Introduction

The title of this book, Cherishing Antiquity, is a translation of the Chinese term: huaigu 懷古. In principle, huaigu could encompass the act of remembering any historical occurrence or individual, but in practice it has often been applied to contemplation of the cultural significance of places where events of historic importance happened. In literary terms, huaigu is a genre that describes the emotions of a visitor to a famous historical site now in ruins. It is at once a form of travel writing and a type of historical literature. As huaigu is related to travel writing, it can be distinguished from historical genres by its predication upon a personal visit by the writer to the site in question. On the other hand, huaigu is distinct from other kinds of travel writing in its use of images and vocabulary derived from ancient historical records to evoke an often highly detailed representation of the past glories of the site in question, and in its conventional presentation of a poignant contrast between the magnificence that had once been and the present desolation meeting the eyes of the traveler-author. The writer plays on the tension between the transience of human endeavor and the continuity of the natural world; the destruction of great palaces and famous monuments, and the survival of weed and bramble-covered ruins; the disappearance of important historical figures; and the visibility of such melancholy remnants as tombs and stone steles.

The focus of this book is on the cultural construction, in particular through huaigu writings, of the ancient kingdom of Wu. This state, situated in what is now southern Jiangsu Province, had its capital located at the city of Suzhou. The kingdom of Wu has a recorded history in ancient Chinese texts of almost exactly one century, beginning with the reign of King Shoumeng of Wu 吳王壽夢 (r. 585–561 BCE) who first opened up diplomatic relations with the states of the Zhou confederacy, and ending with its conquest by enemy forces in the reign of King Shoumeng’s great-grandson in 473 BCE. However,
given that all texts about the history and culture of the kingdom of Wu were written after its sudden and precipitate collapse, they reflect not the wealth and might of its kings when they were at the height of their powers, but the bewilderment of later observers attempting to understand how such an important country could simply implode in the face of an enemy invasion. In this first phase of the development of the cultural legacy of Wu, there was little room for nostalgia or regret at the rise and fall of this immensely powerful and bellicose southern kingdom, but there was certainly great bafflement and a search for some kind of explanation for how such a thing could be possible. In its numerous military campaigns against its neighbors, the Wu army had seemed almost invincible. The destruction of the kingdom at the beginning of the Warring States era resulted in a major shift in the balance of power in the region, with lasting consequences for the history of China as a whole.

During the imperial era, a new phase began in the cultural construction of the ancient kingdom of Wu. The impression given in ancient Chinese texts is that the kingdom sprang out of nowhere, and that its kings and princes through a combination of ruthless use of military force and subtle diplomacy forced their way into the councils of the Zhou confederacy during the late Spring and Autumn period, only to vanish in a sea of blood and flame when their country was conquered by the kingdom of Yue. These dramatic and romantic events seem to have had a considerable hold over the imaginations of members of the literati elite in imperial era China, and to have been the subject of ongoing commemoration within popular traditions in the lands of Wu. Throughout the imperial era, tourists were attracted to sites supposedly linked to the royal house of Wu, and a considerable body of huagu literature was written on the subject. In addition, a number of commemorative monuments were constructed, some in the form of temples and shrines, others in the shape of secular pavilions, stone inscriptions, and so on, which served to remember individuals and events from the history of Wu. These monuments, in turn, also attracted their own visitors, who wrote of their feelings at seeing this evidence of the remembrance of the ancient kingdom of Wu, at first centuries, and then millennia after its collapse.

