

## 4: CHINA'S FEUDAL TRANSITION INTO HIGH CIVILIZATION<sup>1</sup>

a. *Fit the ideational determinist preconditions to feudalism (i.e. prefeudal breakdown) and feudalization stages of the ancient Chinese feudal process to the key events of late Shang and early to mid Zhou China's history. How does shifting to a Marxist material determinist perspective change the story you tell and that story's moral?*

b. *Fit the ideational determinist defeudalization, centralized feudal and bastard feudal stages of a feudal process to the mid to late Zhou (i.e. late W. Zhou & then E. Zhou's Spring-Autumn and Warring States subperiods) of ancient Chinese history. How does shifting to a Marxist material determinist perspective change this analysis?*

The ideational determinist and material determinist perspectives differ most radically when applied to the type of historical process commonly labeled "feudal." The pure Marxist form of material determinism requires that private property in land exist before Feudal Society can arise. Since property in land is bound to arise eventually, this requirement makes feudalism an all but universal stage of history.

By contrast, ideational determinism allows for an *optional* feudal process. Only under certain, rarely encountered circumstances does a feudal process get under way, and various accidents can abort one at any stage of the process. So far only three fully articulated and complete feudal processes seem to have occurred. One evolved during late Shang and Zhou times in ancient China, another in Medieval Europe and a third in Medieval Japan. All three may be divided into similar stages.

This chapter for the most part analyzes ancient China's feudal process from an explicitly ideational determinist perspective. I also sketch in some of the reasons

why a material determinist explanation of Late Shang and Zhou period China has faded out of use, even in a still nominally Marxist China.

### A. The Shang Prefeudal Breakdown and Zhou's New Vision of Heaven

#### 1. The ideational determinist feudal process & its stages

##### a. an historical process

China made the transition from the early civilization of its Late Neolithic and Bronze Ages to the first stage of high civilization by way of a feudal process defined from an ideational determinist perspective. It completed this transition into high civilization as the feudal process's defeudalization stage morphed into its centralized feudal stage.

China was the only ancient civilization to make its transition into high civilization through the feudal process route. By no coincidence, it was also the only one to attain a well-developed bureaucratic state during its first stage of high civilization.

Remember, the definitions of "feudal" and "feudal process" I use here are ideational determinist definitions. "Feudal" simply means pertaining to the fief; a fief being a semi-independent local state ruled by a vassal in voluntary subordination to his feudal lord or overlord. The vassal in some respects is an independent sovereign. Ultimately, however, he subordinates himself to his lord, usually on explicitly religious grounds.

The feudal political order, like all political forms seen from an ideational determinist perspective, appears as a re-presentation onto Earth of a religious vision of the nature and organization of Heaven.

The material determinist uses the term feudal in a much different way. "Feudal" pertains to the type of state established and run by landlords, who rule over land-users by controlling the latter's access to the land.

A material determinist Feudal Society evolves out of a Slave Society and gives way to Capitalist Society. By contrast, an ideational determinist feudal society can arise from a variety of types of state and society. Nor is the nature of the civilization that grows out of an ideational determinist feudal process fixed. Each link to

Heaven can have a variety of material consequences. So far, however, each of the three feudal processes has midwived a shift from one stage of civilization to another.

##### b. a feudal process's stages

The ideational determinist definition characterizes feudalism as a *process*, and divides that process into five stages:

1) a **prefeudal breakdown**, in the Chinese case, during which the growing early civilization discovers it cannot use its early civilized political techniques to keep control over as much territory as it can conquer. At the climax of this stage someone discovers and applies to politics a new vision of Heaven. This new vision permits creation of a larger and ultimately more complex political and cultural order. For example, in China the innovator took the relationship between the North Star and the fixed stars in Heaven as the model for the lord-vassal political relationship on Earth. He took his perception of the nature of Heaven and "re-presented" it onto Earth (i.e. used it as a model or template for reorganizing the political order).

2) **feudalization**, during which, if no external threat prevents it from happening, more or less independent vassals are sent out to organize fiefs (local states) ever further away from their lord's central realm. This creates a large though loosely linked feudal empire. Formally or informally, the vassals each enter into a kind of contractual relationship with their overlord. This contract allows them to do with their fiefs anything not explicitly forbidden by the contract. This allows them to exercise some of the prerogatives of independent sovereigns while ultimately remaining subordinate to their lord. Eventually, however, one or more of the following occurs to bring the feudalization stage to an end:

a. Either the most remote fiefs are too far away from the center for their vassals to remain in regular contact with the lord at the center, or

b. the vassals at the margin bump into states from some other civilization which can bring more power to bear than the vassals can, or

c. some inherent characteristic of the particular vision of Heaven being employed eventually unravels the bonds of loyalty between lords and vassals over time.

The result is:

<sup>1</sup> 2nd draft 9/94; 3rd rev., 10/98, by Edward Kaplan.

3) **defeudalization**, the clumping together of fiefs to form larger feudal principalities. The rulers of these principalities can organize them in one of two ways:

a. as microcosms of the original feudal empire. The ruler of the principality preserves the formerly independent fiefs he has taken over as subfiefs within his principality. The former rulers of these fiefs become subvassals of the ruler of the principality. The principality's ruler remains, at least vestigially, the vassal of the overlord of the original feudal empire.

b. as centrally controlled feudal entities. The ruler of each principality transforms the conquered fiefs into subordinate parts of the whole that he rules directly. Some of the former subvassals and many of the principality's "housemen" (subvassals retained as assistants serving at the court of the ruler of the principality) become bureaucrats (meritocrats, if you prefer a less pejorative synonym).

The difference between even a subvassal and a meritocrat is subtle, but profound. A vassal or subvassal is someone who is permitted to do *anything* not explicitly forbidden by his feudal contract. A meritocrat is someone who can do *nothing* but what his job description (his "template of merit," an optional offshoot of the going vision of Heaven) specifies.

