

THE FORMATION OF THE BA SYSTEM

The Eastern Zhou court, as reorganized by King Ping, was virtually a government in exile. King Ping defeated his rival for power with support from the states of Jin and Zheng, whose troops escorted him as he resettled at Chengzhou. The leadership of these two states, together with that of Lu, a state that had been founded at the beginning of the Western Zhou, was crucial for the survival of the new court.

The Leadership of Zheng

As mentioned in the preceding section, Zheng was a relatively new member of the eastern states. Its first ruler, Zheng Huan Gong (r. 806–771 B.C.), was a younger brother of King Xuan (r. 827–782 B.C.). Enfeoffed in 806 B.C., he established a state within the royal domain, near Huaxian 華縣, Shaanxi. While serving King You as a high minister at the royal court, he moved the state to a new eastern location, at present-day Zhengzhou 鄭州, Henan, also near the eastern capital. Thus, the house of Zheng, close cousins to the royal court, served as a vanguard for its move to the east. The intimate relationship between Zheng and the royal court is shown by the fact that for three generations Zheng rulers continuously served the court as *qingshi* 卿士, one of the two top-ranking ministers.

The strength of Zheng was due not only to its intimacy with the royal court, but also to the way in which its leaders had reclaimed a piece of territory in swampland surrounded by few existing states. It is recorded in the *Zuo zhuan* that the founders of Zheng arrived at this new site with a group of people who were itinerant merchants known as Shang 商 (probably descendants of the Shang people). Assisted by these Shang people, Zheng began to cultivate the reclaimed land.⁹ There were also non-Zhou people, the Man, Rong, and Di, living in the vicinity. Probably because of these adverse conditions, during the founders' reigns the Zheng people developed a pioneering spirit that the older eastern states lacked. In addition, as a relatively young state Zheng had not experienced the sort of continuous segmentation that was intrinsic to the process of feudalism, and so could mobilize its resources more easily than could the older states. In any event, Zheng was soon reckoned as one of the major powers supporting the Zhou court. Zheng Zhuang Gong 鄭莊公 (r. 743–701 B.C.), the third ruler of the state, was especially active in royal politics. He defeated Rong intruders and,

⁹ *Zuo zhuan*, 47 (Zhao 16), 19a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 664).

in the name of the royal court, led an allied force against states that refused to submit.¹⁰

Although Zhuang Gong successfully defended the royal court, his forceful assaults against other Zhou states and Rong people constituted unprecedented behavior toward fellow members of the Zhou polity. The arrogance of Zhuang Gong seems to have caused King Ping to feel threatened. The king appointed a noble of the state of Guo 虢, also located near the Zhou capital, at present-day Sanmenxia 三門峽, Henan, to be another high minister to balance Zheng's dominance. When an enraged Zhuang Gong demanded an explanation, to mollify him the king sent one of his own sons as hostage to Zheng in exchange for Zhuang Gong's heir apparent. For the king and a vassal to exchange hostages in this way was again an unprecedented breach of feudal ethics.¹¹

The relationship between Zheng and the royal court worsened after King Ping's death. When King Huan (r. 719–697 B.C.) appointed another lord of Guo as chief minister, Zheng Zhuang Gong raided crops in the fields of the royal domain. In 707 B.C., King Huan mobilized troops of Chen, Wey, and Cai to attack Zheng. The result of this armed encounter proved to be an embarrassment to the royal court, its army suffering defeat and the king himself being wounded in the shoulder by an arrow. This represented more than just a physical wound; it meant that the Zhou king's status as Son of Heaven was now discredited. The court continued to exist for several more centuries; however, after this conflict between Zhou and Zheng, the authority of the Zhou king was no longer taken seriously; thereafter, the Zhou king merely served as nominal head of the Zhou feudal system.¹²

Zheng thus assumed leadership among the Zhou states. Although the title of *Ba* 霸 (lit. the senior one) had not yet been established, Zheng Zhuang Gong was the first to obtain the status of leader of the interstate community. In this role, Zheng led allied states in attacking other states that challenged Zheng's leadership, which after a number of victories, was recognized by virtually all the Zhou states in the north, including Qi, Lu, Song, and Wey. The death of Zhuang Gong in 701 B.C. triggered a succession struggle between his two sons. Other states, especially Song, also became involved in the struggle between these two sons – a civil war that lasted for two decades and resulted in the end of Zheng's leadership.¹³

¹⁰ E.g., *Zuo zhuan*, 4 (Yin 10), 16b–17a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 29–30).

