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Source: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Jun., 2003), pp. 115-144
Published by: Harvard-Yenching Institute
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25066693
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"Feudalism" and Western Zhou China: A Criticism

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RECENT archaeological excavations in China have greatly expanded our knowledge about the Western Zhou period of Chinese history. Especially in the past two decades, a half dozen cemeteries belonging to the regional states Jin 晉, Guo 虢, Ying 應, Yan 燕, Xing 邢, and Qin 秦 were excavated, redirecting our attention from the Zhou capital area in central Shaanxi to the periphery of the Zhou world.[1] The materials from these local sites, combined with a large number of bronze inscriptions excavated in the Zhou core area, provide us with a tremendous opportunity to examine the political structure of the Western Zhou state and the workings of its government. Although we are unable at present to detail every aspect of the Zhou political system, we do have enough new

An early version of this article was presented at the 53rd annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago, March 2001, panel # 146, organized by Laura Skosey. I thank Deborah Porter, for her discussion of this article at that panel. I am grateful also to Professors Edward Shaughnessy, William Maynard, Barry Blakeley, and Conrad Schirokauer for their readings and comments. Finally, I thank the anonymous referee for *HJAS* for his/her valuable suggestions.

[1] For recent discoveries of inscribed bronzes, see Edward Shaughnessy, "New Sources of Western Zhou History: Recent Discoveries of Inscribed Bronze Vessels," *Early China* 26–27 (2001–2). For details of the cemeteries mentioned, see Feng Li, *The Decline and Fall of the Western Zhou Dynasty: A Historical, Archaeological, and Geographical Study of China from the Tenth to the Eighth Centuries* B.C. (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2000), pp. 19–112, 357–64.

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information to clarify some of its important features and to retest previously held claims about Western Zhou China.

One claim that has deeply influenced our interpretation of early Chinese history identifies the Western Zhou state and its government with "feudalism," suggesting a necessary parallel with medieval Europe. This theory regards the Western Zhou state as a cluster of proto-independent political entities loosely bound together by contractual obligations, and portrays the Zhou king as having had little power beyond the small area of his own domain. According to this view, the Zhou royal government was, at least during the early time, staffed with hereditary officials who were little more than the king's personal servants. This "feudal" theory appeared early in the twentieth century and has in recent decades been endorsed by the two general histories of the Western Zhou period, both taking the concept of "feudalism" as the framework for interpreting the Western Zhou state.[2]

This article aims to recover some important features of the Western Zhou state that have long been obscured by the comparison to European feudalism. Its goal is not a general description of the whole range of Zhou institutions,[3] but rather an analysis of five important themes: (1) the relationship between the Zhou king and the regional rulers; (2) the nature and function of the regional states; (3) the

[2] For early works that employed the concept of "feudalism," see Marcel Granet, *Chinese Civilization*, trans. Kathleem E. Inns and Mabel R. Brailsford (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1930), pp. 70-91; C. P. Fitzgerald, *China: A Short Cultural History* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938), pp. 55-73. Both authors used the term "feudal period" or "feudal age" to characterize the period from the late Western Zhou to 221 B.C. By the mid-twentieth century, prominent French sinologists had produced serious discussions of the so-called "Western Zhou feudalism." See Henri Maspero, "Le régime féodal et la propriété foncière dans la Chine antique," in *Mélanges posthumes sur les religions et l'histoire de la Chine, 3. Études historiques* (Paris: Civilisations Du SUD, SAEP, 1950), pp. 111-46; Marcel Granet, *La féodalité chinoise* (Paris: H. Aschehoug & Co., 1952), pp. 1-32, 187-96. For the two general histories of the Western Zhou period that endorse the concept of "feudalism," see Herrlee Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China*, vol. 1: *The Western Chou Empire* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 317-87; Cho-yun Hsu and Katheryn Linduff, *Western Chou Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 151-58. See also, Derk Bodde, "Feudalism in China," in *Essays on Chinese Civilization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 85-131.

[3] Some critics of "feudalism" have called for such a study as a basis for deciding whether the term should be applied to Zhou China. See Barry B. Blakeley, "On the 'Feudal' Interpretation of Chou China," *Early China* 2 (1976): 35-37.

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"ranking" system; (4) the organization of the Western Zhou military; and (5) the function of the central government. In each aspect, the Western Zhou presents a sharp contrast to what Susan Reynolds defines as the "feudo-vassalic" institutions of medieval Europe.[4] Thus, the comparisons drawn in this article would, on the one hand, help illustrate some characteristics of the Western Zhou institutions and, on the other hand, demonstrate the inappropriateness of applying the concept of "feudalism" to Western Zhou China.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ZHOU KING AND THE REGIONAL RULERS: WAS IT VASSALAGE?

The most important political relationship in the Western Zhou state was that between the Zhou king and the rulers of the regional states. Therefore, we must first examine the ritual procedure by which a person was established as a regional ruler and hence entered into a relationship with the Zhou king. A number of Western Zhou sources illuminate this court ritual, the status of regional rulers, and their relationship with the Zhou king. These sources include two bronze inscriptions, the Ke *lei* 克罍 and the Yihou Ze *gui* 宜侯夨簋, which record the accession of the rulers of the states of Yan 燕 and Yi 宜; and two chapters from the *Shangshu* 尚書, which are speeches made by the Duke of Zhou 周 pronouncing his brother Kang Shu 康叔 as the ruler of the state of Wei 衛.

The ritual recorded in the Ke *lei* inscription begins with a sacrificial offering to the deceased Zhou kings, presumably King Wen and King Wu. In this inscription, the reigning king makes the announcement to the Duke of Shao 召, commanding his son Ke 克 to be the ruler of the state of Yan (Youhou 燕侯). The inscription finally mentions Ke's arrival in Yan, where he inaugurated his new government and cast the bronze to commemorate the granting of Yan by the Zhou king. The bronze was excavated from a large tomb, in

[4] Here I follow Susan Reynolds, who has mounted the most recent and massive attack on the concept of "European feudalism." Reynolds rejects terms such as "feudalism," "feudal institution," and "feudal relation," and instead coined the expression "feudo-vassalic institution" (more often as plural), strictly referring to the unique institution of medieval Europe that was centered on the fief and vassalage. See her *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 11–12.

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the vicinity of present-day Beijing, that probably belonged to the first Yan ruler.[5] The ritual documented by the Yihou Ze *gui* begins with the king observing two maps: the map of King Wu's and King Cheng's military campaigns conquering the Shang dynasty, and a map of the eastern territory. Then, the king stood in the ancestral temple of Yi 宜, facing south, and announced Ze 夨, previously ruler of Yu 虞, to be the new ruler of Yi (Yihou 宜侯).[6] The rituals reported in these two inscriptions were both conducted with clear reference to the former kings, founders of the Zhou dynasty, and regarded the regional rulers as functionaries of the Western Zhou state. By referring back to the ancestral kings as the ultimate authority and symbol of the Western Zhou state, the reigning king depersonalized his role in the ceremony and fashioned a relationship with the regional rulers that was essentially public. By the same token, the "meeting" with the ancestral spirits at the altar would also assure the Zhou king the loyalty of the regional rulers that was due to him as the successor of the former kings.

This power dynamic in depersonalizing the Zhou king's relationship with the regional rulers in the bronze inscriptions works also in the "Kang Gao" 康誥 (Announcement of Kang) chapter of the *Shangshu*, although the document provides little information regarding the ceremony itself.[7] In this long speech, the Duke of

[5] References to bronze inscriptions cited in this article are to two important works: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng* 殷周金文集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984–94), accompanied by *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng shiwen* 殷周金文集成釋文 (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2001), which is a nearly complete collection of rubbings and hand-drawings of inscriptions currently available [hereafter *Jicheng*]; Shirakawa Shizuka 白川靜, "Kinbun tsūshaku" 金文通釋, in *Hakutsuru bijutsukan shi* 白鶴美術館誌 (1966–83), which provides a summary of previous studies of most important inscriptions [hereafter Shirakawa]. Inscriptions not included in these two sources, usually the most recently published ones, are separately noted below. For the excavation of the Ke *lei*, see Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院考古研究所 *et al.*, "Beijing Liulihe 1193 hao damu fajue jianbao" 北京琉璃河1193號大墓發掘簡報, *Kaogu* (1990.1): 20–31. For a discussion of the historical background of casting the Ke *lei*, see Li Feng, "Ancient Reproductions and Calligraphic variations: Studies of Western Zhou Bronzes with Identical Inscriptions," *Early China* 22 (1997): 4–8.

