Narrative Agency

Among the many ways to approach narrative in early China, narrative agency has been largely unexamined: who or what is responsible for events and how taking responsibility for events shapes narrative as a whole. The precise chronology of the surviving texts is uncertain. The *Zuo Tradition* is likely to be the earliest fully elaborated body of narrative, though its precise date remains in dispute (Loewe 69-71). At the very least we can say that narrative in the *Zuo Tradition* is strikingly different from other texts that we tentatively date to the late Warring States or confidently date to the Western Han. Some of those differences follow from the special ethical mission of the *Zuo Tradition*, but others reflect a profound divergence in the representation of agency in events. Here we will first discuss the *Zuo Tradition* and then discuss how one family of stories is transformed in later texts.

From the sixteenth century on anecdotes from the *Zuo Tradition* began to appear commonly in anthologies of *guwen* prose.[1] It is in this form that the *Zuo Tradition* is still most commonly read. These short pieces are often pungent, memorable, and possessed of a unique narrative and prose style. Taken in isolation, however, they fail to convey the distinctive narrative characteristics of the history as a whole. In this larger sense *Zuo Tradition* represents the evolution of chronicle into true narrative. The work keeps hundreds of

[1] For example, see Gui Youguang 歸有光 (1507-1571), *Wenzhang zhinan* 文章指南. rpt. Taibei: Guangwen shuju, 1972.

characters and numerous lines of action in play, in narrative segments organized by years and sometimes by months. Occasionally we are given a more or less complete narrative account of the background of an event that came to fruition in a particular year, but those exceptions serve only to reinforce the work's overall commitment to the annalistic form.

If we attempt to follow a story line back to a beginning, it often dissolves into other stories or the briefest mention of a character in some other action; sometimes it leads back to some minor occurrence, ambiguously balanced between omen for and cause of large events to follow. Important characters die or fade from view, but stories never quite come to a conclusion, branching into or intersecting with other stories. We can recognize ongoing story lines, broken into fragments over the years, but even these are strangely decentered, crisscrossed by other stories. We can acknowledge that in some fundamental way this is how history "is"; but the contrast with more familiar mode of European narrative history calls attention to how much the latter is shaped by conventions of narrative unity and completeness that originated outside of history.

In its present form the *Zuo Tradition* is appended to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋, a tersely worded chronicle of events from 722 BC to 481 BC. Sometimes the *Zuo Tradition* responds like a commentary to the wording of the text of the *Annals*; sometimes it elaborates an event mentions in the *Annals*; and sometimes it adds narratives of other events that occurred in the same year. Discrepancies between the *Zuo Tradition* and the *Annals* led to the popular thesis, proposed by the Qing scholar Liu Fenglu 劉逢祿 (1776-1829), that the *Zuo Tradition* was originally an independent historical

work, cut up into pieces and organized under the years of the *Annals*. But if we then take those fragments and try to piece them back together into some imagined original, it is hard to conceive what they could have been, other than the narrative elaboration of a chronicle. Attempts to extract unified story lines, as in Gao Shiqi's 高士奇 (1645-1704) *Zuo zhuan jishi benmo* 左傳紀事本末, serve to show how much must be omitted and supplemented to produce stories with "beginnings" (*ben* 本) and "endings" (*mo* 末).[2]

The *Spring and Autumn Annals* were believed to have been composed by Confucius to illustrate the moral and political decline of the Zhou and its feudal domains, culminating in the capture of a unicorn in 481 BC, the fourteenth year of Duke Ai of Lu. As a commentary, the *Zuo Tradition* would be amplifying that lesson (though it continues on for another thirteen years after the *Annals* end, to complete Duke Ai's reign). If this is the case, decline must be understood as the general condition of these centuries rather than as a linear process. The general synchronic lesson is indeed well illustrated by the work, but it tells us little about the narrative of the *Zuo Tradition*.

The *Zuo Tradition* is an intricately textured narrative, but one with only provisional centers and local fragments of plot, none of which have the power to unify the narrative as a whole. Even with our flexibility, nurtured by experimental narrative in this century, the *Zuo Tradition* remains difficult for the modern reader, and its very difficulty should remind us of the expectations of unity by which we still structure our understanding of narrative.

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[2] The theory that the *Zuo Tradition* was a "cut-up" history also assumes an ahistorical notion of history as a genre, that narrative history could simply appear out of nowhere.

Such a narrative mode in certain ways adequately represents the political history of the period, in which many feudal domains contended for dominance, with shifting alliances and particular powers rising briefly and then receding. Within the shifting web of relations, narrative focus is dispersed. Political disunity is at the same time narrative disunity. Narrative unity tends to attach itself to individuals, movements, and above all to ends. In the *Zuo Tradition* there are only provisional ends, no ends stable and constant enough to draw the threads together. Overlords, *ba* 霸, appear and hold together coalitions that break apart after their deaths. There are memorable and powerful characters—Count Huan of Qi and his minister Guan Zhong, Duke Wen of Jin, the ever-resourceful Zichan, minister of Zheng—but one can never say that at any point that one of them controls either the overall narrative or historical events. The structural message of the narrative is the same as its political message: disunion continues to the end.

Narrative structure is organized not so much around plots and agents as around foreknowledge of consequences and the ability to interpret signs, particularly in behavior, that reveal consequences. Predictions are always being made within the narrative, and those predictions are inevitably correct—though the prediction can be misread. The readers of the narrative are invited to practice that same skill, and the mention of some apparently trivial incident is a sure sign that large consequences will follow. The annalistic arrangement of narrative segments contributes to this aspect of the *Zuo Tradition*, even as it frustrates narrative unity. Evidence of character can be sprinkled through years in small details before the inevitable consequences come to fruition.

To have foreknowledge of the consequences of behavior is closely related to judgment. "Ceremony" or "proper custom," *li* 禮, is the ideological yardstick by which behavior is constantly measured by the narrator, the sure guide by which one avoids evil consequences. We have uplifting stories of restraint, virtuous action, and foresight. Intermingled with them are stories of lust, incest, adultery, murder, and cycles of revenge. Surrounding the prime players are other figures who pass judgment and offer counsel, both for good and ill. Whether in the observance or in the breach, there is a ritualism in political action that thwarts a sustained agency of individual will. Power is based on fragile alliances formed by equal parts of awe and intimidation. Success follows adherence to proper custom, while willful action usually brings about the dissolution of the very consensus that is the basis of power.

Although proper custom is the overt Confucian measure of behavior in the *Zuo Tradition*, it does not in itself account for agency within the narrative, the wellsprings and means by which events are brought about. Underneath the moral lesson is a more basic level of representation of persons, action, and consequence.

We might here think of three levels of agency, each of which shades into the following level. The first is the agency of Heaven, by which the human transparently executes a charge given by a higher power. The second level is the agency of character, in which actions are a consequence of a person's nature. The third level is the agency of will, in which there is conscious decision and determination to achieve a certain end. These distinctions are not hard and fast, but they do help us understand significant differences in the representation of events.

The Odes on the foundation of the Zhou dynasty frequently represent the agency of Heaven. In "O Splendor" Heaven decides to transfer the Charge to Zhou and sets in motion a long process by which Zhou fulfills the Charge. King Wen had the good character and abilities to be Heaven's instrument, but there is no suggestion that Kings Wen and Wu could have accomplished their great task purely on their own.[3] Within the *Zuo Tradition* itself the agency of Heaven can best be seen in the story of the Jin prince Chong'er driven into exile by the machinations of his stepmother, wandering for many years through the domains, until at last he makes his improbable return homeland to become Duke Wen. Chong'er's fortunes are explicitly understood as divine agency at work (ZZ 408). Chong'er is clearly virtuous, but in his wanderings he is not represented as possessing the essential *Zuo Tradition* virtue of foresight, and he is singularly lacking in determination, as is witnessed in the famous anecdote in which his wife and followers plot to get him drunk and send him away from his comfortable life in Qi (ZZ 406-07). Although his qualities of character are instrumental in some of the episodes, they are not adequate in themselves to fully account for his successes. Once installed as Duke Wen, however, the narrative reverts to an agency of character.

The agency of character is by far the most common kind of agency in the *Zuo Tradition*. We see a wide variety of character traits—prudence, rashness, generosity, cruelty, each of which works itself out in the narrative through interactions with others.

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[3] In purely formal terms this is the displacement of agency away from action, and is no less true of the Great Odes of King Xuan's reign. This is related to the political interest in the "charge," the ability to effect one's will in absence, which was the very foundation of the Zhou feudal monarchy.

Wisdom and a sense of propriety is no less a character trait. We do not see it as something learned and developed but given with the first appearance of a character. Decisions and actions continually reemerge from character, revealing it and reinforcing its consistency. Consistency of character is essential to the system of prediction and foreknowledge that shapes narrative.