This mutation of subvassals into meritocrats results in something revolutionary—the creation of the bureaucratic state and the meritocratic branch of the ruling class. So far in human history, a well-articulated bureaucracy has only resulted from either a feudal process or contact with a civilization that has gone through a feudal process, or both. China had a feudal process two millennia earlier than did Western Europe and Japan, the only other two regions to have gone through a full-blown feudal process. At some point during their feudal processes both of the latter also evolved proto-meritocracies and both quickened their bureaucracy's development by imitating the Chinese forms of bureaucracy.

The first bureaucratic states in ancient China were the centrally ruled feudal principalities that arose during defeudalization. These first bureaucratic statelets tended to be more viable than the principalities that were microcosms of the feudal empire. Wars among these principalities broke out more frequently as the cement of loyalty to their common feudal

overlord broke down along with allegiance to the old vision of Heaven. In the course of these wars, the centralized principalities were more likely to conquer the more slackly organized microcosms, leading to their bureaucratic form of organization becoming dominant during the

4) **centralized feudal** stage. Depending on the size and physical configuration of the civilization's territory, one or more centralized/bureaucratized feudal principalities survive the defeudalization stage. When their last vestiges of allegiance to the old central overlord disappear, the feudal principalities can claim full sovereignty, and

5) the **bastard feudal** stage gets under way. Partly due to inertia, bureaucrats may still appear to be vassals even though they no longer really are. Under a feudal facade a new stage of civilization has taken form. A meritocratic branch of the ruling class is running one or more elaborately bureaucratized states. A larger and more complex market had achieved increasing autonomy from the state during the feudalization stage, and its participants can now vie with these states for control of the civilization's wealth. Partly because of this head start, partly because the state comes to depend on taxing the market for a significant part of its revenue, even the bastard feudal state never quite dares control the market as much as might happen in a state that has not gone through a feudal process.

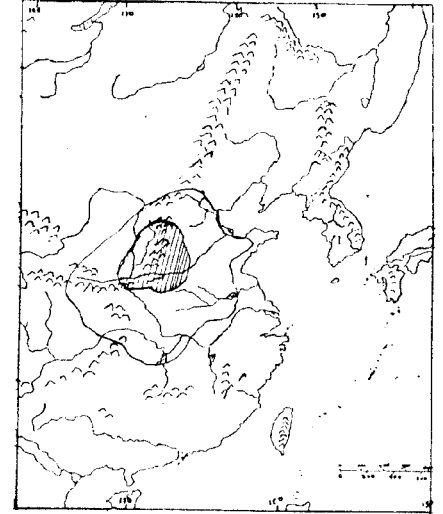
A feudal process is, therefore, really not just a breakdown of an existing civilization, but a positive way to overcome the crisis of civilization caused by that breakdown. It creates a characteristically post-feudal new stage of civilization. Though the Chinese feudal process differed in detail from the much later European and Japanese feudal processes, the three resembled each other and had similar consequences.

## 2. The Late Shang prefeudal breakdown

We have already seen how the late Shang situation was peculiar. Its rulers were able to conquer and culturally influence many groups of people well beyond the margins of the fulcrum subzone, but were unable to achieve sustained political control over these areas.

The Shang, like Xia and earlier rulers going back to the mythic Huang Di, arose

inside the fulcrum subzone. With the move to Yin some time after 1300 BC, they began to take over the rest of the fulcrum subzone and tried to conquer a good bit of B1 and B2. Parts of C1 and A3 also eventually came into Shang's zone of influence.



The core and periphery of the late Shang

Shang infantry and chariots could regularly campaign north to beyond the site of modern Beijing. They could fight their way east part way into the Shandong peninsula. Their technology reached south to the middle reaches of the Huai valley (perhaps even as far as the region of the great lakes bounding the middle Yangzi valley). They took hostages west at least as far as the site of modern Xi'an.

Other states in this broad ring of territory surrounding the fulcrum subzone were importing Shang-made bronzes. Some of them were even using Shang bronze-casting techniques to produce bronzes with unique local styles.

Late Shang oracle bone writings suggest that the kings had to frequently repeat military expeditions into these areas from c. 1250 to 1070 BC, even though each campaign was initially successful. Shang probably lost its initial superiority in weapons (bronze arrowheads, spears and halberds, swords, chariots with bronze sleeve-bearings) as these peripheral states learned its material techniques. Shang could not, however, teach these peripheral peoples to be loyal once the Shang armies withdrew.

If material determinism is correct, this initial material superiority should have been sufficient to assure the permanent enlargement of the Shang state. Shang's failure to permanently swallow its neighbors would seem to undermine the material determinist position.

An ideational determinist perspective provides a plausible explanation for the Shang failure. Perhaps Shang's Heaven was too small and too simple to be re-presented onto Earth as a state comprising that recalcitrant broad outer ring of territory surrounding the fulcrum subzone.

When repeated conquests did not do the trick, the Shang rulers turned to multiple royal marriages. The kings married large numbers of the daughters of rulers of some of the local states of the periphery. Unfortunately, most of the sixty-four wives of King Wuding, the third monarch after King Pangeng moved the capital to Yin, stayed home with their daddies, and Wuding's many fathers-in-law remained obstinately independent.

Taking hostages from among the heirs of the local rulers also boomeranged eventually. One such hostage was Duke Chang (posthumous title, King Wen), heir to the throne of Zhou, a state on the western frontier near modern Xi'an. Chang not only learned much of Shang culture during his time as a hostage, he also perceived the inadequacy of Shang's vision of Heaven. He created (or encouraged the creation by others) of a reworked version of that vision of Heaven. He claimed that it was actually a revival of the vision proclaimed 1,500 years before by Huang Di.

This could be true. In any event, most of the states on the western frontier appear to have accepted the Zhou vision of Heaven by early in the 11th century BC. Zhou could then organize them into a Zhou-led coalition during the next generation. This allowed King Wu (King Wen's son) to conquer Shang, bring the prefeudal breakdown to an end and begin feudalization.