[6] For the Yihou Ze *gui*, see *Jicheng*, # 4320; "Jiangsu Dantu xian Yandunshan chutu de gudai qingtongqi" 江蘇丹徒縣煙墩山出土的古代青銅器, *Wenwu cankao ziliao* 文物參考資料 (1955.5): 58–62. On the historical background of the Yihou Ze *gui*, see Edward Shaughnessy, "Historical Geography and the Extent of the Earliest Chinese Kingdoms," *AM* 2.2 (1989): 13–18.

[7] This is one of the five genuine Western Zhou "announcement" (*gao* 誥) chapters in the

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Zhou concerned himself almost entirely with instructing Kang Shu, his younger brother, in the principles of government and the proper application of punishment to the subjugated Shang people.[8] In another chapter, the "Jiu Gao" 酒誥 (Announcement of Wine), the Duke of Zhou advised the same Kang Shu to prevent the Shang people from indulging themselves in alcohol, and threatened that he would use state power to punish any offenders.[9] In these documents, the Duke of Zhou repeatedly demanded Kang Shu to be faithful to the deceased King Wen; only twice in the "Kang Gao," did he demand Kang Shu's direct service to the "reigning king," stating, "Do not fail the mission of the king," and "Assist the king to host Heaven's mandate and to create a new people."[10]

Except in these two statements, where he cautiously uses the word "king," the Duke of Zhou refers to himself as *zhen* 朕 throughout the "Kang Gao." It may be argued that the word "king" here refers to the young King Cheng—the nominal head of the Western Zhou state—who was brushed aside by the duke who played the role of regent upon King Wu's death. But more likely it refers to the Duke of Zhou himself,[11] and if this is indeed the case, the Duke of Zhou might have deliberately pronounced himself "king," the head of the Zhou state, in these two instances. Neither the "Kang Gao" nor the "Jiu Gao" suggests a new personal relationship between the Duke of Zhou and Kang Shu as the result of the latter's being established a regional ruler. On the contrary, the ritual at the Zhou court is one that transferred personal relationships (royal relatives) into public relationships (functionaries of the Zhou state). There is little personal engagement, much less any physical contact between the "king" and the regional rulers.

Shangshu. Whether it was produced right at the time of Kang Shu's appointment can still be debated, but scholars generally agree that it is a Western Zhou document. See Michael Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), p. 379. The *Zuozhuan* 左傳 also mentions Kang Shu's appointment along with the rulers of Lu and Jin. For an analysis of these records, see Itō Michiharu 伊藤道治, *Chūgoku kodai ōchō no keisei* 中国古代王朝の形成 (Sobunsha, 1975), p. 226.

[8] *Shangshu*, in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), pp. 202–5.

[9] Ibid., pp. 205–8.

[10] Ibid., pp. 202–5.

[11] See the beginning of the document: "The king said to the effect: 'The prime ruler, my younger brother, young boy Feng (Kang Shu)'" 王若曰：孟侯, 朕其弟, 小子封. Since only the Duke of Zhou, but not King Cheng, could call Kang Shu "younger brother," the word "king" here certainly refers to the Duke of Zhou; *Shangshu*, p. 203.

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Scholars who interpret Western Zhou China as "feudal" consider the relationship between the Zhou king and the regional rulers to have been contracted personally with obligations, similar to the lord-vassal relationship in medieval Europe,[12] but such a comparison is erroneous. The medieval ritual procedure for establishing vassalage included two parts: a ritual of homage and an oath of fealty. In the ritual of homage, the lord would personally ask the vassal kneeling in front of him if he wished to become his man, and would enclose the vassal's two hands in his own hands. Importantly, the lord would seal the relation *with a kiss on the mouth* of the vassal, making him his "man of mouth and hands."[13] The oath of fealty was taken standing, and the vassal would swear to the lord in words like: "I promise by my faith that from this time forward I will be faithful to Count William and will maintain towards him my homage entirely against every man, in good faith and without any deception."[14]

This ritual suggests that vassalage was an entirely personal engagement between two free men, as is most evident in the *kiss of mouth to mouth*. Vassalage was an exclusive "marriage" between man and man. Once one had entered such a relationship, one was supposed to maintain his vassalage throughout his life. Western Zhou sources show no instances of such an intimate personal relationship between the Zhou king and the regional rulers.

Some scholars have tended to see a parallel between the medieval homage and the Zhou court ceremony of appointment (*ceming* 冊命), during which the Zhou king personally appointed officials to various government posts.[15] The best description of the appointment ceremony is the inscription of the Song *ding* 頌鼎.[16] The ceremony normally took place early in the morning, when the Zhou king first

[12] See Creel, 349-53; Hsu and Linduff, pp. 177-79;

[13] This ritual of homage was commonly practiced in Western Europe and was described frequently in medieval literature and depicted in many medieval paintings. See F. L. Ganshof, *Feudalism*, trans. Philip Grierson (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 71; Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L. A. Manyon (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1961), pp. 145-47.

[14] Ibid., pp. 71, 75.

[15] Hsu and Linduff, pp. 177, 179.

[16] *Jicheng*, # 2827; Shirakawa, 24.137:153. For a discussion of the appointment ceremony, see Li Feng, "'Offices' in Bronze Inscriptions and Western Zhou Government Administration," *Early China* 26-27 (2001-2).

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came to a building, presumably to make sacrifice to the ancestral altars in the grand chamber. Then, a high official would guide the candidate through the gate to stand at the center of the courtyard, facing north, the direction of the king, who stood facing south. In some cases the king might personally address the candidates; but most often, he would hand a written document over to a court official by his side; another official would then read the document, which described the government duties assigned to the candidate along with a long list of gifts. When this was done, the candidate would receive the document and bow to the king, touching the ground with his head. The candidate would take the document out of the courtyard, after which he would return immediately with a jade tablet and a half jade disk to present to the king. Nearly ninety inscriptions fully or partially record this ceremony of appointment.[17]

The appointment ceremony, which was highly routine and bureaucratic, involving the performance of a number of officials, manifests an even more "public" spirit than does the ritual establishing local rulers. As I have shown in another article, the relationship between the candidates and the officials who brought them into the courtyard and stood to their right during the ceremony was much closer than that between the king and the candidates.[18] All candidates were officials commanded to work in the central government in Shaanxi and were different from the regional rulers in the east. The king presented himself as the head of the government vis-à-vis the candidates, who were the officials of the government. In short, the nature of the appointment ceremony of the Western Zhou was fundamentally different from the medieval ritual of homage, in which physical contact—the sharing of hands and the kiss—between the lord and the vassal was the most defining feature. The medieval ritual of homage involved only the lord and the vassal. The appointment ceremony was a procedure in government administration that involved not only the king and the candidate, but also many officials.

[17] For a survey of the appointment ceremony, see Musha Akira 武者章, "Sei-Shū satsumei kinbun bunrui no kokoromi" 西周冊命金文分類の試み, *Tōyō bunka* 東洋文化 59 (1979): 49-132.

[18] Li, "'Offices' in Bronze Inscriptions," *Early China* 26-27.

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In her most important recent study of the feudo-vassalic institution of medieval Europe, Susan Reynolds distinguishes two types of relationships, though both have the effect of bringing submission: the ruler-subject relationship, which was bound by traditional norms and moral obligations and determined by the natural unit—the kingdom; and the lord-vassal relationship, which was bound by fidelity and determined by vassalage.[19] These two relationships co-existed throughout the medieval period, even when most dukes and counts had become vassals of the kings.[20] The ruler-subject relationship was, from the perspectives of both the king and the subject, public and defined in terms of the political unit of the kingdom, and meaningful only within that framework. By virtue of one's citizenship in the kingdom, one was subject to the king. This relationship need not be claimed and could not be abolished. The king, by virtue of his kingship, was the universal ruler of all in his kingdom.