The agency of character is usually immediate: a lustful count sees a beautiful woman and takes her; a duke looks at the way an enemy is drawn up on the field of battle and decides to withdraw. The seeds of the agency of will are sometimes to be found in response that is deferred—in plotting, revenge, or the repayment of a benefice. Deferred response with a complex structure of contingent conditions necessary to achieve some end is a primary means to unify narrative. There are deferred acts of revenge and repayments in the *Zuo Tradition*; but the form of the work prevents them from becoming a dominant narrative structure. When treated in individual episodes they are summarized, so that cause and consequence are continuous; though the account may mention an intervening span of deferral, such accounts are formally identical to immediate response.[4] When deferred revenge and repayment is treated over a number of years, the chronicle form diffuses the unity of plot among a dozen other equally important story lines.

An agency of character shades into the third level of agency, that of will and determination. Here we have a figure who has become a fully conscious narrative agent, whose plans drive events

[4] For example, to say that a count insulted a certain noble and the noble plotted with his retainers and assassinated the count that night is no different from saying that it happened four years later. If there are intervening conditions in the "plot," they do not sustain a narrative: there is an immediacy in the connection between original action and consequence.

in a complex way. Although one can always say that such a figure's actions are a function of his character, those actions are no longer immediate. Such a figure says, "I *will* do such and such a thing"; and the execution of that abiding intention drives the narrative. Moral judgment becomes more ambiguous with such characters; their determination is admirable even when their actions are transgressive. An agency of character permits easy judgment; but confronted with an agency of will, we are more likely to say that the character is in some ways right and in some ways wrong. Among such figures we would count Wu Zixu, slowly and deliberately accomplishing his revenge against the kingdom of Chu, and Goujian of Yue, with equal deliberation bringing about the downfall of the kingdom of Wu. Wu Zixu and Goujian were to become the heroes of prose saga, centers of narrative very different in kind from that of the *Zuo Tradition* narrative. Yet both Wu Zixu and Goujian appear as figures in the later years of the *Zuo Tradition*, and comparison of the *Zuo Tradition* account with later accounts is an excellent touchstone of the transformation of early Chinese narrative.

It is tempting to see both a historical evolution and a geographical shift in the comparison between the destiny driven Chong'er and the will-driven Wu Zixu. Chong'er represents the late seventh century BC; Wu Zixu represents the late sixth and early fifth centuries BC. Chong'er belongs to the heartland domain of Jin; Wu Zixu belongs to the newly powerful states of the south, to Chu and Wu. Differences in these two characters can be seen even through the relatively homogenous point of view of the *Zuo Tradition*. Part of this difference may derive from the *Zuo Tradition*'s sources. This could be particularly important in the case of the account of Wu

Zixu, though we cannot be certain how well developed the Wu Zixu saga was at the time of the composition of the *Zuo Tradition*. Perhaps the best way to account for the difference—apart from the unknowable question of sources—is the historian's imaginative sense of the difference in the periods and places represented.

We have already discussed the agency of Heaven in the foundation Odes of the *Classic of Poetry*. Here we will first consider a typical *Zuo Tradition* story of the agency of [bad] character, which take a strange turn at the end, foreshadowing the determination of a hero of will. At first Qing Feng is merely a bad man, but at the end he becomes a hard, bad man.

Qing Feng

The ruling house of the northeastern state of Qi, the Jiang, had numerous branch lineages, of whom the Qing were one. In the middle of the sixth century BC Qi was torn by struggles among these noble clans. These clans often held cities as their personal fiefs within the domain, but they also kept fortified compounds in Linzi, the Qi capital. Each clan kept its own armed retainers, along with chariots and armor. During the history of the domain, the Count of Qi often asserted his authority, but sometimes he became the captive of an alliance of the great clans. These alliances were unstable, and clan easily turned against clan. Old blood feuds were reconciled and resurfaced.

The *Zuo Tradition* speaks from the perspective of Lu, Qi's southern neighbor; and while Lu was not without its own internal problems brought on by powerful families and descendants of the ducal house, Lu could watch events unfold in Qi with a fascinated horror. Neighbors often believe that transgression is at its worst

next door, so we must read these accounts of Qi with some skepticism. Lu probably got its information from Qi refugees, who might provide both a more detailed and a more biased representation of events than one might get at greater distances.

As with other stories in the *Zuo Tradition*, the story of Qing Feng intersects with other stories and, as here, sometimes grows out of other stories. Qing Feng's father, Qing Ke, had been carrying on an affair with Count Ling's mother. To this purpose Qing Ke, disguised in women's clothing, was transported by palanquin into the inner palace. On one such occasion he was recognized. The person who recognized him reported the matter to Guo Zuo, an important noble, who summoned Qing Ke to his house and sternly rebuked him. After this Qing Ke remained at home, not daring to go out. When the dowager countess learned of this, she was enraged and plotted the downfall of those involved in exposing Qing Ke. She largely succeeded; the head of one of the great clans, the man who reported having seen Qing Ke, had his feet amputated on a trumped up charge of treason, while another fled to his fief, where his son went into open rebellion against Count Ling.

Count Ling sent Qing Ke and Cui Shu, of whom we will hear more shortly, to put down the rebellion. Guo Zuo, the third of the noblemen involved in Qing Ke's humiliation was at the time serving with Qi forces on a joint expedition of the lords of the domains. He took leave of his post and went to where the Qi army was besieging the rebel city, where he killed Qing Ke. Guo Zuo then retired to his fief and declared his own rebellion against Count Ling. The count came to terms with Guo Zuo, who then returned to his service; later the count had him killed in a court assembly as a punishment for

rebelling and for murdering Qing Ke. Thereafter Qing Feng, Qing Ke's son, was given an important post among the count's advisors.

Cui Shu, head of one of the most powerful Qi clans, figured prominently in the events that followed. Despite a very inauspicious augury, Cui Shu married the beautiful widow Dongguo Jiang. Unfortunately Count Zhuang of Qi, Count Ling's successor, also found her beautiful and began an affair with her. In 548 BC Cui Shu and his armed retainers trapped Count Zhuang on one of his frequent visits to the Cui compound and assassinated him. Subsequently Cui Shu and Qing Feng put the weak Count Jing on the Qi throne. A few years later, in 546 BC, we encounter Qing Feng paying a state visit to Lu.

> Qing Feng of Qi came to pay a formal visit. His chariot was fancy. Mengsun said to Shusun, "Qing's chariot is fancy, isn't it?" Shusun said, "I've heard it said, 'When fancy clothes the man don't fit, a bad end's sure to come of it.' What good is a fancy chariot?" Shusun provided Qing Feng a meal and treated him without respect. Shusun then recited "Observe the Rat," but Qing Feng still didn't understand. (ZZ 1127)

The Lu elite, with their superior grasp of Zhou customs and readiness to pass judgment, often ferret out the cultural lapses of those from other domains, but Shusun's message to Qing Feng in reciting this particular Air is so lacking in subtlety that we can only assume that Qing Feng chose to ignore it rather than failing to understand it.

> 相鼠有皮，人而無儀。人而無儀，不死何為。

相鼠有齒，人而無止。人而無止，不死何俟。
相鼠有體，人而無禮。人而無禮，胡不遄死。

“Observe the Rat” 相鼠 52

Observe how the rat has skin,
a man, yet lacking in manners,
a man, yet lacking in manners,
why does he not simply die?

Observe how the rat has teeth,
a man, yet lacking demeanor,
a man, yet lacking demeanor,
why does he wait to die?

Observe how the rat has his limbs,
a man, yet lacking the graces,
a man, yet lacking the graces,
how come he does not die right away?

The repetition with variables simply reinforces the point. We have three near synonyms for “good behavior,” matching up with three aspects of the rat. We do not know if the person without manners, the external forms of behavior, is like the rat or not even the equal of a rat, which is at least complete on the outside. In the *Zuo Tradition* external appearances and forms of behavior are a sure indication of what lies within, and Qing Feng’s ostentation augurs ill, particularly in a minister. Ostentation is exceeding one’s station, which proves to be true in Qing Feng’s case. As Shusun cannot

know, however, the choice of this Air is prolepsis, for Qing Feng's ability to avoid death becomes remarkable.

Although Qing Feng is mentioned on a few earlier occasions in the *Zuo Tradition*, this is the first time that he is the focus of an anecdote, and he is presented as an appearance rather than as agent. He does nothing; he simply reveals himself and is unable to correctly interpret what others observe in his self-revelation. Later that same year, back in Qi, troubles beset the Cui clan. Qing Feng and his villainous henchman Lupu Pie seize the opportunity to destroy the powerful Cui's, and Qing Feng seizes control of Qi.