This book consists of two parts. The first concerns the history of the royal family of Wu during the century of its recorded existence.
Given that virtually no written records survive of any Wu person except for members of the royal family, it is at present impossible to write a history of this kingdom that does not focus almost exclusively on members of the ruling house. However, there are a number of problems with understanding the history of Wu through its royal family. The first is that different ancient historical texts ascribe different relationships even to some of the best-recorded kings and princes of Wu. Given that the most basic facts about these individuals seem to be disputed, it is very difficult to understand interaction between various members of the family. Likewise, nothing is known about the law or practices of inheritance in the kingdom of Wu in the late Spring and Autumn period (771–475 BCE); this means that it is extremely difficult to interpret the complex and highly contentious issues of succession that occurred at this time. In the circumstances it would be impossible to write a conventional history of the kingdom of Wu. Instead, chapter 1 concentrates on the representation in early Chinese texts of by far the most famous prince of the royal house: Jizha of Wu (dates unknown). The youngest of the sons of King Shoumeng of Wu, the first historically recorded monarch of the kingdom, the prince seems to have received an exceptionally fine education, which combined with a pleasing manner, made him the ideal candidate to represent his king on a number of important diplomatic missions. Prince Jizha is the first, and the best known, of the diplomats sent by the kingdom of Wu to the states of the Zhou confederacy; his first mission was undertaken just a few decades after the earliest known mention of the kingdom of Wu in Chinese records. His deep respect for the customs and culture of the Zhou states, his ingratiating manners, and considerable intelligence made a great impression on his contemporaries, as a result of which he became not only the best-recorded member of his generation in the Wu royal family but also the only prince whose biography was extensively documented in ancient Chinese texts. Given that Prince Jizha never succeeded to the throne of Wu (unlike three of his older brothers), it was his diplomatic success that ensured his lasting fame.

Chapter 2 focuses on the reigns of the last two kings of Wu. King Helü of Wu (r. 514–496 BCE) came to the throne after arranging for the assassination of his predecessor, King Liao (r. 526–515 BCE). In the wake of King Liao’s murder, King
Helü consolidated his grip on power by forcing a number of his relatives into exile, and in some cases he is thought to have sent assassins after them as well. With his authority within the kingdom unchallenged, King Helü turned his army against one of his long-standing enemies, the kingdom of Chu. With a series of stunning victories, the Wu armies marched on the capital of Chu and sacked it, forcing the king into panic-stricken flight and eventually leading to a full-scale evacuation of the city to a new site. More than any other campaign, it was the victorious campaign against Chu, which culminated in the fall of their capital, that defined the military might of Wu and caused their neighbors such anxiety. Where the urbane and educated Prince Jizha represented the civilized diplomatic face of the kingdom of Wu, King Helü represented its barbarity and the brute force of its people. However, in the end he overreached himself. Invading the kingdom of Yue during a period of national mourning, King Helü met the newly enthroned King Goujian of Yue 越王勾践 (r. 496–465 BCE) in battle. King Helü was wounded and died on the retreat, thus bringing to a sudden end a career that had otherwise gone from one success to another. The death of the penultimate king of Wu set in train a sequence of events that would eventually end in the destruction of his kingdom.

Coming to the throne unexpectedly—following first the demise of his older brother, Crown Prince Zhonglei 吳太子終景, and then the death of his father of wounds received in battle—the early years of the reign of King Fuchai 吳王夫差 (r. 495–473 BCE) were overshadowed by the need to avenge King Helü’s untimely death. In the third year of his reign, King Fuchai of Wu invaded Yue and forced King Goujian into an ignominious surrender at Kuaijishan 會稽山. The kingdom of Yue became in effect a protectorate of Wu, and King Goujian spent a number of years in exile before he was finally allowed to return to his home. In the years that followed the terrible defeat inflicted on Yue, the Wu army went from strength to strength, defeating numerous enemies, most notably the state of Qi in a famous engagement at the battle of Ailing 艾陵. This was then followed by what should have been the final triumph for King Fuchai of Wu, when he participated in the covenant at Huangchi 黃池, an occasion intended to confirm his status as the most powerful ruler of the day, second only to the Zhou king in authority. As it transpired,
Huangchi was in fact the beginning of the end. King Goujian of Yue took advantage of the king of Wu’s absence from his kingdom to launch an invasion in the first stage of his long-matured plan for revenge. After a series of devastating campaigns, the Wu capital fell to the enemy, and King Fuchai of Wu was captured alive. He committed suicide, unwilling to survive the loss of his kingdom.