### 3. Zhou's new vision of Heaven

#### a. the religion of Tian

Zhou's new vision of Heaven focused on a new, or perhaps just newly named deity, Tian (天). Tian is conventionally translated as "Heaven." However, even the modern, somewhat abstract, version of the pictograph for Tian is a clear representation of a human being. The top line (a circle or triangle in the ancient form of the character) is the head. The arms of this Heavenly Person are akimbo and his legs spread. This is a special kind of person. The "man" pictograph (*ren* 人) merely

shows the legs of an ordinary male biped. Tian must have been an anthropomorphic (man-shaped) deity.

Tian was associated with the night sky, particularly with the North Star, either as its chief resident or its embodiment. According to surviving fragments of the ancient Zhou astronomy books, Tian ruled over Heaven just as the North Star governed the night sky. Tian/ North Star remains fixed in the north of the sky and all the other so-called "fixed" stars rotate around him. These fixed stars keep a fixed relationship to each other and a constant rotational relationship to North Star in the course of the night. Standing fixed in the north, facing south, Tian rules over all creation.

Zhou's re-presentation of this Heavenly Order onto Earth is still reflected in the layout of the traditional Chinese administrative city. When the Manchu Qing Dynasty rebuilt Beijing in the 17th century AD, the administrative center and imperial palace continued to be placed in the north of the city facing south. The grid layout of the rest of the city was still oriented to the sacred precincts in the north.<sup>2</sup>

The North Star and the fixed stars are not the only conspicuous bodies in the night sky. Also present are the so-called "wandering stars." This was the ancient collective name for what we know as the planets, five of which are visible to the naked eye. Unlike the fixed stars, these wanderers seem to nervously jiggle back and forth across the firmament.

To the casual observer the movements of the wandering stars seem to have no pattern to them at all, but precise observations over generations and centuries revealed to ancient astronomers a complex periodicity—an order discoverable under the apparent disorder of their wanderings. Jupiter, for example, usually taken as the most important because largest of them, has a period of just under twelve years. That is, despite all the seeming irregularity of its movement, Jupiter will return to the same place in the sky approximately every dozen years.

Long-term observation also revealed that just under every 550 years all five of the wandering stars come together in one of the twelve "houses" (wedge-shaped

sectors) into which the Chinese, like the Mesopotamians, divided the night sky.

According to the Zhou cosmology, this was when Tian changed his authorization to rule, his "mandate" (*ming* 命).<sup>3</sup> At such a time the Five Wanderers gathered and delivered Tian's mandate by way of the astronomers who observed them. Astronomers and other wise men would then examine other portents to decide which new ruling family had gained the right to take over control of the state.

Pure superstition, you might say. Perhaps so. But the ancients seem to have acted on them. The paleoastronomers of our times have correlated these grand conjunction dates with archaeologically determined (or tree-ring corrected Carbon-14 approximated) dates for the shifts from one of the three ancient dynasties (Xia, Shang, Zhou) to the next. The paleoastronomical and archaeological dates are also much closer to the dates derived from the 4th century BC chronicle history *Bamboo Annals* than to the orthodox 1st century BC attempt to date the mythic accounts.

The beginnings of Zhou, Shang, and Xia all seem to coincide with grand conjunctions of the wandering stars. (This, by the way, is new information, not yet noticed at the textbook level of the academic consensus.)<sup>4</sup>

Ancient Chinese and ancient Mesopotamian political astronomy were parallel but not identical. Mesopotamian astronomy began earlier, and presumably influenced the Chinese, just as the idea of the chariot was likely brought from the west by Caucasoidal settlers in A1 a few centuries before the Zhou conquest.

But just as the Chinese chariot differed from the West Asian,<sup>5</sup> so too did the Zhou re-presentation of that Heaven differ from the Mesopotamian. The Zhou religion re-presented it onto Earth as a feudal political order and the Mesopotamian religions did not. This difference does not surprise an ideational determinist. It mere-

<sup>3</sup>The original mandate was an object, a wooden or jade tablet broken in half. The king gave one half to a subordinate serving at a distance. He gave the other half to a messenger sent to the first subordinate. The local official could verify the authenticity of the messenger by fitting the two halves of the mandate together.

<sup>4</sup>See David Pankenier's pioneering work in *Early China*, 2, (1981) for the details.

<sup>5</sup>It soon evolved dished spoked wheels which were lighter and stronger than flat profile spoked West Asian wheels. The Chinese version had a sit-down rather than a stand-up driver's box.

<sup>2</sup> China's highest Communist leaders still choose to live in the Zhongnanhai district, in the heart of Tian's re-presentation onto Beijing's administrative city. As Forrest Gump might say, sacred is as sacred does.

ly reflects the autonomy of the human mind which can analogize from Heaven to Earth in a variety of ways from the same body of astronomical data.

## b. Tian's re-presentation onto Earth

The Zhou rulers linked the specific objects visible in the night sky to another level of reality, one not visible except to the mind's eye. This was the realm of the dead kings of the Zhou line. The Zhou traced their line back to a god associated with millet-growing who impregnated their female progenitor, Jiang Yuan, when she stepped into a toe print the god had made in a field of millet.<sup>6</sup> This was at the court of Huang Di back in the third millennium.

When these sacred Zhou kings died, they rose to some realm just below the level of Heaven. There they became what Zhou religion called *pei Tian* (配天), "intercessors with Heaven." These intercessors were celestial bureaucrats who carried messages from Heaven to Earth and back again. They became the Heavenly prototypes for the earthly bureaucrats who only appeared much later.

Tian, the supreme deity, may have begun as a storm god and seems to have sometimes behaved rather arbitrarily. An earthly ruler could make good (if anachronistic) use of the ministrations of these dead ancestors of his in mollifying the supreme deity when he reverted to storm-god modes of behavior.<sup>7</sup>

In the course of consolidating their conquest of the Shang realm the Zhou represented this order of Heaven linked to the night sky, visible and invisible, into a feudal political hierarchy on Earth. Surviving documents make it pretty clear that ideas about the configuration of Heaven came first, and their application to earth came later.