> Before he lost his first wife, Cui Shu of Qi had sired Cui Cheng and Cui Qiang. He married Dongguo Jiang and sired Cui Ming. Dongguo Jiang brought the child of her previous marriage Tang Wujiu with her into the household, who, together with [her brother] Dongguo Yan were the advisors of the Cui clan. Cui Cheng had a disease and was removed from the succession [to become head of the clan]; Cui Ming was put in that position instead. Cui Cheng requested to live out his life in the city of Cui. Cui Shu permitted this, but Dongguo Yan and Tang Wujiu refused to grant it, saying, "Cui is the city of the ancestral temple, and it must belong to the person in charge of the ancestral temple [the head of the clan]." Cui Cheng and Cui Qiang were enraged and planned to kill them. They informed Qing Feng, "Our father's person is well known to you. He is attended only by Tang Wujiu and Dongguo Yan, and even our uncles cannot get in to see him. We are greatly afraid they will harm our father, and we have ventured to inform you." Qing Feng said, "Withdraw for a while. I will consider what to do about it."

He informed Lupu Pie. Lupu Pie said, “That man [Cui Shu] was the enemy of his ruler [Cui Shu having assassinated Count Zhuang of Qi], and it may be now that Heaven is going to abandon him. If his family is in turmoil, why should you suffer because of it? The waning of the Cui’s is the waxing of the Qing’s.”

Another day Cui Cheng and Cui Qiang again came to put their case. Qing Feng said, “If it is of advantage to your father, you must get rid of them. I will help you if there are problems.”

On the ninth month, the fifth day, Cui Cheng and Cui Qiang killed Dongguo Yan and Tang Wujiu in the assembly hall of the Cui clan. Cui Shu came out in a rage, but the crowd had all fled. He sought for someone to prepare his carriage, but found no one. He then had a groom prepare the carriage, and with a eunuch driving he went forth. And he said, “If the Cui clan can enjoy good fortune, it will be all right if the [evil] touch only me.” Then he went to see Qing Feng. Qing Feng said, “The Cui’s and the Qing’s are one. Who would dare do thus? Let me punish them for you.” He sent Lupu Pie at the head of armored men to attack the Cui clan. The Cui’s had put battlements all around their compound wall, and they held it. Unable to overcome them, Lupu Pie had the people of the capital help, and subsequently they destroyed the Cui clan, killing Cui Cheng and Cui Qiang, taking the members of the family prisoner. Cui Shu’s wife hung herself.

> Lupu Pie brought word back to Cui Shu and sent him back home in his carriage. When he reached the place there was nothing to return to. He then hung himself. That night Cui Ming removed him to the tombs of the clan. Then Cui Ming fled here [to Lu].
>
> Qing Feng governed the domain. (ZZ 1136-38)

Again Qing Feng barely has a status as an agent in these events. He is a weak, but ambitious character, who lets Lupu Pie guide him. When asked for help by the two elder sons of the Cui clan, he puts them off until he can consult with Lupu Pie, and then gives them a false promise of support. But the most remarkable moment is that of willful misinterpretation in Qing Feng's treachery to the Cui's. The fulfillment of his ambitions against his rivals seems to depend upon a verbal ambiguity. When Cui Shu comes and asks him for help, he promises to punish the Cui's for their rebelliousness against the clan head. It is a promise he fulfills to the letter but not to the spirit. Under the leadership of the Iago-like Lupu Pie, the Qing clan's men-at-arms strike the Cui's and, drawing assistance from the city, virtually wipe them out. Cui Shu's beautiful but ill-omened wife Dongguo Jiang was instrumental in the assassination of the previous Count of Qi, and her son and brother are responsible for the subversion of the succession of the Cui's; she hangs herself. Finally, in a crowning act of cruelty, Lupu Pie sends Cui Shu back to the Cui compound to witness the destruction of his clan and take his own life. Cui Ming, the son of Dongguo Jiang buries him and flees to Lu.[5]

[5] Despite the implications of the narrative, it should be pointed out that Qing Feng and Lupu Pie have fulfilled their promise, which was to get rid of the rebellious members of the Cui household. Cui Ming appears to have

Qing Feng was, however, too addicted to his pleasures to be a successful strongman, and only a year later, in 545 BC, a violent reaction is soon growing against him and his family. The Qing Feng men-at-arms destroyed the Cui's with the help of an ill-defined ally, the "people of the capital" 國人. In Linzi there were many powerful families, and their alliances shifted with the advantage of the moment.

> Qing Feng of Qi loved the hunt and was addicted to drink. He gave the government of the domain over to [his son] Qing She, and then moved, with his valuables, wives, and concubines into the household of Lupu Pie, where they drank and exchanged their women. For spans of several days audiences of the domain would be transferred there. He permitted those who had fled the domain and been made criminals to return upon informing him. Thus, Lupu Gui was brought back. Lupu Gui entered the service of Qing She; he was favored, and Qing She gave him his own daughter as a wife. An officer of Qing She said to Lupu Gui, "A man and a woman are to be distinguished by surname—why do you not shun someone of common ancestry?"[6] Lupu Gui replied, "One of common ancestry didn't shun me—why should I be the only one to shun? As in detaching a stanza in reciting a Poem, I took what I was seeking in it. Why should I take note of common ancestry?"

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survived the slaughter by chance; but, by the letter of Qing Feng's promise, he was not a target. If the other Cui's chose to support the two elder brothers, they were legitimate targets.

[6] The Qing's and the Lupu's were different branches of the ruling Jiang of Qi.

> Lupu Gui spoke of Wang He and had him brought back. Both men enjoyed Qing She's special favor. He had them carry pikes, one going close in front and the other close behind him.
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> Every day at the meals of court, two chickens were served. The chief cook secretly replaced them with ducks. When the servers realized this, they removed the meat and served the broth. Ziya and Ziwei [of the Qi ducal line] were enraged. Qing Feng reported this to Lupu Pie. Lupu Pie said, "I liken them to birds or animals—I will lay myself to rest on their feathers and hides." He sent Xi Guifu to tell Yan Ying [and ask him to kill Ziya and Ziwei]. Yan Ying said, "My numbers are not enough employ in this; my knowledge is not up to planning it. Yet I will not dare say a word about it. I am willing to take an oath on this." Qing Feng replied, "You have said you would not—what need is there for an oath?" Then he had Beiguo Ziju told, and Ziju said, "Each person has a way to serve his ruler, but this is not something I am able to do."
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> Chen Wenzi said to his son Huanzi, "Their ruin is coming—what can we get from it?" Huanzi replied, "We can get the hundred wooden chariots of the Qings on Zhuang Street." Chen Wenzi said, "We should take care to guard them." (ZZ 1145-47)

As is often the case in the *Zuo Tradition*, some small incident gives rise to insult and anger—here the substitution of ducks for chickens at a court dinner. It is unclear why the anger of Ziya and Ziwei stirred such responding anger in Qing Feng and Lupu Pie, but their

failed attempts to get someone to kill the offenders is a clear indication that Qing Feng is losing his authority. The brief anecdote of Chen Wenzi and his son speculatively dividing up the spoils of the Qing's signals their coming downfall.

When the clan begins to lose adherents, even its loyal henchmen begin to desert. The long account under 545 BC continues with a piece of *Zuo Tradition* subtlety. We almost do not notice that the question asked in the divination (when the question had to be declared out loud to the spirits) differs from the question that Lupu Gui and Wang He report to Qing She. Readers trained in the application of the Poems to look for intentions and motives will wonder why Lupu Gui and Wang He have done so, and they will surely come to the obvious conclusion.

> Lupu Gui and Wang He made divination regarding an attack on the Qing clan. They showed the pattern of cracks to Qing She, saying, "We thought we should make a divination regarding attacking our enemies; may we show you the pattern of the cracks." Qing She said, "The attack will succeed. I see blood." (ZZ 1147)

Here Qing She reads the omen correctly but remains in error because he has been told the wrong question. Qing She is told that the question was an attack on the Qing's enemies, when the question was, in fact, about an attack on the Qing's themselves. Knowing the outcome. Lupu Gui and Wang He know which side to take.

> Winter, the tenth month. Qing Feng was hunting in Lai, with Chen Wuyu [Chen Wenzi's son] accompanying him. On the seventeenth day, Chen Wenzi sent a messenger with a

> request, "Wuyu's mother is sick—please send him home." Qing Feng made divination regarding this and showed Wuyu the pattern of the cracks. Wuyu said, "Death," and wept, taking the tortoise-shell in his hands. Then Qing Feng sent him home. When Qing Si heard about this, he said, "Ruin is coming." And he told Qing Feng, "Go back quickly. Our ruin will surely come at the autumn sacrifice. If you go back, you may still be in time." But Qing Feng refused to heed him and showed no intention of changing his course. Qing Si then said, "Flee. If we are lucky, we'll reach Wu or Yue."
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> [On his way back] whenever Chen Wuyu crossed a river, he sank the boat or destroyed the bridge.

Throughout the story of the Qing Feng and his son Qing She we see misinterpretations, failures to understand, and failures to heed those who do understand. There are many vices in the *Zuo Tradition*, but only one *hamartia*, one "tragic flaw," which is the failure of understanding and foreknowledge. Qing Feng is not developed fully enough as a figure to trace his blindness to some other trait; it is the mere want of foresight.

