勾踐歸國); He, *Spring and Autumn*, 199.

30. In *Wu wang*, these activities are depicted slightly differently: Goujian “then undertook all the sacrifices: to the Lord-on-High, in the altars of soil and grain and ancestral temple, to mountains and rivers, brooks and valleys, marshes and hills” 乃共承上帝、社稷、宗廟、山川、溪谷、澤丘之事【29】.

1. Encouraging agriculture (Section 5)

Section 5 of *Yue gong* manuscript contains several lacunae due to broken slips, which are supplemented in what follows from the parallel text of *Wu wang* (the *Wu wang* part is marked by double braces, with slip numbers of *Wu wang* manuscript; in bold are the characters preserved on the broken slips from *Yue gong*).³¹

王思（使）邦游民三年，乃作五政。五政之初，王好農功。王親自耕，有私畦。王親涉沟畛坳涂，日覲農事【30】，以勸勉農夫。越庶民百姓乃稱嘉（=倭懼）³²悚懼，曰：「王其有勞疾？」王聞之，乃以熟食鮪醢【31】脯臠多從。其見農夫老弱勤懋者，王必飲食之。其見農夫稽頂足見，顏色順比而將【32】耕者，王亦飲食之。其見有列、有司及王左右，先（誥？）王訓而將耕者，王必與之坐食。【33】凡王左右大臣，乃莫不耕，人有私畦。舉越庶民，乃夫婦皆耕，至于邊縣小大遠邇，亦夫【35】婦皆（耕）。王乃畦素草疇。專【38】日不食，乃訓，為之賞。穀既成，王親以受，其後既發，王焉飲食。王焉始命繼絕【39】者，民遷越百里，至都越郊陵陸。陵稼，水則為稻。乃有閒草，皆起【40】為田，【41】}}越邦乃大多食。【36下】

Once the king had allowed³³ the country to rest its people for three years, he thereupon instituted five policies. At the start of [implementing] the five policies, the king displayed fondness for agricultural activities. The king personally tilled his private plot. The king personally treaded through ditches and elevated paths, furrows, and lanes. He inspected farming activities daily, so as to encourage farmers. The commoners and the hundred clans³⁴ of Yue were thereupon

31. Damaged slips confused the Tsinghua editors who misplaced several slips. The proper order was restored by Chen Jian, who put slip 35 and the broken first part of slip 36 after slip 33, followed by the broken part of slip 18 and then slip 34 and the second half of slip 36. See Chen Jian 陳劍, "Yue gong qi shi canjian 18 de weizhi ji xiangguan de jianxu tiaozheng wenti" 《越公其事》殘簡 18 的位置及相關的簡序調整問題, May 14, 2017, www.gwz.fudan.edu.cn/Web/Show/3044, accessed September 7, 2021. The *Wu wang* manuscript validated Chen's insight.

32. In reading 稱嘉 as 倭懼 (to be startled), I follow Ziju ("Qinghua jian").

33. The verb *si* 思 is commonly glossed as *shi* 使 and is interpreted as "to order" or "to let to" (for a collection of these glosses, see, e.g., Jiang Qiuzhen, "Qinghua daxue," 336–38). I am convinced by Edward L. Shaughnessy's argument that there is a slight difference between regular *shi* 使 and *si* 思 used as *shi*; the latter implies less active commanding and more aspiration to attain certain results, approximated by the English "would that." See his review of my *Zhou History Unearthed* in *T'oung Pao* 107 (2021), 209–11. I did not find, however, an adequate English verb to preserve this nuance.

34. This juxtaposition of commoners (*shumin* 庶民) and the "hundred clans" (*baixing* 百姓) suggests that the latter term was still used as the designation of the elite lineages rather than the whole population. This remains the consistent usage of the term *baixing* in the text.

startled and fearful, saying, “Has the king become addicted to manual labor?” When the king heard this, he ordered his followers to carry many kinds of boiled food, fish, mincemeat, dried meat, and fat meat, and whenever they encountered an old or infirm diligent peasant, the king invariably ordered them to give him food and drink. When they encountered a peasant who bowed with his forehead touching the ground, who looked compliant and continued tilling, the king ordered them to give him food and drink too. When they encountered ranked [nobles], officials, and members of the king’s entourage who were the first to emulate the king’s instructions³⁵ and engaged in tilling, the king invariably sat and dined with them. Thus, all the members of the king’s entourage and high ministers thereupon uniformly engaged in tilling, each having a private plot. All the commoners of Yue, men and women alike, engaged in tilling, all the way to the border counties, large and small alike—men and women there also all engaged in [tilling].

The king thereupon searched [among their] plots for the fields covered with grass. He was not eating for the whole day, and only instructing and meting rewards. When grains were ripe, the king personally received them. After the last [sample of grains?] was issued, the king then ate and drunk. Then for the first time the king ordered to restore those who were cut off, and the people returned to the state of Yue which was one hundred *li* squared, reaching to the point of [establishing] major cities in the highlands and lowlands of Yue outskirts.³⁶ In the highlands, grain [was planted]; in watery [lowlands]—paddy fields [were created]. Thereupon all the uncultivated grasslands were developed into agricultural fields.}} The state of Yue thereupon had plenty of food.

Encouraging agriculture was considered the quintessentially prudent policy during the Warring States period and beyond.³⁷ The problem was how to implement this policy. A text with which *Yue gong* may be

35. There was considerable debate about the precise meaning of the character 誥, which the editors read as 誥 in the meaning “to promulgate.” In *Wu wang* the character is 教 in the meaning of *xiao* 效, “to emulate.”

36. The sentence is not clear and my translation is tentative. Restoring those who were cut off (*ji jue* 繼絕) usually refers to restoring extinguished political entities (or aristocratic houses) so as to allow them to continue ancestral sacrifices. Here the term refers to resumption of normal agricultural activity in the vicinity of Yue capital and beyond. It seems that only at that point was the state of Yue repopulated with major cities (*du* 都) established at its outskirts. It is possible that after final publication of *Wu wang* this sentence will be reinterpreted.

37. See Roel Sterckx, “Ideologies of the Peasant and Merchant in Warring States China,” in *Ideology of Power*, ed. Pines, Goldin, and Kern, 211–48.

engaged in an implicit dialog, namely the *Book of Lord Shang* (*Shangjunshu* 商君書) reminds the readers that agriculture is “what the people considered bitter” and urges the ruler to limit the peasants’ occupational choices so as to direct them toward tilling.³⁸ In contrast, *Yue gong* authors believe that the goal can be achieved exclusively through the ruler’s encouragement and his personal example. The “Discourses of Yue A” chapter hints that Goujian became engaged in agriculture (and his wife in sericulture); but there the goal was to reduce taxes en route to improving the peasants’ livelihood.³⁹ In *Yue gong*, the pattern is different. Becoming a tiller himself (“addicted to manual labor”), Goujian imbues his entourage with the tilling spirit; and by honoring laborious peasants he succeeds in imbuing the entire population with this spirit. This total mobilization to agriculture brings about cultivation of all the arable lands—from highlands to wetlands alike—resulting in full granaries.

2. Inspiring Trustworthiness (Section 6)

越邦備農，多食，王乃好信，乃修市政。凡羣度之不度、羣采物之不續、佯偷諒人，則刑也【37】。凡誑豫而價賈焉，則誅誅之；凡市賈爭訟，反倍欺詒，察之而孚，則誅誅之。因其貨以爲【38】之罰。凡邊縣之民及有官師之人或告于王廷，曰：「初日政(徵)勿若某，今政(徵)重，弗果。」凡此類也【39】，王必親見而聽之，察之而信，其在邑司事及官師之人則廢也。凡城邑之司事及官師之【40】人，乃無敢增益其政(徵)以爲獻於王。凡有獄訟至于王廷，曰：「昔日與己言云，今不若其言。」凡此類【41】也，王必親聽之，稽之而信，乃毋有貴賤，刑也。凡越庶民交接、言語、貨資、市賈，乃無敢反倍欺詒。【42】越則無獄，王則閑閑，唯信是趣，習于左右，舉越邦乃皆好信。【43】

Once the state of Yue had comprehensively endorsed agriculture and had plenty of food, the king displayed fondness of trustworthiness.⁴⁰

38. *Book of Lord Shang* 6.5 and Yuri Pines, “Agriculturalism and Beyond: Economic Thought of the *Book of Lord Shang*,” in *Between Command and Market: Economic Thought and Practice in Early China*, ed. Elisa Sabattini and Christian Schwermann (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 76–111.