The last Zhou royal hostage to Shang, King Wen (文), was the last Zhou ruler before the conquest began. The five planets came together during his reign. Many influential members of the Shang ruling class may by then have become believers in the Zhou astronomical religion. An

earlier version of the astronomical faith (perhaps derived from Huang Di's calendrical astronomy) may have been dominant through Xia times. It may also have been present as a minority view during Shang and increased in popularity as more members of the Shang ruling class became convinced that their dynasty's time was up after repeated failures to permanently absorb the periphery.

Since King Wen was already so closely linked to the revived astronomical religion, the next generation suspected that it would be a ruler of his line who would replace the Shang line.

At least two of the earliest known sacred books are closely associated with King Wen, the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易经) and the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing* 书经).

The *Yijing* uses a sacred mathematical language for divining what Heaven expects those on Earth to do. The language has only two "letters"—symbolized respectively by a broken and an unbroken line. Eight "words" were made up from permutations of clusters of three of the two letters arranged vertically, with sequence as a distinguishing characteristic (i.e. b-u-b is different from b-b-u and u-b-b).

These eight "words" are usually called the Eight Trigrams. Their invention, along with the broken-unbroken line letters, is ascribed to the mythical culture hero Fuxi. King Wen's (or his ghostwriter's) innovation in the *Yijing* was to permute these eight trigrams into sixty-four hexagrams, each composed of two trigrams set one above the other.

Each of Fuxi's trigrams symbolized some key aspect of Heaven or Earth. The hexagrams and the rules by which they were formed and transmuted into each other modeled the changes in the relationships between various aspects of Heaven and Earth. King Wen supposedly wrote a short passage of discursive prose for each hexagram summarizing these changes.

These sixty-four hexagrams and King Wen's brief commentary on each hexagram form the core of the *Yijing*. They have been retained more or less intact as that mysterious book has been added to and transmitted by copying down through the millennia until printed copies began to be made by the 11th century AD.

King Wen's passages can still be identified by their similarity in style and vocabulary to long inscriptions found on

large early Zhou bronzes dug up by modern archaeologists. This closely associates the earliest parts of the *Yijing* with the times of King Wen.

The *Book of Documents* (*Shujing* 书经) probably began to be written out just after the conquest. It comprises speeches ascribed to all the great rulers stretching back to Huang Di. The language employed suggests that the speeches of the founding figures of Zhou are probably authentic. Most of the rest appear to have been written out centuries later than the 11th century BC, the putatively earliest being written out latest.

If the *Yijing* was to provide guidance about Heaven-Earth interactions, the *Shujing* was to show earthly precedents for the successors of the Zhou conquerors to apply to contemporary problems they faced. It would have been needed to meet the many new practical problems evoked by Zhou's conquest of Shang and the new world of feudal politics.

## B. Zhou's Feudal Empire

### 1. The two Zhou conquests & feudalization's onset

King Wen died not long after the grand conjunction of the planets in 1072 BC. The conquest of Shang, which probably took place c.1050 BC, two Jupiter twelve-year cycles after the grand conjunction, had to be left to his son, whose posthumous temple name was King Wu (武, "martial;" the antonym of Wen 文 "civil").

Right on schedule, King Wu set out against the Shang armies, surrounded by his allies from among the western frontier states. Most of the peoples of the periphery were resentful of Shang and sympathetic to the Zhou, if only because of Shang's repeated invasions of their territories. As luck would have it, the main Shang armies were off in the east on such a campaign as King Wu launched his attack. King Wu knew this because his father-in-law, the Duke of Qiang, had been keeping watch on the frontier.

Just as King Wu reached the eastern end of the fulcrum subzone and was preparing to cross over the Yellow River on his way north to Great City Yin, the astronomers suddenly reported that Jupiter had lurched away from its return path to the house of the zodiac where the grand

<sup>6</sup> Young women in a similar situation should not try this story on their fathers. Our vision of Heaven differs from that of ancient Zhou.

<sup>7</sup> Most of the instances of arbitrary behavior by Tian are in books which date to well after the conquest when literal belief in the deity as the embodiment of virtue may have been becoming attenuated.

conjunction had earlier taken place. King Wu immediately halted the armies. He waited uneasily for several weeks until Jupiter finally resumed its motion in the appropriate direction.

Only then did the armies set out again. King Wu crossed the river, challenged and defeated the bad last king of Shang. The Shang king and his lewd girl friend<sup>8</sup> died in the burning of his palace at Yin.

After occupying Yin, King Wu assigned several of his younger brothers to garrison the city. King Wu returned home to start organizing his now much enlarged state, but quite unexpectedly and in his prime, he died a few years after the conquest. He left a twelve year old son as his heir. King Cheng ( 成, "accomplished") as he was known posthumously, was still too young to rule in his own right. His uncle, Dan (pronounced Dahn), the Duke of Zhou, was named regent.

The child king's uncles garrisoning Great City Yin promptly rebelled. They called for adoption of the Shang succession pattern, which they claimed involved fraternal succession taking priority over father to son succession. That would have made each of them king in turn and only then could Cheng have taken the throne. Actually, the last four Shang successions had been father to son, if only because no suitable brothers were available. The Zhou pattern apparently had been from father to son for some time.

On behalf of his nephew, the Duke of Zhou asserted that Heaven's Mandate required father to son succession. Otherwise the hierarchy of dead ruler intercessors with Heaven would be unclear and Heaven would have no unambiguous channel through which to deliver Heaven's Mandate to Earth. The brothers were unimpressed.

The Duke of Zhou had to launch a second conquest campaign against the Shang territory, this time directed as much against his own brothers as against the surviving Shang aristocrats who by this time had allied with the Zhou rebels. The Duke recaptured Yin, pacified his brothers and their main Shang allies, and then settled down to begin re-presenting the Zhou Heaven onto Earth as a new political order based upon the Zhou version of the religion of Heaven.