> Lupu Jiang [Qing She's daughter] said to Lupu Gui, "If there is some business afoot and you don't tell me, you will surely not succeed." Lupu Gui told her, and she said, "Father is a stubborn man. If someone doesn't stop him, he won't get out. Let me stop him." Lupu Gui said, "All right."
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> The eleventh month, the seventh day. Qing She was going to perform the sacrifice in the temple to Taigong. Lupu Jiang told him what was to happen and tried to stop him.

> He refused to heed her, saying, "Who would dare?" Afterwards he came to the public place [the temple]. Ma Ying was the impersonator of the dead. Qing Xie was the chief officiant. Lupu Gui and and Wang He held their pikes in close guard. The Qing clan encircled the temple compound with their men-at-arms. Grooms of the Bao and Chen clan put on an entertainment. The horses of the Qing clan were easily frightened; the soldiers all lay down their arms to tie up the horses, then they drank and watched the entertainments, following the players to nearby Yu Ward. Footmen of the Luan, the Gao, the Chen, and the Bao clans then put on the armor of the Qing clan. Ziwei pulled out a bludgeon and struck the door repeatedly. Lupu Gui stabbed Qing She from the rear; Wang He struck at him with a pike and severed his left arm. Still he could grab a square beam of the temple and shook the rafters. He threw platters and jugs, dying himself after he had killed someone. Then they killed Qing Xie and Ma Ying. the count was terrified, but Bao Guo said, "We are acting on your behalf." Chen Xuwu took the count back; there he removed his ceremonial robes and went to the inner palace compound.

The treachery of Lupu Gui, foreshadowed in the divination question, is beautifully concealed here as he gives his wife permission to go and warn Qing She, her father. Her reappearance reminds us that the Qing's and the Lupu's share a common ancestry, a taboo violated by this union. The Bao's and Chen's are the leaders of the revolt. The reader of the *Zuo Tradition* will know that two generations earlier it was the head of the Bao clan who had his feet cut off as a result of the intrigue between the countess dowager and

Qing Feng's father. The Chen's have their eyes on the Qings' chariots. As the Qing's struck down the Cui's, now the great clans of Linzi gather to strike down the Qing's while they are sacrificing.

> As Qing Feng was returning, he met someone who told him of the uprising. On the nineteenth day he attacked the western gate but couldn't take it. Then he turned and attacked the northern gate and took it. Entering the city, he attacked the inner palace compound, but could not take it. Backing off, he drew up his forces in Yue Ward and challenged his enemies to battle. They refused. Thereafter he fled here [to the duchy of Lu].

Qing Feng is back with his forces to avenge the attack on his family, but it is too late. Linzi and the count are in the hands of his enemies. Coming to Lu a second time, this time in flight rather than on a state visit, Qing Feng is again linked to a splendid chariot, evidence of his ostentation and blindness.

> He presented a chariot to Ji Wuzi that was lovely and had such a sheen that one could see one's reflection in it. Zhang Zhuangshu said, "A chariot with such a sheen means that others must be harried and worn; it is fitting that he had to flee." Shusun Muzi held a dinner for Qing Feng, but Qing Feng spilled the ritual offering. Shusin Muzi was displeased and had a musician chant "Owl in the Rushes" for him. And again he did not understand.
>
> Afterward people from Qi came and took us to task [for receiving him]. He fled to Wu. Gouyu of Wu gave him Zhufang. He gathered his clan there and made it is home, and he became even richer than he had been previously. Zifu

> Huibo said to Shusun Muzi, "Heaven seems to enrich corrupt men—Qing Feng is rich again." Shusun Muzi replied, "For good men riches are the boon; for corrupt men riches are the ruin." When Heaven would bring their ruin, it will gather them all together and slay them." (ZZ 1147-49)

Blind to the growing signs of their impending destruction and heedless of warnings, the Qing's are at last broken, Qing She is assassinated by his own guards, and Qing Feng is driven into exile. Framing Qing Feng's career as the dominant power in Qi are his visits to Lu and his failure to understand the messages of the Poems [the second Poem mentioned is now lost]. In both cases a fine chariot is involved. On the second occasion the wood of the chariot is so finely polished that a person can see his reflection therein. Such mirroring is always associated with self-knowledge, which Qing Feng singularly lacks. Shusun Muzi, the spokesman of the Lu elite, reads the fine polish as a sign of something else, as evidence of Qing Feng's abuse of the labor of others.

Yet the Lu moralists, with their fine ability to read the signs that foretell consequences, are puzzled: even though Qing Feng is both a blind and a bad man, he escapes to Wu, where he and the remnants of his clan prosper as never before. Shusun Muzi, with his faith in the inevitability of the consequences of character, can only conclude that Heaven is gathering the clan for the aggregate punishment he assumes it deserves. Or does he assume that it deserves aggregate punishment because Qing Feng has individually escaped and has gathered together the surviving Qing's? The *Zuo Tradition* never disappoints a prophetic moralist; the end comes some years later in 538 BC, in an expeditions of the domains to punish Wu for its incursions into Chu.

> Autumn, the seventh month. The Lord of Chu and the great nobility attacked Wu… He had Qu Shen invest Zhufang. In the eighth month, on the day *jiashen* they took it, capturing Qing Feng and destroying his entire clan. They were about to put Qing Feng to death when Jiao Ju said, "I have heard that someone free from flaw may out another man to death. Qing Feng opposed his ruler's charge, and that is why he is here. Do you think he would be willing to submit to being put to death! What use is there is publicly proclaiming it to the great nobility?" The King of Chu refused to heed him and made Qing Feng carry a great axe on his back, to go around the camps of the great nobles, and he ordered him to say, "May none be like Qing Feng, who assassinated his ruler, treated the young successor as a weakling, and made the grand masters of the domain pledge themselves to him.!" Qing Feng said instead, "May none be like Wei, the son of one of King Gong of Chu's concubines [i.e., the current Chu king Ling], who assassinated his ruler and his elder brother's son Jun, and took his place on the throne, and made the great nobility pledge themselves to him!" The King of Chu had him killed quickly. (ZZ 1253)

Qing Feng's finest moment comes in his end. For all his career he was a bad reader of signs and indirect messages. He misunderstood the Poems and failed to heed warnings, both of which were part of a larger failure in misjudging people and failing to grasp the consequences of behavior and actions. At last, on the verge of execution, Qing Feng suddenly learns to draw a correct analogy; and rather than confess his own crimes, he names the exactly analogous crimes of King Ling of Chu, the person who would put him to

death—and as we know, only "a man free from flaw may put another man to death."

Most of Qing Feng's story properly belongs to the agency of character. What he does follows not from any striking act of decision, but from his character. Opportunistic, ruthless, careless, heedless, and lacking in determination, he is the sum of his responses to events earlier in his life. Character produces behavior, and behavior reveals character; this is the equation that runs through most of the *Zuo Tradition*. But at the end, with nothing to gain and nothing to lose, he engages in an act of defiance that is uncharacteristic. For once he interprets well and transcends the agency of character. He dies mocking and defying his enemy. He is a bad man, but he accepts that—an acceptance necessary for the pungency of the cutting analogy he makes between the crimes with which he is charged and those of his judge, King Ling of Chu. He says: who are you to charge me with these crimes?

There is something admirable in Qing Feng's final act of defiance, even though, from the point of view of the Lu moralists, he is getting his just desserts. It is one of those rare moments in the *Zuo Tradition* in which a bad man, demonstrating his badness in his resistance to contrition, delivers a correct moral judgment of another. And there may be some connection between willful resistance and ethical ambiguity.

Qing Feng's final act of defiance is only a gesture; his story is over. We are here on the edge of a kind of narrative very different from the agency of character and a narrative of knowledge, either foreknowledge of or blindness to consequences. The willful figure can become the organizing center of action and offer an alternative

to the character-driven narrative of the *Zuo Tradition*. This is centered narrative.[7] Such narrative was never fully realized in the *Zuo Tradition*, but it became common later. Such narrative unity went hand in hand with increasingly centered political forces that were driving toward a unified empire. Sometimes the will to revenge focuses the narrative, as is the case in Wu Zixu and King Goujian of Yue; sometimes it is a heroism that requires doing wrong to accomplish good ends, as when the Prince of Wei defies his brother and kills a loyal general to steal the army of Wei and save the domain of Zhao; but the almost impersonal embodiment of the narrative of will is Qin Shihuang, the First Emperor, who is both admired and hated for his ruthless drive to crush all opposition to his unifying intentions.

These are primarily the stories of events that occurred during the Warring States and the end of the Warring States, but one set of such stories overlaps the world of the *Zuo Tradition*: these are the interlocked stories of Wu Zixu taking his revenge against Chu and the struggle between the southern kingdoms of Wu and Yue.