39. The text relates that Goujian did not eat anything he did not plant, nor wore anything that his wife did not weave. This allowed abolishing levies for ten years and ensured three-year agricultural surplus for every family; *Guo yu jijie* 國語集解, comp. Xu Yuangao 徐元誥; collat. Wang Shumin 王樹民 and Shen Changyun 沈長雲 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2002), 571, “Yue yu shang” 20.1.

40. A more literary translation of *hao xin* 好信 would be “became fond of trustworthiness,” but my feeling is that here and below what matters are not just the king’s personal inclinations but making them visible to the subordinates.

He then improved governance of the markets. Whenever the measures did not meet the standard, colored insignia of distinction were not properly painted, or honest people were deceived and maltreated, punishments were employed. Whenever merchants cheated, they were interrogated and penalized. Whenever traders at the marketplace had a lawsuit but were defrauded and this was confirmed by investigation, [the fraudster] was interrogated and penalized; the fines were fixed according to one's merchandise.

Whenever the people from border counties as well as local officials complained at the king's court, saying, "Initially, levies⁴¹ did not surpass a certain quota; nowadays, levies are heavy and we cannot bear them"—whenever this was the case, the king invariably personally observed and listened to the complaint. If the complaint was confirmed by the investigation, the clerks and local officials in the settlement were dismissed. Thus, all the clerks and local officials in the walled cities and settlements dared not increase levies, so as to ingratiate themselves with the king.

Whenever anybody brought a lawsuit to the king's court, saying, "Previously, I was told one thing, but now matters are not as I was promised"—whenever such things happened, the king invariably personally listened to the complaint. If the complaint was confirmed by investigation, he would punish the culprits notwithstanding their noble or base status. Thus, whenever the commoners of Yue interacted, talked to each other, exchanged merchandise, or traded at the marketplace—nobody dared to cheat. Thus, Yue came to have no lawsuits and the king became relaxed. He was attracted only to trustworthiness, and inculcated this into his entourage. Thereupon, the entire state of Yue became fond of trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness (or trust, or good faith, *xin* 信) is conceptualized as an essential precondition for the proper functioning of the political order in such varied texts as *Zuo zhuan* on the one hand and the *Book of Lord Shang* on the other. It can refer to multiple aspects of political action: from the ruler's maintenance of good faith in his interactions with the deities, to preserving mutual trust among the participants in the covenant; from the government's reliability in the eyes of its subjects, to the subjects' faithful fulfillment of the ruler's commands.⁴² Of all these

41. Reading *zheng* 政 as *zheng* 徵; see Liu Chengqun 劉成群, "Qinghua jian Yue gong qi shi yu Goujian shidai de jingji zhidu" 清華簡《越公其事》與句踐時代的經濟制度, *Shehui kexue* 社會科學 2019.4, 142; alternatively, the complaints are not against the levies but against local governance in general.

42. For concepts of trustworthiness in *Zuo zhuan*, see Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722–453 B.C.E.* (Honolulu: Univer-

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semantic fields, the *Yue gong* authors focus on two—mutual trust among members of society and the government’s reliability in the eyes of its subjects. The first is attained by improving the governance of markets and eliminating cheating there. This goal is presumably reached through the administrative apparatus. Yet at the second stage this very apparatus is scrutinized. The king himself personally supervises the investigation of the officials’ malfeasance and invariably punishes those who abused the people’s trust by capriciously aggravating levies or altering established policies. Only this disciplining of the officialdom produces truly compelling results, instilling trustworthiness into the king’s entourage and then the entire population. The elimination of lawsuits—another often cited epitome of good rule⁴³—is a natural outcome of this ubiquitous adoption of mutual trust.

3. Immigration (Section 7)

越邦備信，王乃好徵人。王乃趣使人察省城市邊縣小大遠邇之旬落。王則畢視，唯旬落是察省【44】，問之于左右。王既察知之，乃命上會，王必親聽之。其旬者，王見其執事人，則怡豫喜也。不可□【45】笑笑也，則必飲食賜予之；其落者，王見其執事人，則憂戚不豫，弗予飲食。王既畢聽之，乃品，廷會三品，交（效）于王府三品【46】。年講支數，由賢由毀。有算歲，有賞罰，善人則由，譖民則否。是以勸民，是以延賓，是以【47】旬邑。王則唯旬落是趣，習于左右。舉越邦乃皆好徵人，方和于其地。東【48】夷、西夷、姑蔑、句吳四方之民乃皆聞越地之多食、政薄而好信，乃頗往而歸之，越地乃大多人。【49】

Once the state of Yue had comprehensively endorsed trustworthiness, the king displayed fondness of attracting population. The king then urgently dispatched people to inspect cities⁴⁴ and border counties, small as well as large, remote as well as distant, checking whether

city of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), 120–22 and 146–53; for the *Book of Lord Shang* see section 17.1 there; for systematic discussions of the concept of *xin* in early Chinese thought, see, e.g., Du Daoming 杜道明, “Chuantong ‘xin’ guannian tanwei” 傳統“信”觀念探微. *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 中國文化研究 2010.3, 73–79; Li Xiangjun 李祥俊, “Rujia xin guannian de hanyi yanbian jiqi shehui shenghuo jichu kaocha” 儒家信觀念的涵義演變及其社會生活基礎考察. *Jiang Han luntan* 江漢論壇 2020.3, 56–63.

43. For an early ideal of the lawsuits-free society, see *Lunyu yizhu* 論語譯注, annot. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992), 128 (12.13).

44. As noticed by Huang Aimei 黃愛梅, “*Yue gong qi shi de xushi lichang ji Yueguo shishi*” 《越公其事》的敘事立場及越國史事, *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社會科學戰綫 2020.8, 110–11, the earliest appearances of the compound *chengshi* 城市 in its modern meaning of a “city” are in the late Warring States-period texts, such as *Han Feizi* 韓非子和 *Zhangguo ce* 戰國策. It is possible that *Yue gong* contains the earliest instance of this usage.

or not the population there was dense or sparse. The king then made comprehensive observations, inspecting whether [the population] was dense or sparse, inquiring of his entourage. Having inspected, the king knew the situation. Thereupon, he ordered them to send him statistical accounts, to which the king invariably listened in person. If [the population was] dense, the king met the official in charge and was happy and glad. He not {only}⁴⁵ smiled happily, but also was sure to offer [the visiting official] food and drink. If [the population was] sparse, the king was worried and unhappy when he met the official in charge, and did not offer him food and drink.

Having listened fully to [the officials' reports], the king graded them. At the court assembly they were divided into three grades, which were checked against the three grades as recorded in the royal archives. At the beginning of the year, the numbers were checked to determine who should be commended and who should be censured.⁴⁶ According to the annual calculations, rewards and penalties were determined. Good men were employed, whereas the unreliable people were not.⁴⁷ Thereby the people were encouraged, thereby immigrants were attracted, thereby settlements became densely populated. The king was concerned only with density and scarcity [of the population] and inculcated this into his entourage. The entire state of Yue was thereupon fond of attracting population, and thus became harmonious in its land.⁴⁸ The people from the four quarters—Eastern Yi, Western

45. Adding “just” 僅 for a missing character following the suggestion of Wang Jinfeng 王進鋒, “Qinghua jian Yue gong qi shi yu Chunqiu shiqi Yueguo de xianzhi” 清華簡『越公其事』與春秋時期越國的縣制, *Lishi dili* 歷史地理 2018.2, 83.

46. This sentence is hotly debated. I follow Ziju's (“Qinghua jian”) interpretation of *tinghui* 廷會 as standing for a court assembly (usually rendered *chaohui* 朝會), during which local officials were graded. I then follow the parsing of the sentence as proposed by Wang Ning 王寧, “Qinghua jian qi Yue gong qi shi duzha yi ze” 清華簡七《越公其事》讀札一則, May 22, 2017, www.bsm.org.cn/?chujian/7547.html, accessed March 27, 2022. Most commentators interpret 年講支數 as referring to the divination performed at the annual new year ceremony (for 年講 as identical to 年祝, the invocation at the beginning of the year, see Wang Ning, “Qinghua jian”). This divination was somehow supposed to determine the officials' quality. I see little logic in this interpretation. From the context of the passage it is clear that an annual check of the population figures was conducted, according to which the quality of the officials was determined.

47. This phrase normally should speak of promoting upright officials and dismissing the slanderous ones, but here it clearly relates directly to the officials' performance; hence, *jianmin* 譖民 should refer to those who were unreliable, probably trying to falsify population data.

