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The Submerged History of Yuè

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The Submerged History of Yuè

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THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF YUÈ

The state of Yuè comes briefly into the spotlight of Chinese historical legend toward the end of the Spring and Autumn era during the reign of the fabled king G u Jiàn, whose long personal struggle with the rival state of Wú has come to symbolize the patient cunning and determination that enables a person to stage a comeback after a great defeat. This king of Yuè, as Chinese schoolchildren are incessantly reminded, “slept on brambles and tasted gallbladder juice”—*wò xīn cháng dǎn* 臥薪嘗膽—so as not to forget even for an instant the shame of his captivity and servitude in Wú. Aside from this one great story—the very brio and effectiveness of which must make us entertain doubts as to its strict veracity—the history of Yuè lies scattered and submerged, awaiting an exhumers to attempt some sort of reassembly. The names of rather more than half a dozen kings of Yuè have come down to us in different king lists, but as far as historical legend is concerned, there was only one king of Yuè: the fanatically determined, gall-drinking avenger named G u Jiàn. The rulers of the neighboring state of Wú, equally within the Yuè cultural and linguistic domain, had better luck with posterity; quite a few of them are celebrated for particular traits, deeds, or accomplishments.¹

Except for a few specialists, most people of traditional and modern times have regarded the matter of Wú and Yuè as a story just as essentially Chinese as, say, the story of the career of Qí Huán-g ng or the story of the wanderings of the exiled Chóng’ r of Jìn. Not only is the story a Chinese legend, its artistic strength—its many symmetries of circumstance, the frequent eloquence of its characters, the appeal of the revenge motif that lies at its core—make it the apotheosis of Chinese legend. True, the main characters behave in ways that are, from a Sinitic point of view, both extreme and exotic, but so, to a lesser degree, do the indubitably Chinese characters in earlier, more northern and western,

This article had its inception as a presentation at the meeting of Warring States Project in conjunction with the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) in Boston on March 24, 2007. I am grateful to Dr. Bruce Brooks, the director of WSP, for providing both the venue for this presentation and the initial stimulus for engaging in this research.

¹ There is, for example, the tale of the grand tour of the courts of the northern and central states made in 544 BCE by Prince Jizhá 季札 (the youngest son of King Shòu Mèng of Wú) in which he shows a grasp of music and ritual greatly surpassing that of his civilized hosts; see *Zuǒzhàn*, Xi ng-g ng 29, Item 13. This appears to be one of the earlier examples of the topos of wisdom appearing in unlikely places.

legends; and besides, weren't the kings of Wú descended from the house of Zhōu, and the rulers of Yuè descended from the house of Xià?

But even the most cursory glance at the legendary material, a glance that takes no account of the archeologically attested distinctiveness of the material cultures of Yuè and Wú, at once yields evidence of the non-sinitic nature of the peoples of those two states. The rulers of Yuè and Wú *had no temple names* bestowed upon them after their deaths. Are there any attested sinitic states in pre-Qín times of which the same can be said? The answer, unless I am greatly mistaken, is a categorical "no." The names applied to the rulers of Yuè and Wú after their deaths differed not at all from the names applied to them during their lives. These names, moreover, make no sense in Chinese, and seem therefore to be transliterations of words in the ancient Yuè language. Certain syllables, such as *gou*, *wu*, *fu*, *zhu*, *yu*, and others tend to recur in these names, reflecting indigenous naming conventions that can now only be guessed at. There is moreover not the slightest hint in the surviving materials for the existence in Yuè culture of anything resembling a surname. There are no clan names and no inheritable lineage names. This should scarcely astonish us; it took millennia even for large-scale entities such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam to acquire the practice of surnaming. As late as the mid-nineteenth century, most commoners in Japan and Korea didn't have surnames. It's harder to determine when surnames came into general use in Vietnam, but the non-indigenesness of the practice there can be seen in the fact, with the exception of a few surnames derived from Cham clan-designations, Vietnamese surnames are all words for which Chinese characters exist; this shows that they began their life in Vietnam as Chinese importations.

Places as well as people were nonsinitically named; Wú and Yuè each originally had a two-syllable designation; Wú was "Gōu Wú" and Yuè was "Yú Yuè." These designations were not just place names; they meant something in the Yuè language, as is made clear by certain passages (to be discussed below) in *Yuèjuéshū* 越絕書 and *Wú Yuè Chūnqiū* 吳越春秋, both of which are texts compiled at a time, in the first century CE, when the Yuè language was still going strong in the Mount Guìjī area.² Chinese chroniclers were quick to drop the initial syllable in each name, since the words meant nothing to them, and since the Chinese convention was to use single syllables as designations of states.³ That the names of Yuè and Wú rulers were at times a source of

² This placename is often pronounced "Kuàijī"; dictionaries, however, appear to prefer "Guìjī."

³ There are curious anomalies in the way Yuè is referred to in early texts. The *Bamboo Annals* uses the two-syllable form in almost every instance. The "Suǒyǐn" commentator in *Shǐjì* 41 uses the single-syllable form, but represents the word, not with the usual *yuè* 越, but with the *yuè* 粵 now generally associated with the culture and language of Guǎngzhōu.

confusion to the Chinese can be seen in various discrepancies that occur in written records. Thus *Chūnqiū*, the court chronicle of Lǚ, has a notation of the death in 561 BCE of King Shòu Mèng of Wú, but it gives his name as "Shèng" ("chariot") rather than "Shòu Mèng."⁴ This is very likely an indication that "Shèng" was a name used to facilitate Wú's relations with the central states. It is also possible that it was a translation of the Yuè meaning of the syllables "Shòu Mèng." Then again, it might be a contraction of "Shou Mèng." The 6th-century Lǚ version of the syllables "Shòu Mèng," when pronounced in a hurry, perhaps sounded like the 6th-century Lǚ version of the syllable "Shèng." In his notes on the Yuè kinglist that appears in *Shǐjì* 41, the "Suǒyǐn" commentator mentions several instances of Chinese designations for Yuè kings that were translations of the meaning of the original names in Yuè; Gōu Jiàn, for example, could be referred to in Chinese as "Tǎn Zhí" 荻執, "Reed-holder."

How different, then, were the people of Yuè from the early Chinese? Putting together all that is said about them in Warring States and Hàn texts, and combining this with archeology, we can see that they differed from their sinitic neighbors in language, music, folklore, religion, diet, village layout, boat construction, weapons, terrain preferences (mountain tops), domestic architecture (stilt-houses), coiffure (short), personal adornment (tattooing), funerary behavior (more "following in death, not to speak of outlandish-looking tombs), clothing (bare-foot, short sleeves, short trouser legs), script (serpentine characters) military practices (deep-throated copper wardrums, riverine raids, guerilla tactics), and temperament (fiery, audacious, risk-taking).⁵ Their language was so different from surrounding ones that not even people from Chǔ could understand it.

How did the linguistic situation affect relations between the Yuè/Wú kings and the various refugees from Chǔ who served as their strategists? Did Fūchāi have to suppress irritation at Wǔ Zǐ Xū's fumbling attempts to express himself in Yuè? Did he, or any other Wú-Yuè rulers have any command of Chǔ? Or did these kings and their foreign advisors use some form of Chinese as a lingua franca? Was the kind of Chinese known to Gōu Jiàn sufficiently like the Chinese known to Fàn Lí (originally a Chǔ commoner, says one source) for this expedient to have been of any use? Whatever linguistic situation prevailed in the courts of Wú and Yuè, it is unlikely to have been as free of impediments as one might suppose from reading the accounts of those states in *Zuǒzhuàn*. The principal business of *Zuǒzhuàn*, after all, is to *tell stories*.

⁴ *Chūnqiū*, Xiāng-gōng 12, Entry 4.

⁵ With regard to issues concerning the distinctive script of ancient Yuè, see Michele Thompson, "Scripts, Signs, and Swords: The Việt Peoples and the Origins of Nôm," *Sino-Platonic Papers*, 101 (March, 2000)

MATERIAL REMAINS

Archeologically, Yuè was situated at the heart of an ancient burial-mound culture with extensive remains in southeast China. The mounds were created over a period extending from c. 2000 to c. 300 BCE. Thus we can see that the culture begins considerably more than a millenium before the period of warfare between the states of Yuè and Wú. The mounds are moreover spread over an area much broader than that occupied by those two states alone. These mounds first appeared around the Tiantai Shan area in Zhejiang Province, then spread gradually northward. More than 20,000 such mounds have thus far been identified in southeast China, and more than a thousand have by now been excavated.⁶

Beneath each mound is a stone burial chamber, each of which was originally protected by a sloping wooden enclosure with an apex on top. Most of the wooden enclosures have rotted away, but the holes where the slanting posts were planted are still clearly visible. These wooden enclosures made with sloping posts are peculiar to Yuè-style burial sites; they are not found in the central plain or elsewhere in China. The stone burial chambers are of three types: perfectly rectangular, rectangular with a narrow entryway at one end, and "knife-shaped"; i.e. rectangular with narrow off-center entryways, one wall being continous rather than indented.

Many mounds have only a single burial, and many have multiple burials, some as many as forty or a bit more. All the burial sites have mortuary goods, including ceramic and proto-porcelain vessels, often bearing geometric designs; but only some have bronze vessels. The sites with bronze vessels are thought to have been tombs of the elite: rulers, court officers, and their families. Mounds with multiple burials all have a principal tomb placed in the center; the other interment sites all point toward this central hub. The reddish-brown soil in which the tombs were made is acidic and eats away skeletons, which are therefore not found in the mounds; occasionally a few teeth remain.

Some technologies and design motifs are peculiar to the southeast region; one site, for example, had a jade staff used by a king, the bottom of which consisted of a carved kneeling figure supporting everything carved above it. The kneeling figure's body is completely covered with tattoos.

⁶ For all details in this paragraph and the ones that follow concerning China's southeastern burial-mound culture, I am indebted to a presentation on the subject given at the University of North Carolina on March 2, 2007 by professor Yáng Nán of the history department of the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing.

Some of the most impressive mounds surmount burial chambers carved into the rocky tops of mountains. One such mound was recently discovered at the top of Zhōu Shān in the Taihu area. It is 8.3 meters from top to bottom, 20 meters long, and 8 meters wide. It was robbed around 5 CE. The Sūzhōu Museum claims that a Wú king was buried there, but some archeologists believe it is not big enough to have been a royal tomb.

The most impressive Yuè burial mound yet discovered is carved into the mountain rock at the top of Yīn Shān, SE of Shàoxīng, and directly east of Mount Guìjī. This site was excavated in 1996 – 98. It is surrounded by an "L"-shaped moat more than 20 meters wide and 3 meters deep. A farmer had been using it as a place to stock and grow fish.

The burial mound occupies about a thousand square meters; it extends 350 meters in an east-west direction and 350 meters in a north-south direction. It is 28 meters high. The centrally placed tomb pit, carved out of mountain rock, has a convex shape. It is 54 meters long and 14 meters wide.

Extraordinary antiseptic measures were used to protect the corpse from decay; the crypt was enveloped by a thick layer of white clay, a layer of charcoal one meter thick, and a layer of tree bark. Like other burial mound tombs it has inward leaning wooden posts on either side, resulting in a structure 5 meters high with a long apex. These posts, most unusually, have survived; the structure is essentially intact. The internal space is divided into three rooms with the coffin placed at one end of the room in the middle. The whole looks uncannily like a neolithic, above-ground wooden burial site discovered some time ago in Siberia.

