The Past Becomes readable when we can tell stories and make arguments about it. It is when we can tell more than one story about past events or make divergent arguments about them that the readability of the past emerges as an issue. The idea of readability suggests that the past is textual: not only do we understand the past through texts, but these texts often invoke antecedent texts, oral or written, for principles or models of interpretation. Readability also brings us to the beginning of historical consciousness, the sense of inquiry that informs the representation of the interpretive act and heightens awareness of the grounds of interpretation. How do interpretive structures develop and disintegrate? What are the possibilities and limits of historical knowledge or, put differently, the scope and meaning of skepticism?

This book explores these issues through a systematic study of Zuo-zhuan (Zuo tradition), one of the foundational texts of Chinese history.

1. For a complete English translation, see Legge, The Chinese Classics, vol. 5; for a more recent, partial translation, see Watson, The “Tso chuan.” A new complete translation is being prepared by Stephen Durrant, David Schaberg, and Wai-yei Li and for the Chinese Classics in Translation series, forthcoming from the University of Washington Press. My translations have benefited greatly from this ongoing project.
and literature. In what sense is this vast repertory of narratives and speeches pertaining to events spanning the 255 years from 722 to 468 BCE “historical”? Traditionally, with a few notable dissenters, among them Zhu Xi (1130–1200), Gu Yanwu (1613–82), and Cui Shu (1740–1816), Zuozhuan has been accorded a truth status that eludes many other early Chinese texts. Many modern scholars continue to uphold Zuozhuan as a reliable source for Chunqiu-era history, accepting as factual the course of events recounted in it and mining the text for, among other things, Chunqiu modes of thought and styles of rhetoric. In the standard modern edition compiled by Yang Bojun, variants of Zuozhuan narratives found in other early texts are routinely regarded as less credible. The chronological arrangement of the text, as well as the many details of temporal and geographical setting, lend the narratives and speeches an aura of being more anchored in historical reality than their counterparts in other early texts. It is customary to regard the historical and literary value of Zuozhuan as distinct categories, if not indeed incommensurate attributes. For example, defenders of “historical facts” are often suspicious of the ghosts, spirits, prophecies, or secretive communications that periodically appear in the text, whereas literary historians happily appropriate them as the origins of the Chinese fictional imagination. That Zuozhuan commands a degree of temporal precision and a scope of narrative detail—detail that sometimes serves no apparent ideological purpose—unparalleled among pre-imperial Chinese texts may well bolster its claim to be a “truthful record” (shilu 實錄). The idea that kernels of historical truths can or should be separated from the rich verbal fabric is misleading, however. Whether Zuozhuan accurately portrays historical reality is perhaps ultimately an unanswerable question. It is far more likely that the text reflects the rhetorical modes and intellectual currents ascendant during the period of its formation (ca. fourth century

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2. Zhu Xi (Zhuzi yulei, j. 83, pp. 2149–50) complained that the excessive emphasis on efficacy might have distorted judgments; Gu Yanwu (Rizhi lu jishi, j. 4, p. 95) noted that the same incident can be recorded more than once, with varying factual details. Turning to the Canons (jing) as the ultimate criterion of credibility (quxin yujing 取信於經), Cui Shu questioned assertions in Zuozhuan; see his comments in Kaoxin lu (e.g., Tang Yu kaoxin lu, j. 1, p. 30; j. 2, pp. 21–24; Xia kaoxin lu, j. 2, pp. 23–24; Feng Hao kaoxin lu, j. 3, p. 30).


4. Liu Zhiji’s term; see Shitong tongshi, j. 14, p. 204.
BCE). In any case, what is more germane to the sense of history is the conscious formulation of patterns and principles to understand the past. What we now consider supernatural or supra-rational occurrences, rhetorical constructions, or narrative devices represent such patterns and principles. In other words, literary constructions and formal consciousness are but modes of historical interpretation. The Tang scholar and thinker Liu Zhiji (661–721) understood this very well: he devoted various chapters of his compendium on the principles of historical writings, Shi-tong, to narrative art and rhetorical strategies, constantly upholding Zuozhuan as the source of finest examples.

The patterns and principles employed to understand the past in Zuozhuan have often been characterized as Confucian. Traditionally, this has been framed as the question Was Zuozhuan written as a commentary on Chunqiu (Spring and autumn annals), a text purportedly compiled or edited by Confucius? Many scholars now doubt that Confucius played a role in compiling or editing Chunqiu or that Zuozhuan was originally related to that text. However, the idea that the perspectives articulated in Zuozhuan conform broadly to Confucian thought as it evolved through the Warring States period is still widely accepted. The fact that such perspectives define and defend the early Zhou moral-political order and emphasize the importance of earlier Zhou texts is thought to justify the rubric “Traditionalist,” sometimes used to avoid any suggestion of a unified, coherent “Confucian school.” Stretching the semantic range of epithets like “Confucian” or “Traditionalist” will accommodate more, but probably not all, of the divergent perspectives found in Zuozhuan. We have here an astounding mix of cynical practicality and idealistic moral rhetoric, views that look to the past and earlier texts for guidance versus voices that urge changes and laud expediency, arguments for and against greater power for the ruler or the noble lineages, militaristic and strategic interests versus moralized and ritualized perspectives on warfare. Indeed, over the centuries, despite the prevailing affirmation of Zuozhuan as a canonical classic that embodies Confucian values, there have always been skeptics who questioned the “Confucian” credentials of the text, from Han scholars who championed the Gongyang and Guliang traditions of Chunqiu (and felt that Zuozhuan challenged their exegetical prerogatives) to later Confucian thinkers who criticized Zuozhuan for its moments of ruthless pragmatism and views that deviate from various versions of orthodox moral and socio-political order.
Rhetoric and Power

Different readings of Zuozhuan point to the diverse uses of the past encoded in the text. We may begin with a fundamental paradox. There is a pervasive rhetoric of order in Zuozhuan. The text uses “virtue words” liberally—most notably li 礼 (ritual or ritual propriety) and de 德 (power, virtue), but also yi 义 (duty, appropriateness), ren 仁 (nobility, beneficence, humaneness), jing 敬 (reverence), zheng 正 (rectitude), zhong 忠 (loyalty, devotion, responsibility), xin 信 (good faith), and rang 让 (disinterestedness, yielding). It presumes and fosters continuity as it invokes past models, especially the creation of the early Zhou order, the achievements of early Zhou kings (most frequently Wen and Wu, but also Cheng and Xuan), and the founding of the various states, while encouraging aspirations to become a model for later generations. Zuozhuan appeals to a body of inherited and shared textual knowledge, chiefly the Odes and Documents, as a source of authority. It employs enumeration, definitions, distinctions, and the logic of sequential progression to augment a sense of clarity and inevitability. This rhetoric is, however, imposed on a reality of violence and disorder. The world of Zuozhuan is filled with betrayal, cynicism, destructive wars, ruthless power struggles, and bloody rites (from human sacrifices to the smearing of the mouth with blood to seal covenants between the leaders of states). The late second century–early third century scholar Wei Xi called it “truly a book about mutual hacking” 左氏直相斫書耳.⁵

What, then, is the relationship between the rhetoric of good order and the accounts of strife, destruction, deception, and iniquities? How are the rhetorical constructions of moral systems mapped against the descriptions of power relations in the book? Several apparently distinct—but on another level partially overlapping—possibilities emerge. An efficacious rhetoric can confront volatility and danger by producing or restoring ritual, moral, and political order, albeit often only briefly. For example, the Sui minister Ji Liang convinces his ruler not to pursue the retreating Chu army and to concentrate instead on improving government. What starts off as a military and strategic issue quickly turns into a debate on proper sacrifices and the correct ritual relations between humans and spirits. Ji Liang eloquently argues that reverence for

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the spirits alone brings no blessings if “the people, the masters of the spirits” 民，神之主也 suffer from misgovernment (ZZ Huan 6.2, pp. 111–12). The retreat of the Chu army is in fact a ruse, and by following Ji Liang’s advice the Sui ruler escapes military defeat and possibly annexation by Chu. His new focus on cultivating good government is said to forestall further Chu attacks, until Ji Liang loses favor two years later and his policy is no longer followed (ZZ Huan 8.2, pp. 121–22).