48. Ziju (“Qinghua jian”) considers this remark as an indication that initially Yue settlers in the territory newly allocated to them by Wu maintained tensed relations with their new neighbors, but since the new policies were implemented, tensions

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Yi, Gumie and Gouwu (i.e., Wu)⁴⁹—all heard that the territory of Yue abounds with food, levies are lenient and [the government] is trustworthy, and thereupon all turned and flocked to Yue. Thereupon the land of Yue became abundantly populated.

Increasing the size of Yue's population was one of the most conspicuous features of Goujian's policy, as is hinted already in the prediction that *Zuo zhuan* puts in Wu Zixu's mouth ("For ten years Yue will multiply its masses" 越十年生聚)⁵⁰ and outlined in greater detail in the "Discourses of Yue A" narrative. There Goujian is said to have adopted radical measures of encouraging childbirth: outlawing marriages between adults and elderly men and women, punishing the parents whose 17-years old daughters or 20-years old sons did not marry, rewarding childbirth and introducing tax exemptions and other government support to families that lost their breadwinner. This in turn encouraged not just natural population growth but also immigration into Yue, increasing its manpower.

Yue gong presents a different version of events. Here the king creates a demographic miracle primarily through encouraging the government apparatus to commit itself fully to the goal of attracting immigrants. The promotion and demotion of officials is determined by the population data that are meticulously inspected by Goujian himself. The administrative apparatus in both tiers of local administration—cities and borderland counties⁵¹—is mobilized together with the central government (the king's entourage). The system of grading the officials' performance according to the population data presumably encourages local officials to devise their own ways of attracting immigrants. Those are

receded. Alternatively, it may mean that the state of Yue became harmonious with its neighbors, without which mass immigration from neighboring polities would not be possible.

49. Gumie was a statelet located to the south of Yue, near modern Quzhou 衢州 (Zhejiang). Wu was located to the north of Yue. The name Gouwu as Wu's self-appellation is mentioned in the "The Hereditary House of Wu Taibo" chapter of the *Records of the Historian*. Peng Hua 彭華, who noticed that in the Yue language *yi* 夷 means "sea," proposed identifying Eastern and Western Yi as the Eastern Sea and Hangzhou Bay respectively. See his "Si fang zhi min yu si zhi zhi jing—Qinghua jian *Yue gong qi shi yanjiu zhi yi*" 四方之民與四至之境——清華簡《越公其事》研究之一. *Chutu wenxian* 出土文獻 2021.1, 56–63, 69. Yet interesting as it is, this speculation is not convincing: it is much more likely that *yi* here is a generic term for non-Sinitic ethnic groups.

50. Paul R. Goldin (personal communication) suggested that this statement may be read as referring to population growth through fertility (*sheng* 生) and immigration (*ju* 聚). If so, it will nicely encompass two aspects of population policies associated with Goujian—encouraging childbirth ("Discourses of Yue" A) and attracting immigrants (*Yue gong*).

51. For these two tiers of local administration, see the conjectures of Wang Jinfeng, "Qinghua jian," 77–85.

eager to come, both in light of Goujian's earlier success in ensuring agricultural surpluses and maintaining fair governance, and also due to the local officials' unspecified encouragement. The results, again, are immediate: Yue becomes densely populated and is ready to the next stage of its war preparations.⁵²

4. Military Preparations (Section 8)

越邦皆備徵人，多人，王乃好兵。凡五兵之利，王日翫之，居諸左右。凡金革之攻，王日論省【50】其事，以問五兵之利。王乃催使人省問羣大臣及邊縣城市之多兵、無兵者。王則畢見，唯多【51】兵、無兵者是察，問于左右。舉越邦至于邊縣城市乃皆好兵甲，越邦乃大多兵。【52】

Once the state of Yue was fully engaged in attracting population, it became abundantly populated; the king thereupon displayed fondness of the military.⁵³ The king daily acquainted himself with the advantages of the five types of weapons and placed them among his entourage. The king daily inspected the matters concerning the production of metal and leather [armaments],⁵⁴ and was querying about the advantages of the five types of weapons. The king then urgently dispatched messengers to investigate and query how many soldiers there were in the borderland counties and cities. The king then made comprehensive observations, inspecting exclusively how many soldiers there were, and querying his entourage. The entire state of Yue, all the way to the borderland counties and cities, all thereupon became fond of weapons and armor. Thereupon, the state of Yue had plenty of soldiers.

The military aspect of Goujian's preparations is regrettably sketchy. The king's attraction to *bing* 兵 (military matters) encompasses two major semantic fields of this term—increasing the quality of weapons and soldiers. These goals, again, are achieved through the king's active encouragement of both his entourage and the local officials to focus on

52. In a somewhat speculative attempt to calculate Yue population by the end of Goujian's reign based on the information of the size of its military, Chen Guocan 陳國燦 and Xi Jianhua 奚建華 arrived at the conclusion that it was over 200,000 people; see *Zhejiang gudai chengzhen shi* 浙江古代城鎮史 (Hefei: Anhui daxue, 2003).

53. The word *bing* 兵 has several meanings, three of which, somewhat confusingly, are present in this short passage. First is generalized "military," second is soldiers, and third is the assault weapons. In translating *bing* I tried to fit the translation to the context of each sentence.

54. That is, assault weapons made of metal, and shields and armor, for which leather was used.

military preparations. And once again, as in the previous section, we do not know the details of the officials' policies. Did they introduce universal conscription? Enhanced remuneration for valiant fighters? Or just overawed those who tried to escape the ranks? We are left without clues. From the authors' point of view, the moment the king succeeded to inspire the government apparatus, the desirable results transpired.

5. Rewards and Punishments (Section 9)

越邦多兵，王乃敕民，修令審刑。乃出恭敬王孫之等，以授大夫種，則賞穀之；乃出不恭不敬【53】王孫之等，以授范蠡，則戮殺之。乃趣徇于王宮，亦趣取戮。王乃大徇命于邦。是徇是命及羣【54】禁御、及凡庶姓、凡民司事。唯位之次叙、服飾、羣物品采之愆于故常，及風音、誦詩、歌謠【55】之非越邦之常律，夷訐蠻吳，乃趣取戮。王乃趣至于沟塘之功，乃趣取戮于後至後成。王乃趣【56】設戍于東夷、西夷，乃趣取戮于後至不恭。王有失命，可復弗復、不茲命徇，王則自罰，小失【57】飲食，大失剗墨，以勵萬民。越邦庶民，則皆震動，懼畏句踐，無敢不敬。徇命若命，禁御莫【58】叛，民乃敕齊。【59上】

Once the state of Yue had plenty of soldiers, the king thereupon regulated the people. He corrected the orders and was judicious in imposing punishments. He then put forward those respectful and reverent among the ranks of the royal grandsons,⁵⁵ and handed them over to Grandee Zhong, who thereupon rewarded and employed them. He then put forward the non-respectful and irreverent among ranks of the royal grandsons and handed them over to Fan Li, who thereupon punished and executed them.⁵⁶ [The king] then urgently promulgated [this policy] within the palace, and also urgently apprehended and punished [criminals]. The king thereupon greatly promulgated his decree throughout the country. This promulgation of this decree reached the courtiers, reached all the clans and all the officials.⁵⁷ Those whose orders of ranks, garments, and colored insignia deviated from

55. I rely on Ziju's reading of 孫 as standing for 孫, and understanding of *wangsun zhi deng* 王孫之等 as a broad category for the highest segments of nobility. It is not a self-evident choice, especially because I am not aware of such usage of the compound *wangsun*, but I opted for it because it makes perfect meaning in the context of the given passage (see note 57 below).

56. This is the first of the two mentions of Fan Li in *Yue gong* text. Note the contrast with "Discourses of Yue B" where Fan Li is the major hero.

57. I follow the editors in reading 禁御 as referring to courtiers rather than to punishments as in the last sentence of this section. The dissemination of the king's orders starts with "royal grandsons" (referring here perhaps to the broad category of royal clansmen), extends to the people from within the palace (perhaps the king's intimate

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old norms, as well as those whose airs and tones, poetry recitations, and songs were not in accord with constant tunes of the state of Yue but rather were barbarian babble and savage clamor,⁵⁸ were urgently apprehended and punished.

