
The *Mu Tianzi Zhuan* and King Mu Bronzes

Edward L. SHAUGHNESSY

East Asian Languages and Civilizations, The University of Chicago

The *Mu tianzi zhuan* was unearthed in A.D. 279 from an ancient tomb (said to be that of King Xiang [Ai] of Wei) in Ji Commandery (present-day Jixian, Henan). It recounts the western travels of King Mu of Zhou and of his meeting with the Western Queen Mother, and counts as one of the most famous and important of all of China's unearthed texts. There has long been a debate as to the date and nature of the *Mu tianzi zhuan*'s composition: whether it was an annalistic account from the time of King Mu or a later recounting. Although in the twentieth century there was a general consensus that the text was written in the Warring States period and should count as the earliest short story in Chinese literature, nevertheless paleographers pointed out occasional contacts between the content of the text and bronze inscriptions from the time of King Mu. The clearest of these is the mention of Mao Ban, a figure known from the Western Zhou bronze inscription *Ban gui*. In this study, I examine three or four other names that appear in the text: Jing Li, Zhai Gong, Bi Ju and Feng Li, and argue that all of them also appear as important ministers to the king in recently discovered King Mu-period bronze inscriptions. Based on this, I suggest that the source of the *Mu tianzi zhuan* can be traced back to the Western Zhou period. How this source was transmitted to the Warring States period is still unclear and requires further study.

Keywords: Bronze inscriptions, King Mu of Zhou, *Mu Tianzi Zhuan*, Tsinghua bamboo strips

The *Mu tianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳 is one of the most famous and important texts among all of China's unearthed textual materials.¹ Describing the western journeys of the Zhou king Mu Wang 周穆王 (r. c. 956–918 B.C.) and especially his meeting with Xiwangmu 西王母 (Western Queen Mother), it was placed—together with numerous other texts—in a tomb in the Warring States-period state of Wei (in present-day Jixian 汲縣, Henan) early in the third century B.C. This tomb was then robbed in A.D. 279. Although the bamboo strips on which the texts were written sustained considerable damage, nevertheless a considerable portion of them was salvaged and sent to Luoyang 洛陽, the capital of the Western Jin dynasty. The emperor, Jin Wudi 晉武帝 (r. 265–289) ordered Xun Xu 荀勗 (d. 289), the head of the imperial library, and a committee of officials under him to edit these bamboo-strip texts. The *Mu tianzi zhuan* seems to have been the first of the texts to have been completed, extant editions containing a preface written by Xun Xu himself in A.D. 282, and providing a description of the editorial work done on the text.

The *Mu tianzi zhuan* quickly became known to scholars of the time; for instance, in his *Bo wu zhi* 博物志, Zhang Hua 張華 (230–300) used materials from it as historical evidence concerning the time of King Mu. Bibliographies in the standard histories of the Sui and Tang dynasties all classified the *Mu tianzi zhuan* as “*Qi ju zhu*” 起居注 (rising-and-sitting notes), implying that it was a sort of veritable record of King Mu's reign. However, with the advent of iconoclastic attitudes toward ancient history during the Qing dynasty, doubts began to be expressed regarding the historicity of the text, and in the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 the *Mu tianzi zhuan* was placed instead in the “*Xiaoshuo lei*” 小說類 (fiction category). The “Simplified Index” to this work said of the text:

It records events concerning King Mu of Zhou's western travels that are not seen in the classic literature and contains many discrepancies with the texts of King Mu's time, so that it seems to be the miscellaneous recording of contemporary rumors that

1 The present paper is the author's own translation of a paper originally written in Chinese, entitled “*Mu tianzi zhuan yu Mu Wang tongqi*” 穆天子傳與穆王銅器; I have endeavored to remain as faithful to the Chinese as possible without sacrificing proper English-language conventions.

circulated. Because it included exact dates, past histories placed it among the “rising-and-sitting notes,” but based on its contents we now put it in the fiction category.²

Similarly, the “Comprehensive Record of the *Siku quanshu*” says of the *Mu tianzi zhuan*:

Not only is the text extremely corrupt, but many scholars have not been very careful in reading it. For instance, for “*feng Mozhou yu he shui zhi yang*” 封膜畫于河水之陽 (enfeoff Mozhou on the north side of the Yellow River), seen in the second *juan*, in which Mozhou 膜畫 is of course a person’s name and *feng* 封 means “to enfeoff,” Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 in his *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Record of famous paintings through the ages) mistakenly read *zhou* 畫 as *hua* 畫, and then further mistook *feng mo* 封膜 to be the name of the ancestor of painters.³

After the *Siku quanshu* editors published this negative assessment, the received wisdom has been that the *Mu tianzi zhuan* has no historical value, at most providing a bit of information concerning Warring States period literature and mythology. Despite this, the twentieth century brought numerous archaeological discoveries, including actual bronze vessels from the time of King Mu of Zhou, the inscriptions on which mention the names of some of his important officials. When historians compared the information in these inscriptions with that in the *Mu tianzi zhuan*, they discovered that some of these names matched. The first scholar to compare the *Mu tianzi zhuan* with bronze inscriptions was probably Yu Xingwu 于省吾 (1896–1984), who in 1937 published an article entitled “*Mu tianzi zhuan xinzheng*” 穆天子傳新證 (New Evidence for the *Mu tianzi zhuan*). In this article, Yu pointed out that the figure Jing Li 井利 seen in the *Mu tianzi zhuan* should be read as Xing Li 邢利, and that in bronze inscriptions the name Xing 邢 is always written as

2 *Siku quanshu jianming mulu* 四庫全書簡明目錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 1985), 552.