Wu Zixu: from the *Zuo Tradition* to Saga

King Ping of Chu had sent his vizier Fei Wuji to the domain of Qin to bring back a bride for his son, the Crown Prince Jian. Having seen how beautiful the young woman was, Fei Wuji suggested that the king take her for himself, which the king did, in spite of the opposition from another advisor Wu She. Fei Wuji realized that

[7] The differences appear most clearly in the *Guoyu*. For most states there are anecdotes with speeches for various figures through time or discontinuous anecdotes about the same figure. In the three sections of the *Wuyu* and *Yueyu*, in contrast, we have perfectly linear narratives, retold from different perspectives, with the breaking into sections as unnecessary.

once Jian succeeded to the throne, he would face serious consequences; hence he sought to be rid of the Crown Prince and Wu She. And in getting rid of Wu She, it would also be necessary to get rid of his sons, Wu Shang and Wu Zixu. This was an error. The year was 522 BC.

> Fei Wuji said to the Ruler of Chu: "Crown Prince Jian and Wu She are going to lead the area beyond Fang City to rise in rebellion, and they will set themselves on a par with Song and Zheng. Qi and Jin will make league to help them, whereby they will work harm on Chu. The deed draws to fullness now." The king believed him. He questioned Wu She. Wu She answered: "Your Majesty's first misdeed was great enough [referring to the king's having taken the Crown Prince's bride]; why believe maligning words?" The king arrested Wu She and ordered the Commander of Chengfu, Fen Yang, to kill the Crown Prince. Fen Yang ordered someone to precede him and send the Crown Prince away before he could arrive. The Crown Prince fled to Song. The king then summoned Fen Yang; and Fen Yang had himself arrested by men of Chengfu and taken to the king. The king said: "Words came forth from my mouth, they entered your ears. Who told Prince Jian?" Fen Yang answered: "I did. It was My Lord's command: 'Serve Jian as you serve me.' I lack guile. I could not wrongly keep double faith. I have kept your first command throughout, and could not bear the later one. Therefore I sent him away. I have regretted this, still it avails nothing." The king said: "And how is it that you dare come to me?" He answered: "I was given an

order and failed to carry out the command. To be summoned and not to come would have been a second treason. There would have been nowhere to escape." The king said: "Go back and continue to govern as before."

Fei Wuji said: "Wu She's sons have talents. If they were in Wu, they would surely bring grief to the kingdom of Chu. Why not summon them by an offer to free their father. They have kindness and will surely come. Otherwise they will bring great evil upon Chu. The king sent someone to call them to court, saying: "Come and I will set your father free." Wu Shang, Lord of Tang, said to his younger brother Wu Zixu: "You go off to Wu. I will go back and die. My knowledge does not equal yours. I am able to die; you are able to take revenge. Hearing this command that would free our father, one cannot fail to hurry to answer it. Yet when kin are slain, one also cannot fail to take revenge. To hurry to one's death in order to free one's father is to act well as a son; to take the measure of the deed and carry it through is kindliness; to choose such a burden and leave is knowledge; to know one will die and not to flinch is courage. Our father must not be forsaken, yet our name must not perish. Do your utmost! It is best to let me go my way."

Wu Shang went back. When Wu She heard that Wu Zixu had not come with him, he said: "The Lord of Chu and his Grand Master will not be able to eat their dinners on time now."

Chu had them both killed. (ZZ 1407-09)

The *Zuo Tradition* has tried to digest a story here that is, perhaps, indigestible within its narrative world. Much here is characteristic of other *Zuo Tradition* narratives; for example, the transgression of the minister Fei Wuji and of King Ping, taking the bride destined for his son (an act that occurs on a number of occasions in the *Zuo Tradition*, always with bad consequences), and the further transgressions that must follow from the initial transgression. We have the virtuous minister Wu She, both offering loyal criticism and, in the end, making a prediction. But perhaps the most telling case is the inclusion of the anecdote of Feng Yen, faced with a moral dilemma and choosing to honor his ruler's first command rather than his second (for the famous parallel, see Duke Xuan 15, ZZ 764), then returning to face his punishment and being absolved. This is clearly a foil for the dilemma faced by Wu She's sons. But that moral dilemma is one that the *Zuo Tradition* cannot handle in its ethical universe.

Baldly stated, the problem is this: according to his ruler's decree, by not returning Wu Zixu condemns his father to death, but he refuses to return in order to take revenge for his father's anticipated death. He may know or suspect that King Ping will put them all to death even if he does return; but in defying his ruler, he becomes the one responsible. By choosing to accept that dilemma and live, his future must be lived as the avenger: this is why he is alive. Such a decision may follow from character, but once it is taken it overwhelms character: it is a decision that defines the person and his future actions.

Such constancy of purpose is uncommon in the *Zuo Tradition*. Revenges are carried through, but just as often a father's murderer is forgotten in the realities of politics. Characters debate whether

to honor former blood oaths or not; sometimes they decide one way, sometimes another. The figures of the *Zuo Tradition* generally live in the present moment, weighing past experience and cultural memory in decisions of the moment. Wu Zixu introduces the character who, no matter where he is driven and how much he must bide his time, always has a single purpose. His double appears later in Goujian, King of Yue, who likewise vows the destruction of the kingdom of Wu and carries through his purpose. Their joint foil is King Fucha of Wu, who vows to revenge his father's death on Yue, who has a man stand in his courtyard to remind him of this every time he goes in or out, yet who pardons Yue when he has its king at his mercy.

The core elements of the Wu Zixu story are present in the *Zuo Tradition*, but the *Zuo Tradition* does what it can to soften Wu Zixu's singleness of purpose. This may be because the *Zuo Tradition* represents an older version of the story; it may be due to the Confucian ideology of the work. In the *Zuo Tradition* version of Wu Zixu's decision, the argument that Wu Zixu should live to take revenge is put in the mouth of his older brother Wu Shang, whose instructions carry some authority in their own right. Wu Zixu's problematic decision to heed his brother's advice is elided. That decision, moreover, is complicated by the anecdote of Feng Yan, who, demonstrating his loyalty by returning to face probable death, is pardoned by King Ping.

In the "Biography of Wu Zixu" in the *Historian's Records*, Sima Qian characteristically embraces the moral dilemma. Sima Qian leaves out the anecdote of Feng Yan; he has Wu She loyally forewarn King Ping about his younger son; he strengthens the

conditions of the ruler's command; and he locates Wu Zixu's decision where it must ultimately lie, with Wu Zixu himself.

> The king sent an envoy to tell Wu She: "If you get your two sons to come, you will live; if you cannot, you will die." Wu She replied: "Wu Shang is kindly by nature; and if I call, he will certainly come. But Wu Zixu is by nature hard and untamed; he can put up with the shame, and he is capable of creating great problems. When he sees that he and his brother will both be seized if they come, his inclination will certainly be not to come." But the king would not listen and sent someone to call the two brothers to court: "Come, and I will let your father live. Fail to come and I will kill Wu She immediately."
>
> Wu Shang was ready to go, but Wu Zixu said: "When Chu calls both brothers to court, it is not because he intends to let our father live. He will fear that if we get free, we will work great harm in later times. That's why he is calling us to court with false assurances, using our father as a hostage. When we get there, we and our father will all die together. What will that do for our father's death? By going we will make it impossible to be revenged on our enemy. The best course would be to flee to some other domain and make use of their force to wipe away this shame that has been put on our father. It will do no good for all of us to be wiped out." Wu Shang answered: "I know that going will not save our father from his doom. But still I could not endure to have failed to go when our father has called us to save his life; if afterward I could not wipe away the shame done

> to him, I would end up being laughed at by the whole world." And he told Wu Zixu: "Get away yourself! You will be able to revenge us on our enemies. I am going to go die." When Wu Shang had gone to submit to arrest, the envoy tried to seize Wu Zixu. Wu Zixu bent his bow, notched an arrow and pointed it at the envoy, who did not dare come any closer. Then Wu Zixu escaped. And hearing that Prince Jian was in Song, he went off to serve him. (SJ 2172-73)

Here Wu Shang sees his own return to share death with his father almost as a weakness; he too hungers for the revenge that Wu Zixu will wreak. Wu Zixu makes the decision, for as his father warns King Ping, Wu Zixu can bear the shame to achieve his ends.

The *Zuo Tradition* sends Wu Zixu directly to Wu; the *Historian's Records* first sends him north with Crown Prince Jian. When Jian, by his own plotting, gets himself killed, Wu Zixu rescues his son and escapes with him to Wu. He bides his time, becoming the advisor of Helü, who has seized the Wu throne. In versions other than the *Zuo Tradition*, he repeatedly tells Helü to postpone the invasion of Chu, waiting until the time is right.