The king then turned to the task of [constructing] canals and dams, and urgently apprehended and punished those who were late to arrive and late to accomplish [their tasks]. The king then urgently established garrisons in the lands of Eastern Yi and Western Yi, and urgently apprehended and punished those who were late to arrive and were irreverent. When the king failed to carry out his own orders and did not restore [the proper ways] when they could be restored, thus failing to make the order observable, the king penalized himself. For small infractions, he [punished himself] with regard to food and drink; for large infractions, he [punished himself] by tattooing, thereby encouraging the myriad people. The people of the state of Yue then all trembled, were startled and fearful of Goujian and had no temerity to be irreverent. Orders were promulgated as they were issued, prohibitions were not violated, and the people became regulated and ordered.

Disciplining the population through proper implementation of rewards and punishments is, once again, a very common topos in Zhou texts. Skillful utilization of both handles of government by Goujian is mentioned as one of the reasons for his military success in the “Discourses of Wu” narrative.⁵⁹ However, the *Yue gong* version is incomparably more sophisticated. If my reading of disputed characters is correct, then Goujian imposed the system of regulating the populace in two steps. The first step was promulgation of rewards and punishments through the entire ruling class. This promulgation started with rewarding and punishing the royal clansmen (oddly identified in the text as “the ranks of the royal grandsons” (王孫之等)), then the same norms were applied to the king’s favorites, courtiers, members of other clans (presumably the nobles), and finally, the officials. Interestingly, punishments were imposed in particular on those elite members who deviated from Yue’s ritual and music culture and were attracted by “barbarian babble and

favorites), then the courtiers, then “all the clans” (i.e., nobles from other clans), and then the officials.

58. In translating 夷訐蠻吳 as referring to babble (*xu* 訐 read as *hua* 譁) and clamor (*wu* 吳 refers not to the country, but is synonymous with *hua*), I follow Chen Wei 陳偉, “Qinghua jian qi Yue gong qi shi jiaodu” 清華簡七《越公其事》校讀, April 27 2017, www.bsm.org.cn/?chujian/7529.html, accessed March 27, 2022. Note that the term *yi* 夷, which elsewhere in the text refers to a neutral “aliens,” has a strongly derisive meaning in this specific sentence.

59. *Guo yu*, 559–60 (“Wu yu” 19.9).

savage clamor." This observation implies that for the authors of the text, Yue was a normative Zhou state with its respected ritual and music culture and that it was distinctively "non-barbarian." This contrasts with references to Yue's cultural otherness in such texts as *Zuo zhuan* and *Discourses of the States*.⁶⁰ It seems that at least among certain segments of the Warring States-period educated elite, Yue's cultural prestige increased in tandem with its political power.

At the second stage, Goujian's policies of legal education shift from the elites to the lower strata. Mass mobilization of the population to construction works (canal building) and to garrison service in outlying areas gives the ruler ample opportunities to punish those who were "late to arrive" or "irreverent." Yet to this common practice of punishing laxity, Goujian adds an exceptional step that once again demonstrates the importance of the ruler's personal example. In a fascinating display of adherence to the principle of the "rule of law," he punishes himself for failing to fulfill his own orders. The punishments—ranging from reduction of the king's food and drink to accepting physical sanction of being tattooed—overawe the populace, which realizes that the king is serious about laws and ordinances.⁶¹ Noteworthy, tattooing—which is identified in several Zhou texts as a common cultural trait of the Wu–Yue people—is interpreted in *Yue gong* as the king's self-inflicted punishment.⁶² Does this imply that the text reflects a non-Yue

60. In *Zuo zhuan*, much cultural derision is directed against Yue's northern neighbor, the state of Wu (see, e.g., Ai 7.3b); but Yue is also clearly identified as a "barbarian" (*manji* 蠻夷) entity (Ai 26.1b). In "Discourses of Yue B," Fan Li refers to himself and his fellow countrymen as having a human face but still being a bird or a beast; see *Guo yu*, 587 ("Yue yu xia" 21.7). The irony is explicit, of course (the alleged bestiality of Yue people is used to justify Fan Li's resoluteness in refusing to spare King Fuchai of Wu, and Fan Li is clearly not identified as a savage), but the "barbarian" simile surely hints at what was probably a widespread, derisive view of Yue inhabitants. The cultural image of Yue in the texts from the Warring States into the Han has been discussed (not always accurately) by Erica Brindley, "Barbarians or Not? Ethnicity and Changing Conceptions of the Ancient Yue (Viet) Peoples, c. 400–50 B.C." *Asia Major* (3rd ser.) 16.1 (2003), 1–32 and Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue: Perceptions and Identities on the Southern Frontier, c. 400 BCE–50 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 113–90.

61. This is the only instance of which I am aware that speaks of physical punishment to the ruler for violating his own orders. Robin D.S. Yates had kindly notified me of a regulation in the "Statutes on Currency" ("Jinbu lü" 金布律) from the Yuelu Academy 嶽麓書院 collection of Qin 秦 legal documents, which requires punishing the officials in case the emperor's purchase of slaves or cattle violates the mandatory prices; but in that case the punishment is not applied to the emperor personally.

62. For tattoo as both a Wu–Yue cultural trait and a mild means of physical punishment, see Carrie E. Reed, "Tattoo in Early China," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120.3 (2000), 360–76.

perspective, an outsider's attempt to explain a bizarre cultural practice? Later I shall return to this point. Here, suffice it to say that the king's self-punishment allows him to fully convince the populace in the laws' inviolability. The result—once again—is immediate: “the orders were promulgated as they were issued, prohibitions were not violated, and the people became rectified and ordered.” The goal of “eradicating punishments with punishments”⁶³ is duly achieved.

The “five policies” of Goujian are validated by his ultimate success. The two last sections of *Yue gong* retell Goujian's campaign against Yue. The outline of this campaign resembles in most of its details (and often in its wording) the narratives in *Zuo zhuan* and “Discourses of Wu,” and it will not be repeated here. It is preceded by an anecdote (that appears in *Mozi* 墨子 and is retold in *Han Feizi* 韓非子),⁶⁴ according to which prior to the offensive, Goujian wanted to test his subjects:

乃竊焚舟室，鼓命邦人【59下】救火。舉邦走火，進者莫退，王惧，鼓而退之，死者三百人，王大喜【60】

He then secretly set the Boat House⁶⁵ on fire, struck the drum and ordered the people of the capital to rescue [boats] from fire. The whole capital [people] run into the fire, and those who advanced did not retreat. The king was scared: he struck the drum to order retreat. Three hundred people died. The king was greatly pleased.⁶⁶

The suicidal courage of the Yue capital dwellers is the best proof of Goujian's success. In a few years he had turned his people into valiant fighters who were ready to sacrifice their lives in the king's service. The victory over Wu was predetermined by the proper implementation of Goujian's policies of self-strengthening. The didactic message of the narrative could not be clearer.

63. For the goal of “eradicating punishments with punishments” as a common desideratum of China's legal thought starting with the *Canon of Documents* (*Shang shu* 尚書), see Charles Sanft, “Concepts of Law in the *Shangshu*,” in *The Classic of Documents and the Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy*, ed. Martin Kern and Dirk Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 457–58.

64. See *Mozi jiaozhu* 墨子校注, comp. and annot. Wu Yujiang 吳毓江 (1898–1977) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1994), 159–60 (“Jian'ai zhong” 兼愛中) and 180 (“Jian'ai xia” 兼愛下); *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu* 韓非子新校注, annot. Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2000), 594 (9.30, “Nei chu shuo shang” 內儲說上).

65. *The Glory of Yue* identifies the Boat House as “Goujian's covered shipyard”; see Milburn, *The Glory of Yue*, 235.

66. The authors or editors of the *Wu wang* manuscript may have felt that a ruler who is fond of seeing his countrymen dying for nothing is not a good example; hence in their version of the events, the dead numbered one thousand, after which, however, the king was greatly aggrieved and wept (slip 64).

The Art of Self-Strengthening: The Ideological Context

Among the early versions of Goujian's struggle with Wu, the *Yue gong* account is the most systematic in its coverage of Yue's policies of self-strengthening. Recall that *Zuo zhuan* does not discuss Yue's domestic policies at all, whereas the "Discourses of Yue B" version focuses on proper timing of military action and is very cursory with regard to Goujian's domestic undertakings. The "Discourses of Wu" chapter cites Goujian's praise of his own thriftiness, lenience, care for the people and attention to their economic needs, but the text's authors are less impressed with these than with Goujian's ability to consult his grandees, to delegate them power, and to instill discipline in his armies. In the "Discourses of Yue A" chapter, there are several parallels with *Yue gong* (e.g., Goujian's demographic policies and, again, his ability to display humility so as to gain the people's trust), but the discussion there is sketchier.