To avoid more mischief from Zhou aristocrats rubbing up against Shang poli-

tical culture in Yin, the Duke established a new city near the site of modern Loyang in the middle of the fulcrum subzone. Xi'an in the west would remain the main capital. Loyang would serve as a supplementary eastern capital.

Loyang's initial task was to watch over Yin from a safe distance. Soon it also came to serve as the headquarters for the eastern armies. These garrisoned Loyang so they could more quickly come to the aid of the vassals sent out to occupy the eastern half of Zone B. The old capital to the west in B1 near modern Xi'an remained the king's principal residence and the base for the western armies.

Next, the Duke began sending off vassals into the peripheral area surrounding the fulcrum subzone. The king (*wang*, 王) was now also known as Tian Zi ( 天子). This literally meant "Son of Heaven." It might also be construed as "Fourth-ranked vassal of Heaven," since *Zi* was also the fourth of the hierarchy of five feudal ranks into which the Duke arranged the aristocratic titles he had inherited from Shang. The deities placed above the reigning Zhou king were the Intercessors With Heaven, the Wandering Stars and the Fixed Stars, above whom reigned Tian at the North Star.

## 2. Feudalization

The king's position in the divine hierarchy having been fixed just below Heaven's lowest rank, he (or his representative, the regent) could then re-present that Heavenly hierarchy onto Earth. The Duke of Zhou sent the five grades of vassals out into the periphery to establish fiefs (*guo* 國) of various sizes on behalf of their overlord, the young Zhou king.

Many of the vassals were younger members of the Zhou royal family, including trustworthy brothers of the Duke of Zhou. The Duke could safely send them to the furthest edges of the periphery because no matter how far away they were they would remain loyal to their kinsman, the king, for both religious and practical reasons.

The Duke of Shao, for example, was given the fief of Yan in the Beijing region at the northern end of B2. The Duke of Zhou sent his own son to found Lu along the B2-C1 border. Other vassals were named from among the most reliable of the royal in-laws, such as the Duke of Qiang, who was sent to the east of Lu to

found the fief of Qi. Less reliable relatives and non-relatives were assigned lands closer to Xi'an or Loyang so the center could keep an eye on and control them.

Eventually, the kings enfeoffed non-related local chieftains on the periphery, but nearby vassals related to Zhou kept close watch on them. The central authority often gave them Zhou princesses as wives so as to connect them more intimately to the royal house. These Zhou royal women brought Zhou culture and religion to their husbands' households. Their children, including the future chieftain, were brought up bicultural. This was much more likely to assure loyalty to the center than the late Shang practice of having their kings marry local chiefs' daughters who remained at home.

If a local chieftain persisted in disloyalty, he and his dependents were moved to near Xi'an where the King and his housemen could watch over them more closely.

Before their departure the king enfeoffed (*fengjian* 封建) each vassal in an elaborate ceremony held at court. The new vassal often recorded the details of the ceremony on the bottom of a large bronze ceremonial vessel cast to commemorate the occasion. Many of these pots survive. Similarly large and elaborately shaped pots survive from Shang, but lack long inscriptions, apparently because Shang had no equivalent of the enfeoffment ceremony to evoke them.

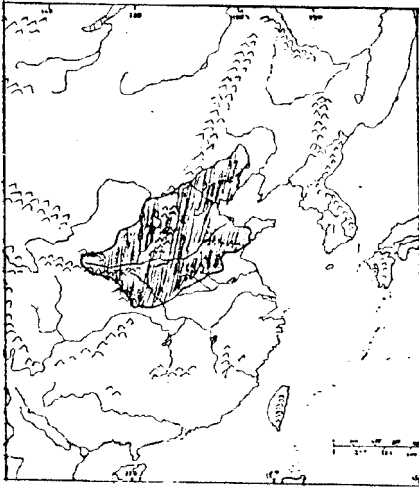
During the enfeoffment ceremony, the vassal was given a clump of land from the fief to symbolize his authority over it. The king assigned him soldiers and officials, including servile officials (*chén* 臣, a noun that later came to mean "minister" or "bureaucratic official") from the old Shang aristocracy, to help him govern the fief.

The vassals were supposed to send periodic payments of tribute goods to their overlords by way of royal officials who rode circuit among the fiefs. These were the Earthly analogs of the wandering stars of Heaven. Each hereditary inheritor of a fief was supposed to return to the capital to renew his family's oath of vassalage before he took over the duties of a vassal.

This complex mixture of politics, social culture and religion tended to co-opt even non-related vassals into the Zhou culture and the religion that upheld it. Hence even when a new vassal was sent

<sup>8</sup>See the accounts in the *Shujing* for the "R" rated details.

well over the horizon from their overlord's eastern capital, he remained loyal. Even if the king was not constantly watching him, he could glance up at the northern end of the night sky and be certain that Tian was keeping an eye on him. So he had better remain loyal to Tian's *Zi*. The conundrum Shang had failed to solve for several centuries had been solved almost overnight by Zhou.



#### Zhou's feudal empire after its initial expansion

The Duke of Zhou and then King Cheng scattered more than a hundred fiefs over north China by the end of the latter's reign. Once his nephew came of age, the Duke retired as regent and withdrew to his own office-lands estates near the capital, yielding full power to the young King Cheng, who faithfully continued his uncle's policies.

As a consequence of this act of conspicuous self-abnegation, the Duke of Zhou has ever since served as the model for loyal officials. Even under the Communists, Zhou Enlai played a similarly self-abnegating role as chief minister to Mao Zedong, becoming a beloved figure as a consequence.

## C. Defeudalization, Centralized & "Bastard" Feudalism

### 1. Feudalization shifts into defeudalization

#### a. barbarians on the northern frontiers

By the 9th century BC, a century and a half after the conquest, the feudalization

process reached its limits. Feudalization ended first among the fiefs in the south and east. Somewhat later, those fiefs in the north and northwest, began to be challenged. All had reached the ethnocultural frontiers of Zhou China's world.

Horse-riding pastoral-nomads from subzones A2 and A1 had been practicing cavalry raids on neighboring oasis farmers since the 10th century. By the 9th and 8th centuries, their raids were beginning to overflow into subzone B1.