At last the internal turmoil in Chu is such that Wu's armies invade and decisively defeat Chu, sending the new King Zhao into flight as the Wu army occupies the Chu capital Ying. This is adequate closure for the *Zuo Tradition*'s account of Wu Zixu's revenge, but inadequate for personal revenge. There are several versions of what occurred. According to the *Guliang Tradition* and the *Huainanzi* Wu Zixu flogged the tomb of King Ping. According to the "Annals of Wu" in the *Historian's Records* both Wu Zixu and Bo Pi, another Chu exile whose father had been put to death by King Ping, flogged the king's corpse. But the most famous version, given in

the "Biography of Wu Zixu" in the *Historian's Records* has Wu Zixu alone digging up the corpse and flogging it. "When the troops of Wu entered Ying, Wu Zixu went looking for King Zhao; and since he couldn't find him, he dug up the tomb of King Ping of Chu, took out the corpse and flogged it, stopping only after he had given it three hundred lashes." This moment is even more luridly elaborated in the Han prose romance *Annals of Wu and Yue*:

> Because he was unable to find King Zhao, Wu Zixu dug up the grave of King Ping, took out his corpse, and gave it three hundred lashes. With his left foot he trampled on his belly, and with his right hand he gouged out his eyes. And he mocked him saying, "Who made you heed that slanderous mouth and kill my father and elder brother. Was this not wronging me!" (WYCQ 42)

The account of this event in the *Historian's Records* is inserted in a section drawn from the *Zuo Tradition*. First, the version in the *Zuo Tradition* in 506 BC:

> At first Wu Zixu had been a friend of Baoxu of Shen. When he was escaping, he told Baoxu of Shen: "I will be the ruin of Chu." To which Baoxu of Shen replied: "Do your utmost! For if you are able to be its ruin, I will surely be able to make it rise up again." When King Zhao was in Sui [having fled the Wu army that had taken his capital], Baoxu of Shen went to Qin to seek an army, saying: "Wu is a great boar, a long serpent that will devour the larger domains one by one. The evil has begun in Chu. My ruler has failed to guard his ancestral altars and is now at large in the wilderness. He has sent me to give you these words of his distress: 'The

> power of these savages knows no satiety; if they become your neighbors, it will be a great evil for your borders. Now, while Wu has not yet completed its conquest, come you and take your portion of us. If Chu then is to perish, it will be your land. But if, by your holy force, you show us grace, so will we serve you for generations.'"
>
> The Duke of Qin commanded him to withdraw, saying: "I have heard the command. You go to the guest lodge for the while. I will make plans and inform you of them."
>
> But Baoxu of Shen answered: "My ruler is at large in the wilderness and has found no place of refuge. How can I, his liegeman, take my ease?" He stood there, resting against the courtyard wall and weeping. The sound did not cease by day or night. For seven days not a spoonful did he drink with his mouth. At last Duke Ai of Qin recited for him the *Poem*, "No Clothes," at which he touched his head to the ground nine times and sat down. The armies of Qin then went forth. (ZZ 1547-48)

By reciting "No Clothes" Duke Ai of Qin let Baoxu know that he had agreed to take the field against Wu.

豈曰無衣，與子同袍。王于興師，修我戈矛，與子同仇。

> How can you say, "I have no clothes"?—
> I will share my greatcoat with you.
> The king is raising his army,
> we will make ready pike and spear,
> and I will share all foes with you.

We do not know if the author of the *Zuo Tradition* knew of the legend of Wu Zixu flogging the corpse of King Ping, or indeed if that legend was already in existence when the *Zuo Tradition* was written. If the legend was known, it was omitted. But what we see clearly is Wu Zixu's statement of intentions, to be the destruction of Chu. The *Zuo Tradition* mentions it only to balance Baoxu's equal and contrary intention to save Chu. The *Zuo Tradition* is uncomfortable with Wu Zixu violent determination. Since he owes no fealty to King Zhao, Wu Zixu remains righteous in avenging his father's death on the kingdom of Chu. But if he flogs the corpse of the ruler to whom he once swore fealty, his revenge becomes morally problematic. Sima Qian does not flinch from the question.

> In the beginning Wu Zixu had been associated with Baoxu of Shen. When Wu Zixu was escaping, he told Baoxu: "I will be the ruin of Chu." To which Baoxu replied: "And I will preserve it." When the troops of Wu entered Ying, Wu Zixu went looking for King Zhao; and since he couldn't find him, he dug up the tomb of King Ping of Chu, took out the corpse and flogged it, stopping only after he had given it three hundred lashes. Baoxu of Shen escaped into the mountains and sent someone to say to Wu Zixu: "Don't you think you have gone too far in your revenge? It is my understanding that masses of men may overcome Heaven, but that Heaven is certainly capable of smashing those men. You once were a liegeman of King Ping; you yourself served him, facing north to the throne; now you have reached the point of dishonoring a dead man. Don't you see that this is an extreme failure to follow Heaven's right way!?" Wu Zixu replied: "Give my respects to Baoxu of Shen. The day draws toward nightfall;

> my road is long. I go against the tide, yet I will do this in spite of all."
>
> At this Baoxu of Shen hurried to Qin to tell them about the crisis, seeking succor from Qin. But Qin would not agree to help. Baoxu stood in the courtyard of Qin and wept by day and by night. For seven days and seven nights the sound never cease. Then Lord Ai of Qin took pity on him and said: "Even though Chu was wanting in the right way, it has liegemen like this! Can we do otherwise than save it?" Then he sent five hundred chariots to save Chu and strike Wu. In the sixth month of that year they defeated Wu's troops at Ji. (SJ 2176-77)

Wu Zixu's famous reply to Baoxu has always been the touchstone of the hero of will: a determination to do something in spite of all, including Heaven and moral right. Despite its popularity and canonical status, the *Historian's Records* of Sima Qian has long provoked the moral suspicions of serious Confucians. Sima Qian's fascination with characters like Wu Zixu is a good example of the reasons for such suspicions. The *Zuo Tradition* keeps Wu Zixu under control, displacing his decision to preserve his own life as his brother commanded, then, at the moment of his revenge, the *Zuo Tradition* shifts the focus to Baxu of Shen.

What does the avenger do after his revenge is accomplished? Wu Zixu becomes the loyal advisor of the kings of Wu, first of Helü, and later of his son Fucha. Like his father Wu She, Wu Zixu braves royal displeasure by openly opposing the king. At the moment of his death, however, we hear the echoes of the implacable avenger in the *Historian's Records*, but not in the *Zuo Tradition*.

> "Plant my tomb with catalpa trees, that they may serve for coffin timbers. Wu is lost! In three years it will begin to weaken. What comes to fullness must go to ruin. It is Heaven's way." (ZZ 1665)

But in the *Historian's Records*, as in other versions of the story:

> "Plant my tomb with catalpas, that they may be had for making coffins for Wu. Dig out my eyeballs and hang them above the eastern gate of the capital of Wu, so that I can watch Yue's thugs when they enter the great city and wipe out Wu." He then cut his throat and died. (SJ 2180)

Wu and Yue

The story of the struggle between Wu and Yue, dovetailing with the story of Wu Zixu, seems to have been very popular in late antiquity. In addition to the two long prose romances of the Han, the *Yue jue shu* 越絕書 and the *Wu Yue chunqiu* 吳越春秋, the *Guoyu* 國語 and the *Historian's Records* each contain three different versions of the story.[8] Sima Qian's three versions are shaped by the different rubrics under which they occur: the biography of Wu Zixu and the annals of Wu and Yue. The *Guoyu* versions, however, appear to be three completely independent texts, at least one of which uses a segment of the story for model speeches. References to and incidents from the story are common in Warring States texts. The story is also told in the last part of the *Zuo Tradition*.

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[8] See also David Johnson, "The Wu Tzu-hsu Pien-wen and Its Sources" I. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 40.1 (Jun., 1980), 93-156.

The versions of the saga of Wu and Yue (including the Wu Zixu story) illustrate the way a story was elaborated and retold with different centers and for different interests. It is open to such multiple retelling because it is centered narrative. In contrast to its treatment earlier periods when great dignity was attached to the affirmation of proper ritual, here the *Zuo Tradition* often appears petty in its concerns. In 482 BC King Fucha of Wu is meeting with Jin to determine who has precedence among the lords of the domains. Primacy among the feudal lords is the goal toward which Fucha had been working for many years. While the negotiations are going on, he learns that Yue has attacked his capital, defeated his army, and killed his son, the crown prince. Fucha personally kills everyone who knows about the disaster to keep it silent. Jin guesses from his appearance that he has trouble at home; and, pressing the issue, they force Fucha to yield precedence to Jin. At this point Zifu Jingbo, a representative of Lu, now a client of Wu, starts arguing ritual procedure for the meeting of feudal lords. The *Zuo Tradition* is trying to tell a story that simply cannot be told in the old way.