More interesting parallels to *Yue gong* narrative come from the Warring States-period philosophical texts. Thus, Goujian's initial policy of relaxation, lenience, *laissez faire*, and maintaining peace as practiced in the first three years of recuperation from the defeat curiously resemble the course of action advocated in the "Jun zheng" 君正 chapter of the *Yellow Thearch Documents* (*Huangdi shu* 皇帝書) discovered in 1973 at Tomb 3, Mawangdui 馬王堆 (Hunan). That text advises the ruler to follow the people's customs during the first year of his rule, to use virtue (*de* 德, probably referring to mildness and kindness) in the second, to allow the people keep what they have obtained in the third, and only then to start disciplining the people until they become ready to be used in punitive attacks in the seventh year.⁶⁷ The similarities (especially the three year recuperation period) are highly interesting indeed, but jumping to broader conclusions about the manuscript's relation to the so-called Huang-Lao 黃老 school would be premature.⁶⁸ Suffice it to mention that *Yue gong* does not display any interest in correlation between natural

67. See Wei Qipeng 魏啓鵬, *Mawangdui Han mu boshu "Huang Di shu" jianzheng* 馬王堆漢墓帛書《黃帝書》箋證 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2004), 21; Robin D.S. Yates, trans., *The Five Lost Classics: Tao, Huang-Lao and Yin-Yang in Han China* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 61. The dating of the *Yellow Thearch Documents* is disputed; it is possible that they were composed early in the Han dynasty rather than in the Warring States period.

68. This argument is promoted by Yuan Qing 袁青, "Qinghua jian *Yue gong qi shi* yu xian Qin Huanglaoxue de zhengzhi sixiang" 清華簡《越公其事》與先秦黃老學的政治思想, *Zhexue yu wenhua* 哲學與文化 47.6 (2020), 181–94 and (much less convincingly) by Liu Chengqun 劉成群, "Qinghua jian *Yue gong qi shi* ji Huanglao zhi xue de yuanqi" 清華簡《越公其事》與黃老之學的源起, *Huazhong guoxue* 華中國學 2018.2, 39–48.

phenomena and political actions, which is the hallmark of the “Huang-Lao” approach as seen from the Mawangdui texts.⁶⁹ It is more likely that the idea of allowing the population to relax and recover before mobilizing it to war was advanced independently by different thinkers.

The “five policies” of Goujian—encouraging agriculture, ensuring trustworthiness, attracting immigrants, increasing the number of soldiers, and disciplining the populace through rewards and punishments—have the closest parallel in the *Book of Lord Shang*. Three of the “five policies”—turning the entire population into tillers cum soldiers and controlling it through rewards and punishments—are the hallmark of that text’s approach. Attracting immigrants is less strongly pronounced in most of the book but becomes the crucial point in one of its latest (in terms of the date of composition) chapters, 15 (“Attracting the people” (“Lai min” 徠民)).⁷⁰ Trustworthiness (in the meaning of the people’s trust in the government) is specifically identified as one of the three pillars of good rule in section 14.1 of the *Book of Lord Shang*; but more generally it is present throughout the book insofar as fairness and transparency of laws and regulations are concerned.⁷¹ Yet the ways to attain these goals in the *Book of Lord Shang* and *Yue gong* differ dramatically. In the former, the solution should come from meticulously designed impartial standards and laws (*fa* 法). The ruler’s individual input is minuscule; once the new laws are adopted, he should faithfully follow these and avoid any whimsical intervention in policy making.⁷² In *Yue gong*, in contrast, the ruler does not just initiate policies. It is his personal example and active intervention in and oversight of government affairs that create the desirable result.

The *Yue gong* insistence on the importance of the ruler’s personal example strongly resembles the *Mozi*. In *Mozi*, the power of the ruler’s example is absolute. A series of anecdotes scattered through the “Universal love” (or “Inclusive care,” *jian’ai* 兼愛) chapters show that the ruler can direct his subjects to any goal deemed desirable. It is in these chapters that we discover the aforementioned Goujian anecdote about testing the valor of his soldiers by ordering them to rescue the burning boat. Personal example aside, the *Mozi*’s ruler also plays an important role in other

69. For the ideology of the Mawangdui Huang-Lao manuscripts, see, e.g., Randall P. Peerenboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang-Lao* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

70. Yuri Pines, “Waging a Demographic War: Chapter 15 (‘Attracting the People’) of the *Book of Lord Shang* Revisited,” *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* (forthcoming).

71. See Yuri Pines, “Social Engineering in Early China: The Ideology of the *Shangjunshu* (*Book of Lord Shang*) Revisited,” *Oriens Extremus* 55 (2016), 25–26.

72. Pines, *The Book of Lord Shang*, 88–89.

respects, e.g., by being able to discover worthy aides among the lowliest subjects and elevate them to the position of supreme authority.⁷³ Yet the latter point also exemplifies the major difference between *Mozi* and *Yue gong*. In the former, the ruler's ability to select meritorious aides is one of the crucial preconditions for his success. In *Yue gong* this topic is not present at all except for the idea that the official's performance should determine their position (section 7). Actually, the meritocratic idea of "elevating the worthy"—one of the cornerstones of the political thought of the Warring States period—is curiously absent from the text.⁷⁴

The ruler-centered narrative of *Yue gong* distinguishes it critically from the majority of the Warring States-period political texts. Goujian is the sole creator of his success; his worthy ministers, such as Grandee Zhong and Fan Li, who are lionized elsewhere (most notably in the *Discourses of the States* as well as in a variety of Han texts, such as *Records of the Historian*, *The Glory of Yue*, and *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue*), are marginal actors in *Yue gong*. This emphasis on the ruler as an intellectual and not just political leader of the polity is even more strongly pronounced in the story of Fuchai's exchange with Wu Zixu, discussed above. *Yue gong* diverges from the common narrative, which contrasts the benighted ruler, Fuchai, and his loyal and prescient aide, Wu Zixu. By restoring Fuchai's prestige as a prudent, even if ultimately unsuccessful leader, the authors clearly position themselves on the ruler's side of the ruler–minister divide. This is a highly unusual stance, especially in Zhou historical and quasi-historical texts, which almost invariably laud the ministers' acumen and lament the ruler's intellectual inadequacy.⁷⁵ The contrast with the narrative in the "Discourses of Wu" chapter is so strong that one can consider these two narratives to be engaged in implicit controversy about the roles of ministers and rulers behind the state's success and failure.

73. See, e.g., *Mozi*, 77 (2.9, "Shang xian zhong" 尚賢中).

74. For the Warring States-period debates about "elevating the worthy," see Yuri Pines, "Between Merit and Pedigree: Evolution of the Concept of 'Elevating the Worthy' in Pre-Imperial China," in *The East Asian Challenge to Democracy: Political Meritocracy in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Daniel Bell and Li Chenyang (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 161–202.

75. For different views of rulers and ministers in the Warring States-period texts, see Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009). For the clearly pronounced pro-ministerial stance of Zhou historiographers, as exemplified in *Zuo zhuan* and the *Discourses of the States*, see David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 86 and *passim*.

Goujian's role in *Yue gong* has two somewhat contradictory aspects. On the one hand, he monitors and directs the well-developed bureaucratic apparatus that includes central government (courtiers, the ruler's entourage) and local administration (cities and border counties).⁷⁶ In particular, Goujian's ability to mobilize this apparatus by subjecting promotion and demotion to objective criteria (e.g., population figures) is remarkable inasmuch as it anticipates one of the major means employed by China's leaders well into present in their quest to mobilize the bureaucracy for a variety of difficult goals—from eliminating tax arrears under the Ming to promoting childbirth control, enhancing environmental protection, or, most recently, attaining poverty eradication in our days.⁷⁷ On the other hand, Goujian more frequently than not acts as a Big Man, personally attending to countless affairs, giving personal example to his subjects (e.g., by tilling), and personally feasting them. Even his personal supervision of bureaucracy, all the way down to market overseers, would be unfeasible in a large polity.⁷⁸ Such a behavior is more appropriate to a chieftain, or possibly a city-state leader, but surely not to the ruler of a larger political unit that has two tiers of local administration. This curious mixture of entirely different government modes is observable in several chapters of the *Canon of Documents*, most notably the "Canon of Yao" ("Yao dian" 堯典) and "The Counsels of Gao Yao" ("Gao Yao mo" 皋陶謨). Yet in those cases, as well as (more equivocally) in "Lü's Punishments" ("Lü xing" 呂刑), the coexistence of the charis-

76. For cities and border counties in *Yue gong* as two different tiers of local administration see Wang Jinfeng, "Qinghua jian."