The coffin was coated with black laquer. Though the site was looted in the late Warring States era, more than 40 objects were found in the tomb, including a wooden pestle, a bronze bell, a jade arrow head, a jade dragon's head, and various Warring States grave-looters' tools. With the exception of a tomb near Bǎojī in Shǎnxī province, tentatively identified as that of Qín Jǐngōng of the Spring and Autumn era, no other tomb in pre-Qin China matches this one in scale.

Archeologists, basing their opinion upon certain passages in *Yuèjuéshū*, are inclined to believe that this site is the tomb of Yǔncháng, Gōu Jiàn's father. Yǔncháng's reign presumably came to an end in 497, the year Gōu Jiàn assumed the throne. A passage in *Wú Yuè Chūnqiū* says that Yǔncháng's reign was contemporaneous with those of Shòu Mèng, Zhū Fān, and Hélú in Wú. The year of the death of Shòu Mèng, the earliest of these Wú kings, as noted above, was 561; thus a literal reading of this notation would give Yǔn Cháng a reign of at least 64 years, which is unlikely; at the same time, there is no reason to discount the possibility that he ruled Yuè for an unusually long time, perhaps

several decades; if so, he would have had an ample opportunity to construct a grandiose tomb.

An anecdote in *Wú Yuè Chūnqiū* 10 is perhaps a faint legendary reflection of this tomb’s grandiosity, and the numinous power correspondingly associated with it. After destroying Wú and gaining further victories to the north, Gōu Jiàn is about to transfer the capital of Yuè to Láng Yé, close to the borders of Lǚ and Qí:

The king of Yuè had men go to Yuáncháng’s [Yǔncháng’s] burial place on Woodcutter Mountain (Mùkè Shān 木客山), so as to move the tomb to Láng Yé. Three times they bored a hole into Yuáncháng’s tomb. Each time a swift wind arose from within the tomb causing people to be hit with flying sand and rocks, so that no one could enter. Gōu Jiàn said, “Could it be that our former lord can’t be transferred?” He then abandoned the enterprise and left.⁷

CHRONOLOGY, KINGLISTS, AND SURVIVAL

The notion that the rulers of Yuè were descended from a son of the Xià restorer Shào Kāng 少康 appears as early as *Zuǒzhuàn*, in which we find Wǔ Zǐ Xū warning Wú’s King Fūchāi that his rival Gōu Jiàn is made of the same stern stuff as that distant ancestor, the man who brought his dynasty back from extinction.⁸

The most detailed early version of this origin myth occurs in a *zhèng yì* 正意 notation on a passage in *Shǐjì* 41. Quoting from a lost text entitled *Guìjī Jì* or “Record of Guìjī” the notation says that Shào Kāng sent one of his sons to the Mount Guìjī 會稽山 area to maintain the grave of the Xià founder Yǔ the Great. Upon arriving at his destination, this son assumed the name Wú Yú 無余 and founded the state of Yú Yuè 於越.

A passage in *Wú Yuè Chūnqiū* 6 provides a continuation of this lore, saying that Wú Yú’s descendents ruled for more than ten generations until a particularly weak successor was no longer able to hold sway over the area and turned into a commoner, after which Yǔ’s grave remained untended for more than ten years.

A man then appeared, says the account, who, invoking the aid of ghosts and spirits, announced that he was descended from Wú Yú and would bring blessings upon the people by resuming the care of Yǔ’s grave. He gained considerable support, and Yuè as a

⁷ Zhao Yè, *Wú Yuè Chūnqiū*, with translation and annotation by Zhāng Jué (Taipei: Táiwān Gǔjí Chūbǎn shè, 1996), *juàn* 10 (“Gōu Jiàn Fā Wú Wàizhuàn”), p.486-87.

⁸ The Shàokāng restoration story, with some variation in detail, actually occurs twice in *Zuǒ-zhuàn*, first in an admonition allegedly directed by Wèi Jiàng to Jin Dào-gōng in 569 (Xiàng-gōng 4, second-to-last item) and then in an admonition allegedly delivered by Wǔ Zǐ Xū to Fūchāi in 494 (Ai-gōng 1, second item).

consequence began to assume the aspect of “a state with a ruler and officers.” The name of this personage was Wú Rén 無王. He was succeeded by a son, Wú Yì 無□ (radical 109 plus the phonetic of 醜), who ruled diligently. The author of this passage, however, is unable to name any of Wú Yì’s successors; and it is thus here that Yuè’s mythical origin lore comes to an end.⁹

While archeological remains make it clear that Yuè culture was an established feature of the human landscape of southeast China during the second millennium BCE, it is not as yet possible to say anything definite about the existence of a Yuè state in this era. A number of Shāng oracle bone inscriptions contain apparent references to Yuè, such as “Will Yuè not come?” “Will Yuè be made to come?” “Will Yuè be obtained?” suggesting uneasiness about the allegiance of the tribal group or kingdom denoted by this word. The character that seems to stand for Yuè is written (incised) without the “zǒu” radical that appears in the modern word. This graph appears to be a picture of a distinctive, hooked, Yuè axe.¹⁰

Certain references in *Guóyǔ* and elsewhere indicate that an obscure branch of the house of Chǔ took over the Yuè (northern Zhèjiāng) region about two centuries subsequent to the founding of Zhōu¹¹; thus the Yuè rulers who emerge in the late Spring and Autumn era are likely to have had an ancestral relationship to Chǔ, a possibility that harmonizes well with Yuè’s frequent military cooperation with Chǔ in that period. The myth of descent from Shào Kāng’s son Wú Yú was very likely a later invention that served to smooth Yuè’s relations with its sinitic neighbors. It may have played a role as well in the civic religion of Yuè. Several of the names of Yuè rulers of the mid Warring States era (Wú Yú Zhī, Wú Zhuān, Wú Qiáng) appear to be modeled on the name Wú Yú, indicating perhaps that the myth may have been more strongly operative in this late

⁹ Zhào Yè, *Wú Yuè Chūnqiū*, with translation and annotation by Zhāng Jué (Taipei: Táiwān Gǔjī Chūbǎn shè, 1996), *juàn* 6 (“Yuèwáng Wú Wàizhuàn”), pp. 283-85.

¹⁰ Yáng Shànqún, *Gōu Jiàn*, Taipei: Zhīshūfáng Chūbǎnshè, 1993, pp. 3-4.

¹¹ *Guóyǔ* 16 (“Zhèng yǔ”) refers to Yuè and to another state (Kuǐ), as belonging to the surname (Mí 芈) of the rulers of Chǔ. In his notes to *Guóyǔ* 19 (“Wúyǔ”) the Three Kingdoms commentator Wèi Zhāo says that Gōu Jiàn was “of the progeny of Zhūróng,” the fire god said to have been the ultimate ancestor of the kings of Chǔ. *Mòzǐ*, “Fēi Gōng Xià” says that the king of the state of Yuè (there characterized as one of the “four great powers of the era,” along with Qí, Jìn, and Chǔ) “sprang from Yǒu Jù 有遽.” Sūn Yíràng has suggested, in his *Mòzǐ Xiángū*, that this is probably a reference to the Chǔ ruler Xióng Qú 熊渠 (c. 887 BCE). *Shǐjì* 40 (“Chǔ Shìjiā,” p.1692) says that Xióng Qú established his youngest son Zhí Cǐ 執疵 as “Yuè Zhāng Wáng 越章王”. It is possible that this refers to the original enfeoffment that lay behind the emergence of Yuè in later times. *Shì Ben* 有世本, a late Warring States text, also affirms the rulers of Yuè belonged to the Chǔ lineage. See Yáng Shànqún, *Gōu Jiàn*, Taipei: Zhīshūfáng Chūbǎnshè, 1993, pp. 5-6.

period than in earlier times.¹² In fact it would probably not be far wrong to attribute the invention of Wú Yú, the son of Shào Kāng, to the mid Warring States, a time that was prolific when it came to the creation of national origin mythologies.

Yuè is mentioned by name in *Zuǒzhuàn* entries dated 601 (Xuān-gōng 8), 544 (Xiāng-gōng 29), 538 (Zhāo-gōng 4), 537 (Zhāo-gōng 5), 518 (Zhāo-gōng 24), and 506 (Dīng-gōng 4). Also *Wú Yuè Chūnqiū* mentions a 510 Wú incursion into Yuè.¹³ The *Zuǒzhuàn* entries mention a number of Yuè officers by name. One can see from these brief entries that, in the mid to late 6th century BCE, Yuè was very much under the sway of Chǔ, and was often charged with the responsibility of providing assistance in campaigns directed against Wú.

The era of named Yuè kings begins toward the end of the Spring and Autumn era and extends to the mid-to-late Warring States era. Chinese knowledge of the actual sequence of kings, appears to have been confused in the extreme. It seems highly likely that, among the factors contributing to this confusion were the Yuè-Chinese language gap, resulting in a proliferation of different Yuè and Chinese designations for the same figures, an indifference to accuracy on the part of Yuè informants and Chinese questioners, and the relatively chaotic organization, and sometimes the numerousness, of states or other entities referred to as “Yuè.” What we have today are three largely unreconcilable Yuè kinglists, one in *Shǐjì* 41, one in *Yuèjuéshū* 10, and one based on a text the authenticity of which has been a subject of considerable debate: the unreconstructed *Bamboo Annals*. Of the three sources, only the last provides more than fragmentary information with regard to dates. The *Shǐjì* and *Yuèjuéshū* lists are simple, tidy, and provide little in the way of circumstantial information. The *Bamboo Annals* list is messy, complicated, and provides quite a bit of circumstantial information. The author of the *Shǐjì* 41 “Suǒ yǐn” commentary adds further detail in the course of an attempt to reconcile the *Bamboo Annals* list with the *Shǐjì* list.

The earliest Yuè king mentioned in *Shǐjì* 41 is Yǔncháng, who appears near the beginning of the chapter as Gōu Jiàn’s royal predecessor. Though *Shǐjì* 41 makes no mention of the fact, it must have been during the reign of Yǔncháng when, in 0506, Yuè

¹² The author of the “Suǒyǐn” notes appended to *Shǐjì* 41 at one point suggests that the triple recurrence in mid Warring States times of these initial “Wú”s may mean that it was a surname. This reflects a sinocentric misunderstanding of Yuè naming practices. A likelier possibility is that this *wú* meant “ruler” in Yuè, being cognate, perhaps, with “vua” in Mường and Vietnamese. Its placement at the *beginning* of each designation in which it occurs is quite in accord with Austroasiatic syntax.

¹³ Zhao Yè, *Wú Yuè Chūnqiū*, with translation and annotation by Zhāng Jué (Taipei: Táiwān Gǔjí Chūbǎn shè, 1996), *juàn* 4 (“Hélú Nèizhuàn”), p.135.

invaded Wú, taking advantage of 1) the absence of Wú troops, which were busy investing the capital of Chǔ and 2) factional division in the court of Wú. This ruler is said to have been the first Yuè ruler to adopt the title "wáng."¹⁴

Most of what follows in *Shǐjì* 41 concerns the well-known legends associated with the reign of Gōu Jiàn. Then, near the conclusion of the chapter, we are told:

When Gōu Jiàn died, his son Wáng Shí Yǔ came to the throne. When Wáng Shí Yǔ died, his son Wáng Búshòu came to the throne. When Wáng Búshòu died, his son Wáng Wēng came to the throne. When Wáng Wēng died, his son Wáng Yì came to the throne. When Wáng Yì died, his son Wáng Zhī Hóu came to the throne. When Wáng Zhī Hóu died, his son Wáng Wú Jiāng came to the throne.¹⁵

We are then told that Wáng Wú Jiāng attacked Qí, but was soon induced by a clever emissary from Qí to attack Chǔ instead, whereupon Chǔ Wēi-wáng (r. 339 - 329) raised troops, defeated Yuè, killed Wáng Wú Jiāng, and annexed all the territory that had belonged to the former state of Wú, all the way up to the Zhè river (Zhè Jiāng). After this, the narrative continues, Yuè disintegrated into groups led variously by kings and by territorial lords (*jūn*), all of whom paid fealty to Chǔ. To what extent this was actually the case will be discussed further below.

