

King Wen, a Settler of Disputes or Judge? The “Yu-Rui case” in the *Historical Records* and its Historical Background

Maria Khayutina

The chapter “Basic Records of Zhou” of the *Shiji* (*Historical Records*, ca. 100 BCE) contains an account of a “dispute” between the rulers of Yu and Rui that allegedly took place during the reign of King Wen of Zhou (died ca. 1049 BCE). According to the *Shiji*, the conflicting parties sought King Wen’s help in resolving their dispute. This gives the impression that, on the eve of the Zhou dynasty, settlement of disputes or deciding upon legal cases might constitute a substantial function of the royal power. However, this impression can be revealed as anachronistic. The present paper argues that the story about this “dispute” came about as the result of a misinterpretation of the ode “Mian” in the *Book of Poetry*, which served as one of the sources of the *Historical Records*. The paper analyses the “Mian” against the historical background of the Western Zhou period (1046–771 BCE). It concludes that rather than referring to a dispute, this ode praises the rulers of Yu and Ru as elder relatives of the Zhou royal lineage, who backed King Wen’s irregular succession to the throne and thus contributed to the Zhou’s rise to power.

During 2001–2003, I had the good fortune to work as a visiting research fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation at the Chinese Section of the Department of East Asian Studies at Ruhr University Bochum. Professor Roetz generously supported my research projects which were dedicated to the study of hospitality in Early China and was a truly considerate and kind host. In one of our many meetings Professor Roetz and I discussed whether dispute settlement or jurisdiction could be among the constitutive elements of Zhou royal authority. I am glad to be able to continue this discussion today. I also take this opportunity to congratulate Professor Roetz on his anniversary.

The “dispute” between Yu and Rui in the *Historical Records* and its sources

Our understanding of Zhou history is greatly influenced by the “Basic Records of Zhou” (Zhou benji 周本記) chapter in the *Historical Records* (*Shiji* 史記),¹ which was drafted by Sima Tan 司馬談 (died 110 BCE) and completed by his son Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–90 BCE). In the part dedicated to the Zhou ruler Chang 昌, known

I am very grateful to Wolfgang Behr and Licia Di Giacinto for their thoughtful remarks and suggestions and to Karen Finney-Kellerhoff for proofreading the manuscript. All remaining errors are my own responsibility.

¹ Translating the title *Shiji*, I follow Chavannes (1967–1969) and Vjatkin (1972–2010).

as *Xi bo* 西伯 (First-Born of the West)² during his lifetime and venerated posthumously as King Wen 文 (died ca. 1049 BCE) it states (*Shiji* 4: 116):

西伯陰行善，諸侯皆來決平。於是虞、芮之人有獄不能決，乃如周。入界，耕者皆讓畔，民俗皆讓長。虞、芮之人未見西伯，皆暵，相謂曰：「吾所爭，周人所恥，何往為，祇取辱耳。」遂還，俱讓而去。諸侯聞之，曰「西伯蓋受命之君」。

“The First-Born of the West secretly practiced good deeds, [thus] various lords all came to [seek] resolutions and appeasement. Thereupon, when men of Yu and Rui had a legal dispute that they could not resolve, they [decided to act] like Zhou. [As they] entered [the Zhou] borders, [they saw that] farmers all let [each other] fix the boundaries of the fields, [and] it was the people’s custom to yield to seniors. The men of Yu and Rui had not yet met the First-Born of the West, since they all settled on the periphery, [and] they spoke to each other, saying: ‘What we were fighting for is what the people of Zhou are ashamed of. Why should we proceed further, we will only reap disgrace!’ Thereupon they went back, completely accepted each other’s [claims] and parted. All the lords heard about this [and] said: ‘The First-Born of the West must be the ruler who received the Mandate [from Heaven].’”

The Zhou ruler remains in the background of this tableau as a potential settler of disputes, whom litigants seeking solutions and appeasement (*jue ping* 決平) may address, though we have no opportunity to see him in action. As an ideal sage ruler, he does not act but rather changes the world by his virtuous example. Justice is established automatically when people’s sense of shame (*chi* 恥) and the fear of disgrace (*ru* 辱) are activated, so that they do everything to reach an agreement, even renouncing some of their rights. This account nicely illustrates Professor Roetz’s observations regarding Confucian views on shame and disgrace or on internal “self-respect” and external “community disrespect” as negative sanctions that can be used to maintain social order as an alternative to the imposition of legal punishments (Roetz 1993: 176–184). However, the concept of King Wen and his role in the “Yu-Rui case” in the *Historical Records* is somewhat ambivalent. On another place in this chapter, he is depicted in almost “Legalist” terms:

西伯蓋傳位五十年。其囚羑里，蓋益易之八卦為六十四卦。詩人道西伯。蓋受命之年稱王而斷虞芮之訟。後十年而崩，謚為文王。改法度，制正朔矣。

“The First-Born of the West probably held his position for fifty years. As he was detained in Youli, he probably extended the eight trigrams of the *Changes* into sixty-four hexagrams. The *Poetry* men wrote about the First-Born of the West. Probably in the year when he received the Mandate he called himself ‘king’ and decided the lawsuit between Yu and Rui. Ten years later, he passed away and was accorded the posthumous honorific

² Siblings were distinguished according to their birth order as *bo* 伯 (First-born), *zhong* 仲 (Second-born), *shu* 叔 (Third-born), and *ji* 季 (Junior); for more details see Gassmann (2006: 320–360). Birth ranks and official titles will be italicized hereafter in order to distinguish them from personal names.

title King Wen. He changed laws and measurements and regulated the first day of the first month [of his own calendar].”