77. For a Ming example (Zhang Juzheng's 張居正 (1525–1582) attempt to eradicate tax arrears by subordinating the officials' career to attaining this goal), see Ray Huang, 1587: *A Year of no Significance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). For recent utilizations of performance measurement as a means to mobilize bureaucracy, see John P. Burns and Zhou Zhiren, "Performance Management in the Government of the People's Republic of China: Accountability and Control in the Implementation of Public Policy," *OECD Journal on Budgeting* 2 (2010), 1–28; Jing Yijia, Yangyang Cui and Danyao Li, "The Politics of Performance Measurement in China," *Policy and Society* 34.1 (2015), 49–61; Wu Jing and Chang I-Shin, "Target Responsibility System of Environmental Protection and Performance Evaluation System," in *Environmental Management in China* (Singapore: Springer, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-4894-9_7; see also Daniel Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) for a broader depiction of China's political model.

78. Compare with the sober view of the *Book of Lord Shang*: "After all, officials monopolize authority and decide on affairs a thousand *li* away; and in the twelfth month they prepare a report to be approved [in the capital]. The affairs of the whole year are to be separately checked, but the sovereign listens to them only once; even when he sees something suspicious, he cannot render a decision if he lacks appropriate evidence" (*Book of Lord Shang* 24.3).

matic and bureaucratic modes of rule may reflect the composite nature of those texts.⁷⁹ In *Yue gong*, in contrast, both modes appear in the same passages and are clearly promulgated by a single narrator, which is not attested to in other early texts of which am aware.

The above brief summary suffices to demonstrate the exceptionality of *Yue gong* in the general landscape of pre-imperial political thought. The text stands in between different intellectual currents. It bears some similarities with Mawangdui *Yellow Thearch Documents*, with the *Book of Lord Shang*, with *Mozi*, and with the “Discourses of Yue A” narrative, but it also differs markedly from each of these texts. It remains free of moralizing discourse, never employing such terms as *de* 德 (“virtue”), *ren* 仁 (“benevolence”), or *yi* 義 (“righteousness, dutifulness”). It downplays the role of the ministers as independent political actors, is indifferent to the topic of searching for the worthy aides, and shifts the emphasis to the ruler, albeit without excessively glorifying the sovereign. The richness of this text highlights the complexity of intellectual dynamics the Warring States period. It demonstrates—to those who still need this demonstration—the inadequacy of the “schools” yardstick in dealing with the ideological texts of that age. The political discourse of the Warring States period evolved through constant mutual enrichment, borrowing, and synthesis of different ideas and the vast majority of contemporaneous texts—unearthed and transmitted alike—cannot be squarely identified with a single “school of thought.”

We should be reminded here that *Yue gong* is not a regular Masters (*zi* 子) text. It does not present its recommendations straightforwardly, is not engaged in open polemics, and avoids theoretic elaborations to justify the policies adopted by Goujian. Rather than attributing their ideas to a Master or a worthy aide, the authors present these ideas more subtly by embedding them in the historical narrative. It is time now to turn to the art of didactic narrative that is exemplified in *Yue gong* and analyze its role in ideological debates in pre-imperial China.

The Art of Didactic Narrative

The publication of *Yue gong* attracted considerable interest from historians, some of whom opined that the manuscript may provide a more reliable interpretation of Yue history than those in the transmitted texts. Even those—like Li Shoukui—who correctly identified *Yue gong* as a

79. See Kai Vogelsang, “Competing Voices in the *Shangshu*,” in *Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy*, 62–105; for the “Canon of Yao,” see also Martin Kern, “Language and the Ideology of Kingship in the ‘Canon of Yao,’” in *Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy*, 23–61.

polemical text disguised as a historical narrative still consider it a more reliable source for Yue history than alternative stories.⁸⁰ I beg to disagree. First, the anachronisms in *Yue gong* are inconsistent with a text that derives from original Yue historical records (if such records existed at all). Second, the very genre of didactic narrative, of which *Yue gong* is representative, is predicated on promoting a particular political vision rather than on presenting reliable details of historical events. In my eyes, neither *Yue gong* nor the three chapters of the *Discourses of the States* were much concerned with historical exactitude.

Above I have demonstrated already several historical inaccuracies which undermine the assertion that *Yue gong* was based on original Yue (or Wu) records. Recall Fuchai's speech confusing two different Wu campaigns against Chu launched by Fuchai's father. Recall the contradictory depiction of Yue as being simultaneously a well-developed bureaucratic entity and a Big Man polity. Recall the odd identification of Yue's habit of tattooing the body with physical punishments. Or consider the implausibly speedy results of Goujian's "five policies." The text does not discuss the chronological ramifications of these policies, but since they were allegedly adopted one after another following the three years of initial relaxation and ending before the elimination of Wu in 473 B.C.E., they could not have spanned more than seventeen years in total. Each of the policies then could not have lasted more than a few years. That such long-term steps as developing fallow lands or attracting immigrants could yield immediate and unambiguous results is surely not plausible. Perhaps this lack of plausibility was tacitly understood by the manuscripts' authors, who dispensed with chronology altogether in their discussion of the "five policies."

This observation causes me to dismiss Kim Tak's assertion that linguistic peculiarities of sections 4–9 of *Yue gong*, most notably the usage of solemn 于 rather than "colloquial" 於 particle, indicate the earliness of this segment and its relation to Yue's archives.⁸¹ Whereas there is no doubt that this segment of the manuscript comes from a different source than the opening and the final sections, this source should not necessarily be identified as a Yue historical text. Recall that the replacement of

80. Li Shoukui 李守奎, "Yue gong qi shi yu Goujian mie Wu de lishi shishi ji gushi liuchuan" 《越公其事》與句踐滅吳的歷史事實及故事流傳, *Wenwu* 文物 2017.6, 75–80; cf. Huang Aimei, "Yue gong," who emphasizes the "high historical reliability" of *Yue gong*. Some scholars dispel with Li's cautious differentiation between polemical and historical texts; for them *Yue gong* is squarely a source for Yue history. See, e.g., Wang Jinfeng, "Qinghua jian"; Liu Chengqun, "Qinghua jian Yue gong qi shi yu Goujian shidai de jingqi zhidu" 清華簡《越公其事》與句踐時代的經濟制度, *Shehui kexue* 社會科學 2019.4, 138–45.

81. Kim, "Qinghua jian."

solemn 于 with the more colloquial 於 particle had occurred already in the second half of the Springs-and-Autumns period, that is, long before Goujian's age.⁸² The overwhelming usage of 于 in the discussion of the "five policies" more likely reflects not a resort to original Yue sources but rather an attempt to archaize or solemnify the language (although admittedly I have not found other examples of archaism in that segment of the text).

That sections 4–9 cannot derive from the original Yue historical records is clear from the very nature of their narrative, devoid as it is of any details such as chronology, names of places or persons, and the like. Aside from mentioning the statelet of Gumie as Yue's southern neighbor and invoking once the names of Yue's two most famous ministers—Fan Li and Grandee Zhong—the "five policies" section is devoid of any identifiable Yue features. This suffices to caution us against speculating that the section derives from Yue's original records. Besides, whether or not Yue maintained detailed historical records on a par with other major contemporaneous polities is a thorny question that requires further exploration.

There are several reasons to doubt the existence of Yue historical records. Recall, first, that Yue were an outsider of the Zhou cultural sphere. Their polysyllabic language differed considerably from that of the Central States, creating a perennial problem of transmitting native historical information to the Zhou audience. There is much confusion in our sources about even such an essential information as appellations of Yue kings; actually, Yue artisans themselves were not sure how to transcribe into Chinese characters the name of King Goujian.⁸³ Whereas during Goujian's reign and in its aftermath, the Yue elites clearly began adapting themselves to the Zhou ritual culture—and is observable in particular in a few of the fifth century B.C.E. inscriptions—the linguistic gap was probably formidable enough to hinder adequate

82. The complexity of the 于 / 於 distribution in pre-imperial texts had been discussed in dozens of studies. For a relatively recent one (based primarily on transmitted texts), see Jung-Im Chang, "Yú 于 and yū 於: Their Origins, Their Grammaticalization, and the Process of Encroachment of the Former by the Latter from a Historical Perspective," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Washington, 2012).