Ji Liang’s speech resonates with many other parts of Zuozhuan, but the message of moral government sometimes gains ambiguous dimensions from the context. This brings us to a question we will revisit from different perspectives: How are ideas clarified or compromised by being resolutely embedded in rhetoric, narrative, and chronology? In one example, Ji Wenzi, the chief minister of Lu, justifies to the new Lu ruler, Lord Xuan, his decision to expel Pu, heir apparent of the small neighboring state of Ju. After murdering the Ju ruler (his father), Pu sought refuge in Lu by offering Lord Xuan a precious jade. Lord Xuan decrees that Pu can stay, but Ji Wenzi rescinds the order and sends Scribe Ke to argue his case. Ke adduces the sixteen good sons and four evil sons of legendary lineages raised to office or exiled beyond the margins of civilization by the sage-king Shun—Ji Wenzi’s act thus becomes an imitation of Shun’s endeavor to establish good government. On this basis, Ji Wenzi somewhat immodestly claims to have attained one-twentieth of Shun’s accomplishments. Shun also reverses the failures of his incompetent predecessor King Yao, whose analogue would be Lord Xuan. References to antiquity elevate the rhetoric, but the authority cited in the speech should not obscure the fact that Ji Wenzi is asserting his dominance in a moment of political instability in Lu—he is legitimizing his ascendancy, which is bound up with his complicity in the intrigues that resulted in the deaths of Lord Wen’s legitimate heirs and Lord Xuan’s accession. Or more precisely, the exalted rhetoric also serves to justify the shift of power from the Lu ruling house to the Ji clan (inasmuch that Ji Wenzi can claim superior judgment and ritual

6. Shun is said to have accomplished twenty things by appointing the sixteen talented and virtuous ones and exiling the four evil ones: “Shun had twenty great achievements and became the son of heaven. Now although he [Ji Wenzi] has not yet obtained one auspicious person, he already removed one inauspicious person. Compared to Shun’s achievements, he has one in twenty. He will probably be absolved from blame!” 舜有大功二十而為天子，今行父雖未獲一吉人，去一凶矣，於舜之功，二十之一也，庶幾免於戾乎！(ZZ Wen 18.7, p. 642).
Introduction

Later in *Zuo zhuan* a scribe tries to explain why and how Ji Pingzi (grandson of Ji Wenzi) drives Lord Zhao of Lu into exile and traces the decline of the Lu house to the succession crisis of Wen 18 (*ZZ* Zhao 32.4, p. 1520), when the Lu nobleman Dongmen Xiangzhong murdered Lord Wen’s legitimate heirs and installed Lord Xuan (*ZZ* Wen 18.5–6, pp. 632–33). Ji Wenzi later claimed to have been drawn into this plot by Xiangzhong and expelled the latter’s lineage from Lu (*ZZ* Xuan 18.5, pp. 778–80). Motivated by the power struggle between the Dongmen and Ji clans, this belated “justice” ensures Ji ascendancy. An equally context-dependent but radically opposite reading would posit a *Zuo zhuan* author using Ke’s speech to expose Ji Wenzi’s ambition; the vision of a realm purged of miscreants thus becomes an ironic critique of his own ambition and failure to expel Dongmen Xiangzhong. 

More often than not, the rhetoric of order has no effect on unfolding events but serves to define the moral parameters of the situation. Unheeded remonstrances and speeches framed as judgments or moral explanations fall into this category. For example, following a series of provocations from the state of Zheng, King Xiang of Zhou enlists the assistance of the Di tribes to attack Zheng. After the successful conclusion of the campaign, King Xiang takes a daughter of the Di ruler as his consort. The Zhou minister Fu Chen remonstrates with the king without success, on the occasions of both the battle and the marriage, by appealing to beginnings and distinctions. Citing the *Odes*, he opposes the confrontation with Zheng, arguing that King Xiang should instead uphold the ties of kinship between Zhou and the various states that define the early Zhou political system; and he urges the king not to marry a daughter of the Di ruler, warning of the dire consequences of relying on barbarians (*ZZ* Xi 24.2, pp. 420–25). Both arguments are premised on the polarization of kin and non-kin (as epitomized by the barbarian). Shortly thereafter, King Xiang’s younger brother Dai commits adultery with the Di consort and, enlisting Di forces and other disaffected

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7. See Fu Xun (16th c.), *Changju Zuo zhuan shushi*, j. 9. *Guoyu* (*Discourses of the States*) also tells of the expulsion of heir apparent Pu, but here, rather than carrying out Ji Wenzi’s orders, Lige, the minister offering remonstrance, acts on his own initiative. This much briefer anecdote is defined by clear moral contours and concludes with Lord Xuan’s acknowledgment of his error (*GT* “Luyu” 1.12, p. 176).

8. Kong Yingda (*SSJZS* 6, 20.20b) asserts that Scribe Ke (the historiographer’s mouthpiece) is criticizing both Lord Xuan’s delusion (*huo*) and Ji Wenzi’s highhanded appropriation of power (*zhuan*). Wu Kaisheng (*Zuo zhuan wei*, pp. 278–80) and Takezoe (*Saden kaisen*, Wen 18.52) both emphasize the ironic disparagement of Ji Wenzi.
elements in the Zhou court, drives King Xiang from the capital. Fu Chen’s remonstrances, although ultimately ineffective, impose patterns and meanings on a sequence of maneuverings, miscalculations, and conflicts that deteriorate into a serious crisis for the Zhou house. Ironically, Wangzi Dai’s insurrection is also made possible by the principle of “kindred affinity for one’s kin” (qinqin 親親) that Fu Chen advocates as the basis of political relations. A year earlier, Fu Chen had argued for the reinstatement of the exiled Dai with the same logic that he employs to idealize Zhou-Zheng relations (Xi 22.6, p. 395).

Using kinship ties as an ordering principle for the polity turns out to be problematic. There are many examples in Zuozhuan of kin ties being betrayed. In one case, the Deng ruler’s misplaced trust in the good will of his nephew, King Wen of Chu, leads to Deng’s annexation, fulfilling the Deng ministers’ vivid warning that failure to anticipate Chu aggression would result in vain regrets, like someone trying to “chew his own navel” (ZZ Zhuang 6.3, p. 169). In other words, simple assertions advanced through the rhetoric of virtue sometimes imply a hidden problem. In this case, the argument for the primacy of kinship has to be read against other definitions of polity that emphasize hierarchy and the unity of authority, a principle that comes to be enunciated as “honoring positions of honor” (zunzun 尊尊) in late Warring States and early Han writings.9

Aside from remonstrances, there are also numerous speeches of judgment in which visions of order are brought to bear on unfolding events. In this sense, there is no necessary paradox between virtuous rhetoric and ethical-political failures—the former simply gives a negative judgment of the latter. Again, closer scrutiny reveals that the moral focus encompasses different perspectives. The polysemy of the word li 礼 is instructive. The most frequently invoked formulas of praise and blame in Zuozhuan are “This accorded with ritual” 礼也; and “This went against ritual” or “This violated ritual propriety” 非禮也. In several important speeches, the meaning of li is extended well beyond specific ceremonies and matters of conduct into the defining principle of moral, sociopolitical, even cosmic order. In one oft-cited example, during an

9. Xunzi links qinqin to benevolence (ren) and zunzun to duty (yi) (“Dalue,” Xunzi jianshi, p. 368). On other elaborations of qinqin and zunzun, see Liji, “Sangfu xiaoji” and “Da-zhuan” [in Sun Xidan (1736–?), comp., Li ji ji, 2: 864, 871, 905, 907, 917]; Zhongyong 20 (Zhu Xi, Sishu jizhu, pp. 15–19). On regional differences in the currency of these ideas during the Chunqiu period, see Qian Hang, Zhou dai zong fa zhidu lishi yanjiu, pp. 158–75.
official visit to Jin, Lord Zhao of Lu shows himself to be adept at diplomatic rituals. The Jin ruler commends the lord for “knowing ritual,” but the Jin minister Ru Shuqi counters that Lord Zhao merely demonstrates a mastery of ceremonial decorum (yi 儀) and, through weakness at home and aggression abroad, betrays his ignorance of the principles of ritual propriety. According to Ru Shuqi, “Ritual is that by which one guards one’s domain, implements one’s governmental commands, and does not lose the support of one’s people” (禮, 所以守其國, 行其政令, 無失其民者也). It thus sustains effective government as well as harmonious relations with other states. For thus articulating the distinction between “ritual propriety” and “ceremonial decorum,” the junzi (noble man) commentator commends Ru Shuqi for “knowing ritual.” The high moral tone and grand claims here should not obscure the fact that ritual propriety is identified primarily with strong, centralized rule. The failure to achieve that is presented as a moral flaw: Lord Zhao is blamed for the erosion of the ruler’s authority by powerful clans, although he is arguably more a victim than a culprit in that development.