The *Yuèjuéshū* kinglist begins, not with Yǔncháng, but with his immediate predecessor, identified as Fūtán:

A great span of time separates the Yuè king Fūtán from the founder Wú Yú; the generations between them cannot be set down. Fūtán's son was Yǔncháng and Yǔncháng's son was Gōu Jiàn, a great hegemon who proclaimed himself king and moved the capital to Láng Yé. Gōu Jiàn's son was Yǔ Yí; he was a hegemon in his time. Yǔ Yí's son was Zǐ Wēng; he was a hegemon in his time. Zǐ Wēng's son was Bù Yáng; he was a hegemon in his time. Bù Yáng's son was Wú Jiāng; he was a hegemon in his time. He attacked Chǔ. Wēi-wáng [of Chǔ] destroyed Wú Jiāng. Wú Jiāng's son was Zhī Hóu; he set himself up as a regional leader by stealth. Zhī Hóu's son was Zūn; he was a regional leader in his time. Zūn's son was Qīn. He lost the support of the masses. Chǔ attacked him, and he ran to South mountain. The rulers from Qīn back to Gōu Jiàn, eight in all, made Láng Yé their capital for two hundred twenty-four years. The ones from Wú Jiāng on back reigned as hegemons and called themselves kings. The ones from Zhī Hóu

¹⁴ The author of the "Zhèng Yì" commentary to *Shǐjì* 41, says that this ruler "expanded his territory, made his state great, and proclaimed himself *wáng*."

¹⁵ *Shǐjì*, (Beijing, Zhōnghuá Shūjú, 1959), *juàn* 41, "Yuèwáng Gōu Jiàn Shì Jiā," p. 1751.

on down were weak and called themselves "regional leaders" (*jūnzhǎng* 君長).¹⁶

The two accounts concur in describing a period of strength lasting until the destruction of Wú Jiāng by Chǔ, which ushered in a period of disintegration and weakness. Many of the other details, however are irreconcilable. In schematic form the two lists may be set forth as follows:

<i>Shǐjì</i>	<i>Yuèjuéshū</i>
	Fūtán 夫鐔
Yǔncháng 允常	Yǔncháng
Gōu Jiàn 句踐	Gōu Jiàn
Wáng Shí Yǔ 王鼂與	Yǔ Yí 與夷
Wáng Búshòu 王不壽	
Wáng Wēng 王翁	Zǐ Wēng 子翁
Wáng Yì 王翳	Bù Yáng 不揚
Wáng Zhī Hóu 王之侯	
Wáng Wú Jiāng 王無疆	Wú Jiāng
	Zhī Hóu 之侯
	Zūn 尊
	Qīn 親

A particularly striking anomaly in the above is the appearance of the name Zhī Hóu *before* Wú Jiāng in the *Shǐjì* list and *after* Wú Jiāng in the *Yuèjuéshū* list. This suggests the possibility of the simultaneous existence of more than one Yuè polity even before the disintegration of Yuè referred to in *Shǐjì*, coupled with a tendency on the part of later inquirers to confuse or conflate these polities. The claim in *Yuèjuéshū* that all the rulers from Gōu Jiàn through Qīn made their capital at the far northern site of Láng Yé is also astonishing, since it appears clear that Chǔ took possession of what had once been Wú after the defeat of Wú Jiāng. If that was the case, then we must imagine a small northern

¹⁶ Liú Jiànguó (editor and translator), *Xīn Yì Yuèjuéshū* (Taipei: Sānmín Shūjú, 1997), *juàn* 8 (Chapter 10), pp. 69-70. Scattered references to other Yuè rulers occur in Chapter 3 of this work in connection with various sites in the old capital area of Wú. These figures, however, are neither located in time nor arranged in chronological series, so it is not clear whether they were rulers of the principal Yuè state or of smaller Yuè groups. One such figure is "Yúfù Jūn" 餘復君, said to have ruled a place called Fùchéng 復城; another is "Yuè Gān-wáng" 越干王 who ruled Gānchéng 干城, and another is "Wáng Shǐ" 王史, associated with a large grave on Mount Yuān 冤, and yet another is Yuè Jīng-wáng 越荊王. Another site is said to be the grave of a Yuè king whose name was unknown to the 1st century CE writer. See *Ibid*, *juàn* 2, Chapter 4, pp. 42-66.

Yuè coexisting in the late Warring States era with many small southern “Yuè” entities extending from Zhèjiāng southward.

References to Yuè in the *Bamboo Annals* begin with 472, the year that Gōu Jiàn conquered and extinguished Wú.¹⁷ From that year on, entries concerning Yuè, referred to always in two-syllable form as Yú Yuè, are numerous and relatively informative, but the details provided seem at times only tenuously related those recorded in *Shǐjì* and *Yuèjuéshū*. What follows is the 5th and 4th century history of Yuè according to this source, together with my comments in parentheses:

In 468, the capital of Yú Yuè was moved to Láng Yé. (This place was in what is now western Shandōng province, near the states of Lǚ and Qí. This move appears to indicate that Gōu Jiàn inherited Fūchāi’s ambition to be recognized as the principal power among the states of the north. *Yuèjuéshū* 10 has a story about an alleged visit paid by Lǚ Āi-gōng to Láng Yé after it became the capital of Yuè.)

In 465 Gōu Jiàn, the viscount of Yú Yuè, known as Tǎn Zhí, died, and was succeeded by his son Lù Yǐng. (It has been supposed that Tǎn Zhí was the Yuè version of Gōu Jiàn’s name. I think the reverse is more apt to have been the case, since the element “gōu” occurs in other names of Yuè rulers. “Gōu Jiàn” means nothing intelligible in Chinese. “Tǎn Zhí” means “reed-holder.” This is discussed in more detail in the next section. As for Lù Yǐng, the author of the “suǒ yǐn” commentary quotes a Master Yuè 樂子 as saying that Shí Yǔ, the name given for Gōu Jiàn’s successor in *Shǐjì*, was the Yuè name for Lù Yǐng, but there appears to be no reason why the reverse could not have been the case. *Yuèjuéshū* applies the name “Yǔ Yí” to this ruler.)

In 459, Lù Yǐng died and was succeeded by Bú Shòu.

In 449, the Yú Yuè viscount Bú Shòu was killed; he was the figure known as Máng Gū 盲姑. He was succeeded by Zhū Gōu 諸句. (Here, it seems clear, since it is unintelligible as a Chinese name, that Máng Gū was the Yuè appellation for Bú Shòu. Bú Shòu, “without longevity,” on the other hand, is entirely intelligible as a Chinese name for a ruler who was assassinated in the 10th year of his reign. Zhū Gōu is evidently the ruler called Wáng Wēng in the *Shǐjì* list. Zhū Gōu seems to be the Yuè name, since 1) it

¹⁷ This and all subsequent references to the *Bamboo Annals* are based on the text and translation contained in: James Legge, *The Chinese Classics, Volume III: The Shoo King or The Book of Historical Documents* (Hong Kong University Press Reprint Edition, 1960), Prolegomena, Chapter IV, pp.105 - 183. Due to a problem in Legge’s date conversion system, a one year error occurs in each dated entry; e.g. 471 BCE instead of 472; this problem has been corrected here.

is unintelligible in Chinese and 2) both syllables recur in other unintelligible names of Yuè rulers and Yuè locations.)

In 416, Yú Yuè extinguished Téng 滕.

In 415, Zhū Gōu, the viscount of Yú Yuè, attacked Tán 鄆 and carried off its ruler viscount Gū 鶻. (These states were both close to Láng Yé. According to passage in *Mòzǐ*, Yuè, together with Qí took part in the dismemberment of the small state of Jǔ 莒 at around this time. A passage in *Zhànguó cè* indicates that the nearby Zēng 繒 was another Yuè conquest. Yuè is mentioned in *Mòzǐ*, together with Qí, Jìn, and Chǔ, as being among the four most warlike states of the era. *Mòzǐ* also mentions that Yuè often had the upper hand in its skirmishes with Chǔ, because the eastward flowing streams in the south made retreats difficult for Chǔ but easy for Yuè.)¹⁸

In 413, Zhū Gōu, the viscount of Yuè died and was succeeded by his son Yī (This is the “Wáng Yī” in the *Shǐjì* list.)

In 379, Yú Yuè moved its capital to Wú.

In 376, in the seventh month, Zhū Jiù, the crown prince of Yú Yuè, killed his ruler Yī. In the tenth month, the men of Yuè killed Zhū Jiù, who was also known as Yuè Gǔ 越滑. The men of Wú [i.e. the men Yuè in the current capital of Yuè, which was formerly the capital of Wú] then raised Fú Cuò Zhī 孚錯枝 to the throne.

In 375, Sì Qū 寺區, a great officer of Yú Yuè, settled the disorders in that state and raised to the throne Chū Wú Yú 初無余; this was Máng Ān 莽安. (This ruler was perhaps the same as the Wáng Zhī Hóu given in the *Shǐjì* list.)

In 365, Sī 思, the younger brother of Sì Qū 寺區, murdered his ruler Máng Ān. He was succeeded by Wú Zhuān 無顛. (The *Shǐjì* list appears to conflate Wú Zhuān with his successor Wú Jiāng, perhaps due to the similarity of their names. The “suǒ yǐn” commentator, again quoting “Master Yuè,” suggests that this Wú Zhuān was the same as a personage named Zǐ Sōu 子搜 mentioned in *Zhuāngzǐ*: “The men of Yuè committed regicide three times. Zǐ Sōu took alarm at this, fled to Dàn Xuè 丹穴 (Cinnabar Cave), and refused to come out. The men of Yuè smoked him out with moxa and conveyed him back in a royal chariot.”)

In 357, Wú Zhuān, the viscount of Yú Yuè, known as Tǎn Zhú Máo 蕤蠋卯, died and was succeeded by Wú Jiāng 無疆.

¹⁸ Yáng Shànqún, *Gōu Jiàn*, Taipei: Zhīshūfáng Chūbǎnshè, 1993, pp. 171-72.

In 336, Wú Jiāng, the viscount of Yú Yuè, attacked Chǔ.

In 334, Chǔ besieged Qí at Xúzhōu, then attacked Yú Yuè and killed Wú Jiāng. (This entry concludes the king list supplied in the *Bamboo Annals*. On the whole, it accords better with the list provided in *Shǐjì* than with that provided in *Yuèjuéshū*.)

In 312, the king of Yuè sent Gōng Shī Yǔ 公師隅 [to Wèi] to present 300 boats, and 5,000,000 arrows, together with rhinoceros horns and ivory.

