

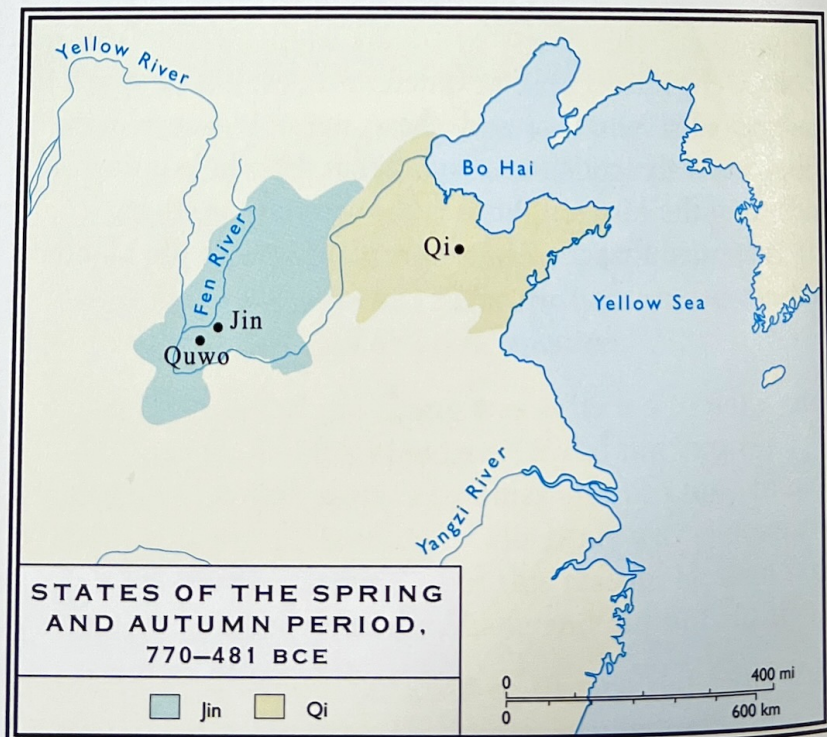
66 RECORD OF THE HISTORIAN, THE TRADITION OF ZUO, MASTER GUAN, AND ANALECTS

WHO'S IN CHARGE? THE RISE OF THE HEGEMONS

Wouldn't it be great to be a king during the Zhou dynasty? You would have a close relationship with both the gods and the spirits of your powerful dead ancestors. You would be the highest-ranking person in the entire land and nobody could tell you what to do. You would even have the stamp of approval from the gods—the Mandate of Heaven—that proved you were the rightful king. The perfect life, right?

Wrong. A king could lose the Mandate of Heaven, sometimes without warning. And although the king was on top of things, he had his lofty position only as long as he held the respect of the powerful military men who were right below him in the strict **hierarchy** that made up Zhou society. These lords supported the king with their soldiers and also gave him gifts—some symbolic of their allegiance,

A hierarchy is a system of ranking people or things. }



and some more practical. In exchange, the lords received the king's protection, both political and religious. But this relationship could crumble at any time, and then there would be trouble. Some of the lords had armies almost as large as the king's and they were accustomed to governing their own lands.

If a Zhou king was not a great leader and the lords lost respect for him, the king was in a shaky position. In the ninth century BCE, according to the *Record of the Historian*, a king named Li "acted cruelly and extravagantly. The people in the capital spoke of the king's faults." People probably spoke negatively of the king only in private, because in public, they were so terrified of him that they "dared not say a word, but only communicated by glances on the roads" for fear that one of his spies would catch them and they would be executed. This isn't the kind of behavior that would make the gods want to extend their Mandate for much longer.

So the kings' hold on power during the Eastern Zhou period (770–221 BCE) was not very firm. True, they belonged to the once-powerful Zhou dynasty, but unlike their ancestors, they weren't strong military leaders. Other states around the Zhou territory were quick to notice this lack of direction from the top, and the Zhou's subjects began to worry about invasion.

The situation became even more serious under the rule of King You. You (his name fit his personality—it means "in the dark") married a woman named Bao Si, the daughter of a nearby ruler. According to the *Record of the Historian*, "King You loved and doted on Bao Si." He pushed aside his first wife, the daughter of yet another ruler, and replaced her with the new one, declaring that the new wife's son would be his heir. Both of these acts were serious insults to his first wife and her family.

People knew that King You's actions would cause trouble. One of the king's officials said gloomily, "The calamity has taken form. There is nothing we can do about it." A rumor went around that Bao Si was not human at all, but was born from dragon spit.

66 Sima Qian, "Basic Annals,"
Record of the Historian, about
100 BCE

SPRING AND AUTUMN

During the Eastern Zhou period (770–221 BCE), the leaders of the Zhou dynasty ruled from a capital to the east of its original home. The first part of the era (770–481 BCE) is called the "Spring and Autumn" period, from the title of a history written during this period. The anonymous author of this history recorded important events by the seasons in which they occurred.