In a more or less straightforward fashion, these examples apply a corrective rhetoric to a reality of violence and disorder. As we have seen, however, even in such apparently unproblematic cases, the context of a speech can introduce ambiguities, and self-evident truths may represent one polemical position among several. In other instances, the tension between medium and message, between message and context, is obvious from the outset. Thus with the rhetoric of indirect remonstrance (juejian 譎諫), in which the persuader abets the desires and encourages the excesses of the listener only to urge the message of restraint and order, artful persuasion takes place within a context of unstable reference and manipulated meanings. The most interesting examples of instruction via seduction are found in the exchanges between King Ling and various ministers (especially the Chu minister Zige), and examples of resplendent rhetorical manipulation from Chu seem to herald developments in the tradition of rhapsodic poetic exposition (fu 賦) from late Warring States Chu and Han. These issues are discussed in connection with the figure of King Ling and Chu culture in Chapter 4. These should perhaps be regarded as “limit cases,” extreme versions of the pleasure of rhetoric that provoked the unease of some traditional commentators and led them to fault Zuozhuan for its “fanciful and exaggerated” (浮誇) diction. 10 Intermittent references to the power and

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10. Han Yu (768–824), “Jinxue jie” 進學解: “The Spring and Autumn Annals is careful...
dangers of beautiful rhetoric in Zuozhuan itself testify to the emergence of rhetorical self-consciousness through considerations of the distance between medium and message. In general, excessive rhetorical display is suspect (see, e.g., ZZ Zhao 26.9, p. 1479), and comments about excessive words (duoyan 多言) and a plethora of fine phrases (duo wenci 多文辭) suggest suspicions that language could construct a false order, leaving no room for knowledge and responsibility.

Tensions arise between message and context when the presumed congruence between ritual propriety and profit (利 利) is exposed as arbitrary and merely expedient. The prevailing thrust of moral arguments in Zuozhuan is that virtue results in benefits, but the frame stories draw attention to the motives of both speakers and their interlocutors. Thus in speeches of negotiation, the minister or envoy of a weaker state often employs the rhetoric of strategic virtue to counter the demands and aggression of a stronger state, and closer attention reveals that virtue is subsumed to strategy. After Jin’s defeat in the Battle of Han (645 BCE), for example, Lord Hui of Jin is held captive in Qin. The Jin envoy, Yin Yisheng, convinces Lord Mu of Qin to return the Jin ruler (ZZ Xi 15.8, pp. 366–67). Yin Yisheng describes the discord in Jin, with the petty men vowing revenge and the noble men awaiting Qin’s commands. The petty fear the worst for Lord Hui, while the noble are calmly certain of his return, which will demonstrate an optimal balance between compassionate virtue (de 德) and just punishment (xing 刑) on the part of the Qin ruler. “To seize the one [i.e., Lord Hui] with disloyal intent, to release him upon his submission—there is no virtue more forgiving, no punishment more authoritative. He who submits will long for virtue; he who has disloyal intent will fear punishment. With this one campaign [i.e., the Battle of Han], Qin will attain hegemony” 賁而執之, 服而舍之, 德莫厚焉, 刑莫威焉. 服者懷德, 賁者畏刑, 此一役也, 秦可以霸 (ZZ Xi 15.8, p. 366). Yin Yisheng urges compassion but expects to sway the Qin ruler by appealing to his hegemonic ambitions. Yin Yisheng’s rhetoric of virtue also harbors veiled threats: the petty people, assuming Lord Hui’s indefinite detainment in Qin, are preparing to install his son Yu. A new ruler would render Lord Hui irrelevant as a pawn. Furthermore, Yin claims, neither the petty people nor the noble men, irrespective of their

and sober; the Zuo Tradition is fanciful and exaggerated” 春秋謹嚴, 左氏浮誇 (Han Yu xuanji, p. 332).

11. See Chapter 5 for further discussion of the example here, Wangzi Zhao’s proclama-
tion to the princes.
views, are evading the state’s levies of taxes and weapons—\textit{不惮征繕}—in other words, they are ready for another war.

The invocation of the hegemonic ideal is common in this kind of strategic reasoning. In another example, when the Zheng minister Zichan assists the Zheng ruler on an official visit to Jin, he has the walls of the mission’s lodgings dismantled to protest Jin Lord Ping’s delay in granting Zheng an audience as well as the meager reception accorded Zheng. Zichan uses the uncertain fate of Zheng’s gifts as a metaphor for Zheng’s predicament and a potential justification for rejecting Jin leadership: the gifts cannot be exposed for fear of decay, nor can they be submitted for want of a proper venue for displaying and offering them. Zichan appeals to the hegemonic model of Lord Wen of Jin, whose frugal abode contrasted with the splendid lodgings provided for the delegations from other states. Lord Ping of Jin, on the other hand, indulges in personal extravagance while treating such delegations deplorably. Jin is persuaded to accept Zichan’s demands, and the Jin minister Shuxiang commends him: “Eloquent words cannot be dispensed with, as this case proves! Zichan has eloquent words, and the princes have benefited accordingly. How can eloquent words be abandoned?” 謫之不可以已也如是夫! 子產有謫, 諸侯賴之, 若之何其釋謫也 (ZZ Xiang 21.6, p. 1189).

The word \textit{ci 謫}, translated here as “eloquent words,” is sometimes associated in early texts with litigation and disputation.\footnote{According to Xu Shen (d. ca. 120), “The graph \textit{ci} means to make a legal argument. . . [The two constituent graphs] mean a challenge to just reasoning” (Shuo wen jiezi, \textit{j}. 14B.5b).} “Zichan has eloquent words” can also be rendered as “Zichan made a convincing case.” In other words, supposedly self-evident moral truths may be no more than one well-argued perspective on a contentious issue.

Throughout most of \textit{Zuozhuan}, Zheng has to fend off the demands and aggression of more powerful states, especially Jin and Chu. Perhaps as a consequence of this weakness, Zheng envoys and ministers specialize in the rhetoric of strategic virtue. Generous treatment of Zheng is said to answer moral imperatives as well as further hegemonic goals, sometimes by countering the ascendancy of other powerful states. Such are the premises of some famous speeches in \textit{Zuozhuan}, including the Zheng officer Zhu Zhiwu’s successful persuasion, which results in the Qin army’s withdrawal from Zheng (ZZ Xi 30.3, pp. 479–81); Zichan’s rejection of the Jin ruler’s summoning of the Zheng ruler to an audience in Jin (ZZ Xiang 22.2, pp. 1065–67); and Zichan’s refusal to submit to the
Jin chief minister Han Xuanzi a jade ring in the possession of a Zheng merchant (ZZ Zhao 16.3, pp. 1379–80). Even when Zheng envoys fail to influence the outcome of events, their authoritative judgments almost recompense for their failures, as when You Ji castigates Chu for its unreasonable demands (ZZ Xiang 28.8, pp. 1143–45) or blames Jin for its failure of leadership (ZZ Zhao 3.1, pp. 1232–33). In one mission You Ji so impresses Zhao Jianzi, chief minister of Jin, with his understanding of ritual propriety (ZZ Zhao 25.3, pp. 1457–59) that the hierarchy of power seems momentarily reversed.