The entry just above is the last one in the *Bamboo Annals* concerning Yuè, here referred to only by its single-syllable designation. The name of the king is not supplied; but one can only infer from the datum recorded here that Yuè, whether it was by this time located only in its ancient territory around Mt. Guǐjī, or in other areas as well, was still a powerful and prosperous state if it could afford to send such a huge quantity of goods to Wèi. A note in *Shuǐ Jīng* quotes this *Bamboo Annals* entry and elaborates upon it some, saying that the gifts included a large ship named, “Shǐ Wáng” 始罔, and many bales of silk, along with the other gifts. The purpose of this gift-bearing mission, says the note, was to make an alliance with Wèi, so as to deal with the threat of Chǔ.

Since *Shǐjì* says that Yuè “disintegrated,” after Wú Jiāng’s death in 333, and that the little Yuè states that came into being in the wake of this event all owed fealty to Chǔ, it has generally been assumed by early China scholars that Yuè ceased to exist as a strong, single, independent entity after this date. There is a fair amount of evidence to the contrary, however, such as the tribute mission to Wèi discussed above.

Various passages in *Zhànguócè* refer to Yuè posing a threat to Chǔ and even to Qín, throughout the 3rd century. If this were the only evidence of the continued strength of Yuè, one might attribute this merely to the rhetorical exuberance of *Zhànguócè* speech-makers—oftentimes a rhetorician needs throw a second place-name into a validating allusive phrase, to endow the whole with a seemly flourish—what choice could be better than Yuè? Who, after all, would be able to check up on the allusion? In 1977, however, an inscribed bronze vessel was unearthed in Píngshān district, Héběi, that contains parallel references to 1) King Kuǎi’s loss of Yān (to Qí; 0315) and “the continued existence of Yuè up to the present day,” which is attributed to the wisdom of its former rulers.¹⁹ This shows clearly that in the minds of the vessel-makers in c. 300, Yuè was still a fully viable state, in no wise inferior to the other major players in the current geopolitical arena.

¹⁹ Ibid, 1993, p. 176.

Yuèjuéshū 2 concludes with a passage saying that Chǔ “annexed Yuè at Láng Yé” during the reign of Chǔ Kǎoliè-wáng (262-238).²⁰ This suggests that Yuè at some point in the previous hundred years had regained its far northern power center at Láng Yé, or had never lost possession of it, and tends to support the statement in *Yuèjuéshū* 10 that all the rulers of Yuè from Gōu Jiàn through Qīn made their capital at Láng Yé. The *Bamboo Annals*, it is true, says that the Yuè capital moved to Wú in 378, but perhaps a transfer back to Láng Yé occurred at some later point. This passage, moreover, appears definitely to be referring to the same great unitary state that had existed prior to 333, and not to a petty, tribal spin-off of that state.

According to *Shǐjì*, Chūnshēn Jūn (the “Chūnshēn Seigneur”) of Chǔ was enfeoffed in the old capital of Wú in 248. Both *Wú Dì Jì* and *Yuèjuéshū* mention defensive fortifications built south of this location by Chūnshēn Jūn to guard against attacks by Yuè. *Yuèjuéshū* also mentions defensive fortifications put up in this period by a Yuè king, Sūn Kāi, to guard against attacks by Chūnshēn Jūn.²¹ Here, again, it sounds as if Yuè is still a unitary, king-led entity pursuing independent policies, an entity powerful enough to be a source of anxiety to a grandee of Chǔ.

Various passages in *Zhànguó cè*, *Hánfēizǐ*, and *Hán Shī Wàizhuàn*, indicate, if we believe them, that in the period 235 – 225 Yuè was not only still powerful, but was actively pursuing alliances with other states to resist Qín.²² The Qín sequence of conquests, a relatively trustworthy piece of data, harmonizes perfectly with this picture.

The following excerpts show the way the sequence is given in *Shǐjì* 6: “...In the 17th year of his [King Zhèng of Qín’s] reign (230), Court Annalist Téng attacked Hán, [whereupon King Zhèng] obtained the submission of Ān, the Hán king, and took all his territory, turning it into a commandery...” “In his 19th year (228), Wáng Jiǎn and Jiāng Guī established control over all the Dōngyáng territory of Zhào and took the Zhào king captive...” “In his 22nd year (225) Wáng Pēn attacked Wèi...; the [Wèi] king asked to surrender; he took all of Wèi’s territory...” “In his 23rd year (224) he recalled Wáng Jiǎn and charged him with the mission of attacking Jīng (Chǔ). He seized the territory south of Chén all the way to Píngyú and took the Jīng king captive...” “In his 25th year (222)...

²⁰ Liú Jiànguó (editor and translator), *Xīn Yì Yuèjuéshū* (Taipei: Sānmin Shūjú, 1997), *juàn* 2 (Chapter 3), pp. 69-70.

²¹ Yáng Shànqún, *Gōu Jiàn*, Taipei: Zhīshūfáng Chūbǎnshè, 1993, pp. 176; this is based in part on a note added to the 22nd of the “Zhì” chapters of *Hòu Hàn Shū* by Liú Zhāo quoting from a now-lost passage in *Yuèjuéshū*. See Fàn Yè, *Hòu Hàn Shū* (Beijing, Zhōnghuá Shūjú, 1965), “Zhì Dì Èrshíèr,” “Wú Jùn,” pp. 3489-91.

²² These passages are quoted in Yáng Shànqún, *Gōu Jiàn*, Taipei: Zhīshūfáng Chūbǎnshè, 1993, pp. 176ff.

he attacked the Liáodōng area of Yān and captured Xī, the Yān king, then turned back and attacked Dài, capturing the Dài king Jiā, after which he went on to pacify the Jiāngnán area of Jīng, where he forced the surrender of the Yuè king, and turned Guìjī into a commandery..." "In his 26th year (221)...Qín had the general Wáng Pēn attack Qí from the southern part of Yān, whereupon Jiǎn, the king of Qí, was captured."²³

It would appear then, that Chǔ's destruction of Wú Jiāng and occupation of Wú territory in 333 did not in any manner bring about the demise of Yuè as an independent political entity. Yuè not only continued to carry on, but posed a distinct military threat to Chǔ, and was even worrisome to Qín, until the very end of the Warring States era. Yuè, in fact, outlived Chǔ, if only by a couple of years. It was the second-to-last state to be overrun by Qín; only Qí held out longer. This must lead to the conclusion that the familiar phrase "qī xióng," or "seven mighty powers" of the Zhànguó era is merely a simplifying construct of later times. There were in fact "eight mighty powers," one of which was non-sinitic.

Even after the Qín conquest, according to *Yuèjuéshū*, certain Yuè elements broke away from Qín administrative control and set up a quasi-state in the Shānyīn area (in present day Zhèjiāng) variously referred to as "Eastern Yuè" and "Eastern Ōu 甌." The syllable Ōu (Vietnamese "Âu") was among the earliest names applied to the proto-Vietnamese. This quasi-state still existed in the Hàn; one of its kings (name unknown) was given the honorary title "Péngzé Wáng 彭澤王" or "King of the Péng Swamps" after his younger brother Yí Wū 夷烏, a general, helped the Hàn court by killing Liú Pì 劉鼻, one of the seven Hàn princes who rose in revolt in 154 BCE. Yí Wū, the Yuè general who carried out the liquidation of the prince, was awarded the title "Píngdū Wáng 平都王."²⁴

In 221 Qín armies were despatched to points further south to subdue the "Yuè" kingdoms that had come into existence in what is now southern Zhèjiāng (the Wénzhōu area), Fújiàn, Guǎngdōng, and Guǎngxī provinces. According to a passage in *Huáinánzi* 18, Qín experienced harrowing difficulties and losses in a prolonged attempt to pacify the Yuè group known as the "Western Ōu" located in the upper basin of the Xī river in modern-day Guǎngxī. A Qín force of five hundred thousand men, supplied by a specially

²³ *Shǐjì*, (Beijing, Zhōnghuá Shūjú, 1959), *juàn* 6, "Qín Shi Huáng Ben Jì," p. 232-35.

²⁴ Liú Jiànguó (editor and translator), *Xīn Yì Yuèjuéshū* (Taipei: Sānmin Shūjú, 1997), *juan* 2 (Chapter 3), pp. 63, 66. The revolt of Liú Pì is recounted in a very detailed manner in *Shǐjì* 106. Liú Pì, a nephew of Liú Bang, had been enfeoffed as "the Prince of Wú" from the beginning of the Hàn," and his fief included the Mount Guìjī area. After mounting his rebellion, Liú allied himself both with Dōng Yuè to his east, and with Nán Yuè in present-day Fújiàn, but was eventually betrayed by the Dōng Yuè king.

dug canal, eventually managed to kill Yì Xū Sòng 譯吁宋, the leader of this group, but then the Yuè people “entered the wilderness and lived there like animals; none consented to be a captive of Qín.” From their redoubts in the jungle, the fugitives attacked by night, inflicted a huge defeat on Qín, and killed Tú Suī 屠睢, the Qín commander-in-chief. Qín then sent convicts to hold the garrisons, but the region remained unpacified—“the sick could not be treated, and the dead could not be buried.”²⁵

Subsequently, the Hàn dealt with the problem of the southerly Yuè kingdoms by granting them a degree of autonomy; a lord Yáo of Mǐn who had achieved merit in the campaigns against Qín, was enfeoffed by the Hàn founder as “the prince of Yuè,” so as to “serve the descendents of Yuè.”²⁶ *Yuèjuéshū* mentions a “Yáo city” in the Wú capital area, which, according to local lore in the latter Han, had once served as the headquarters of this figure.²⁷ And as we have seen above, other independent Yuè entities existed during the Hàn at least until the suppression of the seven feudatories in 154 BCE.

LANGUAGE AND FOLKLORE

We know from surviving first and second century references to Yuè speech that the language of Gōu Jiàn and Fūchāi was still going strong around Guìjī Mountain and other areas along the southeast China coast throughout the latter Hàn.

It can also be deduced from surviving cultural and linguistic hints that the Yuè language belonged to the Austroasiatic family, which includes, among its modern members, Vietnamese, Mường, Chrau, Bahnar, Katu, Gua, Hre, Bonan, Brou, Mon, and Khmer, or Cambodian. In spite of the scantiness of surviving ancient evidence, Jerry Norman and Tsu Lin Mei, in a 1976 article, were able to demonstrate, based on ancient references to Yue words and dialectal survivals of non-sinitic words in the Mǐn dialects of Fújiàn, ten cases of words cognate with modern Vietnamese that were current in the Yuè cultural area in ancient times.²⁸

²⁵ *Huáinánzǐ*. (Sìbú Bèiyào edition), *juan* 18, pp.16a-16b. See also Keith Weller Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 15-17.

²⁶ *Shǐjì*, (Beijing, Zhōnghuá Shūjú, 1959), *juàn* 41, “Yuèwáng Gōu Jiàn Shì Jiā,” p. 1751.

²⁷ Liú Jiànguó (editor and translator), *Xin Yì Yuèjuéshū* (Taipei: Sānmin Shūjú, 1997), *juan* 2 (Chapter 3), pp. 48.

²⁸ Cf. Jerry Norman and Tsu-lin Mei, “The Austroasiatics in Ancient South China, Some Lexical Evidence,” *Monumenta Serica* 32 (1976), pp. 274-301. The modern Vietnamese words for which Norman and Mei demonstrate the existence of ancient southeast coastal cognates are: *chết* (to die), *chó* (dog), *đồng* (shaman), *con* (offspring), *đằm* (moist, soaked), *sam* (crab), *biết* (to know), *bọt* (scum, froth), *bèo* (duckweed), and *kè* (type of small fish).

