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The Study of Regicide in *Zuo Zhuan*

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Abstract

Zuo Zhuan (左傳), as an ancient Chinese chronicle with a complete narrative, records the complex political, military, and diplomatic events in the context of the social changes during the Spring and Autumn Period, and demonstrates the historical characteristics of the Spring and Autumn Period. Scholars have studied *Zuo Zhuan* at various levels, such as war, prophecy, dream depiction and characterisation. This paper selects a frequent phenomenon, regicide, in the Spring and Autumn Period. Through analysing the cause, process and result of the historical events, comparing the similarities and differences between the events, the paper concludes the characteristics, influence and revelation of the type of event "regicide".

In this paper, two representative groups of regicide are selected, namely, monarch within the state and bureaucrats, and study and analyse individual regicide, e.g., Zhou Xu of Wei, Chong Er of Jin, Cui Zhu of Qi, and Qing Fu of Lu, and analyse the similarities among them in order to summarise the common causes of regicide in the context of the era. Through the writing of this thesis, the description of regicide events in *Zuo Zhuan* will be studied in depth by combining macro and micro, historiography and literature, so as to delve deeper into the text of *Zuo Zhuan* and to have a systematic knowledge of the scattered historical events.

Key words: *Zuo Zhuan*, Regicide, Monarch, Bureaucrats, Systematic knowledge

摘要

《左傳》作為中國古代一部敘事完備的編年體史書，記錄了春秋時期社會大變革背景下錯綜複雜的政治、軍事、外交等諸多事件，展示了春秋時代的歷史特點。學者們對《左傳》有各種層面的研究，如：戰爭、預言、夢境描寫及人物形象塑造等等。本文選取春秋時代一種頻繁發生的現象——弑君，通過對歷史事件起因、經過、結果的分析，比較諸多事件之間的異同，歸納出「弑君」這一類型事件的特色、影響及啟示。

本文從總體弑君下，選取公室成員和卿大夫兩個具有代表性的群體種類，研究分析單個弑君事件，如衛國州吁，晉國重耳，齊國崔杼，魯國慶父，並分析其中的相似性，歸納時代背景下弑君共同原因。試圖通過本論文的撰寫，以宏觀和微觀、史學和文學相結合的方式，對《左傳》弑君事件描述作深入研究，更加深入《左傳》文本，對分散的歷史事件有系統的認知。

關鍵詞: 左傳，弑君，公室，卿大夫，系統認知

1. Introduction

This paper analyses regicide in *Zuo Zhuan* from five aspects, namely, pre-writing literature reading and research methodology, definition of "regicide", two representative classifications of regicide, analysis of the causes of regicide, and final conclusion.

2. Materials and Methods

Through reading the research reports and academic papers related to the topic of regicide in *Zuo Zhuan*, it is found that many of them focus on the analysis of the number of regicide events and the reasons for them, and the current research has certain results, but the overall analysis of the single regicide event and the analysis of the impact caused by it still needs to be deepened.

In analysing the regicide in *Zuo Zhuan*, reference is made to ancient materials such as *Gongyang Zhuan*, *Gu Liang Zhuan* and their relevant commentaries. Liu Zhiji's *Shi Tong* in the Tang Dynasty, Lu Zuqian's *Donglai Zuoshi Boyi* in the Song Dynasty, and Gao Shiqi's *Zuo Zhuan Ji Shi Ben Mo* in the Qing Dynasty have a lot of references in exploring the study of regicide in the Spring and Autumn Period in the perspective of historiography. Modern degree theses such as Bao Lingyu's *Study of Spring and Autumn Regicide* and Liu Peng's *Study of Spring and Autumn Regicide* are also of great reference value. Gu Donggao's *Spring and Autumn Table of Events*, which contains a volume of the *Spring and Autumn Table of Chaotic Thieves*, classifies regicides and argues that regicide "was not formed overnight, but for a long time". Ma Su's *Zuo Zhuan Shi Hui*, which contains the author's own unique insights after the narration of the internal turmoil of the vassal states, is an important reference work for us to understand and study the regicide in the Spring and Autumn period.