¹¹ *Zuo zhuan*, 3 (Yin 3), 5a–6a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 13).

¹² *Zuo zhuan*, 6 (Huan 5), 9b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 45–6).

¹³ *Zuo Zhuan*, 9 (Zhuang 14), 8a–9b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 92).

The Leadership of Qi

Zhuang Gong's leadership was too short-lived to give any real structure to the *ba* system. It was in the later hands of Qi Huan Gong 齊桓公 (r. 685–643 B.C.) and Jin Wen Gong 晉文公 (r. 636–628 B.C.) that this system was gradually institutionalized. For decades, there had been no obvious leadership among the Zhou states. The royal court had little authority, while states, both large and small, faced turmoil. Taking advantage of the disunity of the Zhou states, the non-Zhou groups, various kinds of Rong and Di people, intruded on the weaker Zhou states. Meanwhile, the state of Chu, a new power in the south, rose to pose an even greater threat to the Zhou world in the Yellow River valley.¹⁴

Subsequently, Qi Huan Gong developed a new kind of hegemony in answer to the need for leadership. Qi had an important background. When the Zhou had risen to power in the Wei 渭 River valley, their closest alliance was with the Jiang 姜 people, probably natives of the loess highland in the present provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu, frequently intermarrying with them. At the time of the Zhou conquest of Shang, Jiang Shang 姜尚, leader of the Jiang, led the Zhou army. After Zhou successfully conquered the east, the Jiang people shared in the victory by being able to establish several vassal states. Qi was one of these states, established by Jiang Shang himself.

Qi was located on the Shandong peninsula at a strategic spot controlling the non-Zhou groups in the eastern coastal region as well as all north-south communication. It was a neighbor of Lu, which had been established by a son of Zhou Gong, one of the founding fathers of the Zhou dynasty. Support from Qi and Lu was always crucial for the Zhou feudal order in the east. This was especially so during the Eastern Zhou, when Qi became an even more important polity. Even during the early reigns of the Eastern Zhou, when Zheng dominated the scene, Qi was regarded as being too powerful for Zheng to offend. Qi took an active role in campaigns organized, or at least nominally led, by the royal court. However, it was not until the influence of Zheng began to decline that Qi became the primary leader in the politics of the Zhou states.

Qi's ascendance to the *Ba* overlordship was due to a combination of several factors. Its territory was extensive as a result of having annexed a number of lesser neighboring states. Its location at a major trade route junction gave it the opportunity to profit from interstate trade. Its Shandong coastal salt flats provided it with a very important resource, and it also gathered wealth from

¹⁴ E.g., *Zuo zhuan*, 8 (Zhuang 10), 24a, b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 86–7); 11 (Min 1) 1b (ibid., p. 124).

fishing and textile production.¹⁵ Being located on the eastern frontier also gave Qi ample space to expand beyond the Zhou world. Various kinds of Rong, Di, and Yi peoples that had long maintained cultural and political independence were absorbed by Qi. This potential for growth did not exist for such states of the Central Plain as Cai, Wei, Song, and Zheng. As a result, Qi became the first power to become *Ba*.

Qi Huan Gong and his advisor Guan Zhong 管仲 (ca. 730–645 B.C.) jointly brought Qi to an unprecedented status of leadership in the entire Zhou world.¹⁶ What they managed to achieve was not necessarily due to the above mentioned favorable conditions; it was due more to their success in reorganizing the state of Qi and in their clear definition of the mission of the *Ba*.

Reorganization of the state of Qi was probably the first of numerous reform efforts that occurred in the Spring and Autumn and in the Warring States periods. Vassal states of Zhou feudalism had been organized hierarchically in a social pyramid, in which each level represented a member of the nobility who managed his own inherited fief. A ruler of the state could call on subordinates to contribute a certain portion of the resources that they controlled. In addition, aristocrats were related to each other by a kinship network, the ruling house representing the stem of this network and exercising patriarchal authority. Theoretically, all noblemen were vassals of the king. The reform led by Guan Zhong changed this feudal structure drastically.