If arguments urging strategic virtue sometimes stem from a position of weakness, then strength and victory breed their own rhetorical justification. In Zuozhuan, the rhetoric of ritual propriety often justifies aggression or compromises by disguising the reality of power politics—wars are presented as just wars; fear and evasiveness become patience, timeliness, and love of peace. The speeches and passages defining, asserting, and defending hegemony (ba 霸) and the cessation of conflict (mibing 弁兵) may be included here. The rhetorical elevation of the exploits of Lord Zhuang of Zheng embodies some of these issues, as we shall see in Chapter 1. The centrality of hegemony as the ideal accounts in part for the rhetorical manipulation that merges considerations of ritual propriety, power (li 力), and gain (li 利), as the discussion in Chapter 4 demonstrates. Lord Wen of Jin exemplifies the entwining of the quest for hegemony with the concern for moral superiority, or at least its appearance and definitions. A closer scrutiny of the rhetorical justification of hegemony reveals disjunctions in the contexts of related episodes or disagreements among parallel accounts. The passages of praise, whose rhetoric of virtue justifies the continued ascendancy of Jin or the rising power of its ministerial clans (especially Wey and Zhao), display similar incongruities (see ZZ Wen 6.1, pp. 544–46; 7.4–5, pp. 558–62; Xiang 11.5, pp. 991–94). The waning of Jin’s power coincides with efforts (led by the Song minister Xiang Shu) to negotiate the cessation of conflicts, especially between Jin and Chu (Xiang 25 to Zhao 1). The rhetoric of conciliation and good faith that dominates such negotiations barely masks the cynical calculations and mutual suspicions. Jin ministers are especially adept at presenting their fears and ineffectiveness as caution, magnanimity, and the continued semblance of hegemony. This is also a period of frequent and notable citations of the Odes in diplomatic exchanges by ministers of Jin, Lu, and Zheng. The solidarity of cultural heritage thus asserted hides divergent interests and continued intimidation by Chu. Zhao Meng, chief minister of Jin, is adept at
citation of the Odes and elevated rhetoric (ZZ Xiang 27.5, pp. 1134–35; Zhao 1.3, 1.4, pp. 1207–10), yet he is shown to be weak willed, evasive, and defeatist (ZZ Xiang 31.1, pp. 1183–84; Zhao 1.5, pp. 1210–11; 1.8, pp. 1214–15; 1.12, pp. 1222–23).

Sometimes the more exalted the rhetoric, the more violent the reality. In an episode lauded in the text as “proper employment of talents” (juxian 舉賢), the chief minister of Jin, Wey Shu,13 appoints various officers, including his own clansman Wey Wu to take charge of administrative districts formerly under the control of the Qi and Yangshe clans. Wey Shu asks a Jin officer, Cheng Zhuan, whether his appointment of Wey Wu will be considered “partisan” (dang 党). In response, Cheng Zhuan fervently praises Wey Wu’s talents and virtues and cites as exemplary King Wu’s installation of his brothers and clansmen as rulers of states after the conquest of Shang.14 He quotes the “Huangyi” from the Odes and glosses the meanings of all the “virtue words” in the quotation, culminating in the elucidation of wen 文 (whose semantic range includes pattern, writing, culture, refinement) as “the woof and warp of heaven and earth” 經緯天地曰文. Wey Shu, in his just appointments, is said to “approximate the virtue of King Wen” 近文德矣 (ZZ Zhao 28.3, pp. 1493–95).

Cheng Zhuan’s affirmation of Wey Shu’s choices is followed by an exchange between Wey Shu and Jia Xin, another beneficiary of the re-distribution of power in Jin. Newly appointed the high officer of Qi,15 Jia Xin is about to leave for his administrative district when Wey Shu regales him with stories about the former Jin minister Shuxiang’s recognition of the Zheng officer Zong Mie’s talents. Shuxiang met Zong Mie during a visit to Zheng. Zong was ugly (ZZ Xiang 25.14, p. 1108) and stood among the attendants so as to better observe Shuxiang. Zong Mie’s ugliness and common garb ceased to matter once he spoke: “There was one line and it was excellent” 一言而善 (ZZ Zhao 28.3, p. 1496). Shuxiang realized it must be Zong Mie, having heard of his sagacity, and proceeded to tell Zong Mie an anecdote about recognition: an ugly high officer of Jia married a beautiful wife, who did not speak or smile for three years. Only when he took his wife to the fields and

13. I adopt the alternative romanization Wey for 魏 to distinguish it from Wei 卫.
14. Cf. Xunzi jianshi, “Ruxiao,” p. 75: the Zhou Duke “established seventy-one domains, of which fifty-three were ruled by those surnamed Ji, but the world did not call him partial” 立七十一國，姬姓獨居五十三人，而天下不稱偏焉.
15. For Jia Xin’s merit, see ZZ Zhao 22.5, p. 1438.
marshes and demonstrated his talent for shooting pheasants did she began to smile and talk. The Jia high officer exclaims, “Talent cannot be dispensed with” 才之不可以已. Shuxiang affirms the parallel between the two stories of recognizing true worth: “Eloquence cannot be dispensed with, as this demonstrates” 言之不可以已也如是. In thus narrating a story within a story, Wey Shu seems to be implying that Jia Xin’s talents are not immediately obvious and may require special justification. The account also focuses attention on Wey Shu’s powers of discernment—he goes beyond appearance: in the sense both of apprehending hidden virtue and of being indifferent to (potentially negative judgments of) his semblance of partiality.

The episode ends with Zhongni’s (“Confucius”) approbation of Wey Shu’s appointments, which include kin and non-kin, as exemplifying “what is right and appropriate” (yi), and he praises the way Wey Shu commands Jia Xin as “loyal” (zhong). Confucius concludes that the Wey lineage will flourish for long in Jin. Such fulsome praise in the context of these appointments is jarring. Wey Shu redistributes the lands that had belonged to the Qi and Yangshe clans, victims of the ruthless power struggles between rival houses in Jin. Their transgressions are insignificant, and their punishment is both swift and excessive. Ironically, the most famous son of the Yangshe clan, the prescient minister Shuxiang, is introduced here as a man of exemplary discernment. The presumed analogy between Shuxiang and Wey Shu may even suggest a kind of substitution. Wey Shu is taking over land and privileges that had belonged to Shuxiang’s lineage. Wey Shu is not mentioned as complicit in the downfall of the Qi and Yangshe clans, but his own clan is the most obvious beneficiary. As if in proleptic defense against charges of duplicity, the anecdotes about homely appearance and eloquence, ugliness and martial prowess, hidden and demonstrable virtue, argue for the imperative to “rise above appearance.” Who is lying here? Was a scribe associated with the Wey house responsible for this laudatory episode? Did the author or transmitter of this anecdote simply focus on the issue of proper employment of talent and either did not register or chose to suppress its context? Writing under the influence of centuries of more absolutist moral discourse as well as more sweeping claims for loyalty toward the ruler, and reading early history through the prism of late

16. Confucius, usually designated Zhongni, should be regarded as a persona in the text and not be confused with the historical Confucius or the other images of Confucius defined through various early texts.
Ming factional politics, the great seventeenth-century thinker Wang Fuzhi (1619–92) castigated many sections of Zuozhuan for their “partisan words” (dangci 党辭, dangshuo 党說).” Ironically, Wey Shu’s refutation of the anticipated charge of being “partisan” might serve to confirm it: this is rhetorical justification of a fait accompli told by the victors.

Keywords

Even this cursory survey of the rhetorical possibilities in Zuozhuan demonstrates its multiple perspectives. An apparently consistent position may conceal different premises. Thus, approbation of rhetoric premised on ritual and moral order (xunci 訓辭, cishun 訓順) can indicate a Traditionalist perspective, as when a Zhou scribe commends the Lu minister Zang Aibo for his remonstrance of Lord Huan of Lu (ZZ Huan 2.2, p. 90) or when the Jin minister Shuxiang affirms the power of moral rhetoric to counter overweening ambition (ZZ Zhao 5.4, p. 1267), but it may also imply acceptance of power politics, as when Zhao Wu and Confucius praise Zichan’s defense of the Zheng invasion of Chen as apposite expression and effective communication (ZZ Xiang 25.10, p. 1106).

