

## THE ZHOU DYNASTY (1045-256 BCE)

### The Eastern Zhou (771-256 BCE): Classical China

In 771 BCE, non-Chinese raiders from Central Asian steppe invaded the area of the old Zhou tribal homeland where the Zhou king ruled. The capital was sacked, the king murdered, and the young heir to the throne was brought to safety in the "eastern capital" of Cheng-Zhou by loyal followers, leaders of the hereditary aristocracy who held major fiefs in the western areas. From that moment, the nature of the Zhou state changed dramatically. Thereafter, power shifted rapidly from the royal house into the hands of the hereditary rulers of various "feudal states" – the major fief-holding clans of Zhou China. The Zhou king retained only nominal power, and from the seventh century until the extinction of the Zhou royal house in 256 BCE – the period of the Eastern Zhou – the king was no more than a figurehead, a symbol of the common political culture of China.

China itself became increasingly divided into effectively sovereign states, the expanded territories ruled by the most powerful of the fief-holding clans. These rulers of these states, while claiming to be only servants of the Zhou king, were in fact the leaders of independent political entities. It was not long before they began to behave the way that all leaders of states behave – they began to make war. During the first centuries of this interstate struggle, the wars among these states were constant, but relatively mild (though they did not seem so at the time). The aristocratic clans held a monopoly on the advanced arts of warfare, such as charioteering, swordsmanship, and archery. Although commoners were conscripted to fight alongside their patrician leaders and provide colorful bloodshed, war was still very much a gentleman's occupation. This early phase of China's half-millennium-long civil war is called "the Spring and Autumn period," after the title of a chronicle of those years, roughly 770-450 BCE

As the stakes of warfare grew over these centuries, the nature of war – and of society – began to change. Whereas during the early Spring and Autumn years, China preserved the strict division between its hereditary elite class and commoners, who were overwhelmingly peasants under the control of feudal lords, by the sixth century this division began to break down. The demands of incessant warfare sapped the strength of the patrician houses, and the increasingly fierce competition among the states to expand their territories, or perhaps even "receive the Mandate of Heaven" as the successor of the Zhou, made it increasingly important for them to find men of talent in warfare and statecraft to help them fight their wars and run their states more effectively than their

adversaries.

Under these conditions, opportunities for young men to rise in society on the basis of their abilities rather than their birth began to proliferate. By the end of the Spring and Autumn period, a new class of "semi-aristocrats," known as the *shi* class, had been formed. The *shi* class was composed of two types of men (and their families): those men of common birth whose talents or accomplishments on the battlefield earned the attention of rulers and appointment or patronage, and able younger sons of higher birth who, because they were not senior enough to succeed to significant hereditary offices at their home court, sought to find better opportunities by serving rulers of other states.

By the mid-fifth century BCE, this "technocratic" new class had, by increasing the pool of talent at court and in war, greatly advanced both the arts of warfare and of statecraft. In particular, innovations in state governance increased rulers' control over their people, leading to more effective coercion and higher tax yields. This in turn allowed these rulers to finance ever-larger armies and ever-larger wars. The more successful of these warring states began rapidly to conquer smaller states, accelerating the pace of consolidation, revenue extraction, mobilization, and mass killing (which was also aided by the development of new technologies of war: cavalry, the cross-bow, and iron weaponry).