Fundamental features of the lord-vassal relationship were that it implied equality and demanded mutual obligations. As Susan Reynolds says: "The lord in return should act in a corresponding way to his fidelis, lest he be censured for bad faith and perfidy . . . the bond of fidelity deriving from lordship and homage ought to be mutual, so that the lord owes as much to the man as the man to the lord, saving only reverence."[21] It is this sense of mutual obligations that truly distinguishes the lord-vassal relationship from the ruler-subject relationship, which demands only the obligation and submission of the subject to the ruler. Of course, the relationship itself

[19] Reynolds, p. 20. Reynolds uncovers half a dozen social relations in medieval sources that were previously obscured by the concept of "feudal relations": ruler and subject, patron and client, landlord and tenant, employer and employed, general and solider, etc. Reynolds presents a complex picture of medieval Europe in which vassalage was not the only relation between man and man and the fief was not the only form of landholding. She further clarifies: "Calling the subjects of his kingdom his vassals is a modern habit that derives from the usage of late medieval lawyers who were interested only in those they considered fiefholders, not in the nature of political relations between king and subjects"; see p. 291.

[20] Reynolds emphasizes that, even in the "high feudal age," the kingdoms continued to exist insofar as kingship existed in its own right. It was the king—the quintessential type of ruler in medieval ideas—not the lord, who was at the top of political authority and social hierarchy, and the kingdom was the most natural unit of the medieval society. Reynolds, pp. 33-35.

[21] Reynolds, p. 20.

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was not an equal one; it demanded the submission of the vassal to the lord. However, as long as a lord remained in such relation, he was subject to the same rules that governed his vassal. A vassal could take his lord to the court and terminate his contractual relationship with him by charging the latter with bad faith, perfidy, and perjury. By the twelfth century, there was a special ritual for doing this.[22] In light of this fundamental difference between the two types of relationships in the medieval European context, it would seem misleading to call a Zhou regional ruler "vassal" and to speak of his state as a "vassal state."[23]

Some scholars have attempted to see a contractual "feudal" relationship in the appointment ceremony just observed above.[24] It is true that the appointment results in obligations, but the obligations were placed only on the candidate; there is no evidence that each ceremony would place a new responsibility on the king. The question was whether the appointee would fulfill his government duty, not whether he broke an oath of fealty to the king. None of the many appointment inscriptions mentions such an oath. The candidate regards his appointment as a favor bestowed on him by the king, but his service is due only to the king as the head of government. The obligation is bound by political norms and public responsibility and no oath was needed. Without doubt, as the bronze inscriptions show, contractual relationships did exist in Western Zhou society. We have some examples of contracts for the sales or transfer of property between different states or individuals; in these cases, the contract was sealed by an oath taken by both parties, and

[22] Ibid., p. 21. Ganshof suggests that, by the twelfth century in France and Germany, a vassal was even allowed to freely break his contract on condition that he renounce his fief. See Ganshof, p. 98.

[23] The two types of relations were not only distinguishable, but sometimes also came into conflict with each other in medieval society. For example, the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) was triggered by the French king Philip VI's desire to confiscate the English fiefs in France. After the Norman Conquest in 1066, the English kings were vassals of the French kings, from whom they held fiefs on the French soil, but they were not subjects of the French kings. A relationship between equals based on the concept of kingship coexisted with the lord-vassal relationship based on the concept of lordship. Because of the intermarriage among the European nobles and the inheritance of fiefs through such marriage, it was rather common that a king was the vassal of another king, but that did not make him a subject of the other king. There were clearly two types of relations.

[24] Hsu and Linduff, p. 177.

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breaking the contract could result in severe punishment.[25] This suggests that, even in the Western Zhou context, a contractual relationship entailed legal obligations in the sense that, if one of the parties failed to keep the promise, the other was entitled to legal recourse. But such was not true of the relationship between the Zhou king and his officials. The practice of "bowing and touching the ground with head" (*baishou jishou* 拜手稽首) that the candidates performed in the appointment ritual was meant only to express gratitude for the royal favor, not to assert a bond with legal obligations.

The bronze inscriptions offer abundant evidence that regional rulers assisted the Zhou king in military campaigns and that the Zhou royal army responded to foreign attacks on the regional states.[26] However, there is no evidence that the Zhou king was legally obligated to do so upon the request of the regional rulers. More likely, with respect to the regional states, the Zhou king conceived of his military strategy from the standpoint of the Zhou court in the interest of the Western Zhou state as a whole. In many cases, the Zhou king actually failed to protect the regional states. In other cases, the Zhou king himself launched attacks on regional states such as Mi 密, Qi 齊, and even Lu 魯,[27] and he could, at worst, be condemned as "immoral" by the attacked regional rulers. The regional ruler did not have the legal choice to abandon his king; he could overthrow him, but to do so successfully, he had to acquire the sanction and acceptance of all the other regional rulers. Otherwise he had no choice but to live under the king.

In short, the relationship between the Zhou king and the regional rulers was one between ruler and subject, paralleling the relationship between the medieval European kings and their subjects, but not that between the medieval lords and their vassals. To interpret Western Zhou China as "feudal" is to misunderstand the nature of this relationship, and to misinterpret the construction of political relations and obligations in the Western Zhou state.

[25] Laura Skosey, *The Legal System and Legal Tradition of the Western Zhou, ca. 1045–771 B.C.E.* (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1996), pp. 206–7, 382–426.

[26] For examples of the mutual assistance between the Zhou king and the regional rulers, see Li, *The Decline and Fall*, pp. 102, 125, 132, 351.

[27] Ibid., pp. 120, 124, 134.

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TERRITORY AND JURISDICTION: THE FUNCTION OF THE REGIONAL ZHOU STATES

The most important feature of the Zhou political system was its installation of numerous regional states. Therefore, to understand the political structure of the Western Zhou state, one must examine the nature and function of these regional polities. According to an account in the *Zuozhuan* (Duke Xi, 24th year), twenty-six regional states were established in the early Western Zhou to be ruled by members of the royal Ji 姬 clan.[28] Most of these regional states were located in the east, in the area previously controlled by the Shang. However, the rise of the Zhou regional states was not so much a direct result of the Zhou conquest of Shang as it was a result of the second conquest led by the Duke of Zhou to suppress the rebellions of the already conquered population in the east.[29] The rebellion of the former Shang subjects proved the policy of limited military occupation adopted by King Wu a failure. On the basis of farsighted political and geographical considerations, the Duke of Zhou introduced the strategy of establishing regional states. The new strategy was carefully planned by the Zhou court and was systematically put into practice by a strong government.[30] It was considered necessary by the Zhou court, because the regional states would form a "fence" or "screen" (*fanping* 蕃屏) to protect the royal capitals.[31] So the strategy was a "double-edged sword": to hold the vast territory against foreign invasions, and to exercise harsh rule over the local

[28] See *Zuozhuan, Shisanjing zhushu* edition (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), p. 1817. Another account in the *Zuozhuan* (Duke Zhao, 28th year) mentions that forty regional states were established to be ruled by people with surname Ji, the surname of the royal family. See *Zuozhuan*, p. 2119. For a geographical survey of the Zhou regional states in light of recent archaeological discoveries, see Li, *The Decline and Fall*, pp. 19–111.

[29] See Li, *The Decline and Fall*, pp. 47–55. To explain why regional states were installed, Creel gives the state of Qi as an example and suggests that Zhou founders had no choice but to share land with their supporters and relatives; Creel, pp. 342–46. Cho-yun Hsu and Katheryn Linduff also think that the Zhou were forced to establish regional states, but they think the Zhou did it to co-exist with the conquered population in the east, whose chiefs they had to recognize as local rulers. See Hsu and Linduff, p. 152.

[30] Ibid., p. 109. For the role of the regional states in defending the Zhou capitals, see also Edward Shaughnessy, "Western Zhou History," in Michael Loewe and Edward Shaughnessy eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 311–13.