Here, King Wen is represented not just as a model of virtue to be emulated, but as one who effectively decides lawsuits (*duan song* 斷訟). It seems possible that he might not just be a settler of disputes, but a judge, relying on the established law, since this second account goes on to say that after having assumed the royal title, Chang “changed laws and measurements” (*gai fa du* 改法度). Directly linking Chang’s function as a judge to his claim to the Mandate of Heaven, the second account presents the reform of legislation as one of the founding acts of the new royal dynasty, and acknowledges the king as the ultimate judicial authority. The two accounts seem to support that dispute settlement either by common consent or by jurisdiction was an indispensable constitutive element of Zhou royal authority. If the first account of the Yu-Rui case is obviously a moralizing idealization, it does not mean that the second one is more realistic. What did Sima Tan and Sima Qian actually know about the case to which they attached such fundamental importance and was there a certain tradition on which they relied?

As often throughout the *Historical Records*, the source is openly identified, pointing to the [*Book of*] *Poetry* (*Shi [jing]* 詩[經]). The ode “Spreading” (Mian 綿) of the “Great Odes” (*Da ya* 大雅) section is the only pre-Qin text that mentions Yu and Rui together. This ode is actually dedicated not to King Wen but to his grandfather Dan *fu* 亶父, the founder of the Zhou Settlement. In the Zhou cult of royal ancestors he was venerated as both “ancient Duke” (*gu gong* 古公) and “Great King” (*tai wang* 大王). The first seven stanzas commemorate how Dan *fu* brought his people to the Zhou Plain, let them build their dwellings and had them construct a majestic palace for himself. When the palace was ready,

.....

乃立冢土
戎醜攸行

“Then [they] set up an earthen mound [for sacrifices]
On which to line up the ugly Rong [captives].

肆不殄厥愠
亦不隕厥問(聞)
柞棫拔矣
行道兌矣
混夷駟矣
維其喙矣

Thereupon, [he] did not tame his rage
And did not let fall his own fame,
Oak trees were pulled out,
Paths and ways were opened up,
The Hun aliens³ fled
With gaping mouths.

虞芮質厥成
文王蹶厥生

Yu and Rui guaranteed his success,
King Wen prompted his birth.⁴

³ Hun is the name of a group of foreign people living in vicinity of Zhou. It was not related to the Huns, a nomadic people that migrated to Europe during the 1st–7th centuries AD.

⁴ Commentators suggest that *sheng* 生 stands for something other than “birth” or “life”. Usually, they interpret it as *xing* 性, “nature”, in the sense that King Wen “promptly changed their (i. e. Yu and Rui’s) nature” (see, for instance, Qu 1983: 462). Although “nature” was ubiquitous in the philosophical

予曰有疏附	We say: There are the distant and the attached,
予曰有先後	We say: There are the former and the latter,
予曰有奔奏	We say: There are those who perform service,
予曰有禦侮	We say: There are those who ward off insults!”

“Mian” does not state that there was a disagreement between Yu and Rui. Moreover, it indicates that whatever Yu and Rui were involved in, it had happened even before King Wen came on the scene. Clearly, Sima did not rely directly on this source, but on certain exegetic traditions.

During the lifetime of both Sima, four hermeneutic traditions competed in the profoundness of their knowledge of the *Book of Poetry*, although only three of them (Qi 齊, Lu 魯 and Han 韓) were recognized officially. The Qi tradition, represented at the imperial court by a *boshi* 博士 erudite since the reign of Emperor Jing 景 (r. 156–140 BCE; Hightower 1948: 253), considered that “the Lord of Yu and the Lord of Rui disputed fields [and] sought a solution from King Wen” (虞侯，芮候訟田，質於文王者; see Wang 1987: 841). It is not known how old the Qi tradition actually was. According to the *Historical Records*, Lou Jing 婁敬, a native of Qi, used the *Book of Poetry* in his persuasions at the very beginning of the Han dynasty. In particular, in a speech addressed to the founder of the Han 漢 Empire, Liu Bang 劉邦, in 202 BCE, he stated (*Shiji* 9: 2715) that

……文王為西伯，斷虞芮之訟，始受命。

“King Wen became Lord of the West, decided the lawsuit between Yu and Rui and received the Mandate for the first time.”

This indicates that the second account about King Wen as an active judge in the *Historical Records* possibly derives from the Qi tradition of the *Poetry* scholarship.