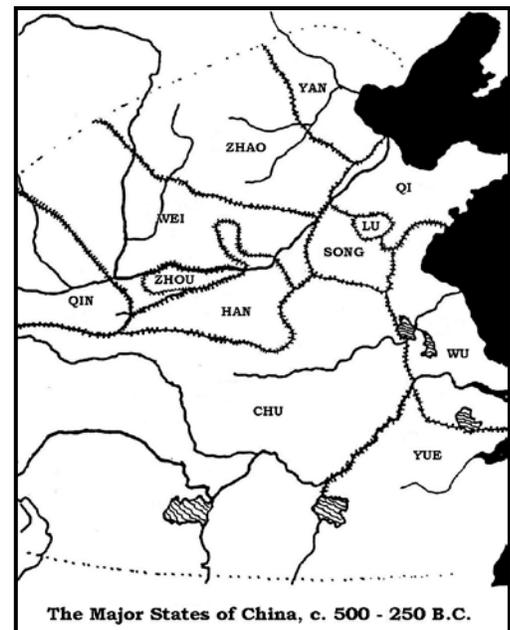
<i>Shang</i>	<i>c. 1700 – 1045 BCE</i>
<i>Zhou</i>	<i>1045 – 256 BCE</i>
<i>WESTERN ZHOU</i>	<i>1045 - 771 BCE</i>
<i>EASTERN ZHOU</i>	<i>771 – 256 BCE</i> ◀
<i>Qin</i>	<i>221 – 208 BCE</i>
<i>Han</i>	<i>206 BCE – 220 CE</i>
<i>“Six Dynasties”</i>	<i>220 – 589</i>
<i>Sui</i>	<i>589 – 617</i>
<i>Tang</i>	<i>618 – 907</i>
<i>“Five Dynasties”</i>	<i>907 – 960</i>
<i>Song</i>	<i>960 – 1279</i>
<i>Yuan</i>	<i>1279 – 1368</i>
<i>Ming</i>	<i>1368 – 1644</i>
<i>Qing</i>	<i>1644 – 1911</i>

The period of the development of these newly powerful states is known as the Warring States period, and it is dated from about 450 BCE until the great Qin reunification and revolution of 221 BCE. The entire Eastern Zhou era, 771 – 221 BCE, is often called the “Classical” era. Despite the fact – or perhaps because of the fact – that politically the Eastern Zhou was basically a 550-year era of civil war, the culture of the period flourished with such great energy and variety that many of the foundations for later Chinese culture were laid during this vibrant time.

**Warfare and social dislocation.** The leaders of these states, realizing that no anchor of stability existed to ensure the safety of their positions under the new regime, quickly

began to compete for political power. The result was a period of domestic warfare among the feudal states that erupted within decades of the Western Zhou collapse and lasted over five centuries, gradually increasing in bitterness and bloodiness. During the first centuries of this era of disunity, the Spring and Autumn period, the warfare among the states was virtually constant. However, armies were relatively small and combat, directed by patricians fighting from chariots, was governed by ceremonial rules. After the mid-fifth century, wars became slightly less frequent but spectacularly destructive, with armies of close to a million men slaughtering tens of thousands in a single battle. Gradually, over more than five centuries, the multitude of feudal states was whittled down to a few dozen, then half a dozen, until finally, in 221, a single state, the state of Qin, reunified China under a revolutionary new regime.

The fluidity of this era of multi-state competition led to fundamental changes in Chinese society, most of them unintended and poorly understood at the time. Along with incessant warfare that proved an immense burden to the farming population, critical demands for skilled manpower, technological innovation, and economic growth in the competing states created unprecedented opportunities for social mobility and innovation. As the old pillars of the Western Zhou began to crumble, the institutions that had distinguished life in China and characterized its orderly nature began to disintegrate.



**The suspension of the Mandate.** As the Zhou kingship fell into decay and the prerogatives of the hereditary elite were undermined by new forces of social mobility, the status of the high deity Tian came into question. As an all-powerful and all-benevolent force, Tian had been a fitting fiction to anchor the religious life of the stable Western Zhou. The success of the early kings validated the Mandate theory, and Tian, as the king's god, served to guarantee the meaningfulness of life under the Zhou monarchy.

But from the time that the Zhou monarchy first comes unraveled we begin to find, in ancient textual and inscriptional sources, questions about the nature of Tian arise. If the dislocations that followed the ninth century were the products of random events, then the benevolence of Tian was no longer assured. If they were the products of a debasement in

the virtue of the Zhou kings, which our historical sources suggest was the common view, then why did not Tian shift the Mandate to a new house and restore order?

As the chaos of the Classical era was prolonged century after century and warfare grew increasingly devastating, Tian ceased to be seen as a satisfactory guarantor of the meaningfulness of social life. Its endless suspension of the Mandate for so many generations could not conceivably be explained on the basis of earlier historical precedents, and the pre-Classical view of the relationship between man and Tian--between man and the order of the universe--began to be questioned. This is the origin of philosophical thought in China.