Chapter 3 is concerned mainly with archaeological evidence concerning the history of the royal house of Wu and their cultural legacy. In the last couple of centuries, a number of inscribed bronzes have been discovered or excavated with inscriptions indicating that they were made for members of the Wu royal house. These vessels and weapons pose particular problems of interpretation, given that in many cases they record different names for members of the Wu ruling house from those found in ancient historical texts, and they also add a number of new members to the family tree. In this chapter I propose a new methodology for understanding the texts found on these excavated bronzes that focuses on the evidence these vessel texts provide of social and linguistic change within the ancient kingdom of Wu. This chapter also considers the portrayal of key events from Wu history on Eastern Han (25–220) dynasty bronze mirrors made in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang region. These exceptionally high-quality objects, often signed by their makers, represent the flowering of a local artistic tradition concerned with depicting the fall of the kingdom of Wu. Although many aspects of this tradition remain obscure, this would seem to be both a response to contemporary political changes as well as a representation of ongoing interest in the Jiangnan region about the most famous events in its history.

The second part of this book consists of three case studies, each concerned with the posthumous commemoration of a member of the Wu royal family and the literary legacy of this remembrance. Chapter 4 describes the imperial era deification of Prince Jizha of Wu. The prince was commemorated in a wide range of monuments in and around the presumed site of his fief at Piling (in what is now Changzhou, in Jiangsu Province): these included his tomb and its commemorative stele, incorporating an inscription said to have been composed by and perhaps even written in the calligraphy of Confucius himself; as well as a series of shrines and temples in the immediate vicinity. Some of these temples are of considerable interest,
not least because of their association with individuals claiming descent from the prince. Although the imperial era deification of this prince was confined to the locale in which he had lived, where he was worshipped as a god of examination success, this worship was an extremely important function in an area that, from at least the Song dynasty onwards, was highly education-oriented.

Chapter 5 describes the remembrance of King Helü of Wu. Surprisingly for such a great monarch, whose reign represented an apogee for the power and authority of the kingdom of Wu, commemorative monuments dedicated to King Helü are few and far between, and he never seems to have been the subject of worship at a temple or shrine. Instead, interest in the penultimate king of Wu was focused on the site of his tomb at Tiger Hill, just northwest of his capital, now the city of Suzhou. The earliest recorded visitors to his grave did not come to muse there upon his great military triumphs and the suddenness of his death, but rather to rob the tomb; and the landscape of the tomb-site is, to the present day, defined by what is said to be the flooded access-pit dug by order of the First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 BCE) in the hope of stealing the treasures buried deep within. King Helü’s grave at Tiger Hill became a major tourist attraction from at least the Tang dynasty (618–907) onwards, and the commemorative pavilions and calligraphic inscriptions found there, together with the poetry and prose written by visitors throughout the imperial era, vividly attest to the many generations of visitors drawn to this site by the wish to remember the penultimate king of Wu. However, rival attractions to the drowned tomb quickly sprang up. Tiger Hill also became the site of a major Buddhist monastery founded early in the Age of Disunion (220–589), the location of the tombs and shrines dedicated to many other later local worthies and famous individuals, and an important focus for literati activity in the Jiangnan region. The ways in which the presence of King Helü’s tomb at Tiger Hill complemented and rivaled these alternative attractions is the subject of this second case study.