The Mao 毛 tradition of the *Poetry*, still unofficial at that time, also assumed that Yu and Rui had a dispute, but stressed that it was King Wen’s virtuous model and not his active intervention that caused the conflicting parties to come to an agreement. The Mao commentary reads (*Mao shi zhu shu* 16.2: 1354–1355):

質成也，成平也，蹶動也。虞芮之君相與爭田，入而不平。乃相謂曰：西伯仁人也，盍往質焉？乃相與朝周。入其竟，則耕者讓畔、行者讓路。入其邑，男女異路、班白不提挈。入其朝，士讓大夫、大夫讓卿。二國之君感而相謂曰：我等小人，不可以履君子之庭！乃相讓以其所爭田而退。天下聞之而歸者四十餘國。

“‘To pledge/to ask’ means ‘to accomplish’, ‘to accomplish’ means ‘to appease’, ‘to move quickly’ means ‘to move [someone]’. The rulers of Yu and Rui mutually disputed

discourse of the Warring States period, it is mentioned only once in the *Book of Poetry* (see “Quan e” 卷阿, Mao 252). At the time when “Mian” was composed (perhaps sometime during the 9th–7th centuries BCE), it was not customary to speak about a person’s “nature” or “character”. On the other hand, *sheng* 生 often appears in the *Poetry*, but never as a substitute for *xing* 性.

over fields with each other, entered [into each other's territory] and had no peace. Then they said to each other: 'The Lord of the West is a man of humaneness, why don't we consult with him?' Then they went together to Zhou for the morning audience. [As they] entered [Zhou] territory, [they saw that] farmers let [each other] fix the boundaries of the fields, [while] travelers gave way [to each other]. [As they] entered his settlement, [they saw that] men and women went on different sides of the road, [while elderly persons with] grey [hair] did not need to ask for help. [As they] entered his audience hall, [they saw that] lesser officers yielded to higher officers, [while] higher officers yielded to ministers. The rulers of the two states were moved and said to each other: 'Men of such low kind as both of us cannot set their feet on the courtyard of the noble ruler!' Thereupon they yielded to each other the fields that they were disputing and withdrew [themselves]. All under Heaven heard about this and there were more than forty states that adhered [to Zhou]."

The image of King Wen in the Mao tradition corresponds to that manifested in the first account of his deeds in the *Historical Records*. However, Mao's version renders the observations of the Yu and Rui visitors to King Wen's realm with different details and does not employ the concepts of "shame" and "disgrace", which seem to be central to Sima's version. One can only guess as to whether the whole text derived from the commentary of the Lu 魯 tradition of the *Poetry*, which both Sima certainly knew, but which has not been preserved, or whether they moralized themselves.⁵

Mao Heng 毛亨, the presumed author of the Mao commentary, and Shen Pei 申培, the alleged founder of the Lu tradition, claimed to have had their tradition handed down from Confucius's pupil Zi Xia 子夏 (5th century BCE) and from Xun Kuang 荀況 (ca. 335–238 BCE), respectively. Both the *Lun yu* 論語, collated by Confucius's pupils from his sayings and continuously extended during the Warring States period, and the *Xunzi* 荀子, written by Xun Kuang and his followers, extensively quote the *Book of Poetry*. But neither the former nor the latter, in surviving editions, quotes the relevant line of the "Mian" ode when discussing King Wen's achievements. There is no trace of the "Yu-Rui case" in any other pre-Qin texts. Whatever Yu and Rui were involved in was completely forgotten before the foundation of the Qin Empire. Starting from the 2nd century BCE, representatives of several exegetic traditions, regarding the *Book of Poetry* as a precious pool of the pre-Qin moral tradition, attempted to provide interpretations for every single line of its often very obscure texts. As it was already clear to Ban Gu 班固 (*Han shu* 30: 1708), these scholars

……皆為之傳。或取春秋，采雜說，咸非其本義。

"all made commentaries on the *Poetry*; some used the *Chunqiu*, some used stories of various [schools], but all of them were unable to grasp its original meaning."⁶

⁵ Sima certainly knew the Lu tradition very well, as the Lu exegesis was favored by Emperor Wen (r. 180–157) and remained influential throughout the Han period. See Kern (2010b: 22).

⁶ In this passage, Ban Gu referred specifically to the three official traditions, i. e. Lu, Qi and Han. He observed that the Lu tradition was possibly the most reliable. Regarding the Mao tradition, he only pointed out that no official position was established for its representatives.

In sum, there is no evidence that the rise of the Zhou dynasty during the first half of the 11th century BCE was in any way associated with King Wen's ability to resolve a dispute between Yu and Rui, or to act as dispute settler or judge in general. Moreover, nothing confirms that Yu and Rui were involved in a territorial dispute. The story about the dispute most probably emerged as the result of exegetic efforts of Han literati who often misinterpreted various texts of the *Book of Poetry*.⁷ Why, then, were Yu and Rui mentioned in “Mian”, one of the most important commemorative texts of the early Chinese tradition?