66 Sima Qian, "Basic Annals,"
Record of the Historian, about
100 BCE

The way the king behaved didn't improve matters. Once, someone thought that an enemy was attacking the capital. Sentinels lit signal lights to tell the lords to rush to defend the king—but there was no attack. These men looked foolish, galloping up with their armies, only to find there was nobody to fight. Bao Si was basically a sour-natured person, but at this sight, she burst out laughing. The king was so delighted to hear her rare laugh that he ordered the signal lights to be lit over and over, just to hear it again. The lords eventually stopped paying attention to the lights, and when they were lit in 771 BCE, everybody ignored them. But this time the attack was real, and King You was killed by invaders led by his first wife's father.

The capital was destroyed and some thought the dynasty would end. Instead, King You became the last king of the Western Zhou. The nobles helped his son, King Ping, establish a new capital in Luoyang, in the east, and he became the first king of the Eastern Zhou.

Over the next several decades, groups of people attacked states that had been loyal to the Zhou, and another royal family in the south was starting to act as if it wanted to take

**DYNASTIES
OF ANCIENT
CHINA**

1046–221 BCE
Zhou Dynasty

1046–777 BCE
Western Zhou

770–221 BCE
Eastern Zhou

770–481 BCE
Spring & Autumn
Period

480–222 BCE
Warring States Period

221–206 BCE
Qin Dynasty

206 BCE–220 CE
Han Dynasty



over. Someone needed to step in and pull the different states together. The lords looked to Duke Huan of Qi. Qi was an ancient and wealthy land with a strong army. Part of its region is mountainous, and part is on the eastern coast, at the edge of the Chinese world.

On the other side of Qi's borders lived non-Chinese people whom the Qi considered barbarians. Dukes who owed allegiance to the Zhou kings ruled this territory. When a disagreement arose over who should take over after a duke died in 686 BCE, a talented official named Guan Zhong supported Jiu, the late duke's oldest brother, against a younger brother, Huan.

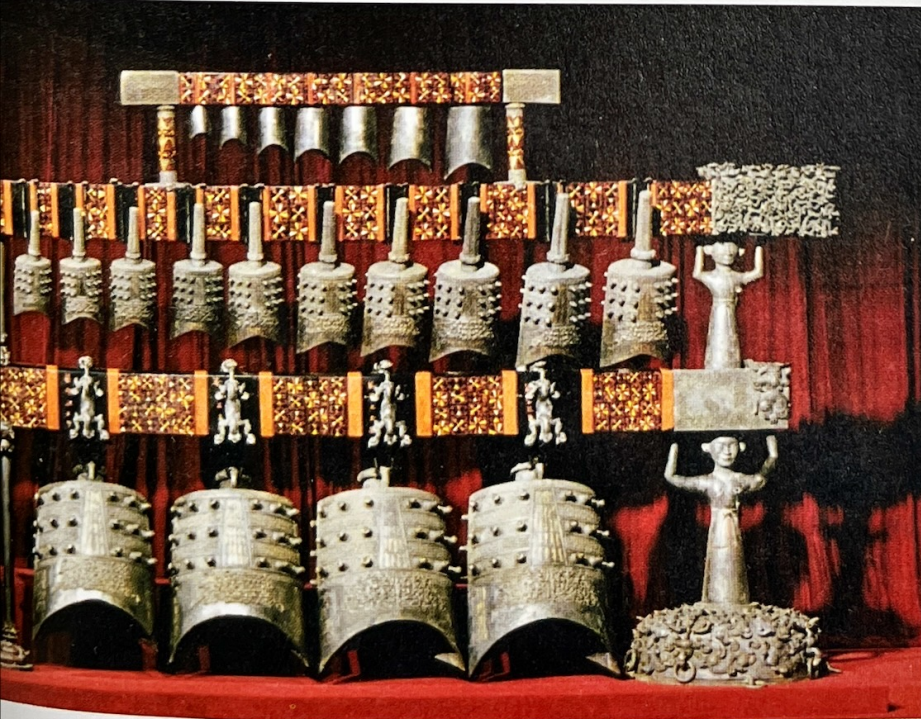
Taking sides like this was risky. If the person you supported won, everything was fine. But if he lost, he was usually killed and his supporters were supposed to commit suicide. Jiu lost, and he was executed by Huan's order. Everyone expected Guan Zhong to do the honorable thing and join his lord in death. But Guan shocked everyone when instead he turned himself in as a prisoner to Huan.