Different perspectives can be associated with the same persona or character. For example, the junzi-commentator, who sometimes offers judgments and evaluations at the end of a speech or a narrative, often upholds ritual and ethical norms, but he also sometimes defends profit, self-interest, and expediency. The terms junzi (君子, “noble man”) and its counterpart xiaoren (小人, “petty man”) designate both social status and moral qualities in Zuozhuan. Moral meanings seem to displace social signification when a self-styled petty man like the Chu musician Zhong Yi is commended for having displayed the qualities proper to a noble man (ZZ Cheng 9.9, p. 845), or when the Zheng noble Han Hu deprecates his limited understanding by calling himself “a petty man” (ZZ Xiang 31.12, p. 1193). Purely social references are much rarer but can be found throughout Zuozhuan. The most interesting ramifications of the concept arise not so much from the potential conflict between its social and moral meanings, as from the tension between received traditions and engagement with circumstantial exigencies. We will explore these issues in accounts related to Zichan and Yan Ying in Chapter 5.

Such complexities should alert us to the varied and sometimes unpredictable lives of ideas and terms in Zuozhuan. We may begin with the

17. See Wang Fuzhi, Chunqiu jiashuo, p. 218.
Introduction

Most scholars agree that divine authority buttressing political and moral order broke down in the period covered by Zuozhuan. There is, however, no proven correspondence between this development and the chronology of ideas expressed in the text, where multiple perspectives prevail. Real acceptance of heaven as moral and purposeful and of the need to comply with its will can be hard to ascertain, for such avowals may mask expediency or power calculations, as we shall see, for example, with the rulers harboring hegemonic ambitions discussed in Chapters 1 and 4.

Formulations such as “heaven opened the way for him” 天啟之, “heaven has just bestowed favor on [a certain state]” 天方授[某國], “heaven brings calamity” [to a person or a state] 天禍[某人/某國], “heaven will destroy him” 天其殃之, or “heaven has drawn out their sense of rightness within” 天誘其衷 often accompany an explanation or enumeration of favorable or unfavorable circumstances. In other words, appealing to heaven may simply be one way to describe circumstantial factors or the momentum of events. Heaven is recurrently used to justify various policies, especially aggression (e.g., ZZ Xi 19.4, p. 383; Xiang 25.10, p. 1105; Ding 4.3, p. 1547) and appeasement (e.g., ZZ Huan 6.2, p. 111; Xuan 15.2, p. 739; Zhao 11.2, pp. 1322–23). There are intermittent arguments justifying concentration on human affairs on the ground that heaven is ultimately unknowable or irrelevant, as we shall see in Chapter 2. Thus the Jin officer Qing Zheng chides Lord Hui for blaming his misfortunes on his father’s failure to follow divination results, citing human conduct as the more decisive factor (ZZ Xi 15.4, pp. 363–65). Another wise minister, Zang Wenzhong, counsels the Lu ruler to ameliorate a drought by improving government instead of burning the shaman (ZZ Xi 21.2, pp. 390–91). The most famous example of this kind of skepticism and pragmatism is Zichan’s refusal to offer sacrifices to ward off a predicted fire, when he justifies his decision with the famous dictum that “heaven’s way is distant, the human way is near” (ZZ Zhao 18.3, p. 1395). Heaven is in turn moral, impersonal, purposeful, and incomprehensible. The “way of heaven” (tiandao 天道) refers variously to the inevitable momentum of events (ZZ Zhuang 4.1, p. 163), ritual propriety (ZZ Wen 15.11, p. 614), toleration of compromises and imperfections (ZZ Xuan 15.2, p. 759), sociopolitical order (ZZ Xiang 22.3, p. 1068), and movements of heavenly bodies that determine human affairs (ZZ Xiang 9.1, pp. 963–64; Zhao 9.4, p. 1310; 11.2, pp. 1323–24).

18. Following Karlgren no. 177.
In the world of *Zuozhuan*, deities and spirits (鬼神) may be regarded as the particular manifestations of heaven. In an oft-repeated scenario, a supplicant who mistakenly assumes “transactional reciprocity” in his dealings with deities and spirits is told that what matters is his political and moral conduct—a ruler falsely assumes lavish offerings will ensure blessings, and a remonstrating minister disabuses him of his illusion, translating divine expectations and displeasure into moral-political imperatives in order to urge reforms (e.g., ZZ Huan 6.2, pp. 109–12; Zhuang 10.1, pp. 182–83; Xi 5.8, pp. 309–10; Zhao 20.6, pp. 1415–18). Wise ministers argue that the people are the true masters of deities and spirits (ZZ Huan 6.2, p. 111; Xi 19.3, p. 382). Natural anomalies and uncanny occurrences are often interpreted as reflections and consequences of disorder in the human realm (ZZ Zhuang 14.2, 196–97; Zhao 8.1, 1300–301). There is pervasive emphasis on ritual control and ethical norms in communication with the spirits, both of which imply human endeavor, although there are also sporadic instances of iniquity decreed and rewarded by the spirits, as we shall see in Chapter 3. A Lu high officer, Zang Hui, divines by turtle shell to choose between “good faith” (信) and “transgression” (僭). Transgression is pronounced auspicious. Zang thus acts in a deceitful manner, exploits the enmity between the Zang and Ji lineages, and ends up successfully displacing the legitimate head of the Zang clan (ZZ Zhao 25.10, pp. 1467–68). Likewise, a just man can be misled by confounding signs from the numinous realm: the sagacious Lu minister Shusun Bao comes to an inglorious end because he is deceived by a dream that makes him trust his evil illegitimate son, Niu (ZZ Zhao 4.8, pp. 1256–59).

The most important and pervasive “value word” in *Zuozhuan* is *li* (ritual propriety). Its broad semantic range is evident in the eloquent speeches of remonstrance occasioned by the ritual infractions of Lu rulers early on in *Zuozhuan* (ZZ Yin 5.1, pp. 41–44; Huan 2.2, pp. 86–90; Zhuang 23.1, pp. 225–26; 24.1. p. 229), which we will discuss in Chapter 2. The ruler’s demonstrable virtue, as realized in ritual spectacle, is said to have an ordering function for the polity. The same standards of evaluation apply to ministers (ZZ Xiang 21.2, pp. 1056–58): they, too, can produce order by their exemplarity. Notions of imitation and correspondence facilitate the elevation and broadening application of the term *li*—wise ministers claim that *li* is coeval with heaven and earth (ZZ Zhao 26.11, pp. 1480–81) and imitates their regulatory principles (ZZ Zhao 25.3, pp. 1457–59).

Confucius famously remarks in the *Analects* (17.11): “What is called ritual, what is called ritual—does that refer only to jades and silks?” 礼云
As noted earlier, the anxiety that correct observances of ceremonial decorum can be detached from the real meanings of ritual propriety is also expressed in *Zuo zhuan*. To assert the distance between ceremonial correctness and real ritual propriety is to simultaneously make grand claims for the latter, as when the Zheng minister Zi Dashu cautions Zhao Jianzi, the leader of Jin, against confusing the two (*ZZ* Zhao 25.3, pp. 1457–59). Ritual propriety may be much more than ceremonial decorum, but nowhere in *Zuo zhuan* is it said that the latter can be dispensed with. The basic continuity between *li* and *yi* persists as ideal. In this sense the Wei minister Beigong Wenzi’s distinction between two kinds of *weiyi* (majesty and bearing)—the mere appropriation of the paraphernalia of authority, and the emanation of rightful estate—is the rehabilitation of *yi* as the real counterpart of *li* (*ZZ* Xiang 31.13, pp. 1193–95). In this vision, ceremonial decorum and ritual propriety converge seamlessly with sociopolitical order, sometimes extending inward to visions of self-cultivation and outward to universal harmony.