Mt. Guìjī itself is just southeast of Shào-xīng 紹興, Lǚ Xùn’s home town, in Zhèjīāng Province. The place is famous for producing *huáng jiǔ*, a strong yellow wine, and for producing sharp and precise young men, known as “Shào-xīng zǐyē” 紹興子爺, who were used as clerks throughout the empire in recent centuries.

Shào-xīng is about a half-hour’s busride southeast of Hángzhōu. If you go directly north from Shào-xīng, you run into the Hángzhōu bay; if you go northwest, you run into the Qiántáng River, which flows into the bay. Just as in ancient times, the whole area is crisscrossed by innumerable small rivers.

The name Shào-xīng, which means “continued flourishing,” was bestowed on the city around 1127 by the first Southern Sòng emperor, Gāozōng, after he fled there from advancing Jīn troops. Shào-xīng was actually the capital of the Southern Sòng for a year and eight months before the court moved to Hángzhōu, then known as Lín Ān. Before the Southern Sòng, Shào-xīng was known by various other names, such as Yuèzhōu, Guìjī District, and Shānyīn.

We know from early descriptions that Wú-Yuè customs included the use of stilt-house dwellings (as may be observed among the Mùòng and other southeast Asian peoples to this day) and a preference for mountain tops as sites of settlements and administrative centers. The reason Gōu Jiàn and his remaining troops were able to hold out for a long time on top of Mount Guìjī was that the place was already a developed settlement with sources of water and stored provisions.²⁹ The same kinds of circumstances lay behind Fūchāi’s later retreat to the top of Mount Gūsū. So far as I am aware, there are no instances of sinitic rulers retreating to mountain-tops in order to withstand sieges, just as there are no instances of sinitic rulers bestowing names upon boats and swords. Phenomena such as these are Yuè culture markers.

We are fortunate to possess, largely intact, two 1st century CE Guìjī texts, *Yuèjuéshū* 越絕書 (“Writings Concerning the Supreme Greatness of Yuè”) and *Wú Yuè Chūnqiū* 吳越春秋 (“Annals of Wú and Yuè”), that are rich sources of information concerning Yuè legends and customs during the latter Han. These two texts both owe their composition, transmission, and eventual printing entirely to the local patriotism of certain minor

²⁹ A passage in *Yuèjuéshū*, for example says, “The city on top of Mount Guìjī was where Gōu Jiàn took refuge after suffering a great defeat in a battle with Wú. He accordingly had a wood-fish pond constructed below the site. Its profit was so great that he would not rent it out.” Cf. Liú Jiànguó (editor and translator), *Xin Yì Yuèjuéshū* (Taipei: Sānmin Shūjú, 1997), *juan* 8 (Chapter 10), p. 199.

members of the educated elite living south of the bay of Hángzhōu in Zhèjiāng Province.³⁰

Particularly noteworthy are chapters 3, “Wú Dì Zhuàn,” and 10, “Dì Zhuàn,” in *Yuèjuéshū*. These two chapters describe the chief architectural sites and topographical features in and around the areas of the ancient capital cities of Wú and Yuè respectively, as they were known to Wú Píng, the text’s first compiler, and often mention stories related to them. They are filled with numerically specific notations concerning the length of walls, the distances between sites, the number, type, and location of city gates, and so on. No earlier extant Chinese text deals with geographical matters in such a concrete fashion; these chapters are ancestral to the *dìfāng zhì* of later ages. One can only surmise that Wú Píng must often have served as a tour guide to Hàn officials and noblemen passing through the area. We know that Zhào Yè, the compiler of the second text, was for a time a local official charged with precisely these responsibilities. *Yuèjuéshū*, as will be shown below, is also the earliest extant Chinese text in which the name and persona of Xī Shī is connected with the tale of Gōu Jiàn and Fūchāi; this occurs in connection with one of the sites mentioned in the “Dì Zhuàn” chapter.

Many passages in this chapter illustrate how topographical features and architectural remains served as the basis both for the growth of stories and the preservation of concepts and traditions in the Yuè region in the latter Hàn. Particular attention is paid to mountains, both as the sites of tombs and as the locus of important royal activities. “The great tomb on Lone Mountain” says one passage, “was the tomb that Gōu Jiàn had built for his own burial. When the capital was moved to Láng Yé, the tomb was still incomplete. It is nine *lǐ* from the district seat.”³¹ “Mt. Jì 稷山,” says another passage, “was the name of Gōu Jiàn’s abstinence and purification retreat.” “Mt. Sea-turtle 龜山,” says the next passage, “was where Gōu Jiàn erected the Roaming-Among-Prodigies Terrace, southeast of the Sīmǎ Gate”:

“It was thus named because it was used to gaze at the motions of sea turtles and also to gaze up at the aspect of the sky to observe celestial prodigies. It was forty-six *zhàng*, five feet, and two inches tall, five hundred thirty-two paces in circumference, and was located near the present day East-city mile-marker. “Another name for it was Prodigy Mountain 怪山. The name arose because, long ago, it came there by itself

³⁰ For details concerning the provenance and transmission of these two texts, please consult the two appendices to this article.

³¹ Liú Jiànguó (editor and translator), *Xin Yi Yuèjuéshū* (Taipei: Sānmín Shūjú, 1997), *juan* 8 (Chapter 10), p. 198.

in a single night. The people marvelled at this, so they called it Prodigy Mountain.³²

In the above we see motifs and ideas quite alien to Sinitic narrative, but typical of Vietnamese historical legend. The two kinds of places most vested with numinous significance are mountain tops and oceans. Political validation, in particular, comes from the ocean, or, more specifically, from sea-turtles. Here we have the same culture as that which produced the legend of An Dương Vương, the early, semi-mythical leader of the southern Việt people. This figure was unable to secure the citadel he established in Cổ Loa, the tradition goes, until a golden tortoise endowed with the gift of human speech emerged from the ocean, showed him how to defeat the demons who were causing the walls of his citadel to collapse night after night, and conferred upon him one of his claws to use as the trigger of a divine crossbow.³³

The motif of a mountain flying into an area and planting itself in a particular spot is not something regularly encountered in Chinese legend, but one *does* see this sort of thing in Vietnamese historical legend, where, for example, in a story called *Truyện Đầm Nhất Dạ*—“The Tale of the Single-night Swamp”—we read of a great walled city that appears by magic in the course of a single night, and later disappears under the same sudden and mysterious circumstances.³⁴ References to similar phenomena may be found in Chapter Four of *Yuèjuéshū*, which speaks of a great rock, named “the Stone of Cén,” by the Qiántáng river, which suddenly disappeared in 100 BCE, then as suddenly reappeared in 97; and of another great rock on Mount Jíduī that was known as “Fallen Star.”³⁵

A passage concerning another mountain contains a vestige of Yuè language:

“Hemp Grove Mountain 麻林山 is also known as Mount Duō 多山. When Gōu Jiàn wanted to attack Wú, he planted hemp to make strings for bows, and had men from Qí oversee the mountain. In Yuè the people of Qí were called “Duō,” so Hemp Grove was called “Duō” to keep Wú from knowing about it [i.e. to keep Wú from hearing that hemp was being cultivated to make arrow strings]. The fields below the mountain were used

³² *Ibid*, *juàn* 8 (Chapter 10), p. 189-90.

³³ Trần Thế Pháp, *Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*, edited and translated into Vietnamese by Lê Hữu Mục (Saigon: Khai Trí, 1961), p. 70-74; Chinese text, pp. 22-24. The earlier portions of this text, including the story referred to here, date from the fourteenth century.

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 51-54; Chinese text, p. 11-13.

³⁵ Liú Jiànguó (editor and translator), *Xin Yì Yuèjuéshū* (Taipei: Sānmín Shūjú, 1997), *juàn* 2 (Chapter 3), pp. 69 and 47 respectively.

as fiefs for meritorious officers. The place is twelve *lǐ* from the district seat.³⁶

A narrative passage in *Wú Yuè Chūnqǐū* introduces a couple of disyllabic phrases in the language of Yuè, but doesn't translate them; the author assumes that the reader will know what they mean. These texts, we must recall, were written by local people for a local audience. Based on the story however, it is possible for us to gain an approximate idea of the significance of the two phrases:

When Gǔ Gōng died, Tàibó 太伯 and Zhòng Yōng 仲雍 went back. After completing their mourning observances, they returned to the Jīng and Mán tribesmen. The people of the state made him their ruler and served him. He called himself Gōu Wú. A man of Wú said to him, "What basis do you have for choosing the name Gōu Wú?"

Tàibó said, "That I presume on my seniority to lead the state is because I have no offspring. The one who should be enfeoffed is the *wú zhòng* 吳仲. I therefore refer to myself as *gōu wú* 句吳. Is this not fitting?"

The Jīng and Mán foreigners thought this very high-principled. Those who rallied to his support and followed him included more than a thousand households, which, acting collectively, raised him to the throne as their *gōu wú*. In just a few years the commoners and people grew to be well-off.³⁷

Here we first of all come across the startling datum that the name "Gōu Wú" was first applied, not to a state, but a person; it is said here to have been a title adopted by Wú's legendary founder, a title that came to be accepted by his followers. It is moreover plain that the protagonists of this story, and the intended original audiences of this story, saw a meaning in the term *gōu wú* that is no longer available to us. The term *gōu* itself may confidently be regarded as a Yuè word; it occurs often in Yuè names of people and places, does not occur in Chinese names, and has no clear significance in Chinese when used in Yuè names. What are we to make of *wú*? It has of course developed, over the ages, into one of the most common of Chinese surnames, but we are dealing here with an era, and a culture, devoid of surnames. A lot hinges on the expression *wú zhòng*. *Wú Yuè Chūnqǐū* itself says elsewhere that "Wú Zhòng" was a secondary name for Zhòng Yōng; *Shǐjì*, however, gives this secondary name, not as Wú Zhòng, but as Yú Zhòng 虞仲.³⁸ In Sino-

³⁶ *Ibid*, *juàn* 8 (Chapter 10), p. 199.

³⁷ Zhào Yè, *Wú Yuè Chūnqǐū*, with translation and annotation by Zhāng Jué (Taipei: Táiwān Gují Chubān shè, 1996), *juan* 1 ("Wú Tàibó Zhuàn"), p.14.

³⁸ *Shǐjì* 4 ("Zhōu Běnjì," pp. 115ff) uses Yú Zhòng for this figure, while *Shǐjì* 31, ("Wú Tàibó Shì Jia," pp. 1445ff) uses Zhòng Yōng and Wú Zhòng Yōng, but not Yú Zhòng.

Vietnamese, this would be “Ngu Trọng” instead of “Ngô Trọng”; “Wú” and “Yú” sounded similar in ancient times. It seems likely, however, that if the syllable was Wú, it arose due to Zhòng Yōng’s association with Wú; he came to rule Wú, and was (Zhòng) a second-born son. This still leaves us with the problem of the original meaning of Wú.