This paper adopts literature research method, classification and induction method, and comparative research method for research. Literature research method: with the help of network resources to collect and collate literature, periodicals, master and doctoral dissertations about regicide in *Zuo Zhuan*¹, on the basis of which we study and read, and collate relevant scholars' viewpoints. Classification and induction method: classify according to the country and identity level, select the representative regicide events in *Zuo Zhuan*, analyse the reasons for its formation and results, and present the characteristics of the description of regicide events. Comparative research method: comparing the differences between different regicide events,

¹ Hu Zhihui 胡志揮 and Chen kejong 陳克炯, *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (英譯) (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1996), p. 38.

analysing and researching their characteristics, which facilitates in-depth understanding of the description of regicide events in *Zuo Zhuan*. In this paper, we plan to combine the historical and literary perspectives of *Zuo Zhuan* to explore the regicide event in *Zuo Zhuan*.

3. Definition of Regicide

In the Preface to the Duke of Tai Shi, it is written, "In the Spring and Autumn period, there were thirty-six regicides." Since this statement does not point to a specific event, the scholarly community has been inconsistent, with 33, 36, 37 and other claims. Modern scholar Niu Hong'en's *"Thirty-six regicides and fifty-two ruined kingdoms" and refutation of the saying that Confucius' Spring and Autumn Period was not a 'classic' but a 'biography'*. The article lists 36 cases of regicide in the Spring and Autumn Annals and *Zuo Zhuan*. Chen Xuanlun's *Examination of Regicide in Zuo Zhuan* (左傳弑君考), on the other hand, concludes that there were 48 cases of regicide.

The former's views on the number of regicides in the Spring and Autumn Period are not uniform, and the most fundamental reason for this is the different definitions of "regicide". The definition adopted in this paper is as follows.

3.1. Interpretation of "Regicide 弑"

The interpretation of "regicide" was considered by Xu Shen of the Eastern Han Dynasty to be the killing of a sovereign by a subject. The word "regicide" and "kill" are often used in a confusing way in the scriptures and biographies. Duan Yucai, a scholar of the Qing Dynasty, believed that any killing of a sovereign by a subject could be called regicide.

However, the word "regicide" also includes a son killing his father. For example, *Mencius - Teng Wengongxia* (孟子·滕文公下) writes: "The world is in decline and the way is weak, and evils and atrocities are committed; there are ministers who regicide their sovereigns, and there are sons who kill their fathers."² The relationship between ruler and minister, and father and son, both possess the relationship of superiority, inferiority and superiority in status. From this we can see that the word "regicide" has the meaning of "violating the superior from below" and "violating the superior with the inferior". Therefore, in the case of regicide, the murderer and the monarch should have a relationship of superiority and inferiority.

² Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 203.

3.2. Interpretation of "Ruler 君"

"Ruler" is explained in Xu Shen's *Shuowen Jiezi* as "Ruler, honourable." Duan Yucai explains: from "Yin" means to govern; from "Mouth" means to issue orders. That is to say, "Ruler" has the meaning of governing the country and giving orders. The note of *"Rites of Passage - Funeral Clothing"* says: "The son of heaven, the vassals and the ministers and dukes who have land are all called kings."

From the above, we can see that a ruler must have land and subjects, and at the same time be able to give orders and govern his subjects. In this article, the "Ruler" in the regicide incident mainly refers to the ruler of the vassal state, but also includes the legitimate heir to the throne, i.e., the "Shizi 世子", and the person who has the fact of succeeding to the throne.

4. Classification of Regicide - represented by two categories

There are many types of regicides classified according to their status, and in this paper, the two main types of regicides chosen for analysis are the monarch within the state 公室 and the bureaucrats 卿大夫.