When we explore the teachings of the earliest Chinese philosopher, Confucius, we will see that, in part at least, Confucius's intellectual enterprise was an attempt to find an alternative foundation for meaning and value to replace the religious concept of Tian-mandated order. Although Tian retains an apparently basic role in Confucius's formulations, this role is actually secondary and superfluous. In constructing a new foundation for meaning and value, Confucius looked to history rather than to religion. Viewing the institutions of the Western Zhou, rather than its ruling kings, as the true expression of Tian's Mandate, Confucius grounded China's first philosophy in the cardinal value of Zhou ritual, *li*, rather than the omnipotent benevolence of a supreme deity.

**The rise of the “gentleman” class.** Another major impetus for the rise of philosophy was connected to the changes in the structure of Zhou society that gradually emerged during the era of civil war. Among the profound social changes that mark this period, none is as important as the diminution in the security of aristocratic privilege and the rise of a new class of people who competed with the nobility for access to wealth, power, and prestige. This new class is sometimes called the class of “scholars,” and other times the class of “knights,” because many of its members sought to rise in society by means of learning or by means of skills in warfare. We will refer to it here as the class of “gentlemen,” which translates the Chinese term *shi*.

It is likely that there was no point in Chinese history when class divisions were so firm that no avenues for social advancement existed. But through the Shang and Zhou, the division between those who were highborn and commoners was seen as important and, to some degree, reflected a notion that ability and excellence were familial rather than individual attributes. The nobility was viewed as an innately better class of people than peasants and other lowborn people – though the firmness of this division was

probably never as absolute as it tended to be in most premodern European cultures. Moreover, only members of the aristocracy were entitled to take part in the political life of the state. All significant offices of responsibility and reward were hereditary in nature. Moreover, warfare, which during the Western Zhou meant warfare against non-Chinese peoples rather than civil war, was very much an aristocratic sport. The Chinese were skilled at chariot war, archery, and swordsmanship, and all these types of war required considerable training. Although wars were fought with peasant conscripts serving as weakly armed supporting infantry (the bronze used in weapons of war was too expensive to supply to common troops), only noblemen were raised with the kind of leisure time and family training that could nurture expertise in chariot war.

The exaltation of the aristocracy was relatively easy to maintain during the stable era of the Western Zhou (that is, until the fall of the Western capital in 771). Under the strong rule of the central Zhou kings, there was no pressing threat to the political well-being of those in power that would require them to look outside the nobility for people whose worth could add to their security. This began to change when the dynasty moved east and power began to be fragmented among the feudal lords. Under conditions of civil war and political intrigue, power-holders could not always afford to accept the fact that the son of the last chief-general of the state army had to inherit his father's post, regardless of his abilities. The risks of aristocratic incompetence and the lure of the untapped talents of the lower class became increasingly apparent, and from the late eighth century on, we begin to note the appearance of low-born men of ability in roles of political significance.

Sometime during the sixth century, the Chinese discovered how to forge iron, and the proliferation of iron technology fundamentally changed the social conditions that had sustained class divisions in China. The iron plough greatly increased crop yields, leading to a population explosion. The number of commoners began to outstrip the aristocracy's ability to exercise control. Furthermore, iron technology led to a new generation of weapons, far cheaper and easier to make than the bronze weapons of earlier generations. Spears, pikes, battle axes, and knives could now be supplied to commoner infantry troops, and the role of aristocratic chariot warriors rapidly diminished. As populations grew, wars came increasingly to pit huge infantry armies of commoners against one another, in service of their kings. By the end of the Warring States period, million-man battles were being fought on the plains of eastern China. The political stakes had risen many-fold since the aristocratic heyday.

The conditions of this new Iron Age society fostered the rapid rise of talented commoners. These men of the gentlemen class were drawn both from junior branches of aristocratic clans, which often fell from privilege but retained high social aspirations and traditions of education, and also from the lowest classes of society. Even a peasant youth, if he possessed martial skill and courage, or if he had the talent and initiative to study successfully with a private teacher such as a Confucian, could impress a power-holder in need of men of worth and secure a position of value at court or in an army.

A bit further on, we'll examine in more detail the nature of those members of this class who aspired to make their way through learning, particularly when we study the career and ideas of their leading representative, Confucius. But by far the greater number of this class of "gentlemen" – *shi* – were warriors, and the culture of this era of war is probably best captured by looking more closely at the way they are portrayed in the cultural records of history and literature.