The *Shuōwén Jiězhì* interprets the element that appears below *kǒu* or “mouth” in this character as a picture of a man inclining his head, and says that the combination of this element with “mouth” could have the significance of great or loud speech. The Sòng commentator Xú Kǎi adds that, etymologically, the word refers to the production of sound, specifically to put the mouth out of shape so as to produce sound, in support of which, he adduces a line from the *Shi*: “Bù wú bù yáng” 不吳不揚 (“not uttered, not laid bare”).³⁹ In view of the acceptance of the term by the Jīng and the Mán tribes in the story, it seems likely that the term was intelligible to them as a reference to a person of authority in their culture; it ought to refer to something including both the idea of leadership and (if the Chinese graphic etymology of the word has any relevance) the idea of speaking, such as “Spokesman of Heaven,” “Voice of the Spirits,” “Interpreter of the Sea-turtle Omens” “Announcer of Destiny,” or the like. When Tàibó says that the one who should be enfeoffed is the *wú zhòng*, he is either saying that this figure should be a “divine-speech-producer second-born” (which would violate Chinese, but not Yuè, syntax), or he is using the syllable *zhòng* to stand for a Yuè word denoting some other attribute.

This leaves the problem of the significance of the word *gōu* in *gōu wú*. We may observe, first of all, that the gist of Tàibó’s assurance to his questioner is that his tenure as leader of the local tribes is going to be temporary; he has no progeny; therefore his successor must be his younger brother, who does have progeny. As noted above, the element *gōu* occurs in other Yuè names; one such name is “Gōu Jiàn.” As we have seen above, Gōu Jiàn was also known as Tǎn Zhí, a name intelligible in Chinese as “reed-holder.” Making allowance for the opposite syntactical structure of Yuè and Chinese, and assuming, therefore, that *zhí*, “to hold in the hand” represents the meaning of *gōu*, we may then have some basis for hypothesizing that *gōu wú* means something like “(temporary or provisional) holder of the divine spokespersonship.”

Though no story has come down to us concerning the words that make up “Yú Yuè,” the name is apt to have a similar etymology. The graph Yuè includes (and in early times consisted entirely of) a representation of a distinctive, culture-marking, hooked axe or halbard. From its occurrence in a number of names of places and people the syllable *yú*

³⁹ Xǔ Shèn, *Shuōwén Jiězhì* (Beijing, Zhōnghuá Shūjú, 1979), pp. 213-14.

appears to have the meaning “to have,” “to possess.”⁴⁰ Thus, if applied to a person, the syllables might mean “the one who possesses the axe of authority.”

As for “holding reeds,” this concept figures in Vietnamese historical legend as an omen or symbol of predestined leadership. Đinh Tiên Hoàng (968 – 979 CE), the founder of a short-lived Vietnamese dynasty, followed his mother to her home in the country after his father’s death. There, says the legend, he often went with other children to graze oxen and water buffalo, and would make his companions join hands so as to make a palanquin for him to sit on like a ruler, and often used reed blossoms to make military banners to use in war games in which he acted as commander. When his mother saw this behavior, she was pleased and gave a banquet for neighbors and relatives.⁴¹

THE GENESIS OF THE LEGEND OF XI SHI

Aside from attesting to the currency of many Yuè words, customs, and legends in the Guījī area in the latter Hàn, *Yuèjuéshū* and *Wú Yuè Chūnqiū* are the earliest surviving texts to draw any connection whatsoever between the legendary beauty known as Xī Shī and the destruction of the state of Wú; and, even in these two texts, the story is nothing more than an embryonic foreshadowing of the one we are familiar with today. By the time of the Latter Hàn the name Xī Shī had already been a byword for beauty for about three centuries. The motifs of frowning, heartburn, and the vain attempt of Dōng Shī to match her allure occur in *Zhuāngzǐ*, but nothing in that text connects Xī Shī with any locality or event whatsoever.

Glancing references to Xī Shī as a beauty occur also in *Guǎnzǐ* (“Xiǎo Chēng”), *Shuō Yuàn* (Zūn Xián), *Huáinánzǐ* (“Shuō Lín Shùn”), and *Xúnzǐ* (“Zhèng Lùn”). The first three of these references merely observe that “Xī Shī and Máo Qiáng were supreme beauties of the realm,” or “were without parallel with regard to looks,” etc. *Xúnzǐ* speaks of “loving beauty but hating Xī Shī.” Only in *Mòzǐ* (“Qīn Shì”) do we find something a little more concrete: “And thus we may see that Bǐ Gān’s execution was due to his resistance; Měng Fèn’s death was due to his courage; Xī Shī’s drowning was due to her beauty; and Wú Qǐ’s dismemberment was due to his power.”

When the legend of Xī Shī as the destroyer of Wú came into being in the latter Hàn, two versions of her ultimate destiny appeared as well. One is that she returned to Yuè and

⁴⁰ See Liú Jiànguó (editor and translator), *Xin Yi Yuèjuéshū* (Taipei: Sānmin Shūjú, 1997), *juàn* 2 (Chapter 3), pp. 39 (Yú Háng Chéng 餘杭城) and 42 (Yú Fù Jun 餘復君 who ruled Fù Chéng 復城).

⁴¹ Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam Sử Lược* (reprint edition, Sài Gòn: Bộ Giáo Dục: Trung Tâm Học Liệu, 1971), p.85

departed that state with Fàn Lí, "floating with him on the five lakes" (modern Tàihú in Jiangsu).⁴² The other is that, after Wú perished, Yuè put Xī Shī out to float on the [Qiántáng] river. They had her "follow the leather bag," which is allusion to the legendary mistreatment of Wú Zǐ Xū's corpse (it was stuffed into a leather bag and thrown into the Qiántáng river), and thus conclude her existence.⁴³

To a modern reader, it seems as if the author of the Mòzǐ passage is alluding to the second of these traditions, and thus knew about a Xī Shī related to the Wú-Yuè story, but this inference, however routinely made, is almost certainly mistaken. The writer needed to fill out his array of allusions with a further example of destruction arising from some kind of personal distinction, so he borrowed or invented a random datum concerning a figure used as a byword for beauty. The reason we may fairly be sure of this is that no text before *Yuèjuéshū*, not even such Hàn texts as *Shǐjì* or *Huáinánzǐ* or *Liènnǚzhuàn*, contains a word about a Xī Shī connected to Yuè.

Shǐjì 41 not only has no Xī Shī, but introduces a figure that clashes with the Xī Shī of later legend. The account of the Fàn Lí's adventures in Qí subsequent to his departure from Yuè has a figure identified as his wife, but this person is not Xī Shī or anyone like Xī Shī. She is not named; she appears only as the mother of Fàn Lí's three sons, and her role is limited to saying and doing a few stereotypically motherly things. This, I think, is as conclusive evidence as one could wish for the non-existence of a Xī Shī legend in the Wú Yuè material in the mid-Hàn. One may postulate, however, that the introduction of this wife figure may have served as a convenient armature for later romancers to use when they elaborated the Xī Shī legend.

Liènnǚ Zhuàn, Liú Xiàng's compilation of accounts concerning noteworthy women, is entirely devoid of references to the Wú Yuè story and to Xī Shī, which shows that, at the end of the former Hàn, there was still no Xī Shī lying around, as it were, for Liú Xiàng to pick up and add to his book. In other words, the Xī Shī who belongs the Wú Yuè saga (as opposed to the geographically, temporally, and situationally unlocated beauty referred to by *Zhuāngzǐ* and others) hadn't yet been invented.

But suppose, for the moment, that she *had* been invented? What chapter in *Liènnǚ Zhuàn* could her account have appeared in? Virtuous mothers and worthy wives? Women

⁴² This is a lost passage in *Yuèjuéshū* quoted in a gazetteer-like text called *Wú Dì Jì* 吳地記, evidently a late Táng work with Sòng additions. See Lù Guāngwēi, *Wú Dì Jì*, edited by Cáo Líndì (Nánjīng: Jiāngsū Gǔjí Chūbǎnshè, 1999), p. 47.

⁴³ This is a lost passage in *Wú Yuè Chūnqiū* quoted in *Xiūwén Yùlán* 修文御覽. See Zhào Yè, *Wú Yuè Chūnqiū*, with translation and annotation by Zhāng Jué (Taipei: Táiwān Gují Chubān shè, 1996), Appendix 1, p. 5.

who were skilled in speech? Women skilled in character analysis and prediction of events? Pernicious and depraved women? Like Mèi Xī, Dá Jǐ, Bāo Sì, and the other women who figure in the last category, the Xī Shī who was to be invented by the people of Guìjī used her beauty to destroy a state, but she was also something new in Chinese historical legend: a femme fatale who acted out of the noblest and most selfless of motives. Concerned about the fate of her native land, she put personal happiness aside in order to bring about the destruction of her people’s enemy. She must thus be regarded as a severely loyal and correct floozy, the first of her kind, and the forerunner of the hundreds of “courtesans who know the meaning of righteousness and propriety” that one encounters in late imperial legend. Thus it is not merely Xī Shī who is missing at the end of the Hàn; the *concept* of a person like Xī Shī is equally missing.

How then did the legend get started? The answer is plain to see in *Yuèjuéshū*; it began as a local response to the curiosity of official visitors gazing at the ruins of old structures in and around the Guìjī area. In *Yuèjuéshū* 10, the gazetteer-like chapter on the remains of the old capital area of Yuè, we read:

“Dazzler Palace [Měirén Gōng], circumference 590 paces, two gates for land-entry, one gate for water-entry, located by the earthen wall next to the north Tánlì mile-marker mound, was the palace and pavilion where Gōu Jiàn gave training and instruction to the beauties Xī Shī and Zhèng Dàn. These girls came from the environs of Mt. Zhúluó. He [Gōu Jiàn] wanted to present them to Wú, but said to himself, “Dōngchuí [evidently a place-name] is remote and rustic”; and he feared that the girls would be unrefined and coarse, so he caused them to reside near the Great Avenue, five *lǐ* from the district seat.⁴⁴

This passage is part of the topos, which pervades this chapter, of secret preparations made by Gōu Jiàn to defeat Wú—another, as we have seen in the previous section, was the cultivation of hemp to make bowstrings. The passage concerning “Dazzler Palace” quoted above reflects the nascent phase of the legend only; Xī Shī is not as yet a special focus of attention; she is but one of a pair of equally alluring beauties.

She continues to occupy this circumscribed, quasi-anonymous role in *Yuèjuéshū* 14, “Jiǔ Shù” (“The Nine Strategies”), describing the reception by Fū Chāi of a series of tribute gifts from Yuè. Among the gifts are jade objects, items with gold embossing, and finely carved wood, which inspire Fūchāi to begin construction of the Gū Sū tower, a motif that was picked up by later elaborators of the Xī Shī legend. :

⁴⁴ Liú Jiànguó (editor and translator), *Xin Yi Yuèjuéshū* (Taipei: Sānmin Shūjú, 1997), *juàn* 8 (Chapter 10), p.191

"...the king of Wú didn't listen [to the advice of Wǔ Zǐ Xū] and forthwith accepted the tribute and began building the Gū Xū 姑胥 Tower." [In later legend the character "Xū" in "Gū Xū" is replaced by "Sū" 蘇.]

"It took three years to collect the building materials and five years to complete its construction. It was so tall that it could be seen a hundred *lǐ* away. Travelers in the area said that the corpses of the dead were weeping." [the purpose of this detail is to demonstrate the terrible incorrectness and inauspiciousness of this tower-building project.]