[31] *Zuozhuan*, p. 1817.

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population in the east. In this regard, Creel was probably right in saying that the regional states were organs of the Zhou government.[32]

The granting of a regional state was often accompanied by the granting of a population. According to the inscription of the Ke *lei*, when Ke was granted the state of Yan, six groups of people were given to him, and when he arrived in Yan, the first thing he did was to "take the land and its officials."[33] The explicit mention of the "officials" (*juesi* 厥嗣) in the inscription suggests that the existing local administration was to be taken over by the new state of Yan. In the inscription of the Yihou Ze *gui*, we can find two impressive lists, one of lands and the other of people, to be taken over by the state of Yi.[34] Comparing these lists with textual records on the granting of the states of Lu, Wei, and Jin, Itō Michiharu 伊藤道治 pointed out that the granting of people was an indispensable part of the granting of a regional state.[35]

The Western Zhou regional states enjoyed the full rights of government over the subjects in their territories. The function of the government was carried out first of all through the implementation of legal punishment, and the right to mete out punishment was granted to the regional rulers when they received their states. In the Western Zhou context, justice was regarded as more than just a right; it was a responsibility that the regional rulers must assume. This is why, in the long "Kang Gao" speech analyzed above, the central concern of the Duke of Zhou was the proper application of legal punishment—repeatedly he advised Kang Shu to be respectful and cautious when carrying out punishment. The regional states were small, but they were complete governments, with the combined rights of civil administration, justice, finance, and military authority. They performed the same functions as did the Zhou central government, but on a much smaller scale.

Some scholars have identified the regional Zhou states with the

[32] Creel, pp. 353–55.

[33] Li, "Ancient Reproductions," p. 6.

[34] Shirakawa, 10.52:542–52.

[35] Itō Michiharu, *Chūgoku kodai kokka no shihai kōzō* 中國古代王朝の支配構造 (Chuo koronsha, 1987), pp. 78–83.

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"feudal" fiefs in medieval Europe.[36] They argued for a similarity on the basis that the regional states provided incomes for the regional rulers and their officials, as did the fiefs for the fief-holders in medieval Europe. Some considered that the regional states might even have provided a part of the revenue for the royal house.[37] Here, we need to clarify the nature and function of the fief and its history in medieval Europe.

A fief is a special type of land tenure rather than the physical existence of a piece of land; therefore, it is defined not by size or the quality of its soil, but by the social relations attached to it. In Ganshof's words, a fief is "a tenement granted freely by a lord to his vassal in order to produce the latter the maintenance which was his due and to provide him with the means of furnishing his lord with the services required by his contract of vassalage."[38] Susan Reynolds, on the other hand, emphasizes the property rights associated with the fief, which she defines as "a property with limited rights and more obligations," compared to lands with full property rights. It was "held from a lord who enjoyed not merely the rights of government over it but also some of the rights of property."[39] Fiefs were granted strictly to people who already held vassalage, but not necessarily was every vassal granted a fief.[40] The fief was not the only form of land tenure in medieval Europe. According to Reynolds, when the word "benefice" was used in the Carolingian context or even in the tenth or eleventh century, it referred to lands that the counts had originally held *ex officio* (by the right of their offices) and the ecclesiastical properties that they had under their care, apart from the fief.[41] Besides the benefices, there were also lands attached to particular offices and held by the royal officials.

[36] Eberhard, p. 30; Creel, pp. 342-45.

[37] Creel, pp. 352-55. See also Bodde, p. 92.

[38] Ganshof, p. 106.

[39] Reynolds, pp. 51, 162, 165-66.

[40] The ritual by which the fief was granted was called "investiture," which was separate from the ritual of homage. It consisted of the handling over by the lord of some symbolic object, representing either the action of vesting or the fief vested. Ganshof, p. 126. The term "investiture" is often used to translate the term *ceming* 冊命 (appointment ceremony), but this practice should be abandoned because *ceming* is different from the medieval investiture.

[41] Reynolds, pp. 92-93, 134, 140.

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Furthermore, lands with full property rights—the *alods*—were held freely and hereditarily by the nobles or the like.[42] Susan Reynolds presents a complex and perhaps also more realistic picture of landholding during the medieval period. In this context, the fief, at least before the eleventh century, was only one special type of land held by vassals and carried with it specifically defined rights and obligations. The point is: not all lands held from the king were fiefs, and even lands held in return for service were not necessarily fiefs.

To summarize, the medieval fief has two criteria: (1) it was essentially a "stipend" to maintain the vassal's capability to serve his lord—pointing strictly to the vassal as the recipient of its profit; (2) it was not a property with full rights, but was held from the lord and carried only rights specifically defined by the vassal's contract with the lord. The regional Zhou states satisfy neither of these two criteria. It is true that some regional states, but not all, were granted as "honors" to individuals who had contributed to founding and consolidating the Zhou dynasty, and therefore would bring economic benefit to their recipients. The inscription of the Ke *lei* indicates that the state of Yan was granted to Ke 克 to honor his father the Duke of Shao. Such is also true in the cases of Lu, granted to the oldest son of the Duke of Zhou, and Qi, granted to the Grand Duke. However, an "honor" is not a stipend; it is not indispensable to the maintenance of its recipient. The honor of receiving a regional state was like that of receiving an appointment to government office. In practice, the states that the regional rulers received from the Zhou court were like the medieval fiefs in that they produced what was needed for the maintenance of the holders, but the states were not granted for that purpose.

The medieval fief and the Zhou regional states differed most in the matter of rights associated with them. Unlike the Zhou regional states, which enjoyed the full rights of government, the medieval fief had only limited property rights—the rights of government over it belonged not to the vassal, but to the lord from whom the fief was held.[43] Ganshof says: "There was nothing in the relationships of feudalism, whether considered from the personal or from the property

[42] Ibid., pp. 82, 145.
[43] Ibid., p. 165.

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standpoint, which required that a vassal receiving investiture of a fief should necessarily have the profits of jurisdiction within it, nor even that he should exercise such jurisdiction on behalf of the lord or of a higher authority."[44] Ganshof also notes that there were cases where the right of justice within the boundaries of a fief belonged neither to the lord or the vassal, but to the prince or some other third party.[45] In the high medieval period, however, when all counts were vassals, and fiefs the standard form of noble property, the right to exercise justice came to be closely associated with the fief; those counts and dukes who were themselves vassals of the kings exercised justice in their own fiefs. Nonetheless, they did this not as vassals, but in their capacity as counts and dukes; and their right to exercise justice went far beyond the boundaries of their own fiefs. In no way did the feudo-vassalic institution demand the right of justice as an integral part of a fief. In contrast, the right of justice and administration was attached to the regional Zhou states, as is analyzed above. The regional Zhou states were not fiefs, but were small regional governments of the Western Zhou state.

If the regional Zhou states were different from the medieval fiefs, was there during the Western Zhou any kind of land tenure similar to the medieval fief? It has by now become clear that the official-aristocrats in the royal domain in the Wei River valley of Shaanxi and the regional rulers in the east were two different branches of the Zhou nobility.[46] Consequently, the aristocratic estates in the Wei River valley had a type of landholding different from the regional states in the east. While the eastern states were small territories equipped with small but complete governments, the aristocratic estates were merely landed properties held in return for service at the royal court. But, as Susan Reynolds points out in reference to Europe, not all lands that were held in return for service were fiefs.

About twenty Western Zhou inscriptions mention land and land transactions within the royal domain in central Shaanxi, and some systematic analysis is needed in the future to clarify the nature of such landholding. Generally speaking, the holders of these estates

[44] Ganshof, p. 156.
[45] Ibid., p. 157.
[46] Li, *The Decline and Fall*, p. 163.