4.1. Monarch within the state 公室

4.1.1. Zhou Xu of the State of Wei

In the fourth year of the Duke of Wei's reign (719 BC), Zhou Xu of Wei killed Duke Huan, the first regicide recorded in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋. Zhuang Jiang, the wife of Duke Zhuang of Wei, was beautiful but childless. Duke Zhuang of Wei and Dai Fang gave birth to Duke Wan, who was favoured by Zhuang Jiang, and after the death of Duke Zhuang of Wei, he succeeded to the throne as Duke Huan of Wei. Both Zhou Xu and Duke Huan were the sons of Duke Zhuang, Duke Huan was the first son of a noble status, while Zhou Xu was the son of a favourite concubine, but he was greatly favoured by Duke Zhuang, and was not prohibited from enjoying armed activities. In the face of this state of affairs, Shi Que, a wise minister of Wei, advised Duke Zhuang that if he did not make Zhou Xu a crown prince, he should not be overly favoured.

In Shi Que's opinion, if he favoured Zhou Xu too much, he would surely be arrogant, and it would be difficult to restrain him, and once he was restrained, he would be resentful and

start a rebellion. Besides, Zhou Xu was lower in rank than Duke Huan³, younger in age, and more distant in relationship. Therefore, Shi Que thought that Duke Zhuang's failure to forbid Zhou Xu's preference for armed activities was an important cause of the disaster. This prediction of Shi Que was confirmed by the subsequent regicide of Duke Huan by Zhou Xu. The regicide took place in the early Spring and Autumn Period, when the patriarchal concept was still respected by the people, and the so-called "Six Obediences" were required by the patriarchal law and ritual system at that time. On the other hand, "six disobedience" is the typical manifestation of destroying the patriarchal law and etiquette. Zhou Xu's regicide undoubtedly had a certain degree of impact on the patriarchal system at that time. As to the end of Zhou Xu, Zong Zhong 眾仲 also predicted that "Zhou Xu, who had killed his king and abused his people, would not be able to avoid the chaos that he wanted to bring about, but would not be able to avoid it. Soon afterwards, Shi Que seized the opportunity of Zhou Xu's "failure to reconcile with his people", and with the cooperation of Chen, he conspired to kill Zhou Xu.

4.1.2. Chong Er of the State of Jin

In the statistics of "regicide", the *Zuo Zhuan* records that Duke Wen of Jin "killed Duke Huai of Jin in Gaoliang." Although Duke Huai of Jin, the successor of Duke Hui of Jin, became the Marquis of Jin, and was killed before he had a chance to update his reign name, he was considered a monarch because of his status as the ruler of the state of Jin. On the other hand, Duke Chong Er was only unofficially the ruler of the state, even though he was installed as the Marquis of Jin before killing Duke Huai. Therefore, Duke Chong Er's killing of Duke Huai of Jin belonged to the regicide incident discussed in this article.

It is written in *Zuo Zhuan* that Duke Chong Er of Jin was a wise man, and when he was in exile, he was followed by Hu Yan, Zhao Dun and other talented people, and when he went to Qi, Song and Chu, he was treated with courtesy. When he came to the state of Chu, LingYin Ziyu requested to kill Chong Er, but King Cheng of Chu said that Chong Er had good character and ability, and was favoured by heaven, so if he was killed, it would be against the will of heaven, and there would be trouble.

In the 23rd year of Duke Xi of Lu (BC637), he arrived at Qin in exile and returned to Jin with the support of Duke Mu of Qin. In the twenty-fourth year of Duke Xi of Lu (BC636),

³ Hu Zhihui 胡志揮 and Chen kejiong 陳克炯, *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (英譯) (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1996), p. 44.

according to the *Jin Shi Jia*, Duke Chong'er was installed as a marquis of Jin at Wugong. On the other hand, Duke Huai of Jin fled to Gaoliang State and was killed by Duke Wen of Jin soon after. The "unrighteousness" of Duke Huai of Jin contrasted sharply with the "righteousness" of Duke Wen of Jin. After Duke Huai of Jin was killed, Duke Mu of Qin helped Duke Wen of Jin to kill Lü's nephew and Xi Rui, former ministers of Duke Hui of Jin, who had rebelled against him, and at the same time sent 3,000 guards to be used by Jin for the purpose of suppressing the civil unrest in the country.