The most basic plot line of the saga is as follows: Helü, the king of Wu whom Wu Zixu served in the conquest of Chu, invades the neighboring state of Yue. His toe is cut off in battle, and he dies as a result of the wound, first making his son Fucha promise to avenge him. After rebuilding his forces, Fucha strikes, capturing the Yue capital and surrounding the Yue king Goujian at Kuaiji. Goujian sends presents and humbles himself before Fucha. Wu Zixu declares the danger Yue poses and argues against peace in the strongest terms, but Fucha overrules him. Having been given a

chance at peace by Yue, Goujian devotes his energies to strengthening his kingdom and bides his time. Meanwhile Fucha, ambitious to become overlord of the domains, prosecutes wars in the north. Wu Zixu continues to protest until Fucha, enraged, tells him to commit suicide. At last Fucha goes to a great covenant meeting with Jin and the northern domains, where he hopes to finally be recognized as overlord of all the domains. While the main body of the Wu army is away, Yue strikes at the Wu capital. The Wu army hastily withdraws south again and later engages in a major battle with Yue forces, in which Wu is routed. At last, surrounded in his capital, Fucha begs for the same mercy that he once displayed to Goujian (the *Zuo Tradition* differs here). In the most famous formulation, Goujian observes that Heaven once gave Yue to Wu and Wu refused to take it; now Heaven is giving Wu to Yue, and he will not refuse the gift. Thereafter Fucha commits suicide.

The *Zuo Tradition* has its share of self-sacrifice, but even early in the account of the struggle between the two southern kingdoms, we find something new and alien to the ritualized battles of the northern domains: mass suicide as a shock tactic. It is easy to see Goujian's stratagem as mere barbarism (which it no doubt seemed to northerners), but it is also a willingness to break custom to achieve certain purposes. If the discipline of the Wu army cannot be broken by the usual flaunting, Goujian is willing to try something new. The year is 496 BC.

> Wu attacked Yue. Goujian, Lord of Yue, opposed them. He drew up his line at Zuili. Goujian was troubled at the good order of the Wu army and repeatedly sent warriors ready to die to seize [captives] from them. But the army did not move. Then he sent out three columns of condemned criminals,

> who held swords to their own necks and made their farewell address as follows: "Two rulers here enforce military discipline, and we have transgressed against our banners and drums. We will not show our zeal before our lord's columns and we dare not flee punishment, but we do dare to meet our deaths." At this they cut their own throats. The Wu army had its eyes fixed on them, and thereupon the Lord of Yue attacked them and greatly defeated them. Ling Gufu struck Helü with a pike. Helü was wounded in his big toe, and one of his shoes was taken. He turned back and died at Xing, seven leagues from Zuili.
>
> Fucha had someone stand in his courtyard; and if he were to pass in or out, the man would always say to him, "Fucha, have you forgotten that the King of Yue killed your father?" And he would answer, "No, I may not forget!" In three years he paid back Yue. (ZZ 1595-96)

The ruthlessness of Yue's determination to have victory is matched by the ritual of reminding. These are not characters who act on the passion or moral response of the moment. Yet by this very public ritual of reminding, Fucha betrays his weakness.

The *Zuo Tradition* gives a very terse narrative account of the defeat of Yue in 494 BC, reserving its energies for a long, formal speech by Wu Zixu, comparing the present political situation to one in the ancient Xia Dynasty. It might be pointed out that the implied comparison of Goujian of Yue to Shaokang, the legitimate heir of the Xia, taking revenge on a usurper is worse than unflattering to Fucha of Wu. In crafting the speech the author of the *Zuo*

Tradition knows that Yue will ultimately be successful, and therefore it must be in the right. Fucha's refusal to heed Wu Zixu's advice invites the prediction that we know must come true.

> Fucha, King of Wu, defeated Yue at Fujiao, paying them back for Zuili. Then he entered the city of Yue. The Lord of Yue took up a defensive position on Kuaiji with five thousand men in armor and shields. He then sent his Grand Master Zhong to bring about a truce through Bo Pi, the Grand Steward of Wu. The Lord of Wu was about to agree when Wu Zixu said, "Do not do this. I have heard it said, 'In planting what will work to one's credit, it is best to nurture it; but in getting rid of what works to one's ill, the best thing is to get rid of it entirely.' Long ago Jiao of the Guo killed Zhenguan's lord, whereafter he attacked Zhenxun and ended the life of Xiang, King of Xia. But Queen Min was then pregnant and fled out through a hole, and she returned to [her family], the house of Reng. She gave birth to Shaokang there. He became the chief herdsman of the Reng, and wary of Jiao's ability, he took precautions. Jiao sent his servant Pepper to find Shaokang, whereupon he fled to the house of Yu, where he became chief of the kitchen in order to avoid coming to harm. Si of the Yu then gave him the two Yao girls to wife and gave him a city-fief at Lun, with ten square leagues of fields and an army of five hundred. There he was able to spread his De and begin his plans to gather back unto himself the hosts of Xia and settle its offices. He sent N i to spy on Jiao, and he sent the younger Chu to beguile Yi [Jiao's younger brother]. Thereafter he put an end to Guo and to Ge [the domains of Jiao and Yi] and restored

> the achievents of Yu [founder of the Xia]. He sacrificed to Xia as the counterpart of Heaven and lost nothing of what was had before. Wu now is is not even the equal of Guo, while Yue is greater than Shaokang; and if it happens that they are made to prosper, will it not be trouble! Goujian is able to win men's hearts and endeavors to show largesse. By largesse he loses no one, and to win men's hearts he does not disregard any service. He shares the same soil with us, and Yue has been our enemy for generations. You conquer it but to not take it, but instead are going to let it live again—this is going against Heaven and perpetuating raids and enmity. Though you may regret it later, you would be able to get rid of them. We may expect the steady decay of the house of Ji [the Zhou royal house, including the collateral branch of the rulers of Wu]. We lie between barbarian realms [Chu and Yue], and you will not succeed in seeking the senior position [among the lords of the domains] if you perpetuate raids and enmity."
>
> Fucha did not heed him. Wu Zixu withdrew and told someone, "For ten years Yue will increase its people; then for ten years it will instruct them; and after twenty years, Wu may well become a slough." In the third month Yue made peace with Wu. (ZZ 1605-07)

The reasons for Fucha's failure to avenge his father and his acceptance of peace with Yue is unexplained here. Later accounts use this gap in the narrative as an opportunity to elaborate. In the *Guoyu* versions, Goujian abases himself, sending gifts and his legitimate children, a boy and a girl, to serve the king. Clearly the girl is intended for his bed, and perhaps the boy as well. In the

"Biography of Wu Zixu" in the *Historian's Records*, the accord is accomplished by bribing Bo Pi, another refugee from Chu long in the service of Wu. Bo Pi becomes the corrupt advisor who serves as a foil for Wu Zixu's loyalty.

Although Fucha of Wu fails to avenge the death of his father, he is no Qing Feng, stumbling into power and stumbling from power on the shifting ground of chance and passion. He is accused, like Qing Feng, of extravagance and excess, and his downfall is predicted for that reason, as well as for his failure to crush Yue (ZZ 1608-09). But beneath the *Zuo Tradition* narrative, we see that Fucha does have his own singleness of purpose: he wants to become overlord of the domains.

Fucha has a dynastic myth to support his simple ambition. In contrast to Chu and Yue, whose ruling houses were admittedly from outside Zhou, the ruling house of Wu was supposed to have been descended from either Wu Taibo or his younger brother Yong, who, according to legend, has fled in order to make way for their youngest brother Chang, later King Wen, to assume rule over the Zhou. It is, of course, exceedingly unlikely that any blood of the royal house of Ji ever flowed in the veins of the kings of Wu; however, such origin myths were easily believed in the retelling and made it possible for Fucha, in the period of Zhou's decline, to see himself and his rising kingdom to represent the senior branch of the Ji's, reclaiming the authority that rightly belonged to them.

To achieve his purposes Fucha pursues a northern policy rather than an eastern policy, first bringing Song and Lu under his influence. In 488 BC the Lu ritualists, as always, predict his doom for his failure to adhere to proper custom.

> Summer. Our Duke met with Wu in Zeng. Wu asked for a contribution of a hundred sacrificial animals. Zifu Jingbo replied, "Such a thing never occurred among the former kings." But the people from Wu said, "Song gave us a hundred sacrificial beasts. Lu may do no less than Song." Lu, moreover, gave more than ten sacrificial beasts to the Grand Master of Jin. Should you not then give the King of Wu a hundred?" Jingbo said, "Fan Yang of Jin was greedy and disregarded proper custom, using his power domain to intimidate our poor city. Therefore our poor city gave him eleven sacrificial beasts. If your lord lays a charge on the great nobility according to proper custom, then there is a set number. The kings of Zhou determined proper custom, and of the finest creatures, no more than twelve were required, that being the highest number of Heaven. If now you disregard the proper custom of Zhou and insist upon a hundred sacrificial beasts, you are merely taking matters into your own hands." The people from Wu refused to heed him. Then Jingbo said, "Wu will be lost. The disregard Heaven and turn their backs on what is basic. If we do not give them what they ask, they will work evils upon us." Then he have them what they asked. (ZZ 1640-41)

Lu bows to the realities of power, always clucking disapproval and prophesying the destruction of those who impose on them.

By this point Fucha of Wu is operating under the burden of various predictions of his destruction. But unlike earlier predictions of doom following from behavior, here the pragmatic agency of Wu's fall is already known—Goujian of Yue, quietly strengthening his

kingdom. A few years later in 484 Fucha turns his ambitions farther north to Qi.