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were officials at the Zhou court. Some of the estates were granted as "attachments" to the official appointments in the court ceremonies mentioned above, for example, in the Da Ke *ding* 大克鼎. Others were simply rewards given by the Zhou king, as documented in the Wu *gui* 敔簋.[47] The officials held the estates in return for their governmental service but not through personal engagement with the king. The situation regarding the tenure of these estates is confused at best. The inscriptions show no consistency between the ranks of government positions and the amount of land granted; on the contrary, they seem to suggest that the level of granting was decided by the temporary will of the king. It is unlikely that the land tenure would expire when the holder's official service expired, for there is no evidence that any official surrendered his estate on the occasion of his retirement or when transferred to a new post. It is likely, however, that once the estate was granted, the right to hold it would become separate from the candidate's government service, and the estate would become his hereditary possession. Perhaps the estates were more like the "benefices" held by the counts of the Carolingian Empire, as described by Susan Reynolds, but they were not fiefs; such holdings naturally tended to become a part of hereditary property with full rights.[48] Given the historical geography of the Wei River valley as the homeland of the Zhou aristocracy, it is plausible that some estates had been held by the aristocratic families since the preconquest time, and had long been elements of their full-rights property, even if they were not originally granted as such. The doctrine that "all land under Heaven belonged to the king" was probably only a political assertion that had no economic effect.

At least by the middle Western Zhou, the estates had become items of sale and exchange between the aristocrats. The best examples are the inscriptions of the Pengsheng *gui* 倗生簋, where Ge Bo 格伯 sold his thirty lands for excellent horses from Pengsheng;[49] and

[47] In the Da Ke *ding*, Ke was commanded to send out and take in royal orders, and he was given parcels of land in seven different locations; see *Jicheng*, # 2836; Shirakawa, 28.167: 498–505. The Wu *gui* records Wu's military merits in defeating the Nanhuaiyi 南淮夷, for which he was given one hundred fields in two locations; see *Jicheng*, # 4323; Guo Moruo 郭沫若, *Liang Zhou jinwen ci daxi tulu kaoshi* 兩周金文辭大系圖錄考釋 (Beijing: Kexue, 1958), pp. 109–10.

[48] Reynolds, pp. 82, 111,134, 140.

[49] *Jicheng*, # 4262; Shirakawa, 20.112:426.

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the Qiu Wei *he* 裘衛盉 and the Ninth Year Qiu Wei *ding* 九年裘衛鼎, where Ju Bo 矩伯 sold his land and forest for luxury items such as jades and bronze chariot fittings from Qiu Wei.[50] In another case—the Hu *ding* 曶鼎—land was used as indemnity for failed lawsuits.[51] Whether or not the estates had originally been granted as full-rights property, these inscriptions suggest that, at least by the middle Western Zhou, ownership with full rights had come to be associated with the estates.[52]

Could a fief be sold in medieval Europe? In principle, the vassal had no right to sell or give away his fief. In reality, vassals who had established their hereditary holdings of fiefs (which was different from hereditary ownership of property with full rights) were able to sell or alienate it. Such transactions involved two acts. One took place between the vassal alienating the fief and the vassal acquiring it, and had economic consequences but not the desired legal changes. The other was between the lord and the vassal acquiring the fief; it generally took the form of a gift, an enfeoffment, or a grant in return for rent. However, sometimes it took the form of a sale or exchange.[53] It resulted in a new relationship between the lord and the vassal, who again held the fief from the lord.

In some land transactions during the Western Zhou, the government did play a role. In the inscription of the Qiu Wei *he* 裘衛盉, the transaction was reported to the court and supervised by the court ministers, who carefully demarcated the boundaries of the lands. However, this cannot be simply construed as the government claiming ownership over the land transferred. The government acted more like an arbitrator, a role that many modern governments likewise play. No evidence suggests that the land transaction in the Qiu Wei *he* created a new relation between the recipient and the king.

Quite exceptional was the inscription of the Da *gui* 大簋, which

[50] *Jicheng*, # 9456, 2831; Shirakawa, 49.ho11:257; 49.ho11:267.

[51] *Jicheng*, # 2838; Shirakawa, 23.135:223.

[52] On this issue, I am in agreement with some Marxist scholars who also note that land can be freely sold during the Western Zhou. See Zhao Guangxian 趙光賢, "Cong Qiu Wei zhu qiming kan Xi Zhou de tudi jiaoyi" 從裘衛諸器銘看西周的土地交易, *Beijing shifan daxue xuebao* 北京師範大學學報 (1979.6): 16–23; Chen Fudeng 陳复登 and Wang Hui 王輝, "Jijian tongqi mingwen zhong fanying de Xi Zhou zhongye de tudi jiaoyi" 幾件銅器銘文中反映的西周中葉的土地交易, *Liaohai wenwu xuekan* 遼海文物學刊 (1986.2): 77–85.

[53] Ganshof, pp. 145–47.

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mentions that the king personally ordered the transfer of land from Ci Kui 䧱睽 to Da 大.[54] This was not a land sale. The king simply took away land from one person and gave it over to another; and there was no dealing between Ci Kui and Da prior to the royal order. The transaction might have been motivated by political reasons. The Da *gui* was cast during the reign of King Li, who, according to the newly discovered Wu Hu *ding* 吳虎鼎, might have also taken away land from a person named Wu Wu 吳無. The land was then given to Wu Hu by the next king.[55] I have suggested that these royally sanctioned land transactions might have been related to King Li's attempt to strengthen royal power over the aristocratic families.[56] If considered in terms of the inscription alone, the transaction mentioned in the Da *gui* is also different from the transaction of fiefs in medieval Europe. A medieval lord could not take a fief away from his vassal unless the latter was found guilty of wrongdoing or the lord would agree to compensate him; otherwise, the lord himself could be accused of violating the feudo-vassalic obligations.

To summarize, the fief of medieval Europe, which was associated with limited rights and clearly defined social obligations, had no parallel in Western Zhou China, not even in the royal domain in central Shaanxi with regard to the aristocratic estates. To interpret the Western Zhou estates as "feudal" is to fail to recognize the complex structure of the medieval properties in Europe and to misread the actual situation of landholding in China.

THE "FIVE RANKS": A WESTERN ZHOU SYSTEM OF RANKING?

Suggesting a similarity between medieval Europe and the Western Zhou are titles such as *gong* 公, *hou* 侯, *bo* 伯, *zi* 子, *nan* 男, which are often translated, and indeed equated, with medieval terms such as "duke," "marquis," "count" or "earl," "viscount," and "baron."[57] In the Eastern Zhou tradition, for instance the *Zuozhuan*, these terms

[54] *Jicheng*, # 4298; Shirakawa, 29.175:571.

[55] For the Wu Hu *ding*, see Mu Xiaojun 穆曉軍, "Shaanxi Chang'an xian chutu Xi Zhou Wu Hu ding" 陝西長安縣出土西周吳虎鼎, *Kaogu yu wenwu* (1998.3): 69–71.

[56] Li, *The Decline and Fall*, pp. 173–75.

[57] Creel, p. 325; see also Bodde, p. 91.

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are used to rank the rulers of the regional states; in works such as *Mencius* and *Zhouli* 周禮, the ranks are further associated with specific sumptuary rules for ritual. Since these terms also appear frequently in the Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, they seem to suggest a parallel between the feudo-vassalic institution and the Western Zhou institution. Creel himself was aware that these terms were not in the same order during the Western Zhou as they were in the Eastern Zhou, but he then thought that the Western Zhou usage of these titles resembles the early development of "feudal titles" in medieval Europe.[58]

A careful reading of Western Zhou sources would seriously undermine this comparison. Early in the century, some scholars already pointed out that "Five Ranks" was not a Western Zhou institution.[59] In the recent decades archaeological excavations have provided new ground for reexamining the issue of ranking. Newly excavated bronze inscriptions make it clear that the regional rulers in the east are predominantly referred to as *hou*, and in a few cases as *bo*. In contrast, the aristocratic families in the royal domain in Shaanxi never used the title *hou*. This indicates that the regional rulers in the east and the official-aristocrats in the royal domain were two different branches of the Western Zhou aristocracy. *Hou*, as symbolized by the graph, was essentially a military commander stationed in the east to govern the conquered population, and he was granted the full rights of government, as analyzed above. Members of the official-aristocratic families in the royal domain in Shaanxi were customarily referred to by their birth orders: *bo* 伯, *zhong* 仲, *shu* 叔, *ji* 季. The reason that we have many more cases where individuals are referred to as *bo* than the other three titles is because of the practice of primogeniture that gives the oldest brother a better chance to be the head of an aristocratic family, to serve in the government, and hence to cast bronzes recording his appointment. We have no evidence that *bo* was ever used during the Western Zhou as a rank in the system that also included *hou* and *gong*.