4.2. Bureaucrats 卿大夫

4.2.1. Cui Zhu of the State of Qi

Firstly, before the incident of Cui Zhu's regicide, the story of Cui Zhu's marrying of the beautiful Tang Jiang is recounted in detail, and he married her despite the prophecy of an evil omen. Next, her beauty also attracted Duke Zhuang of Qi, who went to Cui Zhu's home several times to fornicate with Tang Jiang, and Duke Zhuang of Qi insulted Cui Zhu by bringing Cui Zhu's hat and rewarding it to someone else, which had the meaning of abolishing Cui Zhu's post. As a result, Cui Zhu had a grudge against Duke Zhuang, and because Duke Zhuang did not agree with him in his previous crusade against Jin, Cui Zhu wanted to kill Duke Zhuang. After explaining in detail the reasons why Cui wanted to kill the king, he waited for the opportunity to kill the king, and in the 25th year of Duke Xiang of Lu's reign (BC 548), Cui took the opportunity of Duke Zhuang's banquet for the Ju Zi to carry out his plan of regicide.

The whole process of regicide is narrated without haste. Duke Zhuang found that Cui Zhu was not present and asked him where he was, but he went into the room with Tang Jiang and sang. Outside there was already a lot of killing, but inside there was still a mood to sing, an extremely incongruous rhythm until the door was closed, and only then did Duke Zhuang realise the seriousness of the matter. Duke Zhuang's pleas are more and more desperate, but all of them result in "no". He had to be humiliated when he was about to be killed. Later on, Cui Zhu appointed the younger brother of Duke Zhuang of Qi, Gongzi Chu Jiu, as Duke Jing of Qi.

When recounting the regicide incident, *Zuo Zhuan* also wrote about Duke Zhuang's improprieties as a monarch, which adds a perspective of discernment, which is exactly where *Zuo Zhuan* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* differ. The *Spring and Autumn* scripture values the ruler's point of view, and seeks to uphold the propriety between the ruler and his subjects, and to warn the rebellious officials. The *Zuo Zhuan*, on the other hand, as a history book, records history and serves as a mirror from which later monarchs can learn.

4.2.2. Qing Fu of the State of Lu

Duke Zi Ban was the son of Duke Zhuang, and Qing Fu, Shuya and Jiyou were the younger brothers of Duke Zhuang. When Duke Zhuang was seriously ill, he asked who was suitable to be the heir to the throne, and Shuya thought that Qing Fu had the talent, while Jiyou understood what Duke Zhuang was thinking and said he would work for Duke Ban, so he asked Zhenji to give Shuya poisoned wine, and Shuya drank the poisoned wine and killed himself, thus saving the Shusun clan.⁴

Although the characters' psychology is not explicitly stated in *Zuo Zhuan*, it leaves a lot of room for the reader to think. In addition, from the different answers given by Shuya and Jiyou, it can be seen that the system of succession to the throne of the state of Lu at that time was still relatively confusing: one could have a brother succeeding his brother, or a father dying and a son succeeding his son, so it was easy to have differences and conflicts.

When Ji You killed Shu Ya and installed Duke Zi Ban, Qing Fu was very unhappy with the failure of the struggle for the throne and instigated Zi like his enemies to kill Duke Zi Ban. However, Qing Fu did not set himself up as the ruler, but set up the son of Ai Jiang's sister Shujiang, i.e. Duke Min (閔公). From this circumstance, the nature of the regicide was that a powerful courtier took over the government. The *Zuo Zhuan*'s account of Qing Fu before his death is more situational than the *Shi Ji*'s. Duke Ziyu asked for a pardon for Gongzhong, but failed to do so, and came back crying. Gongzhong had not heard of him, but only heard Duke Ziyu's cries from a distance at the place of confinement and knew that it was not a good idea, and so he hanged himself. This state of mind, in which he did not hear his face but only his voice, and did not need to hear his face again to listen to his details, is also depicted in this self-talk.