The Yu-Rui case and the legitimacy of King Wen

Traditional scholarship attributed “Mian” and many other odes of the *Book of Poetry* to the very beginning of the Zhou dynasty. Recent investigations of the language and contents of the *Book of Poetry* strongly suggest much later dates for most of its parts, with the exception of a small number of the “Zhou Hymns” (*Zhou Song* 周頌; Shaughnessy 1997a: 165–196). The “Great Odes” were composed not before the late Western Zhou or, even more likely, during the early Eastern Zhou period (ca. 8th–7th centuries BCE).⁸ They were possibly used in performances that made up part of the rituals of royal ancestor worship and commemoration at the Zhou court (Granet 1959 [1926], 2: 597; Kern 2009: 170–182). Below I will argue that one of the functions of “Mian”, besides venerating Dan *fu* as the founder of the Zhou royal house, was to claim legitimacy for King Wen as the ruler of Zhou in the second descending generation.⁹

Of all the “Odes” praising early Zhou rulers, the majority were dedicated to King Wen. The arrangement of the “Great Odes” section also suggests that King Wen dominated the royal ancestral pantheon, with King Wu (r. 1046/5–1043 BCE) following. Royal speeches rendered in Western Zhou inscriptions on bronze vessels from the Zhou metropolitan area in present-day Shaanxi 陝西 province corroborate that this is consistent with the official memory culture of this period. In their speeches, the Zhou kings claimed that King Wen received the “Great Command” (*da ling* 大令) from Heaven and that King Wu created the Zhou state (*bang* 邦). Surprisingly, they never mentioned any earlier Zhou rulers. Indeed, in most cases they addressed persons whose ancestors had been recruited into service by kings Wen or Wu, and therefore there was no reason to refer to earlier times. Wen and Wu were charismatic rulers, whose exemplary personal qualities were well suited to creating a broader Zhou identity across kinship

⁷ For some other misinterpretations, see Kern (2010a: 29–56).

⁸ For studies supporting the Eastern Zhou date of most parts of the *Book of Poetry* see Krjukov (2000: 322); Behr (1997; 2004, with further references).

⁹ The “Poetry Preface” (*Shi xu* 詩序) of the Mao tradition glosses “Mian” as follows: “(The root of) King Wen’s prosperity has its origin in *tai wang* [i. e. Dan *fu*]” (文王之興本由大王也; see *Mao shi zhu shu* 16.2: 1341). This interpretation shifts the emphasis from the negotiation of legitimacy to the discourse on filial piety.

groups. They led the small Zhou polity to an explosive upturn and brought prosperity not only to their own family, but also to other lineages that supported them in the campaign against the Shang or shortly afterwards. Therefore, some representatives of the metropolitan Zhou elites who were not related to the royal house by kinship expressed gratitude for their well-being to Kings Wen and Wu, but had no reason to venerate earlier Zhou rulers.¹⁰

The worship of early Zhou rulers during the early Western Zhou period is, however, reflected in the earliest group of the “Hymns” in the *Book of Poetry*, probably chanted during sacrifices in the Zhou ancestral temples already prior to the 9th century BCE (Shaughnessy 1997a: 178). Two of them are dedicated to the Zhou progenitor “Lord Millet” (*Hou Ji* 后稷) and to the Great King, i. e. *Dan fu*, respectively. The “Si wen” 思文 (Mao 275) hails *Hou Ji*, who “joined Heaven” and “established our offering people”. The “Tian zuo” 天作 (Mao 270) praises the Great King who “leveled” Mount Qi “created by Heaven”, referring to the establishment of the Zhou Settlement. Thus, although during the Western Zhou period *Dan fu* played no role in the royal policy of fostering loyalty among metropolitan elites of various surnames, he nevertheless was important for the internal homeostasis within the royal lineage. The “Tian zuo” also states that “King Wen made prosperous” the settlement under Mount Qi. Notably, it links King Wen directly to *Dan fu* over the head of Wen’s father *ji Li* 季歷 (Junior Li), posthumously venerated as *wang ji* 王季 (Royal Junior). The “Hymns” do not contain any texts dedicated to *wang ji*. Such a selective approach to ancestors was also common to the practice of constructing pedigrees in the Zhou metropolitan lineages reflected in the bronze inscriptions. Physical parents of earlier generations who had little merit could remain outside of the pedigree in which only the most illustrious ancestors were included (Sena 2012). The “Mian” Ode, composed considerably later than the “Tian zuo”, expands on *Dan fu*’s achievements and reproduces the same pattern of constructing a selective pedigree of the Zhou royal house by emphasizing King Wen as *Dan fu*’s successor without mentioning *wang ji*.

The transmission of power from *Dan fu* to King Wen was a somewhat delicate issue. The designations *ji Li* and *wang ji* make it clear that King Wen’s father was the youngest son of *Dan fu*, which means that he did not succeed him in accordance with the principle of primogeniture. After the small Zhou polity had become a great Zhou kingdom, the royal house was determined to enforce the rules of succession by primogeniture and, particularly, to prevent succession from brother to brother. In this context, a veil was to be drawn over *wang ji*’s precedent. This was possibly the reason why no “Hymns” were dedicated to him and why he was not mentioned in “Tian zuo” and “Mian”.