So far the most important inscription that seems to suggest

[58] Ibid., pp. 329–30.

[59] Guo Moruo, *Jinwen congkao* 金文叢考, 2nd edition (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1952), pp. 50–53.

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"ranks" during the Western Zhou is the Ling *fangyi* 令方彝. In this inscription, three titles (*hou*, *dian* 田, and *nan*) are listed as "many rulers" (*zhuhou* 諸侯).[60] The Zhouyuan 周原 oracle bone inscriptions refer to the ruler of the state of Chu 楚 as Chuzi 楚子; the term *zi* 子 is also used in the Hu *zhong* 㝬鐘 (or Zongzhou *zhong* 宗周鐘) to refer to the ruler of another southern state (*nan guo fu zi* 南國反子) who had rebelled against the Zhou.[61] The term *nan* is used for the ruler of the state of Xu 鄦(許) in the Xu Nan *ding* 鄦男鼎.[62] In his analysis of the usage of these terms in the *Zuozhuan*, Takeuchi Yasuhiro 竹内康浩 suggests that *zi* and *nan* were in most cases used for rulers of the non-Zhou states.[63] I believe this is also true with respect to the Western Zhou bronze inscriptions.

The term *gong* presents a more complex problem. The bronze inscriptions mention a number of people who were referred to as "*gong*," including Zhou Gong 周公, Shao Gong 召公, Mu Gong 穆公, Yi Gong 益公, Wu Gong 武公, Mao Gong 毛公, and so on. These were all prominent figures at the Zhou court. They were not ordinary court officials or regional rulers, but men who stood between the Zhou king and the entire bureaucracy.[64] A regional ruler could have held the title *gong* only if he had served in such position at the Zhou court. During the late Western Zhou and especially the early Eastern Zhou, some regional rulers did have such opportunities to serve at the central court.

Most likely, the five titles *gong*, *hou*, *bo*, *zi*, and *nan* had different origins and were not integrated into a single consistent system during the Western Zhou. The systematized ranking system found in Eastern Zhou texts was not a Western Zhou institution. It can be speculated that the "Five Ranks" used in the Eastern Zhou—for instance, in the *Zuozhuan*—owed its origin to the eastward migra-

[60] *Jicheng*, # 9901; Shirakawa, 6.25:294.

[61] *Jicheng*, # 260; Shirakawa, 18.98:260.

[62] For the Xu Nan *ding*, see "Chang'an Fengxi Mawangcun chutu Xunan ding" 長安灃西馬王村出土鄦男鼎, *Kaogu yu wenwu* (1984.1): 66.

[63] Takeuchi Yasuhiro, "Shunjū kara mita godōshakusei: Shūsho ni okeru hōken no mondai" 春秋から見た五等爵制—周初における封建の問題, *Shigaku zasshi* 史學雜誌 100.2 (1991): 40-144.

[64] For a discussion of the general power structure at the Zhou court, see Li, "'Offices' in Bronze Inscriptions," *Early China* 26-27.

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tion of the Zhou court and Zhou aristocratic families, by which the two branches of the Zhou aristocracy originally located in the east and west came to be geographically fixed. In other words, the "Five Ranks" was probably the result of the reorganization of the Zhou political institution during Eastern Zhou times.[65]

In the Western Zhou context, *hou* was the term for the regional rulers in the east; *bo* referred to birth order and was used for the heads of the aristocratic families in the royal domain in Shaanxi; *zi* and *nan* were probably terms for leaders of the non-Zhou states or communities in the south. They were not ranks but were reserved for people with particular roles in the Western Zhou state. Only *gong* might have been in some way used as a prestigious rank or a status. Therefore, any comparison between these titles of the Western Zhou and the ranks of medieval Europe is meaningless; and to use the titles of medieval Europe to translate the Western Zhou terms is unsound.

Even in the European context, the ranking system was not an element of the feudo-vassalic institution, but was just another feature of medieval European society. The word "duke" was derived from the Roman word *dux*, "military commander," and was introduced by the Merovingians to name persons in control of an old Roman province or an ethnic unit. "Count" (or earl), the most often seen term, came from the Roman *comes*, and referred to those who controlled several counties. Those who controlled counties near the borders then called themselves "marquis," meaning commander of a march. These ranks existed long before the feudo-vassalic institution was invented. The offices of the dukes, counts, and marquises were public in nature and the territories under their control were administrative units of the Merovingian or Carolingian state.[66] Therefore, there is no point in trying to compare the Western Zhou titles analyzed above with the ranks of medieval Europe; and such a comparison cannot lend support to the interpretation of Western Zhou China as "feudal".

[65] See Li, *The Decline and Fall*, p. 163. For a detailed analysis of the migration of the Zhou court and Zhou aristocratic families, see ibid., pp. 300–73.

[66] Bloch, pp. 394–98.

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MILITARY ORGANIZATION AND MILITARY SERVICE

Throughout the Western Zhou dynasty, the Zhou royal forces were composed of the Six Armies (*liushi* 六師) and the Eight Armies (*bashi* 八師).[67] The Six Armies was stationed near the Zhou capitals Feng 豐 and Hao 鎬 in the Wei River valley in central Shaanxi and was therefore called the "Six Armies of the West." The Eight Armies was stationed in the eastern capital Chengzhou 成周 and was therefore called the "Eight Armies of Chengzhou" (or "Eight Armies of Yin 殷").[68] The original Six Armies had vanished in the Han River during the disastrous southern campaign that ended the reign of King Zhao, but a new force by the same name was established under the next king—King Mu. Besides this large standing army at the disposal of the Zhou king, there were also the armies that the regional rulers maintained and sometimes made available to the Zhou king for military campaigns—as is made evident in the inscriptions of the Shi Yuan *gui* 師寰簋 and the newly discovered Jinhou Su *bianzhong* 晉侯蘇編鐘.[69] In the late Western Zhou, one begins to see evidence for the rise of some private armies owned by the powerful aristocratic families located in the royal domain.[70] There were also

[67] Li Xueqin 李學勤, "Xi Zhou jinwen de liushi bashi" 西周金文的六師八師, *Huaxia kaogu* 華夏考古 (1987.2): 207–10.

[68] The Six Armies is mentioned in the inscriptions of the Nangong Liu *ding* 南宮柳鼎, Lü Fuyu *pan* 呂服余盤, and Ehou Yufang *ding* 鄂侯馭方鼎; see *Jicheng*, # 2805, 10169, 2833; Shirakawa, 27.163:464; 25.142:260. The Eight Armies is mentioned in the inscriptions of the Xia Ke *ding* 小克鼎, Xiaochen Lai *gui* 小臣謎簋, and Hu *hu* 曶壺; see *Jicheng*, # 2796, 4239, 9728; Shirakawa, 28.168:512; 23.136:147. It was estimated that the Six Armies would have been composed of a total number of 75,000 soldiers and the Eight Armies 100,000 soldiers. But this estimate is based on figures given in the *Zhouli* for the *Liujun* 六軍, which many think can be identified with the Six Armies. See Li Xueqin, p. 208.

[69] The Shi Yuan *gui* mentions a campaign against the Huaiyi 淮夷 in which the armies from the states of Qi and Ji 紀 took part. See *Jicheng*, # 4313; Shirakawa, 29.178:600. The Jinhou Su *bianzhong* mentions a campaign carried out by the Zhou king against the Suyi 宿夷; the ruler of the state of Jin led his own troops and assisted the Zhou king. See Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, "Jin Hou Su bianzhong" 晉侯蘇編鐘, *Shanghai bowuguan jikan* 上海博物館集刊 (1996.7): 1–17; Jaehoon Shim, "The 'Jinhou Su *bianzhong*' Inscription and Its Significance," *Early China* 22 (1997): 49–53.