In many other instances, *li* summons associations with laws and rules (*fa*) through consistent emphasis on efficient administration, military discipline, readiness for war, powerful government, enforcement of rules and laws, and judicious rewards and punishments (e.g., *ZZ* Zhuang 27.5, pp. 236–37; *Xi* 27.4, p. 447; *Wen* 6.1, pp. 543–46; 18.7, pp. 633–36; *Xuan* 16.4, pp. 769–70; *Cheng* 16.5, pp. 880–81; *Xiang* 3.7, pp. 928–30; 14.5, p. 1016). Advocates of opposing positions, notably the conservative Jin minister Shuxiang and the Zheng reformer Zichan, can appeal to notions of ritual propriety and make grand claims. Zichan casts penal codes on bronze vessels, and Shuxiang expresses his opposition in a letter to Zichan by invoking a vision of idealized antiquity wherein ritual norms are fulfilled through the imitation of virtue and submission to its affective power (*ZZ* Zhao 6.3, pp. 1274–76). Zichan in reply declares that his goal is “to save his generation” and does not mention *li*, but elsewhere he cites an ode (not in the extant *Classic of Odes*), “So long as proper ritual and rightful duty are not violated, Why should I heed other people’s [critical] words?” (*ZZ* Zhao 4.6, p. 1254), and the aforementioned Zi Dashu quotes Zichan’s pronouncement on *li* as the normative principle for heaven, earth, and the people (*ZZ* Zhao 25.3, p. 1457). The elevation of *li* could thus serve both “conservative” and “reformist” arguments, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

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19. For other affirmations of *yi*, see *ZZ* Cheng 13.2, pp. 860–61; *Zhao* 2.3, p. 1229; 5.4, p. 1267.
On many occasions, the rhetoric of ritual propriety masks power calculations. This is especially evident in accounts of the quest of some Chunqiu rulers to become hegemons, as we shall see in Chapter 4. The definitions and representations of ritual propriety are in turn related to other important issues in Zuozhuan: what constitutes legitimate authority and how it should chart the relationship between rulers and subjects. Most of the speeches in Zuozhuan comprise advice, remonstrance, or policy debates offered by ministers (qing 卿) and high officers (dafu 大夫), and they understandably advance the claims, rights, and interests of those groups, who are often represented as the rulers’ moral and intellectual superiors.

Keywords charting the ruler-subject relationship include de 德 (power, charisma, virtue), zhong 忠 (loyalty), and xin 信 (good faith). The term de is used retrospectively to designate the power and virtue of the Zhou house throughout Zuozhuan, often by way of appealing to the early Zhou political order and fealty sanctioned by kinship ties. Associated with governance, beneficent domestic policies, and judicious, nonaggressive policies toward weaker states, de naturally comes up in debates and recommendations on the proper courses of action for rulers and ministers in charge of government. As with varying uses of ritual propriety and other “virtue words,” particular historical situations call for the manipulation of de to justify appeasement (ZZ Xiang 27.4, pp. 1129–33; Zhao 4.1, pp. 1246–47), yielding in the interest of self-preservation (ZZ Zhao 10.2, p. 1317), and resolution in eliminating the enemy (ZZ Cheng 17.10, p. 903). The passages on the minister’s de also foment the continuum between “self-cultivation,” “ordering the family” and “ordering the state,” intimated in Mengzi and developed in the famous formulation in Great Learning (Daxue 大學). For example, Jiu Ji observes how Xi Que and his wife show proper respect for each other and concludes that he possesses the de to govern the people, and Lord Wen of Jin makes Xi Que officer of the lower army (ZZ Xi 33.6, pp. 501–2). The de of another

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20. In Preceptor Kuang’s vision of ideal polity (ZZ Xiang 14.6, pp. 1016–18), opinions and criticisms from different groups circulate effectively through recognized channels.

21. See Mengzi 7.11. The eight steps in Great Learning proceed from self-cultivation to political order: investigate things (gewu 格物), extend knowledge (zhizhi 致知), make one’s thoughts sincere (chengyi 诚意), rectify one’s mind (zhengxin 正心), cultivate one’s person (xiuben 修身), bring order to the family (qijia 齊家), govern the state (zhiguo 治國), bring peace to the world (ping tianxia 平天下). The Great Learning, a chapter in the Record of Rites, was later designated by Zhu Xi as one of the Four Books.
Jin minister, Fan Wuzi, is shown among other things in how “the affairs of his lineage were in good order” 家事治 (ZZ Xiang 27.4, p. 1133; Zhao 20.6, p. 1415).

Later in the Chinese tradition, the loyalty demanded of subjects became more absolute. In Zuozhuan, zhong is often understood as “fulfillment of duty,” and as such is a category of evaluation applicable also to the ruler (e.g., ZZ Huan 6.2, p. 111). The subject’s loyalty to “the altars of earth and grain” rather than to the ruler’s person can potentially justify the expulsion of an immoral or incompetent ruler (e.g., ZZ Xiang 14.6, pp. 1016–18; Zhao 32.4, pp. 1519–20). The idea that a ruler who does not fulfill his duty as ruler (bujun 不君) is no longer entitled to his subjects’ allegiance recalls the vision of “rectifying names” (zhengming 正名) in the Analects (12.11, 13.3) and Mengzi’s assertion that the killing of a tyrant cannot be considered regicide (Mengzi 2.8). 22

Likewise, keeping good faith with a ruler requires reciprocity—rarely is unconditional obedience lauded as a virtue. Obedience is sometimes advertised as a gesture of opposition: the claim to obey one lord justifies defiance of another, as when Yuan Fan defies the new Zheng ruler by claiming to have served the former lord with good faith (ZZ Zhuang 14.2, pp. 197–98). The famous advisors in early Zuozhuan, such as Guan Zhong and Chong’er’s followers, achieve glory either by switching allegiance or by turning against a reigning ruler. Another minister, Zhai Zhong of Zheng, is depicted in a curiously sympathetic fashion, despite his duplicitous and self-serving maneuvers. 23 In general, subjects refusing or subverting misguided commands are consistently commended in Zuozhuan, and conflicts of loyalty between a ruler’s due and the greater good of the state are often resolved with the choice of the latter. A more general defense of the minister’s rights is sometimes combined with the acceptance of compromise and the desire for self-preservation as legitimate motives, as in some accounts related to the Qi minister Yan Ying (ZZ Xiang 25.2, pp. 1098–99; 28.9, pp. 1146–47; 28.11, p. 1159; Zhao 10.2, pp. 1316–17). It is typical of the inconsistencies in Zuozhuan that elsewhere Yan Ying is known for his eloquent defense of li as absolute moral principle (ZZ Zhao 26.11, pp. 1480–81).

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22. Mengzi characterizes Zhou, the last ruler of Shang who lost all support in the realm, as “the lone man” (yifu 一夫). Cf. Xunzi’s view of Zhou as “the isolated man” (dufu 獨夫) (“Yihing,” in Xunzi jianshi, p. 200).

23. See ZZ Huan 11.3, pp. 131–32; 15.2, p. 143; 18.2, p. 153. He is last mentioned as “having escaped harm because of his prescience” 以知免, because he managed to avoid being implicated when two of the conspirators in Zheng’s succession struggles were killed.
There are notable regional differences in the representation of ruler-subject relationships. In Chu, for example, the ruler is twice compared to heaven and his command is upheld as inviolable (ZZ Xuan 4.3, p. 684; Ding 4.3, p. 1546), and Chu rulers are sometimes praised despite their failures (ZZ Xiang 14.4, p. 1002; Ai 6.4, pp. 1634–36). This may suggest that powerful Chu kings justified and were justified by political thought maximizing the ruler’s claims.24 By contrast, one is tempted to link the great power of noble lineages in Jin to some recurrent concerns in what might have been Jin sources—the fulsome praise of just rewards for ministers (ZZ Min 1.6, pp. 258–59; Xi 33.6, pp. 501–3; Xuan 15.6, pp. 764–65; Xiang 11.5, pp. 993–94; Zhao 28.3, pp. 1493–96), the arguments justifying the expulsion of unworthy rulers (ZZ Xiang 14.6, pp. 1016–18; Zhao 32.4, pp. 1519–20), and the sympathetic treatment of ministers involved in regicide (ZZ Xuan 2.3, pp. 655–63; Cheng 17.10, pp. 900–903; 18.1, pp. 906–7).25 Views toward the collateral branches of the ruling family also differ: in states where the ascendant noble lineages bore surnames different from the ruling house, such as Jin and Qi, noble lineages related to the ruler by kinship (gongzu 公族) were seen as sharing the same fate of decline as the ruling house (ZZ Zhao 3.3, pp. 1233–39)—they were thus no longer adversaries, as in Lu and Song.