The state of Qi was divided into fifteen units termed *xiang* 鄉,¹⁷ the lord of the state and his two senior ministers, each commanding five units. Traders and artisans in the state capital who were not required to render military service were divided into six units. In the capital region, the *guo ren* (people of the state) and *ye ren* (people in the field) were each divided into four levels of administration. In both cases, civil and military functions were united in one level, the administrators of which reported to their direct superiors and eventually to the ruler. The performance of officers at all levels was judged, as well as rewarded or punished accordingly.¹⁸ If our sources are dependable, this administrative structure should have provided Qi with the capability to mobilize human and material resources more effectively than other Zhou states, which remained loosely structured.

The mission of the *ba* system came to be defined by historical events. For

¹⁵ Wang Gesen and Tang Zhiqing, *Qi guo shi* (Ji'nan: Shandong Renmin, 1992), pp. 174–8; also, *Shi ji* 32, pp. 1477–94.

¹⁶ For the question of Guan Zhong's role, see Sydney Rosen, "In Search of the Historical Kuan Chung," *JAS* 35, 3 (1975): 431–40.

¹⁷ *Xiang* demarcated territorial jurisdictions without reference to ownership or hereditary tenure.

¹⁸ Wang Gesen and Tang Zhiqing, *Qi guo shi*, pp. 182–4; *Guo yu*, 6 ("Qi yu"), 4a–6b.

various reasons, the Zhou states were either indebted to Qi for its assistance or were subjugated by it in military engagements. One state after another fell into line, becoming followers of Qi. In 667 B.C., Huan Gong convened the rulers of Lu, Song, Chen, and Zheng for a conference in which he was elected leader of these Zhou states. Subsequently, King Hui of Zhou (r. 676–652 B.C.), who had recently put down a challenge to his rule by his own brother, dispatched a high-ranking minister to Qi to confer on Huan Gong the title of *Ba* and the privilege of undertaking military actions on behalf of the royal court. The very first assignment was to launch a campaign in 671 B.C. against Wey, which had assisted King Hui's brother in his challenge to the king. This marked the official recognition of Qi's status as *Ba*.¹⁹ Subsequently, Qi intervened in a power struggle in Lu, effectively establishing its leadership credibility. In a series of actions, Huan Gong seems to have clarified the mission of the *Ba*; it was by no means intended to be sheer hegemony through military might, but rather to restore the authority of the Son of Heaven. In other words, the *Ba* was supposed to serve the function of guardian of the Zhou feudal system.

Meanwhile, the non-Zhou peoples posed a serious threat to the security of the Zhou world. In the north, several confrontations occurred almost at the same time. The Rong tribes in the highland regions of northern and eastern Hebei attacked the state of Yan (located near present-day Beijing). In 664 B.C., Qi and Lu planned to help Yan. However, afraid of the strength of the Rong, Lu backed out. Huan Gong nevertheless sent troops deep into the mountains to launch attacks on the Rong, and Yan was saved.²⁰

Among the Di in the north, the Chi Di were the strongest. In 662 B.C., they invaded the state of Xing 邢, located in the central part of Hebei. Guan Zhong insisted that Qi should give military aid to Xing for the sake of solidarity among the Hua Xia world. In 659 B.C., Xing collapsed under an assault by the Di. Huan Gong led Qi troops, as well as troops from Song and Cao, to the rescue, driving the Di away. No sooner was victory declared than Huan Gong escorted the Xing people to a safe area where a new city was built for them with provisions supplied by Qi. A Qi garrison unit was stationed in Xing to protect it from further Di intrusions.

When in 660 B.C. the Chi Di also attacked Wey, killing the Wey ruler and occupying the capital city, Huan Gong again led Qi troops to reestablish Wey, bringing a few thousand of the Wey refugees to settle at a new site. One of the sons of the deceased ruler of Wey was then authorized to rule the

¹⁹ *Zuo zhuan*, 10 (Zhuang 27), 11b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 112).

²⁰ *Zuo zhuan*, 10 (Zhuang 30), 18b–19a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 117–18); *Shi ji* 32, p. 1488.

restored state, while a Qi detachment was stationed there to provide protection until it regained the capacity for self-defense.²¹

The successful rescue and restoration of these three Zhou states established Huan Gong's credibility as leader of the Zhou world. Huan Gong next needed to stop the expansion of Chu. Chu was a giant state in the Yangzi valley where over a few centuries numerous southern non-Zhou people had gradually formed political entities. The Zhou court had tried to stretch its influence into the south without any sustained success. Near the end of the Western Zhou, Chu emerged as a significant power. In 706 B.C., a Chu leader attacked Sui 隨 (in the northern part of Hubei) and adopted the title of king, which was supposedly a perquisite of the Zhou royal house. This is the first time that Chu showed such ambitions.²²