Given the terrible circumstances in which the kingdom of Wu fell, and the long-standing enmity between King Fuchai and his conqueror, King Goujian, it is hardly surprising that every building and monument attributed to the last king of Wu went up in flames at the time of the Yue conquest. Chapter 6 describes the two sites most
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strongly associated with the tragic and romantic figure of the last king of Wu, of which one—Lingyanshan or Numinous Cliff Mountain, the site of his summer palace—has no surviving ancient remains, and the other—Gusu Tower, a monument erected to commemorate King Fuchai’s military victories and built at least in part with timbers presented by the conquered kingdom of Yue—is so comprehensively lost that not even its original location is known. In spite of this, both Numinous Cliff and Gusu Tower were the subject of much literature in the imperial era, and they offered writers and poets the opportunity to describe the luxurious and sybaritic life of the last king of Wu, which was of necessity almost devoid of any considerations of the contemporary appearance of the scene of his triumphs. In these works the possibilities of the *huaigu* genre may be said to be pushed to their greatest limits, as scant historical sources were mined for any information that might bring accounts of these imaginary pleasure domes to life, given that their desolate and weed-covered ruins existed only as literary conventions.

The history of Wu was largely written by people far removed in time, place, and cultural background from the inhabitants of this ancient southern kingdom. There is considerable reason to doubt that even some of the most basic facts about the history and civilization of Wu were correctly recorded in the texts of the Central States during the Warring States (475–221 BCE) and early imperial eras. However, these records were crucial for understanding the way that later generations interpreted events in the kingdom of Wu at the end of the Spring and Autumn period, and they determine the way that its kings and princes were portrayed in the literati tradition. When commemorative monuments were constructed at sites associated with these men, what was being remembered was the individual as described in ancient Chinese texts, though this was occasionally mediated by popular traditions and later interpretations of events. When composing *huaigu* literature about sites associated with the ruling house of Wu, the writings of classical antiquity did not form a dead hand lying on the creativity of later imperial era poets, but rather, served as a source of inspiration, a way of understanding the scene before their eyes. In an age before archaeology, early imperial descriptions of the architecture of Wu were of particular importance given that many exceptionally beautiful and historically significant
buildings had left no above-ground remains at all. Visiting these sites was an important cultural experience, given their association with the most romantic figures of the ancient past, men whose cunning and intelligence, bravery and wit changed the course of history.

The development of *huaigu* literature and popular perceptions of the last kings of Wu, not to mention tourism to the city Suzhou throughout the imperial era, were closely intertwined. Sites associated with the royal family of Wu fulfilled every expectation of literati travelers. They were exotic thanks to their location in southern Jiangsu Province, in lands that had in antiquity stood beyond the borders of the Zhou confederacy in a kingdom inhabited by tattooed men armed with sharp swords, who lurked among lush primeval forests threaded with silver rivers. At the same time, by the imperial period, the lands of the former kingdom of Wu were located safely within the Chinese cultural sphere, having joined the empire at the time of unification. Possessing a reputation for being sinicized that long predated any such political settlement, their diplomats were noted for their courtesy and education, and their princes were admired by Confucius himself. For much of the imperial era the former capital of the kingdom of Wu, Suzhou, was numbered one of the richest, most cultured, most glamorous and exciting cities in the empire, a place that was a pleasure to visit and a sorrow to leave. For members of the literati and the ruling elite, two overlapping but nevertheless distinct groups, Suzhou and the surrounding region represented the gratification of every sensual delight, and this can be seen in the literature written about it. Given the power that descriptions of the wealth and might of the ancient kingdom of Wu had over the imaginations of ancient Chinese authors, it is hardly surprising that this should also be reflected in the works of later writers. Though the solitude and desolation that culminates the descriptions of ancient ruins in many works of *huaigu* literature was no doubt hard to come by at most important Wu sites in the imperial era, any such lack could easily be remedied by the romantic imagination. Thus the kingdom of Wu lived on, embalmed within its literary legacy.