83. On three of his swords, Goujian is rendered 欲瞿 (Zhongguo kexue yanjiuyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, ed., *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng* 殷周金文集成, 18 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1984–1994), hereafter *Jicheng* no. 11594); 欲 𠄎 (*Jicheng* no.11595); and 欲瞿 (*Jicheng* no.11621). See more on the problems of rendering Yue names in Dong Shan 董珊, *Wu Yue tiding yanjiu* 吳越題銘研究 (Beijing: Kexue, 2014) and Eric Henry, "The Submerged History of Yuè," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 176 (2007), http://sino-platonic.org/complete/spp176_history_of_yue.pdf.

documentation or even extensive recording of native oral traditions into literary Chinese.⁸⁴

The second point that should be considered in discussions of Yue historiography is that no reliable records of Yue history existed by the time of Sima Qian. “The Hereditary House of King Goujian of Yue” chapter in the *Records of the Historian* is the weakest in the entire “Hereditary Houses” section in terms of its historical information. This is true not only with regard to early Yue history of which neither Sima Qian nor the authors of Han compilations such as *The Glory of Yue* had any reliable knowledge, but also with regard to Goujian’s section, the literary qualities of which clearly outweigh its historical exactitude.⁸⁵ What is more surprising is Sima Qian’s confusion about the Yue history after Goujian, the so-called “Shandong period,” when Yue, acting from its new capital of Langye 琅琊 (or Langya) in southern Shandong, became one of the four leading powers of Chinese world.⁸⁶ It is only thanks to the *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年), abundantly cited in Sima Zhen’s 司馬貞 (679–732) *Suoyin* 索引 glosses on *Records of the Historian*, and, more later, thanks to the discovery of *Xinian* that many details of Yue’s post-Goujian’s history became clearer.⁸⁷ That such an important period was not known either to Sima Qian or to the authors of other Yue-related compilations from the Han dynasty, suggests that either Yue did not maintain systematic accounts of its history at all, or that these accounts were lost soon after this polity’s decline in the early fourth century B.C.E.

84. For Yue inscriptions, including a few relatively lengthy ones which clearly indicate adaptation to the Zhou norms (*Jicheng* nos.0144 and 0171); see Dong Shan, *Wu Yue*. For what may be a unique record of allegedly native Yue story about Goujian’s military preparations, see *Yue jue shu*, 95 (3.4.7); Milburn, *The Glory of Yue*, 138–39. To be sure, there is no way to verify whether this story is related to Goujian’s time or was invented by local Yue elites during the Han dynasty.

85. For the inadequate coverage of early Yue (and Wu) history in currently available sources, see Xu Lianggao 徐良高, “Kaoguxue wenhua, wenxian wenben yu Wu Yue zaoqi lishi de goujian” 考古學文化、文獻文本與吳越早期歷史的構建, *Kaogu* 考古 2020.9, 81–92. For criticism of the Goujian narrative in *Records of the Historian*, see Wang Chunhong, “*Shi ji*.”

86. The term “Shandong period” is borrowed from Chen Minzhen 陳民鎮, “Qinghua jian *Xinian* suo jian ‘Shandong shiqi’ Yue guo de junshi yu waijiao” 清華簡《繫年》所見“山東時期”越國的軍事與外交, in *Qinghua jian yu Rujia jingdian: guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 清華簡與儒家經典國際學術一研討會論文集, ed. Jiang Linchang 江林昌 and Sun Jin 孫進 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2017), 205–13. For Yue as a superpower, which, along with Qi, Jin, and Chu, “had divided All-under-Heaven into four parts and possessed it” (四分天下而有之), see *Mozi*, 221 (5.19 “Fei gong xia” 非攻下).

87. Chen Minzhen, “Qinghua jian”; Pines, *Zhou History*, 113–16. Note that even this information focuses on Yue’s royal genealogy and major military activities in the Shandong area, namely, a type of information that could be well known to Yue’s neighbors. No reliable information on Yue’s domestic affairs is preserved in our sources.

Putting aside the thorny question of Yue's original records, the dearth of reliable historical information in *Yue gong* is not surprising. Rather, like the Wu–Yue chapters of the *Discourses of the States*, this text was devoted not to narrating “who, when, where, and what,” but rather to answering the single question of “why.” What matters to the authors of all these stories of the Wu–Yue conflict is not necessarily how the events unfolded but rather the proper historical lessons that could be gleaned from them. They belong to a broad array of historical and quasi-historical works that dealt with success and failure of the former rulers—arguably the major focus of interest of Warring States period readers.⁸⁸ In the age of intense ideological struggles, these works stood at the nexus of history and philosophy and should be understood in this context rather than treated as purely historical texts.

The major medium for disseminating edifying historical knowledge in the Warring States period was the didactic anecdote—a short vignette usually centered on a moralizing speech by a prescient advisor or a later wise observer. These anecdotes, whose features have been analyzed in an excellent study by David Schaberg, have attracted considerable scholarly interest.⁸⁹ My own work on *Yue gong* has led me to infer that it belongs to a different genre of edifying historical texts, which I dub didactic narratives. These narratives differ from didactic anecdotes both in their length and their means of conveying the message. I believe that didactic narratives were particularly fitting for analyzing long-term factors influencing the outcomes of political struggles and also for putting forward relatively controversial ideas.

The major difference between didactic narratives and anecdotes is the role of speeches. In the latter, the speech is the heart of the didactic message. It permits the most straightforward presentation of the authors' views, in a manner reminiscent of the Masters' texts. In didactic

88. For instance, Sima Qian tells of Duo Jiao 鐸椒, the tutor to King Wei of Chu 楚威王 (r. 339–329 BCE), who, in response to the king's request, “selected examples of success and failure” from the lengthy text of *Springs and Autumns* (here referring in all likelihood to *Zuo zhuan*; see Lin Zhen'ai 林真愛, “Zuoshi Chunqiu kaobian” 左氏春秋考辨, *Zhongguo gudaishi luncong* 中國古代史論叢 3 (1981), 192–206), creating *Duo's Subtleties* (*Duoshi wei* 鐸氏微) in forty chapters (*juan* 卷); *Shi ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1997), 14.507. For sure King Wei was not the only reader who preferred to dispel with manifold minor details of earlier historical narratives and focus on the bottom line: what should be learnt from the achievements and failures of his predecessors.

89. David Schaberg, “Chinese History and Philosophy,” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 1: *Beginnings to AD 600*, eds. Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 394–414; Paul van Els and Sarah Queen, eds., *Between Philosophy and History: Anecdotes in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017).

narratives, such as *Yue gong*, speeches play an auxiliary role in the development of the narrative, whereas messages are conveyed more subtly. It is the tendentious depiction of the outcomes that leads the reader to identify a certain course of action as either beneficial or disastrous. The discussion preserves an aura of objectivity associated with larger historical works, such as the local histories of competing states, which served the primary source materials of *Zuo zhuan*.⁹⁰ Yet unlike the latter, didactic narratives were less concerned with the details of the narrated events, dispensing with information that did not fit the edifying design.

Didactic narratives were a particularly convenient means of promoting controversial ideas that could not be readily addressed in a moralizing speech. Take, for instance, the *Rong Cheng shi* 容成氏 text from the Shanghai Museum collection of bamboo manuscripts. The text deals with the sensitive issue of abdication as the ideal means of transferring power. Without openly promulgating this ideal, the authors skillfully weave it into their depiction of an idyllic situation in the times of paragon rulers who practiced abdication, which is contrasted with woeful outcomes of power transfer once the dynastic principle was adopted.⁹¹ Or take, for instance, the issue of radical reforms. Rather than openly advocating such reforms, the authors of the “Discourses of Qi” 齊語 chapter of the *Discourses of the States* attribute these to the model Qi minister, Guan Zhong 管仲 (d. 645 B.C.E.). The narrative is built so as to convince the reader that these reforms were the major reason for the success of Guan Zhong’s patron, Lord Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685–643 B.C.E.), the first and the most illustrious of the hegemons (*ba* 霸) of the Springs-and-Autumns period. This is precisely the technique adopted by the *Yue gong* authors in their story of Goujian’s success.