The *Zuo Zhuan* uses the art of social contract narrative. The French structuralist Greimas proposes a social contract narrative model, whose core pattern is: social contract (prophecy) - test - contract rejoinder (fulfilment), and the *Zuo Zhuan* is a prophecy system that builds on complex, compelling moral patterns that are perceptible in actual human history." The basis for the construction of the social contract, i.e., the rites, virtues, and paths honoured by the authors of the *Zuo Zhuan*. The use of characters' words to foreshadow the end of personnel development and change is the most common mode of contract construction in the *Zuo Zhuan*.

⁴ Hu Zhihui 胡志揮 and Chen kejiong 陳克炯, *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (英譯) (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1996), p. 77.

5. Reasons for Regicide

5.1. Monarch within the state 公室

From the point of view of regicide of office members, their blood relationship with the reigning monarch belongs to brother, uncle and nephew, father and son, among which the number of regicide incidents of brother and uncle and nephew relationship is a bit more. Therefore, the power of the members of the office who dared to kill the king was stronger than that of the reigning monarch, and even some of the members of the office were supported by external forces, such as the killing of Duke Huai of Jin by Duke Chong Er of Jin, which was supported by the state of Qin, and so on.

Although there were many reasons for regicide by members of the office, such as the abolition of the position of "son of the king", favouring the son of the concubine, the growing power of the members of the office, the king's lack of justice, etc., the core problem was the seizure of the king's power. The main reason for the struggle for the power of the king was the destruction of the feudal system and the system of succession of the first-born son. The monarch's arbitrary abolition of the position of "the first-born son" or his excessive preference for the commoner's son, which undermined the system of succession of the first-born son, would lead to the occurrence of parricide. For example, Wei Zhou Yu killed Duke Huan of Wei, and Duke Chong Er of Jin killed Duke Huai of Jin. At the same time, because members of the office could in fact share political power, once a male son or a male grandson was stronger than the monarch, a redistribution of power was inevitable, which would ultimately lead to regicide and create a great threatening challenge.

5.2. Bureaucrats 卿大夫

The parricide of a bureaucrats came to a large extent from the exaltation of his power. During the Spring and Autumn Period, the decline of the offices of some of the vassal states gave the opportunity to the ministers to come to power. Once in power, the ministers would try to grow stronger and stronger, and then they would clash with the monarchs, and they might parricide the monarchs. The reasons for parricide of the sovereign by the chief ministers varied, such as the chief minister's monopoly of power, personal grudges between the chief minister and the sovereign, the sovereign's wrongdoing and the sanctioning of the sovereign, and the relationship between the states and the states, and so on. Among them, the monopoly of power by the chief ministers was a notable cause of parricide in the Spring and Autumn Period,

especially in the middle and late Spring and Autumn Periods, when the chief ministers continuously interfered in the power of the vassal states, which made the power of the monarchs gradually shift downwards. As selected in this article, Cui Zhu parricides Qi Zhuang Duke. It can be found that most of the ministers were stronger than the parricide, and the ministers had the power to kill the king, which was caused by the disadvantages of the feudal system. During the Western Zhou Dynasty, a patriarchal system was practised, with the Zhou Son of Heaven, the vassals and the Ministers and Dukes of State each owning their own land, subjects and armies. Therefore, in the Spring and Autumn Period, with the development of social productive forces, the comprehensive strength of the vassal states became stronger and stronger, even stronger than the Zhou royal family. At the same time, the ministers of the vassal states, by virtue of their own territories, subjects and armies, also became stronger than the rulers of the vassal states.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, a more detailed study of individual parricides, such as Zhou Xu of Wei, Chong Er of Jin, Cui Zhu of Qi, and Qing Fu of Lu, has been chosen to analyse the reasons for parricide in the context of the Spring and Autumn period, both in terms of monarch within the state and bureaucrats, in order to help to study the individual historical events in greater depth in the context of the period, to sum up their characteristics and commonalities, and to make the study of the text of the *Zuo Zhuan* more meaningful.

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