Yuè thereupon adorned the beauties Xī Shī and Zhèng Dàn, and had the court officer [Wén] Zhǒng present them to the king of Wú, saying, "Some time ago, Gōu Jiàn the king of Yuè, through no merit of his own, had Xī Shī and Zhèng Dàn bestowed on him by Heaven. The state of Yuè is dirty, wretched, and afflicted with poverty; we dare not lay personal claim to this gift of Heaven, so he had me, his lowly officer Zhǒng, bow twice and present them to your majesty." The Wú king was greatly pleased.

Shēn Xū [Wǔ Zǐ Xū] admonished the king, saying, "This cannot be done. Your majesty must not accept this gift. Your servant has heard that the five colors cause people's eyes to lose their acuity and that the five tones cause people's ears to lose their sharpness. Jié failed to take Tāng seriously and was destroyed; Zhòu failed to take Wén of Zhōu seriously and perished. Your majesty will assuredly suffer calamity after accepting this gift..."⁴⁵

These are the only references to Xī Shī in the currently extant *Yuèjuéshū*. *Wú Dì Jì*, a late Táng text,⁴⁶ has a passage in which we can see the beginnings of the connection between Xī Shī and Fàn Lí that would become such a prominent part of the later legend. The connection reflected there, as may be seen below, was very different from the one that evolved later:

A hundred *lǐ* south of Jiā Xìng district is "Talking Infant Pavilion." When Gōu Jiàn ordered Fàn Lí to take Xī Shī to give as tribute to Fūchāi, Xī Shī had illicit relations with Fàn Lí along the way, not reaching Wú until three years later. Thus she had a son and, upon coming to this pavilion, her son at the age of one year was able to talk, so it was called "Talking Infant Pavilion."

Here, for the first time, we find Xī Shī both highlighted (there is now no talk of the other lady, Zhèng Dàn) and connected with Fàn Lí. Later legend, however, would decisively reject the three years of illicit relations with Fàn Lí and the birth of a son.

⁴⁵ Ibid, *juàn* 12 (Chapter 14), pp. 264-65.

⁴⁶ *Wú Dì Jì*: see Note 42.

Even after the development, in the old region of Yuè, of a Wú-destroying Xī Shī, it took many centuries for her to gain widespread currency in China as a whole. As late as the Táng dynasty, whoever wrote or compiled the Dùnhuáng story about Wú Zǐ Xū was entirely unaware that a Xī Shī component of the Wú Yuè material had come into existence.⁴⁷ In order for the Wú-destroying Xī Shī to go national, as it were, it was necessary first for a large-scale socio-economic development to occur: the Chinese settlement and development of the south during the Táng, and, more especially, the southern Sòng.

This very much parallels the development of traditions associated with other Chinese cultural icons. Many elements of the Zhūgé Liàng material began in the Shǔ or Sìchuān area and only gradually spread throughout China as a whole.⁴⁸ The Cold Food festival, associated with the Jìn Wéngōng's officer Jiè Zǐ Tuī, had its beginnings in the area once occupied by the ancient state of Jìn and only gradually, and in the face of much official opposition, spread throughout China.⁴⁹ The genesis of the tale of Wáng Cùiqiáo, which, after serving as the basis of a Qīng dynasty novel, became, in the early nineteenth century, the theme of a long verse romance that eventually attained the status of the national poem of Vietnam, evolved in a manner very similar to the tale of the Wu-destroying Xī Shī; at first, Cùiqiáo was merely one of a pair of concubines of a sea pirate who jumped into a pond and drowned after the pirate's destruction by Ming imperial forces—the earliest source doesn't even bestow a name upon her; then, stage by stage, she evolves into a great tragic heroine.⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

Based on the data presented in the foregoing sections, I believe it can fairly be asserted that the geopolitical importance of Yuè in pre-imperial China, and the continued strength of Yuè polities and traditions in southeast China subsequent to the Qín unification, have gone largely unrecognized by historians of the region. One reason for this has been the Yuè-Chinese language barrier, which has consistently inhibited the flow of

⁴⁷ See David Johnson, "The Wu Tzu-hsu Pien-wen and Its Sources," Parts I and II, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (hereafter *HJAS*) 40:1 and 40:2 (1980), pp. 93-156 and pp. 465-506 respectively.

⁴⁸ See Eric Henry, "Chu-ko Liang in the Eyes of His Contemporaries," *HJAS* 52.2 (1992), pp. 589-612.

⁴⁹ See Donald Holzman, "The Cold Food Festival in Early Medieval China," *HJAS* 46.1 (1986), pp. 51-79.

⁵⁰ See Eric Henry, "On the Nature of the Kieu Story," *Vietnam Forum* (Yale University Council on Southeast Asian Studies) 3 (Winter-Spring 1984), pp. 61-98. (The syllable *qiáo* becomes *kiêu* in Vietnamese)

information from Yue (broadly speaking) into China (broadly speaking). The bits of data that did cross the barrier were fragmentary, garbled, at times mutually contradictory, and buried in passages concerning other matters. Another reason for the relative invisibility of Yuè from a Chinese standpoint is the inherently disintegrative nature of Yuè politics, a quality that makes Yuè history, of whatever group or period, hard to fathom. Yuè peoples (if I may venture a generalization here), lack the strong devotion to ideals of group solidarity and political unity that is such a striking feature, usually, of Chinese peoples. One can see at a glance that the dynastic history of Vietnam is far messier, far more ridden with internecine division, than the dynastic history of China. Even the Vietnamese origin myth emphasizes division rather than unity: Lạc Long Quân and Âu Cơ, the progenitors of the Việt people, have to agree to live apart, because their natures are too dissimilar; one is an ocean creature, the other a mountain creature.

Nevertheless the Yuè presence in southeast China was so pervasive and firmly rooted, that it is impossible to say even now that it has disappeared. One has only to observe shamanistic dance rituals in front of Daoist temples in Taiwan (a place populated by descendants both of Mǐn-Yuè peoples and Chinese peoples affected by Mǐn-Yuè culture) to be reminded of a number of the cultural motifs of ancient Yuè: deep-voiced wardrums possessing both a martial and a supernatural significance, tattooing, face-painting, warlike dancing, and so on. One has only to listen to the indigenous music of southeast China and Vietnam to recognize a spirit, tragic and individualistic, quite distinct from the sturdy communal optimism of north Chinese music. To conclude with a yet more outrageous generalization, the Yuè ethos is the *yīn* counterpart to the *yáng* orientation of the Chinese.

Appendix A:

Yuèjuéshū: Provenance and Textual History

The title “Yuèjuéshū,” which means “The Sensational, Record-breaking Greatness of Yuè,” appears to have been given this name by its second compiler, Yuán Kāng. The original compiler, Wú Píng, also known as Wú Gāojūn, a man of the early to mid 1st century CE, called it “Yuèniǔlù.” The basic meaning of *niǔ* is “knot,” a tight arrangement in string that can be undone. Unless the word has some undiscoverable local meaning, the title must therefore mean “Records of the Yuè Nexus,” or “Record of Yuè and Things Radiating From Yuè, or “Record of the Unsolved Puzzle of Yuè.”

Later a man named Yuán Kāng got hold of a manuscript and added an introductory section in which he suggests, playfully and preposterously, that the book might have been compiled by Zǐ Gòng, the disciple of Kǒngzǐ, or that it might have been compiled by Wǔ Zǐ Xū. Among the many reasons these two suggestions are preposterous is that the book contains countless references to personages of the Zhànguó, Qín, and Hàn eras. This Yuán Kāng also added a concluding section in which he supplies, in veiled form, his own name and the name of Wú Píng as joint authors of the book. In doing so, he implies that he was the primary author, whereas the truth of the matter seems to be that Wú Píng compiled it and Yuán Kāng got hold of a copy, added a couple of sections, laid claim to it, and promoted it.

That we know this much about the text’s history is due to a reference made to it in *Lùn Héng* 論衡 by the celebrated skeptic and materialist philosopher Wáng Chōng. Wáng Chōng’s dates are 27 to 97 CE. He himself was a native of Guìjī; his grave in the environs of Shàoxīng can still be visited. It is in chapter 83 of *Lùn Héng*, near the end, that we see the earliest reference to this text.

In this chapter, Wáng Chōng inveighs against the vulgar practice of blindly venerating the writings of the ancients and blindly disparaging the writings of contemporaries. “Let us note,” he says, “that Zòu Bóqí of Dōng Fān, Yuán Tàibó and Yuán Wénshù of Línhuái, and Wú Jūngāo and Zhōu Chángshēng of Guìjī, though they do not enjoy high position, nevertheless have such a stock of knowledge and ability as to be considered heroes of literature.”

Wáng Chōng then goes on to name the productions of these authors, and from the data thus provided we learn that Wú Jūngāo of Guìjī is in every likelihood none other than the Wú Píng alluded to in the last chapter of *Yuèjuéshū*, as being one its two compilers.

“If we look,” he says, “at Bóqí’s Tracing the Origins of Thought [Yuán Sī], Tàibó’s Chapter Commentaries on the Yì [Yì Zhāng Jù] Wénshù’s Xián Inscriptions [Xián Míng], Jūngāo’s Records of the Nexus of Yuè [Yuè Niǔlù] and Chángshēng’s Explication of Chronology [Dòng Lì], we will see that Liú Zǐ Zhèng [Liú Xiàng] and Yáng Zǐ Yún [Yáng Xióng] are unable to surpass them.

From Wáng Chōng’s comments, we glean the valuable information that Wú Jūngāo was a man of Guìjī, that he did not hold high official position, and that at the time Wáng Chōng saw his work on Yuè in the mid to late 1st century, he was the sole compiler of it.

That the word *jué* in the title of the extant work is intended to carry the meaning “record-breakingly great” is made plain in the opening chapter, which is devoted to explaining this and other unusual features of the text. In format, the chapter consists of a series of questions, followed by teasing, whimsical answers. This chapter has every appearance of having been added by a subsequent compiler who wished to give the work a new name, perhaps because the original name was hard to understand, or perhaps because he wished to claim partial credit for the work’s compilation.

Wú Píng’s compilation seems to have had twenty-three chapters, to which Yuán Kāng added an opening and a concluding chapter, making a total of twenty-five, of which nineteen remain today.

The creation, transmission, and, finally, the Southern Sòng printing of this work (c. 1215) appear to have been carried out entirely by people native to the Guìjī area, SE of Shàoxīng in present day Zhèjiāng province. Were it not for regional patriotism, the work would not exist.

Prior to the Sòng, the only texts put in printed form were a few classics and almanacs. Everything else, including even the poems of Lǐ Bái and Dù Fǔ and the essays of Hán Yù and Liǔ Zōngyuán, was transmitted by handcopying. The first person to create a printed copy of *Yuèjuéshū* was a Southern Sòng figure from Yú Háng 餘杭 district in Zhèjiāng province, who flourished during the Jiāding 嘉定 reign period (1208 – 1224). His name was Dīng Fǔ 丁黼. In the preface to the first printed edition of he says: “In the year *rén zǐ* 壬子 (1192) during the Shàoxīng reign period (1190 – 1194), while roaming about the land of Wú, I obtained a copy belonging to the Xǔ 許 family. The corrupt passages in it were very numerous. In the *rén shēn* 壬申 (1212) year of the Jiāding reign period (1208 – 1224), when I took up the magistracy of Yú Háng, I obtained another copy belonging to Chén Zhèngqīng 陳正卿. In the year *yǐ hài* 乙亥 (1215) when I took up a post in the capital (中都), I borrowed a copy from the imperial collection, then compared the texts

with each other. By selecting the passages that made sense, I came up with a version that could be read after a fashion, though it was still not perfect. Thinking of the many errors in the versions I had read, I feared that if the text were not printed, it would not have a wide distribution, and people would have no means of correcting the copies in their personal possession, so I had it printed at Kuímén 夔門, hoping that others would continue this work.”