In the Analects (16.2), Confucius laments the downward shifts of power from the Son of Heaven to the princes, then to high officers, and then to retainers, the subjects of subjects (peichen 陪臣, jiachen 家臣).26 The famous speeches justifying the shift of power from rulers to ministers invoke the ideas of collateral counterparts or “seconds” (er 貳) and inevitable mutability (ZZ Xiang 14.6, pp. 1016–18; Zhao 32.4, pp. 1519–20). Perhaps therein lies the dilemma of ministers and officers—the arguments that justify their ascendancy are also potentially threatening. Their own collateral branches and retainers, as well as the momentum of inexorable change, can undermine their position. Loyalty and good faith acquire a somewhat more personal tint in the relationship between min-

24. A notable exception to this pattern of “honoring the ruler and holding down the minister” (zun jun yi chen 尊君抑臣) is Wu Zixu, whose campaign against Chu to avenge his father’s unjust execution is presented as justified.
25. There are also extensive passages in the Zuozhuan praising the Wey, Han, Zhao, and Fan lineages in Jin (ZZ Min 1.6; Xiang 9.9, 11.5, 13.3, 26.13, 27.4; Zhao 20.6, 28.3).
26. These retainers sometimes belonged to the cadet lineages of ministers and high officers and held land, which meant that, like Yang Hu and Nan Kuai in Lu, they had the wherewithal to revolt. Sometimes they were officers or stewards (shi 士), like Luan Ying’s followers or Confucius’s disciples, who were paid by emoluments of grain (gulu 穀祿).
isters and their retainers. Whereas personal ties to rulers are often described with negative words such as *si* 私 and *bi* 嬌, implying favoritism for attendants or eunuchs that fostered their undesirable influence with inevitably disastrous consequences, and attendants who die for their rulers are regarded as evidence of the ruler’s errant course rather than praised as martyrs (ZZ Zhuang 8.3, pp. 175–76; Xiang 25.2, pp. 1097–98), the personal allegiance of retainers for their masters is sometimes romanticized, notably when the Jin minister Luan Ying’s followers pledge to die for his cause (ZZ Xiang 23.3, pp. 1073–74). The disaffection of ministers and high officers is sometimes explained and justified, but rebellious retainers are never treated sympathetically in Zuozhuan. However, in some cases retainers share the same concerns and dilemmas as ministers and high officers (vis-à-vis the ruler), such as the need for self-preservation in troubled times, or the goal of higher good, in the interests either of the state or of realizing a political ideal. Confucius’s disciples, as depicted in the final years of Zuozhuan, exemplify a range of alternatives—a case we will examine in Chapter 5.

One of Confucius’s disciples, Zilu, died for the Wei minister Kong Kui during the internecine conflicts in Wei. He upholds the principles of reciprocity, whereby profit or gain is a legitimate motive for service and allegiance: “I profit by an official salary from him [Kong Kui], I must rescue him from calamity” 利其祿，必救其患 (ZZ Ai 15.5, p. 1696). In Warring States writings, especially Mengzi, *yi* (duty, righteousness) and *li* (profit, gain) are sometimes polarized. However, the verbal uses of *li* (benefit) in regard to one’s progeny, the army, the state, the people, and the altars of earth and grain are always positive in Zuozhuan. As such, it defines a moral position when the choices are problematic: the Qi minister Yan Ying agrees to swear a covenant with the usurper Cui Zhu by changing its words to indicate support for anyone who “would benefit the altars of earth and grain” (*li* sheji zhe 利社稷者) (ZZ Xiang 25.2, p. 1099). When envoys and statesmen use the word in interstate negotiations to argue what would be most advantageous and profitable for various parties, deception and manipulation are not uncommon and the import of the word is more amoral. The quest for inappropriate or excessive gain (*zhuanli* 專利, *liguo* 利過) is consistently castigated, as is seeking unfair advantage by flouting good faith—although taken contextually, the negative judgments in the latter case are often strategies of denouncing the enemy and claiming the moral high ground. Yan Ying refuses a gift of settlements because “excessive gain would bring defeat” 利過則為敗 and instead defends “measured gain in due proportion” (*fuli* 規 禮)
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幅利), which would ensure its continuance and protect the beneficiary from jealousy and future loss. Most interesting, the term *li* is sometimes presented as the impetus for other virtues or the link in a causal chain of moral attributes.27

In such formulations, gain or benefit is often presented as the goal of *yi* (duty, rightful conduct). This underlines the external and externalized focus of the lexicon of virtue in *Zuozhuan*. In this world, ethical attributes are observable, efficacious, and invariably have social and political ramifications. The word *ren* (*humane, benevolent*), for example, has a lesser dimension of inwardness compared to late Warring States usage. The crucial importance of *ren* in the *Analects* and Confucian thought in general does not prepare us for its relatively infrequent occurrence and surprising vagueness in *Zuozhuan*,28 where it is often linked to benevolent and noninterfering government, judicious military discipline, the quest for interstate peace, and a protective stance toward weaker states. More generally, it connotes courage, sound judgment, and effective action. In terms of policy debates, the more Traditionalist leaders (like Shuxiang) invoke *ren*, while reformers trying to create a more powerful government could be accused of being *buren* (*inhumane*).29

Unlike *ren*, which occurred rarely in Western Zhou sources, *xiao* (filial piety) was a keyword in late Western Zhou texts and bronze inscriptions, where it referred primarily to rituals for deceased forefathers and functioned to enhance lineage unity and affirm the authority of the ruling house.30 References to *xiao* in *Zuozhuan* are merely intermittent.31

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28. The word *ren* appears twenty-eight times, one-tenth of the number of occurrences of *li* (ritual); see Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, pp. 184–86.

29. On Zichan’s refusal to disband village schools where critics of government gather, Confucius comments, “Judging from this, when people say that Zichan was not humane, I do not believe it” 以是觀之, 人謂子產不仁, 吾不信也 (ZZ Xiang 31.11). The Lu minister Zang Wenzhong, almost always praised for his sagacity, is yet castigated by Confucius for being *buren*. Two of the reasons, instituting new kinds of taxes for road passes and allowing his concubines to weave rush mats, have to do with increasing the wealth of the state and its leaders (ZZ Wen 2.5, pp. 525–26).


31. The word *xiao* appears twenty-four times in *Zuozhuan* (excluding the instances when the word is part of a posthumous honorific).
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Its functions and political implications vary. Filial piety is presented as instrumental in healing divisions in the polity in accounts related to Lord Zhuang of Zheng (ZZ Yin 1.4, pp. 10–16), as we see in Chapter 1. It is sometimes mentioned as one of the components in a catalogue of roles virtuously fulfilled in depictions of idealized sociopolitical order (ZZ Yin 3.7, p. 32; Wen 18.7, p. 638; Cheng 18.3, p. 909; Zhao 26.11, p. 1480). It is only once linked to early Zhou political order, when kinship and marriage ties among states implied that incivility to the mother of another lord would be tantamount to violation of filial piety (ZZ Cheng 2.3, p. 797). A son may feel compelled by filial piety to accept a ruler-father’s commands, even when they are obviously benighted (ZZ Huan 16.5, pp. 145–47; Xi 4.6, pp. 295–99). Conflicts between loyalty (to the ruler) and filial piety are often resolved in the interest of the former (e.g., ZZ Xiang 22.6, pp. 1069–70; Ding 4.3, pp. 1546–47). Even so, debates on the meanings of xiao in Zuozhuan often imply challenges to the ruler’s authority. Could the rejection of a ruler-father’s misguided or pernicious command be justified in the interest of the son’s self-protection or the state’s stability and higher good (ZZ Min 2.7, pp. 268–72)? Should the need to avenge the father justify violence against the ruler (ZZ Zhao 20.2, pp. 1407–9; Ding 4.3, pp. 1546–47)? Should the claims of one’s lineage take precedence over the ruler’s commands? In some ways, xiao in Zuozhuan is leaving behind older associations with Zhou ritual-political order but is not yet justified through a more affective understanding of virtue. The different associations of words such as ren and xiao in Zuozhuan (as pitted against texts like the Analects and Mengzi, for example) remind us of the importance of comparative analysis. The great semantic range of keywords in Zuozhuan can best be ascertained through internal juxtapositions and comparisons with other received texts from early China.

32. In the aftermath of Jin’s defeat of Qi in the Battle of An, Jin demands that the mother of the Qi ruler, Xiao Tong Shuzi, be made a hostage, on account of her rudeness to the Jin minister Xi Que. The Qi envoy, Bin Meiren, argues that by doing so Jin would be trying “to command the lords by the violation of filial piety” (yi buxiao ling zhouhou 以不孝令诸侯).