**The People of Wu**

By the time the kingdom of Wu entered Chinese records in the late Spring and Autumn period it was noted for the high degree of sinicization and the close links maintained by its royal family and ruling
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elite with the states of the Zhou confederacy; however the inhabitants of this kingdom were not part of the Hua-Xia ethnicity but instead formed the northernmost branch of the Bai Yue 百越 peoples. The kingdom of Wu was crucially placed to dominate cultural and commercial exchange between the Bai Yue and the Central States of the Zhou confederacy.\(^1\) In ancient Chinese texts, the kingdom of Wu was almost always known simply as Wu 吳. However from inscriptions on bronzes it is known that the kings of Wu claimed to be the rulers of Gongwu 攻敟, also known as Gouwu 勾呂. A number of theories have been advanced to explain the meaning of the term Gouwu. The earliest is that this is a transliteration of a dialect word of unknown meaning, which is based on the commentary by Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) on the “Dili zhi” 地理志 (Treatise on geography) chapter of the Hanshu 漢書 (History of the Han dynasty).\(^2\) A large number of dialect words from Wu (particularly place names) survive as transliterated terms, but in the vast majority of cases the original meaning is not known. Serious problems are caused by the lack of a standard method in early Chinese texts to transliterate words from the ancient language of the kingdom of Wu, or indeed from any other foreign language.\(^3\) A second theory is that it is a place name, based on the evidence of the Zhengyi 正義 (Correct meanings) commentary by Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (fl. 737) on the Shiji 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian) chapter on the hereditary house of Wu.\(^4\) A third theory is that Gouwu is a contraction of the names of two ancient states, either Gou and Wu or Gan 千 and Wu.\(^5\) There is evidence in a number of ancient texts that the kings of Wu used a double title of this kind: for example the Zhanguo ce 戰國策 (Records of the Warring

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2. Hanshu 8B.1667, n. 2. The importance of this theory is that it makes Gongwu/ Gouwu (whatever it meant) the name that the indigenous people of the region used to designate themselves, as opposed to any term used by the people of the Central States to describe them.
3. Zhou Chenghe and You Rujie, “Gu Yueyu diming chutan,” p. 61. The authors consider in particular detail the problems posed by such characters as gou 勾, jiu 窮, gu 姑, yu 于, wu 烏, yu 陽, wu 無 and ju 夫, since these were commonly used for transliterating ancient Wu and Yue words.
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States) uses the latter in a discussion of the amazing qualities of southern swords: “As for the swords of Wu-Gan, if you test them on flesh they cut apart oxen and horses; if you test them on metal they cleave bowls and basins; if you place them on a pillar and strike, they will chop it into three pieces; if you position them on a stone and hit, they will crush them into hundreds of bits.” Today, most scholars ascribe to the theory that the term Gouwu should be understood as the name of the ancient people of this region of China. This word is also regarded as related, if not identical, to the word Gusu—-the oldest known designation for the region around the city of Suzhou, as well as the name of the mountain that was the heartland of the kingdom. (This mountain was once the site of the Gusu Tower, one of the major prestige projects undertaken to proclaim the power and wealth of the kings of Wu.) The confusion between these terms is certainly something that has caused problems for centuries; in the Song (960–1279) dynasty Zhu Changwen 朱長文 (1041–1100) noted in the Wujun tujing xuji 呉郡圖經續記 (Supplement to the Illustrated Gazetteer of Wu Commandery) that Gusu Mountain was also sometimes known by the alternative names of Guxu 姑胥 and Guyu 姑餘. Be that as it may, when the name of the ancient capital of the kingdom of Wu was changed during the Sui dynasty (in 589) the su 蘇 of Suzhou was chosen to honor the ancient name of Gusu. At all stages of the development of Wu regional culture, the ancient history of the Gouwu people remained an important source of pride, inspiration, and identity. Although at the time of the unification of China the history of the kingdom of Wu became part of Chinese history, it is clear that throughout the imperial era the people of Suzhou and the surrounding region remained deeply committed to a sense of an individual, special Wu iden-
tity, which could not be swamped by the arrival of waves of immigrants from China proper, nor attenuated by the passage of time.