In my eyes, the three Wu–Yue chapters of the *Discourses of the States*, as well as *Yue gong* (and, insofar as we can judge from the preliminary publication, its sister manuscript, *Wu wang*), all exemplify the art of the didactic narrative. A comparison of the four narratives may shed light on the evolution of this genre. Of the four, the “Discourses of Wu” story is probably the earliest, insofar as parts of it appear on the badly damaged (and still not fully published) slips from the early Warring States-period

90. The nature of these local histories is discussed in Pines, *Zhou History*.

91. See Yuri Pines, “Political Mythology and Dynastic Legitimacy in the *Rong Cheng shi* Manuscript,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 73.3 (2010), 503–29; for a different analysis, see Sarah Allan, *Buried Ideas: Legends of Abdication and Ideal Government in Recently Discovered Early Chinese Bamboo-Slip Manuscripts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 181–262. For broader analysis of the abdication legends and their evolution, compare Yuri Pines, “Disputers of Abdication: Zhanguo Egalitarianism and the Sovereign’s Power,” *T’oung Pao* 91.4–5 (2005), 243–300 and Sarah Allan, *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China*, rev. ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).

Tomb 36 at Shibancun 石板村, Cili 慈利 County (Hunan).⁹² It is also the closest to informative history. Aside from the basic factual setting, this narrative provides many other details. It mentions historically verifiable events, such as Wu's victory over Qi in 484 B.C.E. and the Huangchi 黃池 interstate assembly of 482 B.C.E. It provides rudimentary chronology and mentions a variety of personal names, most of which undoubtedly come from scribal records. And yet, this is clearly not an informative history as such. Its goal is to show that Fuchai lost his state and his life because of the king's excessive self-confidence and dismissal of Wu Zixu's loyal remonstrance, whereas Goujian won precisely because he was able to heed his aides and even foreign advisors, such as Shen Baoxu 申包胥 from Chu. To strengthen this message, the text at times departs from historical accuracy, adds imagined speeches and narrative details, and tolerates minor anachronisms.⁹³ Its depiction of events should not be dismissed outright, but must be read *cum grano salis*.

It would not be too far-fetched to hypothesize that both the "Discourse of Yue A" and *Yue gong* were designed as a counter-narrative to the "Discourses of Wu." Both texts share not just common textual segments (especially in the depiction of the final campaign of Yue against Wu), but, most notably, the common ruler-oriented perspective. In both cases it was Goujian who had navigated his country toward resurrection and the ultimate victory over Wu, and in both cases his populist policies aimed at attaining the subjects' affection occupy pride of place. The two versions differ in certain aspects, e.g., the precise content of Goujian's policies. They diverge, even if subtly, also on the topic ruler-minister relations. Thus, the "Discourse of Yue A" starts with Goujian's intercourse with Grandee Zhong, which reaffirms the minister's primary importance for the state, a topos that is notably absent from *Yue gong*. Nonetheless, the similarities are substantial enough to permit the guess that both texts derived from the same group of thinkers. Speaking of their historical reliability, it is notable that both preserve incomparably fewer details than the "Discourses of Wu" chapter. Even the chronology is reduced to the absolute minimum: we are informed only about the length of the policy of recovery (three years in *Yue gong*, ten years in

92. Zhang Chunlong 張春龍, "Cili Chujian gaishu" 慈利楚簡概述, in *Xinchu jianbo yanjiu* 新出簡帛研究, ed. Ai Lan 艾蘭 (Sarah Allan) and Xing Wen 邢文 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2004), 4–11.

93. For clearly imagined speeches, see the exchange between Goujian and Shen Baoxu; for the imagined narrative detail—the story of Goujian's expedition against Wu in which daily executions of the violators of military discipline are followed by the daily release of certain groups of conscripts so as to manifest the proper balance between sternness and lenience. For anachronisms, see for instance mentioning the state of Chen 陳 (extinguished in 481 BCE) as submitting to Yue after 473 BCE (all the three examples are from *Guo yu* 19.9).

the “Discourses of Yue A”), but no other chronological details are provided. I do not have an unequivocal indicator of these texts’ dates of composition, but both appear to me to be more removed in time from the depicted events than the “Discourses of Wu.”

The fourth narrative, the “Discourses of Yue B,” fully restores the pro-ministerial focus. As mentioned above, Yue’s success there is squarely attributed to Fan Li, with Grandee Zhong acting as the second in command, whereas Goujian is reduced through most of the narrative to Fan Li’s obedient disciple. Once again, dating this text is not easy, but my guess is that it is the latest in terms of the dates of its composition. The story does provide rudimentary chronology, but this chronology is patently wrong, as the text reduces the period of Yue’s resurrection from twenty to ten years. Yet more broadly, the narrative does not seem to be much concerned with historical reliability. Suffice it to mention the narration of Yue’s major campaign against Wu, in which Yue forces simply motionlessly preserve their ground for three years and cause Wu’s armies to melt down. I doubt that this fanciful story was ever intended to convince the audience of its factual accuracy.

This comparison, sketchy and speculative as it is, may indicate a trend in the didactic narratives’ evolution. Initially, these narratives derived from local histories, which combined informative and didactic aspects. As time passed and memories of the depicted events faded, informative details mattered less, whereas didactic messages became more strongly pronounced. By inventing outright fallacious details—such as depicting non-existent reforms, lionizing minor personalities such as Fan Li,⁹⁴ or altering the story of military campaigns—the authors strengthened their ideological message, paying less attention to historical reliability. The increasingly manipulative nature of these historical accounts was duly noted by not a few Warring States-period thinkers who overtly ridiculed it (*Zhuangzi* 莊子 and *Han Feizi* come immediately to one’s mind),⁹⁵ but

94. Recall that Fan Li is not mentioned at all in *Zuo zhuan* and “Discourses of Yue A,” and plays only a minor role in both the “Discourses of Wu” and *Yue gong*. It is reasonable to assume that his importance was dramatically inflated by the authors of “Discourses of Yue B” story.

95. For a brilliant satiric take on the proliferation of fallacious historical accounts, see an example of counterfactual history in *Zhuangzi*’s “Robber Zhi” 盜跖 chapter. Compare to Han Fei’s derision of manipulative and unreliable accounts of the past in the opening passages of the “Illustrious Learnings” (“Xian xue” 顯學) chapter. See more in Yuri Pines, “Speeches and the Question of Authenticity in Ancient Chinese Historical Records,” in *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism and Ideology: Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a New Comparative Perspective*, ed. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, Achim Mittag, and Jörn Rüsen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 220–22; cf. Paul R. Goldin, “Non-Deductive Argumentation in Early Chinese Philosophy,” in *Between*

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in the absence of authoritative version of the past, fake histories proliferated as freely as fake news proliferates today.

This proliferation of the art of didactic narrative, just like the proliferation of didactic anecdotes, marks what I have identified elsewhere as the turn away from informative histories in the Warring States period. That age which prized ideologically powerful argument over historical veracity was conducive to the dissemination of imagined accounts of the past or habitual modification of existing accounts so as to suit the authors' ideological requirements.⁹⁶ The Wu–Yue story, with its twists and turns, was an ideal playground for competing thinkers with different explanations of the states' success and failure. It may even be hypothesized that the absence of detailed historical records from both states was a boon for the authors of didactic narratives. Without the need to bother themselves with anything except the basic factual framework, being unburdened by “unnecessary details,”⁹⁷ competing thinkers were free to improvise. The result, even if historically unreliable, is fascinating for the light it sheds on ideological debates during the formative age of China's political tradition.

Philosophy and History, 50–51. The topic of the Warring States thinkers' attitude toward manipulations of history deserves systematic discussion.

96. See Pines, *Zhou History*, 92–94; cf. Paul R. Goldin, “Appeals to History in Early Chinese Philosophy and Rhetoric,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35.1 (2008), 79–96.

97. For the concept of “unnecessary details,” see Li Wai-ye, “Inconvenient and Unnecessary Details in *Zuozhuan*,” in *Early Chinese Historiography: Zuozhuan in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Yuri Pines, Martin Kern, and Nino Luraghi (forthcoming).

教訓類敘事和自強之術：清華簡《越公其事》思想特徵及其在
中國古代史學史上的地位

尤銳

提要

《越公其事》是新出版的清華大學藏戰國竹簡中一個比較長篇的史書。它比較詳細地記述了越王勾踐如何轉敗為勝並消滅了越國的死敵——吳國。本文將集中討論《越公其事》的兩個方面。其一，該書中展現的勾踐的自強政策讓我們重新認識到戰國時代政治思想的一些特點。其二，筆者認為該文本是我稱之為“教訓類敘事” (didactic narrative) 的代表，這是一種常常被忽略的春秋戰國之際產生的史學新類別。

Keywords: bamboo manuscripts, didacticism, historiography, state building, Wu, Yue, 清華竹簡, 教訓類歷史, 史學史, 自強, 吳國, 越國,