¹⁰ This was manifested, in particular, in the construction of pedigrees linked to the genealogy of the royal house during the 9th to early 8th centuries BCE. See Sena (2012).

The situation changed with the passing of time. The royal house experienced a case of irregular succession during the first quarter of the 9th century BCE.¹¹ King Li 厲 (r. 877–841 BCE) had fled into exile, King You 幽 (r. 781–771 BCE) changed his heir and his two sons both proclaimed themselves king.¹² After such upheavals, there was no reason for taciturnity concerning *wang ji*'s case. Rather, the need for a clear statement of *wang ji*'s legitimacy and, consequently, the legitimacy of King Wen emerged. A statement to this effect can be found in the “Huang yi” 皇矣 (Mao 241) Ode in the “Great Odes” section of the *Book of Poetry*:

天立厥配	“Heaven established its mate,
受命既固	The reception of the Mandate was already secured,
帝省其山	The Di-Deity inspected this mountain.
.....	
帝作邦作對	Di established this state, established its counterpart
自大伯王季	Starting with <i>tai bo</i> and <i>wang ji</i> .
維此王季	This was <i>wang ji</i> !
因心則友	According to his heart he was brotherly-loving,
則友其兄	So he loved his elder brother as a brother.
則篤其慶	Therefore, honest were his congratulations,
載錫之光	[He] carried the honor bestowed [on him],
受祿無喪	[He] received blessings [and] had no loss,
奄有四方	[and] extensively possessed the Four Quarters!
維此王季	Oh, this <i>wang ji</i> !
帝度其心	Di measured his heart
貊其德音	[and] purified the sounds of his charisma.
其德克明	His charisma can be enlightened,
克明克類	Can be enlightened, can be made an example!
克長克君	[He] can be a chief, can be a ruler,
王此大邦	Be a king of this Great State!”

This poem was possibly written in order to fill the gaps left by the “Tian zuo” and “Mian” and to eliminate any doubts concerning the legitimacy of *wang ji*. It indicates that Dan *fu*'s first-born son *tai bo* (Great First-Born) was appointed as heir and that *wang ji* was loyal to him. Suddenly, *tai bo* was no longer on the stage for unknown reasons.¹³ The honorific “Odes” were not an appropriate place to discuss such unpleasant things. In any case, *wang ji* replaced *tai bo*, and this was approved by the Di-Deity.

¹¹ King Xiao 孝 succeeded his great nephew King Yi 懿. He was not able to pass on the throne to his own children (if he had any), and King Yi's son succeeded him as King Yi 夷. See *Shiji* 4: 141.

¹² For details about the struggle between King You's successors, see Li (2006: 219–221).

¹³ Sima Qian believed that *tai bo* “fled to the Jing-Man” (*li Jing-Man* 纘荆蠻), called himself Gouwu 句吳, and became the first ruler of Wu 吳 state in present-day Jiangsu 江蘇 Province and adjacent areas (*Shiji* 31: 1445). Neither such an early origin of the Wu state, nor the early Zhou presence in

It is not clear whether *tai bo* died before or after Dan *fu* or whether he had a chance to succeed his father as the Zhou ruler. Whatever the case, he died childless, so that his position should legitimately have been taken by his younger brother (*Zuozhuan*: 307 [Xi 僖: 5]; *Shiji* 31: 1446). However, *wang ji* was not his only brother. Another brother stood between them, and this was Yu *zhong* 虞仲 (Second-Born of Yu). His designation means that he was the second son of Dan *fu* and that he was established in Yu as the ruler. During the early Western Zhou period, Yu was located in Qian 汧 river valley to the north of present-day Baoji 寶雞 municipality and ca. 90 km from the Zhou Settlement on the Zhou Plain (see Map).¹⁴ The ruler of Yu involved in the so-called “Yu-Rui case” had legitimate claim to the Zhou throne.

The Rui ruling house also belonged to the community of the Ji-surnamed lineages.¹⁵ It may have split from the Ji-surnamed stem lineage¹⁶ before the time of Dan *fu*.¹⁷ The toponym Rui was one of the landmarks associated with an even earlier Ji-surnamed progenitor, Gong Liu 公劉, who had settled in the middle flow of Jing 涇 river. This toponym may have been related to the Rui 芮 river which originates in present-day Longxian 隴縣 county of Shaanxi, flows towards the north-east through south-eastern

eastern China can be confirmed. Instead, some scholars suggest that *tai bo* could have withdrawn to the Qian river valley in western Shaanxi where Mount Wu 吳 was located. See Huang (1983: 295–305).