Within two generations, Chu expanded northward by annexing territories of the non-Zhou peoples in the Huai River valley, as well as several minor Zhou states in the Han River valley. Chu's threat to the Zhou world appeared serious, as the states in the southern part of the Central Plain, such as Zheng, often fell victim to its northward movement. Qi therefore had to take action to curb Chu's expansion. In 656 B.C., Huan Gong led an allied force of eight states on campaign against Cai, which had been forced by Chu to become its satellite. Cai fell and Chu was compelled to attend an interstate conference at Shaoling 召陵 called by Huan Gong. This was the first such compulsory meeting attended by heads of state or their most prominent nobles at which the presiding state was the *Ba*, de facto leader of the interstate community. Huan Gong had set a precedent for *Ba* politics.²³

Interstate Meetings

The Shaoling conference was followed by several other interstate meetings convened by Huan Gong, some of which were for military actions, while others were for reconfirming the existence of the interstate order. Nominally, the Zhou royal court sent a high-ranking official to supervise these conferences, and both Huan Gong and Guan Zhong paid due respect to the royal envoys, as well as to the royal decrees. By such means, Qi demonstrated its determination to restore royal authority. Moreover, at these conferences the attending delegates usually swore their support for the Zhou feudal structure

²¹ *Zuo zhuan*, 11 (Min 1), 9a-11a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 129-30).

²² *Zuo zhuan*, 6 (Huan 6), 16b-20b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 48-9). For recent scholarship on Chu studies, see Barry B. Blakeley, "Recent Developments in Chu Studies: A Bibliographical and Institutional Overview," *EC* 11-12 (1985-7): 371-87, 446; and for the early development of Chu, Barry B. Blakeley, "In Search of Danyang I: Historical Geography and Archaeological Sites," *EC* 13 (1988): 116-52.

²³ *Zuo zhuan*, 12 (Xi 4), 10b-13a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 140-2).

as spelled out in formal agreements. In an agreement signed in 657 B.C., Huan Gong had urged the allies: "Let there be no damming of irrigation water, no withholding sales of grain, no changes of heir apparents, no promoting of concubines to replace wives, and no involvement of women in state affairs."²⁴

An agreement adopted at Kuiqiu 葵丘 in 651 B.C., recorded in the *Mencius*, stipulates five items:

First, slay the unfilial; change not the one who has been appointed heir; exalt not a concubine to be the wife. Second, honor the worthy and maintain the talented to give distinction to the virtuous. Third, respect the old, and be kind to the young; be not forgetful of strangers and travelers. Fourth, let not office be hereditary, nor let officers simultaneously hold more than one office, and in the selection of officers let the object be to get the proper men, and let not a ruler take onto himself to put to death a great officer. Fifth, make no crooked embankments, and impose no restriction on the sale of grain, and let no boundary markers [be] set without announcement.²⁵

Three of these items seem to concern household affairs and the general principle of appointment of worthy and capable people. However, in Zhou feudalism patriarchy was an integral element of the state's structure; for this reason, it appeared relevant to maintain order within the households of the various ruling states. Two items related to the role of officials and to the prevention of hereditary tenure of positions; these should be regarded as a new trend breaking away from the feudal tradition of hereditary government positions. The restrictions against irrigation, hoarding grain, and establishing new borders were measures that guaranteed interstate cooperation and mutual respect of boundaries. In short, Huan Gong used his *Ba* leadership to set up a new order for an interstate community that was to be guarded by consensus rather than authority. As for actual deeds, Huan Gong repeatedly fended off invasions of non-Zhou peoples against Zhou states and settled succession disputes in the royal house, as well as in the important Zhou states of Jin and Wey.²⁶ For more than forty years, he brought order to the Zhou world and halted the expansion of the non-Zhou peoples, both the Rong and Di in the north and the newly emerging Chu in the south. This was a new kind of political unification, a system of interstate community.

In 645 B.C., Guan Zhong died. An ageing Huan Gong, having lost his major advisor, failed to keep his own state in order. In 643 B.C., he died. Five of his sons contended to succeed him; Qi's status as *Ba* thus came to an end.²⁷

²⁴ *Chunqiu Guliang zhuan*, 8 (Xi 9), 8.5b-6a.