In the era prior to the unification of China, the kingdom of Wu was located at the southernmost edge of the Chinese world. However, from the Warring States era onwards, writers based in the Central States began to produce accounts of the landscape, history, and culture of this southern kingdom. These records stressed the enormous natural wealth of the region: not only was this a land without famine, with vast natural resources, but it was a place with an unimaginable abundance of new and strange flora and fauna. By the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) Chinese writers were attempting to chronicle that abundance: the primeval forests where dozens of species of trees unknown in other parts of China grew, the enormous variety of plants, the strange birds and animals of the region. The amazing experiences waiting for ancient Chinese visitors to the south were catalogued in such works as the “Wudu fu” (Rhapsody of the Wu capital) by Zuo Si (ca. 250–ca. 305). The rhapsody, a genre noted for its use of listing, was ideally suited for conveying the overwhelming foreignness and wealth of Wu, and this rhapsody in particular was crucial for maintaining the exotic reputation of the region in the early imperial era:

The land unfurls in rolling hills,
The plants grow tall and wide.
Walking through the wilderness, it seems like a park,
Even when encountering a forest, it seems like a garden.
Exotic flowers bloom from every tree and shrub,\(^8\)
They are magnificent in summer, evergreen in winter.
Local histories describe these things,
They are envied by the Central States.

8. In the section translated here, the exotic effect is heightened by the use of a local dialect word 屬，meaning flower, which is identified as such (it also means a variety of camellia) in the Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324) commentary on the Erya 鄭雅 dictionary. Erya, p. 296 (“Shicao” 釋草).

The first serious ethnographical studies of non-Chinese peoples were produced in the Han dynasty. This is obviously unfortunate for the Gouwu people, whose independent kingdom had vanished some four hundred years too early to be properly recorded, and whose territories had subsequently been assimilated into a series of more or less unsympathetic regimes. As a result, in the absence of any proper discussion of Wu culture and the degree to which it was alien from that of the Zhou confederacy (a realm of enquiry that was impossible to pursue until modern archaeological discoveries provided a significant body of data), ancient Chinese records concentrated almost exclusively on superficial signs of difference. In particular, virtually every pre-Han and Han dynasty text commented on the fact that the inhabitants of the kingdom of Wu were tattooed. No doubt in the cultural context of the times this added greatly to the perception that the south was a strange and exotic place, a land of mystery and danger. Tattooing was known to the people of the Central States, but there it was used as a means of punishment; minor criminals were tattooed, and the marks on their skin were a sign of their shameful past. This connection between tattooing and criminality would cause considerable misunderstanding and distress when the states of the north came into contact with the peoples of Wu and Yue, for whom it was a culturally (rather than legally) significant act. The repugnance that was felt in the Central States for the practice of tattooing can be seen in the fact that it was banned even as a punishment in 167 BCE and that southern people who were conquered by or surrendered to the Han were required to give up this cultural practice.

The significance of tattooing to the people of Wu is not well understood, for to the people of the north whose written records provide the vast majority of descriptions of this southern people, they were barbarians whose alien practices were hardly worthy of detailed comment. As a result, virtually nothing is known of the methods used, or the kind of designs favored within Wu society. It is entirely possible that the tattoos had significant distinguishing elements, understood within these communities, which were simply

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ignored by those unfamiliar with and hostile to this cultural prac-
tice.\textsuperscript{12} In recent times a number of ancient bronze figures that repre-
sent Bai Yue peoples have been excavated, and the patterns on their
cheeks and bodies are thought to depict tattooed designs.\textsuperscript{13} However,
in spite of the comment that Wu cultural practices clearly occasioned
in the people of the Zhou confederacy, there are but few references to
people from the south experiencing any prejudice because of this. In
fact, the only story concerned with discrimination against any of the
Bai Yue peoples on the grounds of their alien customs describes a
confrontation in the kingdom of Chu between a courtier and an am-
bassador from the kingdom of Yue. This story from the \textit{Hanshi
waizhuan} 韓詩外傳 (Mr. Han’s outer traditions of the \textit{Book of songs})
thus provides a unique account of the kind of prejudice faced by the
peoples of the ancient south:

King Goujian of Yue sent Lian Ji to present people to the king of
Chu, and one of the king [of Chu’s] envoys said: “Yue is a barbarian
country. I ask leave to make fun of their ambassador.” The king [of
Chu] said: “The king of Yue is a wise man, and his ambassador is also
a clever man, you should think carefully before doing this.” The en-
voy went out to see Lian Ji, and said: “If you wear an official hat, then
you can have audience [with our king] according to the rules of ritual
propriety. If you do not put on a hat, then you cannot see him.” Lian
Ji said: “Yue was separately enfeoffed by the Zhou royal house, but
we have not been included among the Central States, and live be-
tween river and sea, with salt-water and fresh-water turtles, eels, and
fish as our companions. It is only after tattooing our bodies and cut-
ting our hair that we have been able to live there. Now I come to this
great kingdom, and you say if I put an official hat on then I can have
audience, and if I do not put a hat on then I cannot. If this is the case,
when you send an ambassador to Yue, then he will also have to be

\textsuperscript{12} One of the few references to the technique of tattooing used in the south is
found in a commentary to the Nan Man 南蠻 (Southern Man barbarian) chapter of the
\textit{Hou Hanshu} 86.2834, n. 1, which states that these people “cut lines in their flesh
and then coloured them with red and green [pigments]” 刻其肌以丹青涅也. Wang
Wenqing, “Zailun Wu Yue tongzu,” gives an interesting discussion of the impor-
tance of northern prejudice towards southern culture as a shaping force for the
surviving documentation on this subject.

\textsuperscript{13} Liang Baiquan, \textit{Wu Yue wenhua}, pp. 54–56, figs. 64, 67, 69, 70; Peters, “Tat-
ttooed Faces and Stilt Houses,” p. 16.
tattooed by cutting his skin and [rubbing in] ink, and have his hair cut, and only after that will he be allowed to have audience according to our customs. How would that be?”

In the early imperial era, the lands of the Yangtze River delta region were perceived as exceptionally rich, just as southern people were believed to be fearsomely dangerous. This reputation was not unjustified, for the talents of these southern people had been honed by countless generations of tribal warfare, and many luckless migrants and soldiers from the north died at their hands. Tales of southern prowess in warfare were so prevalent that even long after the lands of Wu had been absorbed into the great southern kingdom of Chu, fighters from this region were feared across the rest of China. This early reputation for fearless bellicosity is perhaps surprising, given that after the fall of the Han the male inhabitants of this region came to be conventionally portrayed as effeminate and indolent, too luxury-loving to be any good at fighting. In spite or perhaps because of this reputation—a stereotype that has continued largely unchallenged to the present day—the martial prowess of the ancient Gouwu people was a source of considerable pride to imperial era inhabitants of the region.

From at least the Qin dynasty onwards significant numbers of migrants began to arrive in Gouwu territory from northern China. Some came as soldiers in the military campaigns to subdue the south, a small handful were administrators sent to govern the region. More importantly, there were countless ordinary people who fled the north to escape warfare, drought, famine, persecution, and lack of opportunity, and who created the present landscape of Jiangsu. These men cut down the great forests, drained the swamps, and extended the polder and canal system originally developed by the Gouwu people.

thus harnessing the natural resources of the region and developing its potential. These migrants were crucial for the development of the region and its successful integration into the Chinese cultural sphere. Thanks to the history of this region, framed by romantic images of wealth, the strangeness and bellicosity of its original inhabitants, and the impact of subsequent immigration, perceptions of the Jiangnan region in traditional Chinese culture were founded upon an interesting dichotomy: Jiangnan was at once an exotic border region and an entirely safe and stable place to visit. It enjoyed both a rich cultural legacy (thanks to the residual remnants of Wu civilization and the ongoing commemoration of the triumphs and tragedies of this ancient kingdom throughout the imperial era), as well as an unassailable position within traditional Chinese culture from having become part of China proper at the time of the unification in 221 BCE. Representations of the Jiangnan region were profoundly influenced by this dual vision; the literature that describes this part of China plays at once on a sense of the comfortably familiar and of the dangerously exotic.