> Wu was about to attack Qi, and the Ruler of Yue led his hosts to pay his respects to the court of Wu. The king and his warriors all were given presents. The men of Wu were all delighted. Only Wu Zixu was afraid and said, "They fatten Wu up for the slaughter." And he presented his protest: "Yue's relation to us is that of an illness of the stomach or heart. Our lands would form a single whole, and they want to take ours from us. By such meekness and yielding they further their desire. If you achieve your aims in Qi, it is like getting a stony field—you will have no use from it. If you don't turn Yue into a lake, it is Wu that will be drowned. One never has a doctor get rid of a disease and tell him, 'You have to leave some of it.' The Pan'geng Declaration in the Documents says: 'Whosoever overturns my will or transgresses or wants due reverence, his nose shall be hacked off and I will destroy him utterly, and I shall cause him to have no spawn remaining, neither shall I let him shift his sprouts to this my new city.' In such a way the Shang rose. My Lord now does otherwise, and in your search for greatness you will also find great troubles."
>
> The king refused to heed him. He sent him as an envoy to Qi, where Wu entrusted his son to the Bao clan, and from that son came the house of Wangsun. When he returned from his mission, the king heard of this and presented him with the sword Zhulou by which to die.

> When he was ready to die, Wu Zixu said: "Plant my tomb with catalpa trees, that they may serve for coffin timbers. Wu is lost! In three years it will begin to weaken. What comes to fullness must go to ruin. It is Heaven's way." (ZZ 1664-65)

The warning that Yue is a fatal disease for the domain of Wu is the favorite Wu Zixu speech, recomposed in many variations by a culture that loved good speeches. But here we should consider the degree to which this entire story of Yue's revenge on Wu is the creation of Wu Zixu, who possessed of a fierce singleness of purpose in his own right, understood the large political relations between states in the same light. Wu Zixu infects the political narrative with long-range purposes that involve concealment and biding one's time. All the later versions offer a linear narrative in which Yue is humbled, Yue bides its time, Yue strikes. But if we are to believe the *Zuo Tradition*'s chronology (the last part of which carries on after the *Spring and Autumn Annals* conclude), more than two decades intervene between Yue's humiliation and the final destruction of Wu. More important, nine years intervene between Yue's raid on the Wu capital while Fucha is off at the blood-oath ceremony with Jin and Yue's final destruction of Wu. What is, in most accounts, presented as an almost continuous series of battles actually takes up almost a decade.

In accounts of earlier periods such spans of time witnessed numerous shifts of alliances between the domains, between Jin and Qin, Chen and Chu. Domains sworn to friendship one year might see and advantage and strike in the following year. Only Yue's subordinate alliance with Wu is seen as biding one's time. It is not at

all surprising that Yue, after a long alliance, should seize the opportunity to raid Wu. The only thing that holds these events together as a single action across more than two decades is Wu Zixu's interpretation. And Wu Zixu is merely retelling his own story, discovering his own double in Goujian of Yue.

Two years after Wu Zixu's death, in 482 BC, Fucha's long-standing ambitions are on the point of being realized. He meets with the northern feudal lords for a blood oath, where he plans to contest the precedence usually accorded to the powerful state of Jin.

> Summer. Our Duke met with Duke Ping of Dan, Duke Ding of Jin, and Fucha of Wu at Yellow Pool.
>
> The sixth month, the eleventh day. The Lord of Yue attacked Wu in two columns. Chou Wuyu and Ou Yang came from the south and were first to reach the outlying meadow around the city. Crown You Prince of Wu, Prince Di, Miyong prince of the blood, and Shou Yuyao watched them from the Hong River. Miyong saw the banners of Gumie and said, "The banners of my father" [who had been taken by Yue]. I cannot see the enemy and resist from killing them." The Crown Prince said, "If we do battle and do not overcome, we will destroy the kingdom. I beg you to wait." Miyong would not do so, and gathered five thousand of his followers, Prince Di helping him. On the twentieth they did battle. Miyong captured Chou Wuyu, while Di captured Ou Yang. When the Lord of Yue arrived, Prince Di held against him. On the twenty-first they did battle again and the Wu army was greatly defeated. They captured Prince You, the prince

> of the blood Miyong, and Shou Yuyao. On the twenty-second the entered the Wu capital. The people of Wu informed the king of the defeat, and the king, hating that the news become known, personally slit the throats of seven men in his tent.
>
> Autumn, the seventh month, the sixth day. A blood-oath was taken. Wu and Jin were in competition for precedence. The people of Wu said, "In the Zhou house, we are the eldest." The people of Jin said, "Among those of the Ji surname, we are the elder brothers." Zhao Yang called to the Minister of War Yin [of Jin], "The day grows late! The great matters are not decided, which is the fault of us two. Set up the drums and draw up the lines, and let us two fight to the death—then the elder and the younger will certainly be known." In response Yin said, "Let me see the king." When he got back, he said, "Those who eat meat should not have a look of gloom. Today the King of Wu had a gloomy look—was his capital taken, or is his crown prince dead? Moreover, the Yi folk [contemptuously referring to the Wu] are of a light disposition and they cannot bear persevering. Pray wait a while." And in fact they did give Jin precedence. (ZZ 1676-79)

Here, at last, just as his ambitions seem on the point of realization, disaster strikes. Fucha, realizing he must return as quickly as possible, is in no position to contest dominance with Jin.

Wu's end does not come quickly. Five years later, in 478 BC, a Yue army defeats Wu forces at Li Marsh. In 475 Yue troops surround the capital. Finally, in 473 BC:

> Winter, the eleventh month, the twenty-seventh day. Yue put and end to Wu. They asked that the King of Wu take up residence east on Yong. He refused saying, "I am old and alone. How can I serve your lord?" He then hung himself. The people of Yue took his body back. (ZZ 1719)

Within the *Zuo Tradition* Wu Zixu attempted to tell a straightforward revenge narrative. The chronicle form breaks that narrative up and scatters it over a number of years, interspersed with stories from other domains. But freed from the form of chronicle, time collapses to economically conclude the story that Wu Zixu anticipated. In the *Wuyu* 吳語 in the *Guoyu*, the end begins with the King of Wu's return from the meeting at Yellow Pool. Zong, a Grand Master of Yue, tells Goujian that the time is right to strike Wu, and Goujian musters his army, shows his mercy by releasing from duty those needed to support their family, and then strikes Wu. He fights three battles and defeats Wu forces three times, after which he enters the capital and surrounds the terrace where the king lives. There is no hint that this process occupies nine years. The *Zuo Tradition* gives Fucha the chance to escape with his life, which Fucha refuses. The *Wuyu*, by contrast, drives towards closure of the revenge narrative.

> The King of Wu was terrified. He sent someone to arrange a peace: "Long ago I had the misfortune to have been put under restriction by the Lord of Yue.[9] Your Majesty told me of your plight and sued for peace; and your son and daughter

[9] As the Wei Zhao commentary notes, the situation is quite the reverse: Yue is in the power of Wu. Wei suggests that this is the rhetoric of humility.

submitted to me and joined my entourage. Because of our relations with the former lords of Yue, I saw no choice; I stood in dread of doing something inauspicious in the sight of Heaven and did not dare put an end to your ancestral sacrifices. I agreed to peace with Your Majesty, which has lasted until today. Now I am in the wrong, and I am held guilty by Your Majesty. Your Majesty has personally shamed me in my poor city. I dare to sue for peace from you, and my own son and daughter will submit to you and serve as your liegeman and in your bedchamber."

The King of Yue said, "Long ago Heaven gave Yue to Wu, but Wu did not accept it. Now Heaven gives Wu to Yue. Do I dare refuse to heed Heaven's charge, and heed your commands instead?" And he did not agree to peace. The then sent someone to inform the King of Wu, "Heaven has given Wu to Yue, and I dare not refuse to accept it. Since the life of people is not long, I hope that you do not die. But people's life on the earth is only a temporary lodging, and how long are they given? I will provide for Your Majesty east of Yongju; you will have three hundred families there to see to Your Majesty's ease, and there you may live out your years."

Fucha refused: "Neither before nor afterward has Heaven visited calamity on the Kingdom of Wu, but on my own person. I have indeed lost my ancestral temples and the sacrifices to Earth and Grain. All the folk of the lands of Wu are now in the possession of Yue. How can I be seen any more in the world?" And when Fucha was ready to die, he sent someone to inform [the spirit of] Wu Zixu, and said, "If

> the dead have no consciousness, then that is all. But if the dead do indeed have consciousness, how will I have the gall to meet Wu Zixu?" Then he killed himself. (GY 627-28)

By this concluding economy, both revenges due—Gou Jian's long planned revenge and the injustice to Wu Zixu—are simultaneously satisfied.

Abbreviations:

ZZ Yang Bojun 楊伯峻. *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981.
SJ Sima Qian 司馬遷. *Shiji* 史記. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982.
GY *Guo yu* 國語. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978.