The Chinese infantry and chariots of the Zhou armies and their vassals proved inadequate to contain these increasingly frequent, though still irregularly timed, raids into B1. The Chinese called these raiders by the collective label *Xianyun*, which was likely a transliteration of the name of their dominant clan in some non-Chinese language.

We have no way of even guessing what the *Xianyun* language was since we do not even know how the word *Xianyun* was actually pronounced by Chinese speakers during the 1st millennium BC. The *Xianyun* seem to have been at the same stage of development as a people far to their west, the Scythians. The Scythians lived north of the Black Sea, and by the 6th century BC began to intermittently raid Greek settlements near the Black Sea. The *Xianyun* and Scythians were both part way through the transition into a full-blown horseback pastoral-nomadism.

#### b. sedentary southern barbarians

In what is now part of southern China, in B4, lived a number of sedentary non-Chinese cultures. The Chinese collectively called them the *Man* (pr. Mahn). These peoples had absorbed influences from Shang, and then probably from Zhou as well, but retained their own culture.

Their original culture was the part of the Zone C Longshanoid Late Neolithic which had spread up the Yangzi valley during the Late Neolithic and had recently added a Bronze Age technology. By the 9th century they were well into the process of state formation. They had not, however, participated in Zhou's feudal process. Having bypassed feudalization, their maturing early civilization states were sometimes bigger than and were often stronger than the Zhou fiefs, which had finally reached their borders.

#### c. influence on the center

The threat from the north was intermittent and was close enough to the Zhou western capital near Xi'an for defense against it to remain the responsibility of the Son of Heaven, the Zhou overlord. For a time, this was possible, though the costs of expeditions to the west and north by the royal forces were high and their results ambiguous.

The Zhou fiefs on the southern borders, however, faced a tougher because ongoing challenge. The southern Zhou fiefs were too small and weak to handle the Man states. The subordinate eastern capital near Loyang was too far away for the Son of Heaven's garrisons there to effectively reach the southern frontier.

The southern fiefs had no choice but to reverse feudalization. Instead of the Zhou central authority setting up additional small fiefs further away from the center, the fiefs on or near the southern frontier had to begin to clump together. They formed small and then ever larger feudal principalities until these principalities were big enough to mobilize locally the resources needed to hold off the Man.

The Zhou feudal empire was also reaching internally defined limits. By 771 BC, subzone B1, including the Xi'an area, had been so discombobulated by *Xianyun* and related peoples' raids that the people settled around the capital were beginning to become rebellious themselves.

The Zhou central armies had during feudalization moved most of these peoples there from various locations in B2 because they had proved too fractious for the Zhou vassals of B2 to handle. The Zhou armies forcibly moved them close to Xi'an the better to keep an eye on them.<sup>9</sup>

These peoples returned to their fractious ways when the Zhou proved incapable of protecting them against *Xianyun* raids.

#### d. irreversible weakening of the center

In 771 BC one such set of local rebels occupied the Zhou western capital, and killed the last Zhou king to reign from there. A few Zhou loyalists fled east, carrying with them the heir-apparent, who later reigned as King Ping. They did not

<sup>9</sup> Stalin was still employing this tactic in the Soviet Union during the 1930s; even the Americans employed similar methods to establish control of many Indian tribes during the 19th century.

stop until they reached Loyang in the fulcrum subzone, where they reestablished the monarchy. The Zhou who reigned in Loyang were known to later historians as "Eastern Zhou." The preceding period (c.1050-771) came to be called "Western Zhou."

This move of the capital entirely changed the power relationship between the Zhou feudal overlord and his vassals. When the kings were isolated in the west they could more easily preserve their aura of majesty. Now they were surrounded by some of their strongest vassals, who had long before been given fiefs around the subordinate eastern capital.

The kings, now reigning in the east and much weakened by the move, very quickly became the creatures of these strong vassals, and could no longer effectively discipline them. The fiefs competed among themselves for primacy over the king in Loyang. This competition encouraged organizing fiefs into fewer but larger feudal principalities at the center as well. The Zhou overlord was no longer strong enough to stop the swallowing of weaker fiefs by stronger ones closer to the center.

### e. sublineages & subinfeudation

Religious and social limits to the preservation of the old power relationships also soon became evident. The Zhou employed what modern anthropologists call the "ramage patrilineal" type of descent system to transmit political power from father to eldest son. Economic division of an inheritance was not yet an issue. Private property in *land* had not yet appeared. The early Zhou rulers claimed (how truly we cannot tell) that father to son political succession was a return from the cross-cousin system employed by Shang back to the system created by Huang Di and then used by Xia.

According to the religious rules governing Zhou ramage patrilinealism, after five generations of younger sons (i.e. the younger son of a younger son repeated five times) that fifth generation younger son had to leave the ranks of the main ruling family.

That last younger son founded a separate sublineage, with a separate name. The sacred tablet associated with the first in the sequence of younger sons<sup>10</sup> was removed from the main clan's ancestral temple and placed in a new sublineage

ancestral temple. There it held the highest place as repository of the ancestral spirit of that new sublineage.

Whatever its religious intent, one good practical effect of this rule was to reduce the number of full members of the main lineage for whom its head had to find government jobs. A bad effect was to reduce the clan solidarity between the senior and junior ex-members of the ruling lineage.

In the course of the several centuries after the conquest, several cycles of sublineage formation occurred. Some vassals who were junior descendants of the royal house were by the 9th century several sublineages removed from direct connection with the dynasty's founding fathers. That separation tended to undermine their impulse to remain obedient to their overlords. Subvassals of a principality-founding vassal might be even more tempted to betray him and were still less likely to be related to him.

### f. subvassals mutate into meritocrats

The most junior sublineages found that there were ever fewer jobs hereditarily available for their sons. These "gentle" folk could claim aristocratic *ancestry*, but no one any longer considered them descendants of those directly linked to Heaven.