33. Note that even Dou Xin, who opposes his brother Dou Huai’s expressed wish to kill King Zhao to avenge their father’s execution by King Ping (King Zhao’s father), does so on the grounds that regicide would lead to the elimination of their own lineage and that “to abandon the lineage and extinguish sacrifices” (feizong miesi 废宗灭祀) would be unfilial.
Mapping Divergences

How do we account for the divergences? Calendrical discrepancies indicate the divergent geographical origins of the material. Traditional scholarship refers to the “three first months” (sanzheng 三正): the Xia, Shang, and Zhou calendars each designated a different month as the first month (SSJZS 6, 1.5b). In Zuozhuan, Lu and Qi, for example, follow the Zhou calendar, whereas Jin uses the Xia calendar (ZZ, 9–11). Regional distinctions may reflect different historical realities and ideological constructions: as noted earlier, the relationship between ruler and subject is represented in different ways in various states.

The various “histories of the states” (guoshi 国史) amalgamated in Zuozhuan may have had unique narrative conventions, or there may have been regional differences in rhetorical styles. (It is perhaps no accident that the instances of indirect remonstrances from Chu mentioned above may be related to the excess and conscious paradox in the later tradition of rhapsodic poetic exposition, also associated with Chu.) We can also imagine generic differences. The public communications between states (letters, proclamations, formal exchanges) have distinct generic boundaries. Sometimes there is an obvious gap between these pronouncements and parallel accounts of the same events. One notable example is Lü Xiang’s letter severing Jin’s relations with Qin, which starkly aligns Jin with propriety and Qin with transgression. The examples enumerated in Lü Xiang’s letter yield narratives with different sympathies elsewhere in Zuozhuan. There also seems to be recognition of the functional and formal differences between public words (gongyan 公言) and private words (siyan 私言). In one instance (to be discussed in Chapter 5), on the occasion of a marriage alliance between Qi and Jin, Shuxiang and Yan Ying exchange formal greetings that imply the integrity of the ritual, social, and political orders but privately lament the disintegration of those structures with the decline of the ruling houses in Qi and Jin. Furthermore, anecdotes based on recurrent topoi, such as remonstrance, prediction, or divination, may have specific generic features, so much so that their incorporation can lead to inconsistencies. For example, Zuozhuan contains several famous speeches of remonstrance by the Qi minister Yan Ying. All conclude with the Qi ruler heeding his advice, which

34. See also Pines, Foundations of Confucian Thought, pp. 19–20; and Shaughnessy, “Calendar and Chronology.”
in turn leads to the improvement of government in Qi. We may surmise that a successful conclusion is common for the remonstrance anecdote. As a result, these Yan Ying anecdotes coexist, somewhat incongruously, with a broad narrative of Qi decline in *Zuo zhuan*.

I take up the issue of divergent sources in Chapter 1. Basic formal and textual problems suggest that sedimentation and heterogeneity characterize the formation of *Zuo zhuan*. Most germane to this discussion is the implication of ideological differences. It is often said that *Zuo zhuan* is didactic and moralistic. Being “didactic,” however, is not the same as being “univocal.” Different positions encoded in narrative and rhetoric suggest competing lessons, which could be formulated as exegesis, pedagogy, or remonstrance. The object of exegesis may well have been the kind of annalistic entries found in the extant *Chun qiu*. Its function, and more generally the purpose of elaborating the kind of stories and speeches found in *Zuo zhuan*, would be political persuasion of those in power, both by laying down the broad principles of government and by making specific policy recommendations. We can imagine situations in which scribes, teachers, and counselors espousing different views practice such political persuasion. Inasmuch as implied or explicit opposites to articulated positions can be found in the text itself, *Zuo zhuan* is a platform for contesting different conceptions of political order that flourished during its long period of accretion. Further, although the chronological arrangement and exegetical imperative of the text were later developments, the embedding of the text in chronology has the (unintended) consequence of foregrounding contexts and juxtapositions that alert the reader to varying perspectives.

The basic building block of arguments in *Zuo zhuan* is often a piece of causal reasoning. In this sense, conceptions of rhetoric and interpretation are closely intertwined, once they are tied to duration and temporal consciousness. In Chapter 2, I examine conceptions of causality, contingency, and necessity. In *Zuo zhuan*, causality is realized through recurrent patterns: a small, apparently inconsequential gesture, action, or event has momentous consequences. Different types of “small beginnings,” the force of exemplarity, and the idea of gradual, irrevocable development (*jian* 渐) chart the parameters of determinism and human agency. It is also worth pondering what counts as a sufficient cause. I single out music and woman as examples of “sufficient causes” made to bear much explanatory weight. Music is perhaps the best example of the analogical thinking behind the representation of small causes and momentous consequences. A small dissonance disrupts the coherence of an
entire system. Music comes to be both the basis of and the index to moral, social, political, and cosmic order. Zuozhuan also abounds with accounts of how beautiful and licentious women embody the principles of transgression and disorder and how the passions they inspire change the fortunes of states. Unlike music, woman or the relationship between men and women is not presented as the fundament of order—that elevation has to wait until the Xi Commentary to the Classic of Changes (hereafter the Changes) and the Mao Preface to the Odes. The questions of how and why music and woman are called on to explain what otherwise seems incomprehensible testify to a basic ambivalence regarding pleasure and sensual existence, as well as to a fear of excess and unrestraint as destructive forces.

Causal reasoning is formalized in the reading of signs, a ubiquitous act of wide-ranging application in Zuozhuan. Chapter 3 begins with broad discussions of whether and how human and numinous signs can be read. Prescient characters inside and outside the event offer prophetic and retrospective judgments based on the interpretation of divination, riddles, dreams, manifestations of and encounters with gods and ghosts, astronomical phenomena, natural anomalies, or observed details of a person’s attire, speech, behavior, gestures, and movements in rituals. The will to systemization coexists with randomness and the awareness of limits in such interpretations. Different interpretive skills seem to answer varying concerns: thus knowing music and the Odes is the province of a Traditionalist, who is likely to appeal to early Zhou order; in contrast, divination is presented as a more specialized and technical knowledge. I focus on divination and the decoding of dreams as modes of shaping narratives, controlling the past, and defining the margins of its readability. The ubiquitous concern with signs and causality points to recurrent interpretations as a principle of narrative organization.

Chapter 4 shows how the betrayal and manipulation of signs, as much as their fulfillment and interpretation, define narrative units and question (even as they assert) the readability of the past, thereby redefining causality and human agency. Using Lord Wen of Jin as the chief example, I examine how the discourse of hegemony, poised on a precarious balance between a rhetoric of ritual propriety and a concern with power, is built on the manipulation of signs. By contrast, the inversion of hegemony, exemplified by the overdetermined downfall of King Ling of Chu, presents how signs of ritual constraints try to contain excesses and overreaching ambitions. The broader issue is how opaque or equivocal signs, as well as the misreading, incomprehension, and cynical
manipulation of signs, may indicate skepticism regarding moral laws, the meaning of history, and the constancy or existence of the gods and of the sociopolitical-cosmic order.

Is it, then, justifiable to hypothesize about the anxiety of interpretation? In Chapter 5, I explore this question by focusing on moments of rhetorical and interpretive self-consciousness in Zuozhan. Do such moments tell us how interpretive structures develop and disintegrate? Tales of sound and fury in the text sometimes defy attempts to wrest meaning from them. Paradoxically, the absence of exemplary figures and actions can also determine the momentum of narratives. Do accounts of proliferating disorder and disintegration challenge the compass of readability? Does anxiety arise as part of the attempt to grasp the “shape of history,” such as that obtaining in compelling visions of decline? Such visions augment and at the same time undermine temporal order, which upholds antecedent exemplars as superior but imitable. The authority of precedents is furthered questioned as competing pasts are invoked in diplomatic confrontations. Deliberations on the rules of reading in Zuozhan lead us to ponder the functions of comments (especially those of the anonymous “noble man” and “Confucius”) and dimensions of historical self-consciousness, as defined through the many guises of the scribe (shi 史) in Zuozhan. If one can speak of an emergent sense of history embodied by the text, it would lie precisely at the intersection of varying conceptions of interpretation and rhetoric brought to bear on the past within a larger context of competing solutions to the crisis of instability and disintegration represented through the events of the 255 years covered by Zuozhan.