During the Eastern Zhou period, within the hereditary aristocracy, the men who gained greatest power – both state leaders and also rogue "warlord" patricians within the states – tended to be those who attracted the greatest numbers of *shi* warriors – often men of great ruthlessness. Whereas in the past, it was said that the elite clans that ruled Zhou China had maintained their ascendancy over the people by means of harmonious and cultivated behavior within their court circles, now the dog-eat-dog attitude of the rudest *shi* had infected the feudal clans. In almost every state, aristocrats *other than* the rightful rulers were amassing massive power by building huge stables of knights-at-arms and hiring household stewards skilled at bullying the peasantry on their own family lands to provide them with ever-increasing "rents." These warlords could drive whole districts to the brink of starvation in the pursuit of increased wealth, and in many cases they amassed so much power that they could engineer coups d'état, toppling the hereditary rulers of major states and becoming, amidst great pomp, the new Duke of Qi or King of Zhao.

The two tales that follow have been selected because they illustrate the atmosphere and values of Warring States China. These tales are historical accounts, undoubtedly much embellished by literary imagination, of events of the third century BCE, towards the close of this long era of war. Nevertheless, they illustrate the culmination of social trends that had gradually been building throughout the Eastern Zhou. In each tale, we see the interactions between a powerful aristocrat and the *shi* who serve him. In each case, the aristocrat is not the ruler, but a warlord member of the ruling clan, whose growing power is seen by the ruler as a threat. And in each tale we see a very complex combination of values which reflect both the warrior ethos of the society these tales

portray, and also the influence of more ethical ideas of moral behavior, which the authors of these fictionalized retellings, clearly influenced by the growing influence of Confucian thought, used to present their own complex moral messages.

The two tales are called "Lord Mengchang and Feng Xuan," and "Lord Xingling and Hou Ying." The first is a translation, while the latter abbreviates the narrative of a much longer text.

## Lord Mengchang and Feng Xuan

*Lord Mengchang was a powerful warlord in the eastern state of Qi. He was a member of the ruling Tian clan, and served as prime minister to the ruler at the capital. Because he was the descendant of an earlier ruler, certain lands in the district of Xue (mentioned in this story) had been set aside as his personal territory, where the peasants remitted their taxes directly to him, thus financing his luxurious mansion at the capital, and allowing him to support a vast number of “retainers” – shi – in his service. One of these retainers is the protagonist of the story, Feng Xuan. Lord Mengchang was a well known historical figure, and we know from many sources that he was famous for the great – even exaggerated – respect with which he treated his retainers. Feng Xuan may or may not have been a historical person.*

There lived in Qi a man named Feng Xuan who was poor and unable to support himself. He asked an intermediary to arrange for him to be taken under the protection of Lord Mengchang as a retainer. When he arrived, Lord Mengchang asked him, “What is your specialty, Sir?”

“I have no special art,” answered Feng Xuan.

“Well then, what are you able to do?”

“I am not able at anything.”

Lord Mengchang smiled, and saying merely, “All right,” he accepted Feng Xuan into his entourage.

The other retainers disdained Feng Xuan, and when he was served at table, his food was placed in bowls of woven grass.

One day, after remaining for a time in this way, Feng Xuan drew his long sword from its scabbard and, leaning against a pillar, began to twang it and sing. “Long sword!” he sang, “shall we go home? At meal time here I receive no fish!”

The other retainers reported this to Lord Mengchang. “Treat him as a regular retainer,” he said.

Not long afterwards, Feng Xuan once again plucked at his sword and sang. “Long sword! Shall we go home? When I go out I have no chariot to ride!”

The other retainers reported this to Lord Mengchang. “Provide him with a chariot,” he said. “Let it be as good as those of the other retainers with chariots.”

When Feng Xuan mounted his chariot, he raised his sword and raced past the others shouting, “Lord Mengchang has made me a true retainer!”

But a short time later, he plucked his sword again. “Long sword!” he sang, “shall we go home? I’ve nothing to give my family!”