Though the work is far being homogenous in style, most of its chapters are internally homogenous. A number are devoted to legendary narratives, some of which later entered the generally accepted “matter of Wú and Yuè” and some of which dropped by the wayside. Two chapters (nos. 5 and 11) consist of economic policy advice presented to Gōu Jiàn by an elsewhere unattested figure named Jì Ní. These chapters seem inspired by the same type of thinking that led to the “Discourses of Qí” section of *Guóyǔ*.

The content of each chapter is as follows:

1. Běn Shì (Wài Zhuàn) 本事

Consists of questions and answers explaining the title and other features of the work; evidently the work of Yuán Kāng.

2. Jīng Píng-wáng (Nèi Zhuàn) 荊平王內傳

Tells the story of Wǔ Zǐ Xū’s escape from Chǔ; in which, for the first time, the washerwoman story appears. Numerous details underline the parallels between the washerwoman’s sacrifice and that of the old fisherman. When Wǔ Zǐ Xū arrives in Wú, Hé lú is already on the throne and recruits Wǔ Zǐ Xū after three days and nights of conversation. There is nothing about Wǔ Zǐ Xū helping Hé lú to assassinate of Wáng Liáo.

3. Wú Dì Zhuàn (Wài Zhuàn) 吳地傳

Describes the chief architectural sites of the land of Wú, with a great deal of numerically specific notations concerning the length of walls, the distances between sites, the number, type, and location of city gates, and so on. No earlier extant Chinese text records this kind of information. In this respect, the present chapter and no. 10, “Dì Zhuàn,” could be characterized as the earliest ancestor of the many “dìfāng zhì,” local gazateers, that appeared in subsequent dynasties.

4. Wú Nèi Zhuàn 吳內傳

Less than a third of the chapter is actually devoted to Wú history. These portions stress the barbarity of Wú and Wǔ Zǐ Xū’s determination to avenge himself on Chǔ. The

rest of the chapter concerns: the hegemonic careers of Qí Huán-gōng and Jìn Wén-gōng, and the glories of the ancient sage-rulers: Táng Yáo, Yú Shùn, Qǐ of the Xià dynasty, Chéng Tāng of the Shāng, Kings Wén and Wǔ of the Zhōu, and the Duke of Zhōu.

5. Jì Ní Nèi Jīng 計倪內經

Consists of advice given to Gōu Jiàn of Yuè on how to develop the agricultural and military strength of Yuè. Some of its references to the mores and conditions of Wú and Yuè are obviously anachronistic, as when it speaks of ru-ists roaming from place to place laying their theories before rulers. In its concentration on economic issues, this chapter bears comparison to the "Discourses of Qǐ" section in *Guóyǔ*.

6. Qǐng Dí (Nèi Zhuàn) 請糶 (內傳)

On Wén Zhǒng's advice, Gōu Jiàn asks permission to purchase rice from Wú, so as to create dissension between Bó Pǐ and Wú Zǐ Xū in the court of Wú.

7. Cè Kǎo (Wài Zhuàn) 策考

This is devoted to evaluations of the roles of Wú Zǐ Xū, Fàn Lí, Wén Zhǒng, and Bó Pǐ in the changing fortunes of Wú and Yuè.

8. Fàn Bó (Wài Zhuàn) 範伯

This is devoted to the background and mutual relations of the Yuè officers Fàn Lí and Wén Zhǒng. Both of them are said to have come from Chǔ, where Wén Zhǒng was a high-ranking officer and Fàn Lí was an obscure man-of-service noted for eccentric behavior. It is Wén Zhǒng who first discovers, appreciates, and employs him.

9. Chén Chéng Huán (Nèi Zhuàn) 陳成恆

This is devoted to the international political activities and speeches of Zǐ Gòng, who is portrayed as a master of eloquence, diplomacy, and wisdom.

10. Dì Zhuàn (Wài Zhuàn) 地傳

Like "Wú Dì Zhuàn" (Book 3), this is basically gazetteer-like, but it includes more popular legend than the earlier chapter. It contains a genealogy of the rulers of Yuè that differs considerably from that given in both *Shǐ Jì* and the *Shǐ Jì* "Suǒyǐn" commentary. It also has notations on the visit paid to the area by Qín Shǐ Huáng.

11. Jì Ní 計倪 (Wài Zhuàn)

This chapter shows how Jì Ní, the economic advisor of Book 5, sets Yuè on the course that will eventually enable it to vanquish Wú.

12. Wú Wáng Zhàn Mèng (Wài Zhuàn) 吳王占夢

In this chapter, Fūchāi has a dream full of enigmatic and memorable details (he enters an elegant palace and sees two cauldrons that are boiling but failing to cook, two dogs howling in a northward direction, etc.). Curious to know if the dream has any omens concerning his contemplated campaign against Qí, he asks Bó Pǐ to interpret the dream. Bó Pǐ gives every detail in the dream a brilliantly auspicious meaning. Eager for more explication, Fūchāi continues to seek dream interpreters. An officer recommends a man in the capital city named Gōngsūn Shèng. Shèng knows he is doomed as soon as reads the summons to the palace. In his interpretation of the dream, every detail is grimly inauspicious. Enraged, Fūchāi has him killed. He and his commanders then proceed to attack Qí, but he is intercepted in mid-campaign by forces of Yuè, whereupon he commits suicide, speaking of the shame he will feel on encountering Wú Zǐ Xū and Gōngsūn Shèng in the underworld. This is, in short, an alternate version of the downfall of Wú, highlighting the forthright behavior of Gōngsūn Shèng and omitting all the details about the Huángchí conference and its aftermath that play such a prominent role in the better-known versions of the legend.

13. Bǎo Jiàn (Wài Zhuàn) 寶劍

A sword expert examines and evaluates five, named, precious swords in the collection of Gōu Jiàn, bestowing particular praise on the third, Chún Jūn. More sword lore follows, involving rulers of Chǔ and Jin.

14. Jiǔ Shù (Nèi Jing) 九術

In this chapter Wén Zhǒng meets with Gōu Jiàn and names nine methods of attacking Wú.

15. Jūn Qì (Wài Zhuàn) 軍氣

Most of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of *qì* as a determinant in the outcome of battles. Here *qì* refers, not to courage, but to some kind of mystical emanation that sages know how to analyse. Tacked on to the end of the chapter is a paragraph concerned with the extent of the territories occupied by the states of the Zhànguó era.

16. Zhěn Zhōng (Wài Zhuàn) 枕中

This chapter is devoted to a series of policy discussions between Gōu Jiàn and Fàn Lí. The concepts and theories involved appear to be similar to those that appear in the "Discourses of Yuè" section of *Guóyǔ*.

17. Chūnshēn Jūn (Wài Zhuàn) 春申君

This provides an account of the career and activities of Chūnshēn Jūn, the prime minister of King Kǎoliè of Chǔ, enfeoffed in the old capital of Wú in 0256, that differs greatly from that provided in *Shǐ Jì*. It concludes with an extremely garbled summary of Chǔ history subsequent to his demise.

18. Dé Xù (Wài Zhuàn) 德序外傳

This appears to be what Wú Píng conceived to be the concluding chapter of *Yuèjuéshū*, or *Yuèniǔlù*, as he titled the work. It is devoted to a consideration of the moral and intellectual capacities of Hé lǔ, Fūchāi, Gōu Jiàn, and their officers. The author concludes by saying that, in compiling the work, the Chūnqiū of Kǒngzǐ served him as a model. He then briefly introduces and explains eight chapters in the work, the titles of which contain the words Nèi Jīng and Nèi Zhuàn. At the time this chapter was written, there were eight such chapters in the book, but two of them, "Tài Bó" and "Bīng Fǎ," have since been lost.

19. Piān Xù (Wài Zhuàn) 篇序外傳

Evidently written by Yuán Kāng. This has 1) a discussion of the capacities of the principle characters in the Wú Yuè saga 2) a discussion (in question and answer form) of the arrangement and content of the Nèi Jīng and Nèi Zhuàn chapters, and finally a series of hints as to who wrote the work, from which it is possible to construct the names Wú Píng and Yuán Kāng.

Appendix B:

Wú Yuè Chūnqīū: Provenance and Textual History

The author, Zhào Yè 趙曄, seems to have been born around 40 CE and to have died around 100 CE. He was a native of Guìjī, served for a while in that region as a minor official whose responsibilities included the reception and care of visiting dignitaries, then threw up everything, went to Sìchuān, and studied the Hán Shī for about twenty years with one Dù Fǔ 杜撫. When the later died, he returned to Guìjī and devoted himself to study and writing.

The work, in the form that we now possess, consists of 10 *juàn*, of which the first five are devoted to the affairs of Wú and the second with the affairs of Yuè. This appears to be an abridgement made by Huángfǔ Zūn of Zhào Yè’s work, which had twelve *juàn*.

1. Wú Tàibó Zhuàn 吳太伯傳

Traces Wú Tàibó’s ancestry back its beginnings, describes the burial place of Tàibó, then gives an account of his descendants up to Shòu Mèng.

2. Wú Wáng Shòu Mèng Zhuàn 吳王壽夢傳

Stresses Yuè’s cultural remoteness from the central states. Scants the account of Jì Zhá’s tour of the central states.

3. Wáng Liáo Shǐ Gōngzǐ Guāng Zhuàn 王僚使公子光傳

This chapter takes its title from the opening words of the first sentence. It is focussed on the background and activities of Wǔ Zǐ Xū.

4. Hélu Nèi Zhuàn 闔閭內傳

Devoted to the career of Hélu. Has many details that differ from *Zuǒzhuàn* and *Shǐjì*, such as the tale of the killing of Qìng Jì.

5. Fūchāi Nèi Zhuàn 夫差內傳

Devoted to the career of Fūchāi. Includes the Gōngsūn Shèng dream-interpretation story from *Yuèjuéshū*.

6. Yuèwáng Wúyú Wàizhuàn 夫差內傳

Contains colorful legends concerning Yǔ the Great. Has some account of Wúyú’s successors.

7. Gōu Jiàn Rù Chén Wàizhuàn 句踐入臣外傳

Begins with a depiction of Yuè officers seeing off Gōu Jiàn. Much space is devoted to debates about the relative wisdom of killing or not killing, releasing or not releasing, the king of Yuè.

8. Gōu Jiàn Guī Guó Wàizhuàn 句踐歸國外傳

Begins with the people of Yuè welcoming Gōu Jiàn back to the state, then shifts to the policy advice of Gōu Jiàn's officers and the means used delude Wú.

9. Gōu Jiàn Yīn Móu Wàizhuàn 句踐陰謀外傳

Concerns Gōu Jiàn's war preparations in the 10th and 13th years of his reign. Has material, such as the lyrics of a Yuè song, and details concerning military technology (e.g. crossbows), that don't occur in earlier texts.

10. Gōu Jiàn Fā Wú Wàizhuàn 句踐伐吳外傳

Summarizes Gōu Jiàn's war preparations, then recounts the final series of battles. Includes some ancient poems and song lyrics. Wǔ Zǐ Xū's ghost makes an appearance, and Kǒngzǐ appears as well, with an offering of medicine.



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