[70] This is evident in the inscriptions of the Duoyou *ding* 多友鼎, which mentions that Duke Wu's personal chariots were sent out in a battle against the invading Xianyun 玁狁, a northwestern people, and of the Yu *ding* 禹鼎, which mentions that 200 charioteers and 1000 foot soldiers of Duke Wu were sent out to assist the royal Six and Eight Armies to suppress the rebellion of the state of E 鄂 in the south. See *Jicheng*, # 2835, 2833; Shirakawa, 27.162:442.

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some garrison troops such as those stationed in a place called Xi 㪉, mentioned in the inscription of the Qi *gui* 趞簋.[71] But, the standing royal armies were by far the most important military forces of the Zhou king.

The Six and Eight Armies were not only standing military forces of the Western Zhou state; they also appear to have been huge organizations that carried out multiple functions. The inscription of the Li *fangzun* 盠方尊 provides important information regarding the internal structure of the Six and Eight Armies, and a careful reading would reveal that they had possessed a large bureaucracy including functionaries such as: *sima* 𤔲馬 (supervisor of horses), *situ* 𤔲土 (supervisor of land), and *sigong* 𤔲工 (supervisor of construction).[72] This indicates that officials in the Six and Eight Armies performed some civil administrative duties, probably for logistic purposes.[73] Another inscription, the Nangong Liu *ding* 南宮柳鼎, proves this point and suggests that the Six and Eight Armies possessed pastoral land, orchards, marshes, and even some farmland that was managed by the military personnel.[74] The Li *fangzun* also mentions different battle contingents in the Six and Eight Armies including the *wanghang* 王行, which was probably a special legion directly commanded by the Zhou king when he went on a campaign. The inscriptions suggest that the Six and Eight Armies were well-established organizations with their own systems of command, an independent bureaucracy, and perhaps an independent system of logistics as well.

We have no direct information as to whether the soldiers of the Six and Eight Armies were camp-based full-time warriors, or whether they fought in the royal armies only when there was a war. Given the complexity of the organization of the Six and Eight Armies, one guesses that they were camp-based. We do not know the term of military service during the Western Zhou, or whether

[71] It is not clear whether these troops belonged to the Six and Eight Armies or were independent legions. For the Qi *gui*, see *Jicheng*, # 4266; Shirakawa, 16.83:114.

[72] See *Jicheng*, # 6013; Shirakawa, 19.101:312.

[73] For detailed discussion of this inscription, see Li, "'Offices' in Bronze Inscriptions," *Early China* 26–27. On the organization of the Six and Eight Armies, see also Kimura Hideumi 木村秀海, "Rokushi no kankōsei ni tsuite: Rei hōson meibun o chūshin ni shite" 六師の官構成について—盠方尊銘文を中心にして, *Tōhōgaku* 東方學 69 (1985): 3–4.

[74] See *Jicheng*, # 2805; Shirakawa, 27.163:464.

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there was such term at all. But the poem "Dongshan" 東山 in the *Shijing* 詩經, which describes the harsh feelings of a soldier on campaign for three years in the east, certainly suggests that military service performed by the Western Zhou warriors was lengthy and unconditional.[75] Incidentally, the inscription of the Ban *gui* 班簋 mentions a Zhou king, probably King Mu, sending out a group of commanders led by Maogong 毛公 on a campaign in the east that turned out to have taken three years.[76] Another inscription, the Jinhou Su *bianzhong* mentioned above, records a campaign that was concluded in about three months.

Some historians have compared the Western Zhou military aristocracy to the knights of medieval Europe, for both were professional warriors who totally detached themselves from the rest of the population and from activities of production. Some scholars have also suggested that the Western Zhou warriors lived in accordance to the unwritten code (*li* 禮) that values courage and honor, and behaved in war like the European chivalry.[77] The comparison is loose at best. A careful investigation of the organization of military forces in medieval Europe reveals the fundamental difference between the two. The essence of the feudo-vassalic institution is that it freed the lord from the burden of armoring and equipping his warriors. By granting them pieces of land, the fiefs, he shifted onto the warriors the responsibility to furnish themselves with expensive weapons and horses. Therefore, as a rule under this system, there was no standing army at the king's disposal. When there was a war, the king formed his army by summoning to his service his vassals, who would be accompanied by crowds of knights. The only soldiers in the king's immediate service were the household knights whose number was normally several dozen and never exceeded a couple of hundred.[78]

To have a military elite that detached itself from activities of pro-

[75] *Shijing*, in *Shisanjing zhushu* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1979), pp. 395–97, 412–13.

[76] *Jicheng*, # 4341; Shirakawa, 15.79:35. For an English translation of the inscription, see Edward Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History: Inscribed Bronze Vessels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 251–52.

[77] Creel, pp. 322, 338–41. See also Bodde, p. 95.

[78] Michael Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages: The English Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 39–40.

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duction and monopolized the rights of military service was not rare in ancient civilizations. What made the medieval Europe military aristocracy unique was that the vassal, under contract, owed military service to his lord. The term of the contract was limited. The period of unpaid service was usually *forty days*. The lord could not obligate his vassal to serve him longer than the contracted forty days, but he could entice him with concessions or pay.[79]

The medieval army and the Western Zhou army were organized on totally different principles and operated in completely different ways. The medieval army was a loosely bound body of soldiers who, though professional warriors by nature, served the lords and kings only for fixed terms and on a conditional basis. The Western Zhou army was composed of soldiers who stood always for the king in a system that was routinely managed and financed by the king. An army that could exercise control over the vast territory of the Western Zhou state and be responsive to attacks on the borders at anytime was what Zhou king required.

WESTERN ZHOU GOVERNMENT WAS NOT A FEUDO-VASSALIC INSTITUTION

Above, I have demonstrated that past comparisons between Western Zhou China and medieval Europe have been misconceived. They were based on misunderstandings of the Western Zhou state and the medieval European feudo-vassalic institution, and on the mislabeling of some non-feudal elements as "feudal." The latter problem gave rise to another widespread misconception that identifies the Western Zhou government as a "feudal" institution.[80] Therefore, I should further discuss the definition of "European feudalism" and its application to the Western Zhou government.

Even historians who endorse a theory of "European feudalism" have had difficulty defining the term. Early in the twentieth century, Marc Bloch identified the fundamental features of "European feudalism" as follows:

[79] Ibid., pp. 9, 58,

[80] Creel, pp. 319–21.

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A subject peasantry; widespread use of the service tenement (i.e. the fief) instead of a salary, which was out of the question; the supremacy of a class of specialized warriors; ties of obedience and protection which bind man to man and, within the warrior class, assume the distinctive form called vassalage; fragmentation of authority—leading inevitably to disorder; and, in the midst of all this, the survival of other forms of association, family and state, of which the latter, during the second feudal age, was to acquire renewed strength.[81]

Many scholars have found this all-embracing "definition," which amounts to treating "feudalism" as "a type of society," unsatisfactory. Narrowing down Bloch's definition, F. L. Ganshof defined "feudalism" as a social institution that regulated obligations of obedience and service between two free men and that had as its effect the grant of a fief.[82] To Ganshof, two essential features of "feudalism" are vassalage and fief. Different from Ganshof, Joseph Strayer sees "feudalism" as purely a political-military institution, characterized by the fragmentation of political authority, private control of public power, and armed forces secured through private contract. In his view, "feudalism is a method of government, and a way of securing the forces necessary to preserve that method of government."[83]

Using Strayer's notion that "feudalism" is "a method of government" and combining it with Marc Bloch's notion of the "fragmentation of authority," Herrlee Creel manufactured his own definition of "feudalism" as "a system of government in which a ruler personally delegates limited sovereignty over portions of his territory to vassals," and applied it to the Western Zhou.[84]

As Barry B. Blakeley pointed out, Creel's definition of "feudalism" is too narrow.[85] Most scholars would now agree that, in the European context, the feudo-vassalic institution was not a system of government but a system that regulates sociopolitical relations bound by economic ties. The two essential elements of this system

[81] Bloch, p. 446.

[82] Ganshof, p. xvi.

[83] Joseph R. Strayer, *Feudalism* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1965), p. 13.