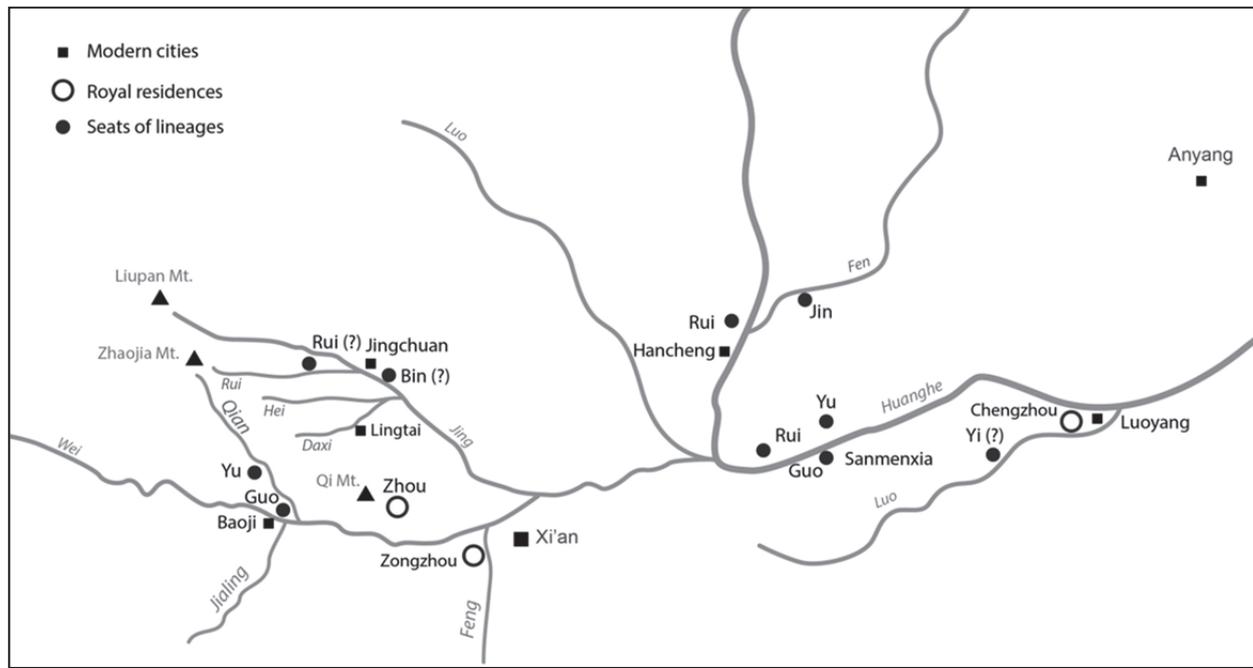
¹⁴ Recently excavated inscriptions indicate that the character 𠄎, previously transcribed as *ze* 夬 and used as the name of a Ji-surnamed polity in Qian valley, should be read as Yu. See Chen Chao-jung (forthcoming). Qian river originates on the Zhaojiashan 趙家山 mountain in Gansu province, which is part of the Liupan 六盤 mountain system. It flows into Wei river to the east of Baoji.

¹⁵ See, for instance, *Rong gong li* 芮公鬲 (*Jicheng* 711f., 743); *Lü wang hu* 呂王壺 (*Jicheng* 9630).

¹⁶ It is not certain whether the lineage to which Dan *fu* belonged used the name Zhou before it moved under Mount Qi and thus gave its name to the Zhou Plain, or whether it took its name from this Plain which was called Zhou before its arrival. Some Shang oracle bone inscriptions of an earlier date mention Zhou, but it is not entirely clear whether they refer to the same political entity. Thus, caution is required when speaking about “Zhou” before the time of Dan *fu*.

¹⁷ Rui *bo* 芮伯 was mentioned among the participants of the last meeting of “all the lords” (*zhuhou*) and other dignitaries called by King Cheng before his passing away, as it is reflected in the “Gu ming” 顧命 chapter of the *Book of Documents*. Although the “Gu ming” possibly achieved its present form during the Warring States period (see Meyer [forthcoming]), its earlier layer possibly reflects the official memory culture of the early Eastern Zhou period, in which relationships between the royal house and other Ji-surnamed lineages played a major role. The lineages are listed in the “Gu ming” according to their status based on the priority of birth. In the list of the six highest dignitaries, the First-Born of Rui occupied the second place after Shi, the First-Born of Shao 召伯奭 and before the First-Born of Tong 彤伯, the Duke of Bi 畢公, the Lord of Wei 衛侯 and the Duke of Mao 毛公 (see *Shangshu* 1936, 16: 479). Bi, Wei and Mao lineages were all founded by King Wen’s sons. See *Zuozhuan* 421 (Xi: 24). Shao was also a Ji-surnamed lineage (see *Shiji* 34: 1549). It is not clear who was its first ruler, but he certainly belonged to an earlier generation and, therefore, in the conical hierarchy of the Ji-surnamed kinship community Shao was higher than the lineages created after the conquest. By analogy, Rui and Tong were plausibly also founded by members of generations preceding that of King Wen’s Zhao.

parts of Gansu 甘肅 province, then turns south-eastwards, finally pouring into the Jing near to Jingchuan 涇川.¹⁸ This location also suggests that the Rui lineage was founded before or at about the time when Dan *fu* moved to the Zhou Plain. Therefore, the ruler of Rui who was involved in the “Yu-Rui case” was the leader of the eldest branch of the Ji-surnamed community, with which the Zhou lineage maintained relationships.