At first, Huan was furious at the man who had supported Jiu, saying, according to the *The Tradition of Zuo*, written in the late fourth century BCE, "Guan Zhong is my sworn

ONE IF BY LAND, TWO IF BY SEA

Since the Zhou states were constantly under the threat of attack, they set up an ingenious system of signal lights. They built towers close together so that sentinels in one tower could see the next. In case of attack, a watchman would light a flame. Guards in other towers would see the flame and light their own beacons, spreading the alarm.

“ Anonymous, *The Tradition of Zuo*, about 300 BCE



Creating a set of bronze bells that played in tune required the skill of a group of highly trained craftspeople. The Marquis of Zeng, in whose tomb these bells were found, was one of a handful of people wealthy enough to afford a complete set.

66 Anonymous, *The Tradition of Zuo*, about 300 BCE

66 Anonymous, *Master Guan*, written about 300 BCE but based on much older stories

霸 }
A hegemon is an overlord,
or *ba* in Chinese.

enemy. I want him so that I can personally get my hands on him.” And Huan had a personal reason for disliking this man: Guan had almost killed the duke in battle. The duke was saved only because Guan’s arrow hit Huan’s belt buckle. But one of Huan’s ministers told the duke, “Guan Zhong is better at government than Gao Xi [Huan’s former assistant]. You can use him as your minister.” The duke changed his mind about revenge and took on Guan as his most important assistant.

Almost everyone was astonished. Guan had supported Duke Huan’s enemy, so what made Huan think he could trust him? And at a time when men gained positions in the government through their noble birth, people were upset that Guan’s only claim to his important job was that he was good at it.

Also, according to the codes of honor of the time, Guan had acted disgracefully by not committing suicide when the man he supported was killed. He defended himself by saying he had acted in his country’s best interest. According to the third-century BCE book called *Master Guan*, Guan said, “It was because I wished to make the altars of Land and Grain [which stood for the state] secure that I did not die for Jiu.”

Duke Huan made Guan Zhong his honorary uncle. That way it was all right for the duke to give his assistant houses, villages, and other gifts that technically he should have given only to members of the nobility.

The duke and his “uncle” ran Qi’s government very efficiently. When fear of invasion made the states look for a military leader, they chose Huan. The person the lords chose to lead them during the crisis was called a “**hegemon**.” Huan took the position of hegemon in 680 BCE and held it for almost 40 years, long after the original threat had passed. This was the first of five times that the lords appointed someone from their own ranks to take charge.

Some sources say that Duke Huan called the leaders of the allied states together nine times to settle disputes and to make alliances with each other, and to renew their vows of loyalty to the king. Each meeting was a combination of a religious rite and a political gathering and was run strictly, with a great deal of ritual and ceremony. After all of the

leaders had agreed on what they were going to do, they ended with a solemn oath. Priests performed a sacrifice in a rectangular pit dug near the altar of the God of the Soil. The victim was usually an ox, although at least once, after Huan's rule had ended, a man was burned in the pit for arriving late at the meeting. They used the sacrificial victim's blood as ink to write their treaty, and then each of the leaders smeared the blood on his lips. This symbolized that their mouths had spoken truthfully.

Huan held his territory with a tight fist. He led the armies of his own state and those of his allies into battle. In fact, he was just like a king except that the Zhou king still had the religious powers that made him too important to ignore. All these duties made for a lot of work for one man. It was too much, in fact, and Duke Huan relied more and more on his right-hand man, Guan Zhong.

Later generations of Chinese had mixed opinions about Guan Zhong. Some criticized him for not killing himself when Prince Jiu died, for serving Duke Huan, who had ordered the death of his own brother, and for accepting what they considered inappropriate gifts from the duke. They also disapproved of his taking a high-ranking position in the government when he didn't belong to the social class that was supposed to fill that.

Others gave him credit for helping to keep Qi strong, and preventing people they despised as barbarians from taking over. The **philosopher** Confucius said in his *Analects* many years later: "Were it not for Guan Zhong, today we would be wearing our hair untied and would fasten our clothes on the left [like the barbarians]."

Even if some of them disapproved of Huan, many later Chinese writers admired this setup of a ruler assisted by an intelligent and hard-working assistant. But after the Spring and Autumn period, no one leader was strong enough to become a hegemon.



**WHAT A BARBARIAN—
HIS BUTTONS ARE ON
THE WRONG SIDE!**

Clothes and hairstyles help identify a person's culture and attitude. (This might have something to do with why parents sometimes object to the way their children dress and wear their hair.) A "civilized" ancient Chinese man had to wear his hair in a topknot and his clothes had to fasten on the right side, never the left.

A philosopher tries to understand the world and figure out what people should do to make society work smoothly. In China, a philosopher was someone with ideas about how individuals should act and how the ruler should govern his state.

“ Confucius, *Analects*, fifth century BCE