²⁵ *Mencius*, 6/2 (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 2: *The Works of Mencius*, p. 437); see also, Hsu, *Ancient China in Transition*, p. 54.

²⁶ Wang Geshen and Tang Zhiqing, *Qi guo shi*, pp. 215-18.

²⁷ *Zuo zhuan*, 14 (Xi 17), 18a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 173).

The Leadership of Jin

After the death of Qi Huan Gong, his son Qi Xiao Gong 孝公 (r. 642–633 B.C.) and Song Xiang Gong 宋襄公 (r. 650–637 B.C.) attempted to claim the *Ba* leadership. Both failed. The new leadership was soon established by Jin Wen Gong (r. 636–628 B.C.); Jin leadership was to last for three generations. Under the leadership of Jin the stage of interstate activities extended beyond the Central Plain to include peripheral areas such as Qin and Chu. This was a continuation of the earlier extensions, Zheng's domination of the heartland of the Central Plain, and then Qi's even wider influence. It is yet another step in the process by which individual ethnic and cultural entities joined to form a common Chinese community.

Jin was founded by Tangshu Yu 唐叔虞, a son of King Wu of Zhou (r. 1049/45–1043 B.C.), at the beginning of the dynasty. Jin was originally located in the southern part of Shanxi, on the north side of the Yellow River from the Zhou eastern capital of Chengzhou. It was included among the Zhou vassal states in order to shield the Zhou eastern capital from northern threats. Indeed, Tangshu Yu brought Zhou troops and several lineages of surrendered Shang people to Jin, while the native populations were mainly the remains of the old nations of Xia, which according to tradition was the first of the Three Dynasties. Jin also had within its territory some Rong peoples related to other Rong active in the mountain areas to the north. Therefore, when Jin was established, instructions were given to Tangshu Yu to use Jin's laws and administrative regulations to integrate the customs of the Xia and the Rong.²⁸

The state of Jin fulfilled its function quite well. With the collapse of Western Zhou, Jin joined Zheng and other states to help King Ping in the succession crisis and to set up the new court in the east. Ironically, Jin itself soon suffered from succession struggles. In 746 B.C., Jin, needing to guard against possible disturbances from the Rong people, established a subsidiary state at Quwo 曲沃, a strategic spot north of the Jin capital. This Quwo branch rapidly developed into a power center that challenged Jin's own authority. After prolonged struggles, the Quwo branch replaced the original house of Jin, with Wu Gong 武公 of Quwo (r. 715–677 B.C.) being recognized by the royal court as duke of Jin in 678 B.C.²⁹

This change in the Jin ruling house coincided with a more profound change in its state structure. During the reign of Jin Xian Gong 晉獻公

²⁸ *Zuo zhuan*, 54 (Ding 4), 19a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 754–5).

²⁹ *Shi ji*, 39, pp. 1635–9; Li Mengcun and Chang Jincang, *Jin guo shi gangyao* (Taiyuan: Shanxi Renmin, 1988), pp. 17–19. For archaeological excavations of early Jin sites, see Zou Heng, "Lun zaoqi Jin du," *Wenwu* 1994.1: 29–34.

(c. 676–651 B.C.), the lord plotted to extinguish all powerful scions of the former rulers. This meant that Jin would not need to bear the burden of distributing its resources among members of the ruling house, an unprecedented break from the Zhou feudalism that required overlapping lineage segmentation.³⁰

Served by capable assistants who were not members of the ruling house, Xian Gong gathered unchallenged power with which he conquered no fewer than sixteen small states located in present-day Shanxi. A number of Rong and Di peoples were also absorbed by Jin. Jin's territory and population expanded to such an extent that it became many times more powerful than it had been formerly.³¹

The death of Xian Gong triggered a succession struggle among his sons. Jin's western neighbor Qin was deeply involved in similar struggles. Within a century of the departure of the Western Zhou court from the Wei River valley, Qin had gradually taken control of it and organized a state with a multiethnic, multicultural population. However, at this time Qin did not participate in interstate activities. Like Jin, Qin was also located in a peripheral area with ample space to expand, and perhaps even more so than Jin, was unrestricted by a traditional background. As such, it constituted an inhibiting factor against the rise of Jin. Conflicts between the two created two highly militarized states. They both emerged as formidable powers in the Zhou world.³²

By the mid-seventh century B.C., the Zhou world was dominated by four powers: Qi, Jin, Qin, and Chu. All four of these powers were located in the peripheries, while those states in the Central Plain, such as Zheng, Song, Lu, and Wey, were becoming ever less important in interstate politics. Among the four major players, Jin and Chu played the central roles on this historical state for the next two centuries.