Map. Yu and Rui lineages and some of their neighbors

According to the principle of primogeniture, *wang ji*'s succession to Dan *fu* was legitimate only if the ruler of Yu willingly resigned, and in fact he possibly did so. The ruler of Rui, as the eldest living relative of Dan *fu*, could be called upon to approve this irregular succession. However, it is not certain whether the Zhou lineage practiced primogeniture before it started to claim kingship, and hence, there was quite possibly no problem at all. Yu and Rui could simply continue to support *wang ji*, as they had previously supported his father, because they mutually benefited from cooperation. And, later on, they also backed King Wen. This is why Yu, Rui and King Wen are mentioned in the final lines of the “Mian” before honorific exclamations praising close and distant relatives and allies.

¹⁸ See Chen Pan (1988: 364–367); Chen Chao-jung (forthcoming). A part of the present day Jing river between Jingchuan and Changwu was regarded as the lower flow of Rui. The source of Rui is located on the north-eastern slope of Zhaojiashan mountain in Gansu ca. 60 km to the north from Longxian. This is the same mountain where Qian river has its source.

Yu and Rui lineages in Western and Eastern Zhou history (ca. 1046/5–641 BCE)

Did then the ruler of Yu (unprofitably?) sell his birthright for “a bowl of bean stew”? Or did he manifest an unmatched virtue by “yielding” to *wang ji*? Confucius and his pupils admired (without fully approving) Yu *zhong* as a hermit who rejected political life in order to safeguard his purity, similar to such figures as *bo Yi* 伯夷 and *shu Qi* 叔齊 (*Lunyu* 8.8: 197). They by no means regarded him as a greedy “low man” occupied with petty quarrels, but as an exemplary selfless person. This alternative moralizing interpretation of the “Yu-Rui case” is likewise not realistic. The data in both transmitted texts and in bronze inscriptions from the Western Zhou period may help to reconstruct the historical background.

Qian river valley, where Yu was located, was an important trading route connecting present-day south-eastern Sichuan 四川 province with southern Gansu and further areas in northern China.¹⁹ Control of this route was a guaranteed source of income. If *Dan fu*'s elder sons seized this veritable goldmine, why should they abandon it for the ephemeral right to replace their father on the Zhou Plain? The Zhou Plain was sheltered by Mount Qi from the north. This provided security, but offered few opportunities for development. Only when King Wen conquered Chong 崇 and founded a settlement in Feng 豐 (the later Zongzhou 宗周) near present-day Xi'an 西安, did new chances for the Zhou people arise. But who could have anticipated this some fifty years earlier? Hence, in “yielding” to *wang ji*, *tai bo* and Yu *zhong* did not imagine that by doing so they were “yielding everything under Heaven” (see *Shiji* 31: 1475).

Rui river possibly served as one of the communication routes between the Qian river, where Yu was located, and the Jing valley.²⁰ The Jing river connected southern Gansu with the Central Plains. If Rui controlled the Rui river and the middle reaches of the Jing river during the 11th century BCE, it could accumulate considerable wealth. Although it is not clear whether Yu and Rui supported the Zhou lineage economically, they certainly contributed to its security because of their geographical situation.

Manifold evidence points to the fact that during the early Western Zhou period Yu and Rui occupied privileged positions vis-à-vis the Zhou royal lineage. The “Shi fu” chapter of the *Remnant Zhou Documents* (*Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書), which possibly represents the lost “Wu cheng” 武成 chapter of the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書), shows that the Lord of Yu was venerated as one of the royal ancestors (*lie zu* 烈祖; *Yi Zhou shu*: 213–214). The relations between the royal house and the Yu lineage continued to be very close afterwards. One of the early Zhou kings (supposedly King

¹⁹ For communication and exchange along the “border arc” extending from Sichuan in the south-west, through Qinghai 青海 and the Hexi 河西 corridor in Gansu, across parts of Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Inner Mongolia, to northern Hebei 河北 and Chifeng 赤峰 in Liaoning 遼寧 in the north-east, see Rawson (2013).

²⁰ Some features in the early bronzes from the tombs of Rui rulers confirm that Rui had connections to the Baoji area (Chen Chao-jung [forthcoming]).

Kang 康, r. ca. 1020–996 BCE) commanded Lord Yu/Ze of Yu (虞侯矢) to move to Yi 宜, a strategically important location near to the eastern royal residence Chengzhou 成周 in present-day Henan 河南 province (Huang 1983; Shaughnessy 1989: 15–18). Yu/Ze in the Qian valley continued to exist after Yu *Hou* Yu/Ze had moved to Yi. Yu rulers called themselves “King” (*wang* 王), and the Zhou kings obviously tolerated it. Yu kings intermarried with the Zhou aristocracy and there was also interaction between Yu and Zhou on other levels.²¹ It is not clear when exactly the Yu lineage founded a dependency in the south-western Shanxi 山西 province, but this probably happened before the end of the Western Zhou period. This eastern location remained the main seat of the Yu ruling lineage until 655 BCE, when Jin 晉 swallowed up its territory.