Now the others truly despised Feng Xuan, feeling that he was greedy beyond proper restraints. But Lord Mengchang called him in. “Good Sir,” he asked, “have you

then a family?"

"I have an aged mother," Feng Xuan replied.

Lord Mengchang ordered that Feng Xuan's mother be provided with food and goods to cover all her needs. "Let her lack for nothing!" Thereupon, Feng Xuan sang no more.

Some time later, Lord Mengchang decided to make up his accounts and asked who among the retainers was a practiced accountant and able to manage the collection of the income due in his estate of Xue. Feng Xuan sent a reply saying that he could do this. Lord Mengchang was puzzled. "Who is this?" he asked.

His advisors replied, "It's the fellow who sings to his long sword about going home."

Lord Mengchang laughed and said, "So he has a skill after all. How I've neglected him! I have not had him in to see me. Please ask him to come."

When Feng Xuan appeared, Lord Mengchang addressed him by saying, "I have been fatigued with work and exhausted with care, and so my spirit has grown dull and stupid. Immersed in affairs of state I have offended against you, Sir. Yet you, Sir, are nevertheless willing to demean yourself and offer to collect accounts for me in Xue, am I correct?"

"Indeed," replied Feng Xuan, "I am willing."

Thereupon Feng Xuan prepared to set off. He prepared a carriage and provisions and loaded all of the tally slips that had to be matched with those of the debtors in Xue. Then he went to give his farewell to his lord. "When I have completed the collection of the debts," he said, "what shall I purchase with them as I return?"

"Look around," said Lord Mengchang. "See what is lacking in my household."

Feng Xuan rode off, and when he reached Xue he ordered the local officer to call all the people owing debts to assemble together so that their tally slips could be collected and matched with the slips he had brought.

When all the slips had been matched and the debts ascertained, Feng Xuan arose and addressed the assembled people. In the name of Lord Mengchang he declared that all their debts were to be returned to them as a gift, and accordingly, he had the tallies burnt. The people all cried out, "Long live Lord Mengchang!!"

Then Feng Xuan rode straight back to the capital city without stopping and sought an audience with Lord Mengchang at first light. Lord Mengchang was amazed at the speed with which Feng Xuan had returned. He put on his robes and cap and received him saying, "Are the debts all collected already? How quickly you've returned!"

“I have collected the debts,” said Feng Xuan.

“And what did you purchase with them on your way back?”

Feng Xuan said, “My lord, you told me to look and see what was lacking in your household. I presumed to calculate that within your pavilions, precious jewels are piled high, dogs and horses fill your stables, beautiful women are everywhere arrayed--truly, all that my lord’s household lacked was righteousness. Hence I have presumed to purchase some righteousness on behalf of my lord.”

“How does one go about purchasing righteousness?”

Feng Xuan replied, “Well, my lord, you possess Xue, but though it is a tiny place, you do not treat the people there with love and kindness, as though they were your children. Rather, you treat them as a merchant would, like commodities which can yield you a profit. Hence I presumed to address them on your behalf and make a gift to them of all their debts. Then I burnt the tally slips and the people all cried out, ‘Long live Lord Mengchang!!’ This is how your servant went about purchasing righteousness for you, my lord.”

Lord Mengchang was displeased. “All right,” he said. “Go rest now, Sir.”

One year later, the new king of Qi addressed Lord Mengchang. “I cannot presume to employ the ministers of the former king as my own,” he said, and Lord Mengchang went off into retirement in Xue.

When his entourage was still 100 *li*\* distant from Xue, the people appeared along the road, leading their children and supporting their old, all welcoming Lord Mengchang to Xue. Lord Mengchang turned round and looked back at Feng Xuan. “Your purchase of righteousness, Sir!” he said. “I finally see it today.”

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\* A *li* is about one-third of a mile.