What could be done with such people to keep them from poverty and rebellion against the rulers? One course of action was to allow them to mutate into bureaucrats—men of merit—and allow them to qualify for non-aristocratic jobs helping to administer the new feudal principalities, particularly those of the centralizing type.

These bureaucratic feudal principalities tended to win out over the ones organized as microcosms of the original feudal empire. As a result, the number of meritocratic jobs tended to increase, though not necessarily at the same rate as the increase in the number of declassed aristocratic potential meritocrats.

Templates of merit now had to be devised to which these meritocrats could fit themselves. However, it was soon evident that the old Zhou religion could not be used to construct such templates with the precision that was required unless it was modified.

Creating such a template was not just a matter of inventing bureaucratic techniques. The first requirement of any tem-

plate of merit is to fulfill the injunction "Thou shalt remain loyal to thy bureaucratic superior even when thou art sent over the horizon from him."

The Zhou religion could keep *vassals* in line, but could only very dimly tame bureaucrats by making analogies to bureaucratic loyalty from the behavior of the Duke of Zhou. Such analogies were first made more convincingly only by the first philosophers, who did not appear until late in the 6th century.

In the meantime, the shaky loyalty of the new class of meritocrats kept the internal politics of these centralizing feudal principalities too complex for them to be stable. Even replacing the still weaker microcosm of the feudal empire sort of principality did not increase stability.

## 2. The "Spring-Autumn era" (771-479 BC)

### a. new sacred texts

It was during this period—the first part of Eastern Zhou—that the transition from early civilization to the first stage of high civilization, which had in a sense begun during Late Shang, visibly accelerated.

At the intellectual level, the first step in this process was to assemble new texts that could begin link the new men of merit to the Zhou order of Heaven. These might provide guidance for the rulers in formulating a template of merit.

Quite suddenly after the move of the capital in 770 BC, many (and perhaps all) of the fiefs began to write chronicle histories of themselves. These were called "spring-autumn," *chunqiu* 春秋. Later historians used the one supposedly edited by Confucius for his home state of Lu to supply the name "Spring-Autumn" period for the subperiod of Eastern Zhou which ran from 770 to 479.

We can only speculate why writing of such history books began at this time. Perhaps, right after the shock of the overlord's abandoning his western capital, each state suddenly felt more fully sovereign than before. Hence the local rulers started keeping a detailed record of their activities for their successors and the bureaucrats working for them to consult. These chronologically arranged records of court activities and their consequences could provide precedents on how to handle later problems.

<sup>10</sup> An aspect of his spirit was believed to inhabit it.

Only four of these historical narratives survive, three of which are variants of the history of one principality, Lu, the fief assigned to the Duke of Zhou's son, and later the birthplace of Confucius. The fourth, dealing with Jin, a strong fief just west of Loyang and an early protector of the E. Zhou monarchs, survives only in fragments. These chronological histories resemble heavily annotated versions of the court calendars which aristocratic courtiers must have been keeping for centuries in more abbreviated form.

Who might have created such histories? One hesitates to generalize. Adding the additional annotations to these court calendars would have been natural work for the first generations of overt meritocrats. The histories themselves suggest that men of merit became numerous enough to become self-conscious of their peculiar new status during the generation or so following the Zhou court's flight east in 771-770. It is also probably no coincidence that precise dates for events finally become established from that same time forward. These carefully preserved annotated court calendars made it easier for their bureaucratic keepers to also keep track of the flow of linear time.

Also dating, at least in its original form, to the first decades after 771 BC was a collection of sacred poetry, eventually called the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經). The texts of sacred chants used by both the central authority and the most important fiefs in ceremonies held in their ancestral temples and palaces comprised most of the material initially transcribed and collected. Lyrics of folk songs, including songs of protest, from various places within the Zhou realm were also collected.<sup>11</sup>

Apparently the men of merit were showing off their most conspicuous asset, their literacy. They used their literacy to collect and write down material useful for guiding the state from the center, including information on the state of public opinion.

The men of merit at the Zhou capital collected some three-hundred poems. Later editors apparently continued to add to and subtract from the original corpus right

down to at least the 3rd century BC.

These two works joined the *Book of Changes* and *Book of Documents* as required reading for both meritocrats and aristocrats. Though the *Changes* and *Documents* went back to the days of the founding fathers of Zhou, they continued to be added to in the centuries after 771 BC. This made them as up to date as the newer works in reflecting the evolving mentality of believers in the old vision of Heaven.

The men of merit of late Western Zhou and Spring-Autumn times were, in effect, creating a library of new and modified old texts. As the meritocrats fussed over them, the texts became more secular than sacred, and by the end of Spring-Autumn could be used as raw material by the first philosophers to cobble together a workable template of merit.

The most successful of these templates created post-feudalization secular equivalents of the old sacred relationships between Heaven and Earth. The Chinese meritocracy created for itself first the texts and then from the texts a formal theology, and a metaphysics from which an equally elaborate doctrine of ethical behavior for meritocrats could be deduced.

As the meritocracy became more adept at its job, the transition from defeudalization to the centralized feudal stage of the feudal process accelerated still faster. Centralization did not, however, become dominant until the century after the death of the first true philosopher, Confucius, in 479 BC.

(More on Confucius in the chapter after next. We might here note, however, the irony of it having been Confucius, who celebrated his loyalty to Zhou, who crafted the chief intellectual tool which allowed the centralized feudal principalities to become states, i.e. independent in form as well as substance from the Zhou overlords and hence participants in a wholly new balance of power diplomacy.)

Confucius and his disciples and rivals completed the shift from early civilization to the first stage of high civilization at the intellectual level. This was as drastic a transition at the cultural level as the much earlier physical transition from H. erectus to H. sapiens or the Late Neolithic shift from precivilization to early civilization.

## b. markets, moneys & landlords

This shift to high civilization did not occur only at the political and intellectual

levels. It also drastically changed economic and social life. The marketplace, which must have appeared some time before this, becomes visible in both the written and archaeological records by the end of Spring-Autumn times.