[84] In his note to this definition, Creel says: "By referring to those to whom limited sovereignty is delegated as 'vassals,' I mean that they stand to the ruler in a special relationship of personal loyalty, and are not mere officials to whom certain powers have been delegated." However, Creel never fully demonstrated this "personal loyalty" as an essential feature of "Western Zhou feudalism." Creel, p. 320.

[85] Blakeley, "On the 'Feudal' Interpretation," p. 36.

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were vassalage and fief. Without the fief as the underlying concept, the words "feudal" and "feudalism" would never have been created.[86]

To clarify the relationship between the feudo-vassalic institution and the government one must look at their origins and how they functioned in medieval Europe. The medieval government existed long before the emergence of the feudo-vassalic institution and continued to exist after the feudo-vassalic institution was created to support it.[87] Vassals were previously the king's personal attendants or soldiers whose social status was relatively low; they commanded little respect. According to Ganshof, it was during the reign of Pepin III (751–768) that the Carolingian king first adopted an aggressive policy to force the dukes and counts into the new relation of vassalage with the king.[88] The dukes and counts were functionaries of the Carolingian state to whom the burden of local government and public responsibility were entrusted. That they needed to be brought, or even forced, into the new relationship of vassalage with the king illustrates the point that vassalage was a new institution separate from the government itself. As for the reason for the creation of the feudo-vassalic institution, Ganshof points to the weakening of the administration of the Carolingian state.[89] Similarly, Marc Bloch thinks that the chaos caused by foreign invasions in all directions after the collapse of the Carolingian Empire in the ninth century gave rise to "feudalism."[90] Susan Reynolds, who dates the beginning of feudo-vassalic institution to the twelfth century, attributes the rise of vassalage to the lack among the Germanic people of the idea of public authority, and suggests that the feudo-vassalic institution helped the government to recover under the Capetians.[91]

[86] Reynolds, p. 3.

[87] Most scholars agree that, by the time of Clovis's accession in 481 at the latest, the Frankish kingdom was already a state with its own government in place. So, even in Ganshof's chronology that dates the beginning of "feudalism" to the time of the Carolingians, there was still a preceding period in the Frankish kingdom during which the Merovingians ruled without the feudo-vassalic institution. See Ganshof, pp. 15–16.

[88] Ganshof, p. 51.

[89] Elsewhere, Ganshof notes that in Germany feudo-vassalic relations arose as a response to the decline of the imperial authority as a direct result of its struggle with the Roman pope. Ibid., p. 163.

[90] Bloch, pp. 3, 60–69.

[91] Reynolds, pp. 20, 84–88, 117–19, 479.

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In short, the feudo-vassalic institution was something new added to an existing government. Its purpose was to maintain the government by strengthening the personal ties between the king and his officials; it was not itself a method of government. The failure to recognize this distinction between the government and the feudo-vassalic institution has resulted in the incorrect identification of the Western Zhou government with the feudo-vassalic institution.

Similarities did exist between medieval Europe and the Western Zhou, such as a hierarchical power structure, a division of authority between the central court and the regional powers, and a limited central administration. But, medieval Europe and Western Zhou China were not the only societies with these features. The feudo-vassalic institution was not about how to organize government or how to distribute power, but was a way to regulate personal relations among the ruling elite. It therefore differentiates medieval Europe from Western Zhou China.

CONCLUSION

The Western Zhou political system, characterized by the installation of the regional states, was created by a strong central government upon the successful suppression of rebellions in the east—not by a weak one that had to divide its authority to accommodate the social elite. The relationship formed in the court ritual establishing the regional rulers defined them as subjects and demanded their unconditional submission to the Zhou king. The regional states were equipped with small but complete governments that carried the functions of civil administration, finance, justice, and military. The royal authority was maintained through a common ancestral worship that determined the superior position of the king and through the presence of a standing royal army that was far superior to the military forces of any regional states. The "feudal" model derived from the medieval European case cannot be applied to Western Zhou China without recognizing the fundamental differences analyzed in this article.[92]

[92] Note that the "feudal" model cannot even be applied everywhere in Europe. In the recent decades, the theory of "European feudalism" has suffered heavy strikes and is on the verge

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In fact, the native Chinese tradition provides a term that, though not perfect, may be applied to the Western Zhou institution. The term, "fengjian" 封建, was used in the *Zuozhuan* to describe the establishment of the Zhou regional states. Although the compound is probably a product of the Warring States that speaks retrospectively about the Western Zhou institution, the two characters *feng* 封 and *jian* 建 both appear in the Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. *Feng* is repeatedly used in the inscription of the Sanshi *pan* 散氏盤 to describe the action of planting trees to demarcate borders between two states.[93] *Jian* has only recently been deciphered by Professor Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 as "to establish." It appears in the inscriptions of the Xiaochen X *ding* 小臣𤞔鼎, clearly in a "fengjian" context: "*Shao Gong jian Yan*" 召公建燕, or "The Duke of Shao established the state of Yan."[94] However, when the term "fengjian" is used, we must isolate it from the implications the term had in late Chinese history and from the Marxist usage of the term in current Chinese historiography.[95]

Of course, the arguments presented here involve more than substituting one term for another. Analyzing the fundamental differences between the "fengjian" institution and the feudo-vassalic institution of medieval Europe frees us to understand the historical development of Chinese civilization. The "fengjian" institution was created when the Zhou central power was strong enough to impose a universal political order in North China, in contrast to the

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of collapse. Elizabeth Brown exposes various problems involving the concept of "medieval feudalism," which she suggests should be abandoned; see her "The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe," *The American Historical Review* 79.4 (1974): 1063–88. Other scholars present their research in medieval history without using the term "feudalism." In her book *Fiefs and Vassals*, Susan Reynolds argues that the concept of "feudalism" has done more to harm than to help medieval studies. See Reynolds, p. 11.

[93] *Jicheng*, # 10176; Shirakawa, 24.139:191.

[94] Qiu Xigui, *Gu wenzi lunji* 古文字論集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), pp. 353–56. For the Xiachen X *ding*, see *Jicheng*, # 2556.

[95] The Song encyclopedia *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 has a section titled "fengjian" 封建, which exemplifies the usage of the term in the late historical periods. This section gathers records on the granting of any ranks or titles that are outside of the normal administrative structure down to the Tang dynasty; most of these grants were given along with a certain amount of tax quota. See Li Fang 李昉, *Taiping yulan* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), pp. 952–76. The famous Tang writer Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 once also wrote on the subject to attack the idea of giving land to the imperial descendants. See "Fengjian lun" 封建論, in *Liu Zongyuan ji* 柳宗元集 (Taibei: Huazheng, 1990), pp. 69–76.

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feudo-vassalic institution, which emerged when the Frankish Empire was weakening. It gave the Europeans a new way to reorganize themselves against enemies outside and within. In the Zhou case, however, kinship worked in the place of contracted vassalage, and the Western Zhou state was formed by the extension of the royal lineage, assisted by a network of marriage alliances.

However, the fall of the Zhou capital in 771 B.C. and the collapse of the Zhou central power resulted in a historical environment somewhat similar to that from which the feudo-vassalic institution arose in medieval Europe. Studies of political institutions in the Spring and Autumn and early Warring States period point to several major new inventions: written legal codes such as the one cast on a huge bronze cauldron in the state of Zheng 鄭; contracted political loyalty sealed with the oath of alliance as indicated by the covenant inscriptions from Houma 侯馬; a new type of estate to which there was attached not the right of administration or justice but only the right to derive revenue.[96] All of these occurred at a time when the many states were unable to organize themselves according to the traditional lineage bonds.

Whether these new developments can be in any way related to a feudo-vassalic institution like that of medieval Europe deserves future study. Here, it should suffice to say that to identify the Western Zhou with the feudo-vassalic institution is to misunderstand the Zhou institutions and to misread its historical context. By freeing the Western Zhou from the "feudal" restrictions, we will have a better chance to understand the Western Zhou in its own right.

[96] For an analysis of these new estates, see Mark Lewis, "Warring States Political History," in Michael Loewe and Edward Shauhnessy ed., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 605–8.

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