## Lord Xingling and Hou Ying

*The biography of Lord Xingling pivots on his treatment of retainers and the remarkable men he assembled in a warlord court. In this, his story resembles that of Lord Mengchang in Qi, whose court clearly served as a model for Lord Xingling. But Lord Xingling, a member of the ruling family of the state of Wei, lived in a state with a more stridently militaristic culture than Qi. For this reason, this tale serves as an excellent illustration of the cult of the warrior that became a prominent feature of Warring States society.*

*The heart of the following story concerns Lord Xingling's single-handed rescue of the state of Zhao from the besieging armies of Qin in 257--an historical fact--but an equal portion of his biography is devoted to establishing his character and introducing the mystifying figure of Hou Ying, a "recluse in the midst of society," whose keen powers of understanding remain hidden from others until Lord Xingling finds the key to releasing them. Strange super-warriors like Hou Ying and his friend, the butcher Zhu Hai, allows us to see in ancient China the origins of esoteric martial arts in Imperial China, the samurai tradition in Japan, and Marvel Comics.*

Lord Xingling was a member of the ruling clan of Wei. His name was Wuji, and he was a half-brother of King Anli of Wei, who came to the throne in 276. At this time, the state of Qin had placed Wei under great pressures, and the new king was grateful for the military leadership that Lord Xingling could offer. But an incident made him suspicious of his brother.

One day when the two were playing a game of chess word came that beacon fires had been lit on the northern border and the king of Zhao was launching an attack. The king leapt up, but Lord Xingling merely said, "The king is out hunting. There is no invasion," and he continued to play. The king was unable to concentrate; he believed that an attack was imminent. But after a time another messenger arrived and reported that the Zhao armies had indeed been no more than a hunting party.

"How did you know?" the king asked his brother.

"I have retainers who are kept informed of all the doings in Zhao. They pass their information along to me. That's how I knew."

The king, recognizing the craft and power of his brother, began from this time to watch him warily.

There lived in seclusion in Wei an old man of seventy named Hou Ying. He held a sinecure as the warden of Yi Gate in the city of Daliang, where King Hui of Wei had moved the capital of Wei about seventy years earlier. Hou Ying was very poor, but Lord Xingling nevertheless heard that he was a worthy man and went to see him with gifts,

hoping to add him to his group of loyal men. When he arrived at Yi Gate, however, Hou Ying, rather than being overwhelmed by his largeness, declined the gifts.

Lord Xingling was nevertheless impressed with Hou Ying, and he devised a plan. He arranged a great banquet and invited many distinguished guests. They had already taken their seats when Lord Xingling announced that he needed to fetch one last guest, and he drove off to Hou Ying's narrow alley, leaving the left hand space of his chariot vacant in order to bring the old man back with him.

When he arrived at Hou Ying's house, the old man agreed to go with him, but rather than standing at the left, he took the post of honor at the right, carefully keeping an eye on Lord Xingling. But Lord Xingling merely increased the respectfulness of his manner and took the reins.

"I have a friend named Zhu Hai who is a butcher at the market," Hou Ying said. "Would you mind stopping there on the way?"

When they reached the butcher's house, Hou Ying descended and stood chatting with his friend longer and longer, watching Lord Xingling from the corner of his eye. But Lord Xingling merely waited patiently. The people in the market began to gawk at Lord Xingling, who did not ordinarily appear in the position of a lowly charioteer, and the riders who had accompanied him out began to grumble, knowing full well how impatient the elegant assembly at the banquet must be growing. But Lord Xingling gave no sign that any of this concerned him.

When Hou Ying saw Lord Xingling's calm manner, he bade his friend the butcher good-bye and once again mounted the chariot.

Once they reached Lord Xingling's compound, Lord Xingling introduced Hou Ying to all and made him take the seat of honor before the astonished guests. During the feast, he walked across to Hou Ying's place and offered him a formal toast.

Hou Ying looked at him and replied, "I have tested you hard today, my lord. I am merely the warden of Yi Gate, yet when you called upon me in person, I made you go out of your way and stand holding the reins in the marketplace while I stood gossiping with my friend. Yet throughout, you maintained your courtesy and composure." And from that time on, he became an honored retainer of Lord Xingling.

Later, Hou Ying recommended the butcher Zhu Hai to Lord Xingling. "He has withdrawn to the lowly position of a butcher only because none have recognized his high abilities," he said. Lord Xingling called on Zhu Hai several times, but the butcher showed absolutely no sign of appreciation or any inclination to form a bond, and Lord Xingling puzzled over this.