The *ba* system organized by Jin Wen Gong 晉文公 (c. 636–628 B.C.) was an important milestone in the history of that period. Wen Gong was a son of Xian Gong, who had already consolidated Jin into a strong state. As already mentioned, after Xian Gong's death Jin was once again faced with a succession struggle. Wen Gong was in exile while his rivals ruled in his absence. After nineteen years of drifting from state to state, Wen Gong returned home to take over the then exhausted state of Jin.

Assisted by a group of extraordinarily capable followers, Wen Gong almost

³⁰ *Zuo zhuan*, 10 (Zhuang 23), 2b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 106); 10 (Zhuang 24), 5b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 108); 10 (Zhuang 25), 8b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 110); 21 (Xuan 2), 12b–13a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 291).

³¹ Li Mengcun and Chang Jincang, *Jin guo shi gangyao*, pp. 23–5.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 26–33.

immediately brought stability to Jin. In 635 B.C., King Xiang of Zhou (r. 651–619 B.C.) was challenged by his brother Zhao 朝 and fled from the capital. The exiled king requested help from Jin and Qin. Jin Wen Gong promptly responded to the royal call. Having declined assistance offered by Qin, he sent troops to escort the king back to the capital. To mark his gratitude, King Xiang bestowed upon Jin several territories in the vicinity of the royal capital. Thus, Jin gained not only prestige but also a foothold in the core of the Central Plain.³³

The Emergence of Chu

For almost a decade after the death of Qi Huan Gong (643 B.C.), there was no recognized leader among the Zhou states. Not checked by effective resistance that any such leader might offer, Chu moved farther north. Its immediate targets were Song and Zheng, whose exposure on the southern edge of the Central Plain made them easy prey for Chu encroachment.

The first confrontation between Jin and Chu took place in 633 B.C., when Song was besieged by a Chu army. Jin took immediate action, expanding the number of its armies to three. Instead of sending reinforcements directly to relieve Song from its siege, Jin's forces went to attack Cao and Wei, both of which by then were satellite states of Chu. In 632 B.C., Jin led 700 of its own war chariots and was joined by troops from Qi, Qin, and Song, confronting Chu at Chengpu 城濮, where it won a decisive victory.³⁴

Not only did Jin's victory in this battle curb Chu's northward expansion, but its contribution to the protection of the Zhou world was duly recognized. Shortly after the battle was won, Wen Gong presided at an interstate conference at Jiantu 踐土. Rulers of seven states as well as King Xiang of Zhou himself attended the meeting. Jin led the lords in affirming their loyalty to the royal authority; in turn, the king conferred on Wen Gong the status of *Ba*.³⁵

Although Chu was defeated at the battle of Chengpu, it did not lose its formidable strength, nor did it give up efforts to invade the north. The pattern of Jin–Chu confrontation was one of precarious balance. Those Zhou states located along the southern front of the Central Plain were constantly under pressure from both Jin and Chu, turning the area into a battleground.

³³ *Zuo zhuan*, 15 (Xi 23–4), 8a–24b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 1186–7, 190–3); 16 (Xi 25), 1b–6a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 195–6).

³⁴ *Zuo zhuan*, 15 (Xi 23), 7b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 187); 15 (Xi 24), 23b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 193); 16 (Xi 26), 8a, b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 199).

³⁵ *Zuo zhuan*, 16 (Xi 27), 10a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 201–202); 16 (Xi 28), 19a–27a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 207–11).

After Wen Gong died in 628 B.C., Chu once again gained the upper hand, defeating Jin at Mi 郕 in 598 B.C.³⁶

To maintain its status as *ba*, Jin needed to keep the northern states in line, but Qin and Qi, both being strong powers, sometimes challenged Jin's leadership. By this point the interstate power struggle had become a four-sided affair. Immediately after the death of Jin Wen Gong, Qin attacked Zheng, a close ally of Jin. Qin's army was ambushed and defeated by Jin forces in 627 B.C., and then Qin was invaded by Jin in 625 B.C. In 624, Qin sought revenge, forcing Jin to retreat.³⁷