Merchants began to manufacture the widely valued commodity, bronze, into coins (perhaps under the protection of subfief rulers) some time during defeudalization. This set the stage for the new centralized feudal principalities to begin playing a more direct role in the manufacture of coins by the beginning of the centralized feudal period, if not just before then. The men of merit began overtly discussing and writing about the market by the beginning of the 5th century BC.

By the beginning of the 6th century BC (from an edict of 594 BC quoted in the *Spring-Autumn Annals* establishing a tax in kind on land in Lu) we get the first indication that land was being privately owned, and its owners taxed in proportion to the size of their holdings. Since agricultural products do not keep well for very long, it would have been logical for grain merchants to have used the coins they had obtained in exchange for grain not only to buy more grain but to buy the land on which the grain grew. They could then use the purchased land as an imperishable store of value rather than just using perishable grain.

As the role of markets grew, the relative proportion of the wealth exchanged by way of the rulers' collection of tribute and distribution of gifts to their subordinates began to decline. In the course of Spring-Autumn times, the aristocratic rulers of the centralized feudal principalities and their meritocratic helpers began to explore the potential for taxing the market. They enticed some of the richest and/or most intelligent merchants into entering the ruling class, particularly if they were engaged in the manufacture of coins. They could help the rulers tax market transitions and even teach them how to make money by making money.

We can call these men "plutocrats" to distinguish them from "meritocrats." Both of these new branches of the ruling class were partly recruited from among declassified aristocrats, but they served somewhat separate functions and had different relationships to wealth and power. The plutocrats used wealth to buy a measure of power. The meritocrats used power to acquire wealth or leverage over posses-

<sup>11</sup> During the 20th century, as part of its campaign to mobilize the rural masses during the war with Japan, the Chinese Communists mimicked the *Shijing* and sent sympathetic students into the countryside to similarly collect the words and music of local folk songs, supposedly to guide Party policy creation.

sors of wealth.

### 3. The "Warring States" era (479-221 BC)

#### a. from centralized to "bastard" feudalism or from Slave Society to Decentralized Feudalism?

It was during this period<sup>12</sup> that the transition from defeudalization to centralized feudalism, which had begun during the Spring-Autumn period, was completed. Almost immediately, the transition to the final stage of the feudal process, bastard feudalism, began.

The above framework for the narrative of Zhou history as a feudal process rests on ideational determinist presuppositions. What might be the material determinist approach?

Chinese material determinists and their foreign fellow-travelers have a hard time characterizing Western Zhou as merely the last stage of Slave Society. They cannot find enough slaves. They cannot explain away oaths of vassalage used to create a large and growing state. They cannot explain why contemporaries kept using the word *fengjian*. They can (and do) get partly off the hook by making Western Zhou's later years the earliest stage of China's transition into Feudal Society. Sure enough, slaves get scarcer (or less conspicuous), but so too do oaths of vassalage during Eastern Zhou, and states grow stronger and more fully sovereign.

Still, the appearance of references to land-ownership in the chronicle histories by the 590s BC allows the material determinists to talk about an initial, decentralized feudalism getting under way then. They notice that some of the landlords were being co-opted into the ruling class as either plutocrats or (if they had the right ancestors or married appropriately), as at least nominal aristocrats or de facto meritocrats.

The meritocrats and aristocrats are harder to assimilate into this scheme except in their roles as landlords. By Eastern Zhou times, most members of all three branches of the ruling class tended to own

land. Behold! A ruling class of landlords! Since this was only the beginning of Feudal Society, material determinists can characterize any instances of non-standard behavior as survivals of Slave Society mentality. The appearance of ever larger numbers of subfiefs and subvassals during Spring-Autumn times makes political life seem more feudal than before.

The ideational determinist might score points by noting that only two of these three groups of rulers, meritocrats and aristocrats, mostly got land because they had political power rather than the other way around. Plutocrats mostly bought land in the market.

You will have to judge for yourselves (perhaps after reading more ancient Chinese history than there is room to provide here) whether the Warring States period was increasingly or decreasingly feudal. Landlordism was indeed spreading, but the feudal aspects of life were becoming increasingly superficial, providing only the outer forms of a feudal state and society. The states were increasingly bureaucratic, the markets increasingly monetized. Could the resulting bureaucratic, market feudalism be best characterized as feudal or bastard feudal?

#### b. material determinism's retreat under verbal fire

Since the late 1970s, the Chinese material determinists seem to have been conceding, at least by implication, the appropriateness of the "bastard feudal" label for China since late Warring States times when they call their next substage which began with the swallowing of all China by the Qin and then Han Dynasties by the oxymoronic label "bureaucratic feudalism."

The material determinists have also changed their minds several times on the role of the first philosophers. Up through the late 1960s, Confucius and his followers were treated relatively gently as progressive for their times. During the 1970s, they were condemned as merely apologists for the Slave Society which was fading away during their time. That made them "unprogressive" even for their own time (late Spring-Autumn through early Warring States).

Since the early 1980s, however, Chinese Marxists have conceded there were "feudal" elements and even elements transcending feudalism in the key ideas of Confucius. These render him relevant and

"progressive" even for modern times.

By making Confucius the key intellectual harbinger of high civilization, the ideational determinists also make him fundamental for our time as well, since we are still at the stage of high civilization.

The material and ideational determinists appear to be converging in their judgment of the first Chinese philosopher, but the ideational determinists can claim to have gotten there first.

Both perspectives contrast a Chinese ancient period feudal transition into high civilization in the east of Eurasia with a non-feudal transition among the Greeks and Hebrews and Persians in the west. The material determinists somewhat misleadingly label the Greeks and Romans as still being at the Slave Society stage.

Both explanations have bureaucracy as an inevitable mutation out of feudal vassalage.

The ideational determinist can perhaps better handle the simultaneous appearance of coins in both Greece and China, two societies at supposedly quite different historical stages.

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<sup>12</sup> Also named after a book, the *Stratagems of the Warring States*, a secular set of texts for teaching meritocrats about the tactics of interstate political conflict.