In 257, the armies of Qin routed the forces of Zhao and advanced upon the Zhao capital of Handan. The sister of King Anli and Lord Xingling was married to the younger brother of the king of Zhao, and she sent desperate pleas to her brothers to help lift the siege. King Anli sent 100,000 men under the general Jin Bi to rescue Zhao, but as they were setting out, an envoy from Qin appeared at the capital. "Handan will fall to us any day now," he announced. "Should any state send armies to her aid, we will take our revenge as soon as Zhao has been taken." The frightened king revised his orders to Jin Bi, telling him to garrison his men at the border city of Ye near Handan, so that Wei could claim to have come to Zhao's aid without actually doing so.

Lord Xingling tried repeatedly to persuade King Anli to change these orders and save Zhao, but the king would hear none of it. Finally, desperate to respond to his sister and her family in Zhao and save his own honor, Lord Xingling determined to set out for Handan on his own with a party of his private force of warriors and die defending his kinsmen.

As his group rode out through the Yi Gate, Lord Xingling stopped to explain to Hou Ying where he was going. "Farewell my lord," said Hou Ying, "I am too old to go with you."

Lord Xingling set off, but as he galloped it began to gall him that after all the favors he had shown Hou Ying, the man had said hardly a word to him as he rode off to his death. He wondered whether he had somehow offended Hou Ying, and the thought became so urgent that he finally stopped his men and turned back to Daliang.

"I knew you would come back," said Hou Ying when Lord Xingling reached Yi Gate. "Here you go off throwing yourself at Qin like meat to a tiger. What's the use of making all these friends if you don't use them? I knew that when I responded to you so coolly after all your goodness it would start you thinking."

So Lord Xingling sent everyone away, bowed, and begged Hou Ying to advise him.

"I have been told that the tally that matches Jin Bi's orders is kept in the king's bed-chamber," Hou Ying began. "Now, the king's favorite concubine owes you a great debt, for after her father was murdered, only you were willing to listen to her pleadings and avenge him. You must have her steal the tally for you, and then you can ride to the front and give Jin Bi new orders."

It was so arranged and the tally was taken, but as Lord Xingling prepared to ride off again, Hou Ying stopped him. "Jin Bi is a fine general, and a general in the field is not obligated to follow his king's distant commands if they endanger the state. I suggest you

take my friend Zhu Hai with you, for he is a powerful man. If Jin Bi refuses to accept your orders, Zhu Hai can kill him for you.”

At this Lord Xingling began to weep. “Are you afraid of dying?” asked Hou Ying.

“No,” replied Lord Xingling. “It is the thought that I may have to kill a man like Jin Bi. He is utterly fearless, and unlikely to obey me.”

When Lord Xingling approached Zhu Hai, the butcher began to smile. “You have shown me courtesies again and again,” he said, “though I am only a lowly butcher drumming my knife in the market. I have never responded to you, because petty displays of propriety are useless. Now you need me and my life is at your disposal.”

This time, Lord Xingling set off in a single chariot, alone with Zhu Hai. As he rode once more through the Yi Gate, Hou Ying said, “I truly am too old to ride with you, but I shall prove my loyalty. I will calculate the time of your journey, and when I know you have arrived at the battle, I will face north and kill myself on that day.”

Jin Bi was indeed suspicious when Lord Xingling arrived with new orders and the tally that matched his own. “I command 100,000 troops here far from the capital,” he said. “My responsibilities are very grave. I must ask you to explain how it is that you have come on so critical a mission of state in a single unaccompanied chariot?” As he prepared to refuse Lord Xingling’s orders, Zhu Hai stepped forward and struck him with a heavy pestle that he had hidden beneath his coat.

Then Lord Xingling took command of the armies of Wei. He appeared before the troops and addressed them. “If there are any fathers and sons who are both in service here, the father may return home. If there are any who are brothers, the elder may go back. If any among you are only sons, they may return to their parents and care for them.”

Then with 80,000 picked troops, he led an attack against the forces of Qin that surrounded Handan. The Qin armies retreated and the siege was raised. Zhao had been saved. The king of Zhao himself rode out to welcome Lord Xingling. “Among all the worthies of the ages,” he said, “none has ever equaled you!”

Back in Wei, Hou Ying, facing north, swung his sword and cut off his head in loyalty to his lord.