After the conquest of Shang, Rui *bo* 芮伯 (First-Born of Rui) held a privileged position at the court of King Cheng 成 (r. ca. 1042–1021), possibly owing to his ancient ancestry.²² Starting from the early Western Zhou period, Dukes of Rui pursued autonomous policies and made alliances with polities founded by non-Zhou peoples of south-western Shanxi (Chen Zhaorong 2012). On the edge of Western and Eastern Zhou, Rui dukes resided near to present-day Hancheng 韓城 in Shaanxi and thus controlled an important ford over the Yellow River. Their richly furnished tombs display the same standard of funeral honors as those paid to the contemporary rulers of Jin and Guo 虢 principalities.²³ At some point in time, Rui also founded a dependency in present-day Ruicheng 芮城 in south-western Shanxi. However, the main seat of Rui possibly remained close to Hancheng until it fell to the Qin 秦 principality in 641 BCE (*Shiji* 5: 189).

The loyalty of lineages that descended from Zhou rulers preceding King Wen and earlier common ancestors was an important factor for the strength of the Zhou royal house during the Western Zhou period. Besides the Yu and Rui, the Shao 召 and Guo 虢 lineages played a significant role in Zhou politics. Like the Zhou royal house, these lineages too founded dependencies in the east. These were set in strategically important locations, on major trade routes, and in the vicinity of the eastern royal residence Chengzhou. The possession of eastern dependencies enabled these lineages to survive after Quanrong 犬戎 invaded the Wei valley with the main royal residences Zhou and Zongzhou in 771 BCE. They played an important political role during the 8th and first half of the 7th centuries BCE, until the Guo, Yu and Rui were finally conquered by the Jin and Qin. Shao, however, persisted and continued to serve as the right hand of the Eastern Zhou kings.

²¹ See *Ze (Yu) wang ding gai* 矢 (虞) 王鼎蓋, early Western Zhou, *Jicheng* (2149); *Ze (Yu) wang gui gai* 矢 (虞) 王簋蓋, late Western Zhou, *Jicheng* (3871); *San shi pan* 散氏盤, Late Western Zhou, *Jicheng* (10176). Ironically, the subject of the *San shi pan* is a quarrel about fields between some men of Ze/Yu and San, in which the King of Ze/Yu acts as a higher authority (see Lau 1999: 334–345).

²² See “Gu ming” 顧命 in *Shangshu* (1936, 16: 479).

²³ See Shaanxi Sheng Kaogu Yanjiuyuan/Shanghai Bowuguan (2012) with further references.

Conclusions

The “Great Odes” of the *Book of Poetry* were certainly not products of spontaneous literary activity, but were commissioned by the Zhou royal house. They had not only religious, but also political relevance. Their wide distribution during the Spring and Autumn period was probably promoted by the royal court, striving to keep its leading position amidst increasingly independent principalities. Being short of economic and military resources, it attempted to assert itself by ideological means through spreading the official memory culture in an aesthetically attractive form.

A series of “Odes” praising early Zhou rulers aimed at providing unassailable legitimation for the superiority of the Zhou royal house both in the ritual and in the political sense. Given that other lineages descending from Dan *fu* or even from Dan *fu*’s own ancestors were still in place and possessed military power, it was indeed reasonable to recognize their contributions to the blossoming of Zhou in the “Odes” and in other official commemorative texts produced around the 9th to 7th centuries BCE. Stating that “the Yu and Rui guaranteed the success” of Dan *fu*’s enterprise of state building, the “Mian” expresses the deep indebtedness of the royal house to these highly respected lineages. This is also why King Wen is referred to in the “Mian” after and not before the Yu and Rui: he was not an arbiter but, in a certain sense, the very object of the agreement between them. His success derived from the support of Yu and Rui rulers, whom Western Han scholars erroneously or intentionally degraded to petty litigants.

Confucius and his followers suppressed the political concerns of the *Poetry* when they reinvented it as a general source for moral education. The shift in focus resulted in frequent misunderstanding, misreading and deliberate misinterpretation. The Yu-Rui case has particularly grave consequences, since Sima took a speculation as evidence and used it in his “Basic Records of Zhou”. This produced the illusion that King Wen accumulated authority by assuming the role of settler of disputes and judge. The present investigation reveals that such an idea was foreign to both Western and Eastern Zhou memorial culture.

Why did a topos associating King Wen’s authority with dispute settlement or jurisdiction emerge and become important during the 2nd century BCE? Judging from the wording of the commentaries on the “Mian”, it derives from the discourse between Confucians and so-called “Legalists” concerning either law or shame and disgrace as a means of social regulation. Possibly, it also has to do with the realities of the first century of the Western Han dynasty with its oppressive and rigid judicial system inherited from the Qin Empire, authoritarian activist emperors and manifold social conflicts that could not be resolved as easily as in King Wen’s imagined realm.

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