For some time thereafter, a stalemate ensued on Jin's western front. In the east, Qi was also trying to regain its influence. In 589 B.C., Jin defeated Qi, which had invaded Lu and Wey.³⁸ Since Chu was too strong to be defeated outright, Jin adopted a new strategy, grooming the southern state of Wu, located in the lower reaches of the Yangzi River, to be an ally in Chu's rear. Chu subsequently had to fight simultaneously on two fronts.³⁹

Caught in this struggle among the four states, in 580 B.C. Jin Li Gong 晉厲公 (r. 580–573 B.C.) restored good relations with Qi and Qin, so that the northern states were temporarily united to face the Chu threat. The state of Song, however, long exhausted by the constant conflicts between Jin and Chu, sought peace among the contending powers. In 579 B.C., a minister of Song arranged a conference for Jin, Chu, Qi, Qin, and others to declare a truce. The four powers also agreed to limit their military strength, thus providing one of the earliest records in history of interstate disarmament.⁴⁰

Just as with other disarmaments in history, peace did not last long. Skirmishes between Chu and the northern states in 575 B.C. escalated into another large-scale confrontation, with Jin and its allies defeating Chu at Yanling 鄢陵 in 574 B.C.⁴¹ An arrogant and over-confident Li Gong attempted to get rid of some of his powerful ministers. However, he was killed in a coup d'état in 574 B.C., being succeeded by Dao Gong 悼公 (r. 572–558 B.C.). During Dao Gong's reign, not only did Jin restore internal peace, but it also managed to regain the respect of the other states. This was due both to political reforms that enlisted the services of the best talents of Jin and especially to his policy

³⁶ *Zuo zhuan*, 23 (Xuan 1), 15a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 310); 23 (Xuan 12) 3b–22a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 316–21).

³⁷ *Zuo zhuan*, 17 (Xi 32, 33), 10b–16b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 221, 224–5); 18 (Wen 2, 3), 10a (ibid., p. 233), 18.19a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 236–7).

³⁸ *Zuo zhuan*, 25 (Wen 2), 8b–16b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 344–6).

³⁹ *Zuo zhuan*, 26 (Cheng 7), 16a–17b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 363–4).

⁴⁰ *Zuo zhuan*, 27 (Cheng 12), 5a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 378–9).

⁴¹ *Zuo zhuan*, 28 (Cheng 16, 17), 3b–14a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 395–8).

of pacifying the Rong people, through which Jin gained both internal stability and also the Rong land and population.⁴² With this, Dao Gong was recognized as *Ba*.

A MULTISTATE SYSTEM

By the sixth century B.C., ancient China had gradually developed a multi-state system. The four major powers, Jin, Chu, Qi, and Qin, had each acquired a sphere of domination, while the status of the Zhou royal house had become even further reduced. Both Jin and Chu realized that they had to coexist with the other powers, especially Qi and Qin in the east and west, respectively. Thus, the claim of dependence on a *Ba* to hold the Zhou states together was no longer meaningful. Even the cultural identity claimed by the Zhou against the non-Zhou was no longer convincing, since the process of assimilation had blurred such distinctions; each of the contending states had incorporated among its population various ethnic and cultural groups; for example, Jin had expanded to include Rong and Di lands, while Chu gained several satellites that were former Zhou states, such as Cai and Sui.

A Balance of Power

These developments had a profound impact on the last century of the Spring and Autumn period. Once again it was the states of Zheng and Song in the Central Plain that initiated a new type of interstate alignment. The ministers of these two states lamented that their locations made them vulnerable, caught in the midst of the seesaw struggles between Jin and Chu. Zheng especially suffered from the repeated wars.⁴³

Song Xu 宋戌, a minister of Song, persuaded the prime ministers of Jin and Chu to hold an interstate peace conference. With their consent, Song Xu invited them, as well as ministers of Qi, Qin, and other states, to meet at Shangqiu 商丘 in 546 B.C. The peace agreement they reached provided that the various satellite states of Jin and Chu should pay court visits to these two powers; Qi and Qin were not to be held to this obligation because they were independent powers. In fact, Qi and Qin each claimed a few neighboring states as being within their own spheres of influence. For each of these major powers, there was to be a limit on the number of their war chariots.

⁴² *Zuo zhuan*, 28 (Cheng 17), 23b-26b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 404-406); 29 (Xiang 3), 29.12a-14b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 420).

⁴³ *Zuo zhuan*, 22 (Xuan 11), 115b-16b (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, p. 310); 30 (Xiang 9), 28a-33a (Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pp. 440-1).