3 *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目 (Taibei: Taibei Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1985), Vol.1042, 246.

Jing 井.⁴ Moreover, with respect to the record “*ming Mao Ban Feng Gu xian zhi yu Zhou*” 命毛班逢固先至于周 (commanding Mao Ban and Feng Gu to arrive first in Zhou), Yu cited several passages in the Western Zhou bronze vessel *Ban gui* 班簋 to argue that Mao Ban “was a person of the time of King Mu, whereas Guo Moruo 郭沫若 and Wu Qichang 吳其昌 have both been mistaken in dating the *Ban gui* to the time of King Cheng.”⁵ After this, both Yang Shuda 楊樹達 (1885–1956) and Tang Lan 唐蘭 (1901–1979) provided more detailed discussions of the *Ban gui* inscription and of its implications for the authenticity of the *Mu tianzi zhuan*. Yang Shuda said:

Past scholars have viewed the *Mu tianzi zhuan* as fiction, and have said that its records are nonsensical and not to be believed, but now seeing that names in it are also seen in bronze inscriptions, there must be some basis for the book and it cannot be entirely groundless.⁶

Tang Lan added:

Although [the *Mu tianzi zhuan*] contains exaggerations and the date of its composition is rather late, still other than the single chapter concerning Sheng Ji 盛姬, it generally has a historical basis and can be corroborated by this *gui* vessel.⁷

Given these assessments, the *Mu tianzi zhuan* would seem to be something of a historiographical enigma: on the one hand, its date of composition is “rather late” and it is filled with records that are “nonsensical and not to be believed” and “exaggerations”; on the other hand, some of its content is not altogether without historical basis. As an unearthed document in its own right, the date that the *Mu tianzi zhuan* was copied is probably not in question: it

4 Yu Xingwu 于省吾, “*Mu tianzi zhuan xin zheng*” 穆天子傳新證, *Kaogu she kan* 考古社刊 6 (1937): 277.

5 Yu Xingwu, “*Mu tianzi zhuan xin zheng*”, 283.

6 Yang Shuda 楊樹達, “Mao Bo Ban gui ba” 毛伯班簋跋, in Yang Shuda, *Jiweiju jinwen shuo* 積微居金文說 (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 124.

7 Tang Lan 唐蘭, *Xi Zhou qingtongqi mingwen fendai shizheng* 西周青銅器銘文分代史徵 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 355.

was doubtless about 300 B.C. or slightly earlier, just before it was put into the tomb. However, the date and nature of its original composition still need to be clarified. I hope in the future to be able to devote a comprehensive study to these questions. For present purposes, however, I will be able only to extend the work of Yu Xingwu, Yang Shuda, Tang Lan and other scholars in examining the names in the text and comparing them with names seen in King Mu period bronze inscriptions.

The identification of the “Mao Ban” 毛班 in the *Mu tianzi zhuan* with the Mao Ban of the Ban *gui* is by now accepted by virtually all scholars of Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, and would seem to require no further elaboration. However, there has recently surfaced some new evidence to consider in conjunction with this name. Aside from the *Mu tianzi zhuan*, the name of Mao Ban or Duke Ban of Mao 毛公班 was also contained in another traditional text, but because of a textual corruption and other reasons its reading has never been clear. At the end of 2010, the Research and Conservation Center for Excavated Texts, Tsinghua University (*Qinghua daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu yu baohu zhongxin* 清華大學出土文獻研究與保護中心) published the first volume of the Warring States bamboo-strip texts in its collection. Among the texts included in this volume was the “Zhai Gong zhi gu ming” 祭公之顧命 (Retrospective command of the Duke of Zhai), which corresponds to the “Zhai Gong” 祭公 (Duke of Zhai) chapter of the *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書 (Remaining Zhou documents). Not only does this text provide further evidence concerning Mao Ban, but it also mentions two other ministers of King Mu. The editors of *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡 provide the following comparison of the “Zhai Gong zhi gu ming” and the “Zhai Gong” chapter.

This text is ancestral to the “Zhai Gong” chapter of the *Yi Zhou shu*. Comparing the bamboo text with the received text, the received text’s many corruptions and omissions can be resolved at a glance. Whenever the received text has either deleted the character *bang* 邦 (country) or changed it to the character *guo* 國 is obviously the result of Han-dynasty editors avoiding the taboo on the name of Liu Bang 劉邦, the first emperor of Han. The most important discovery in the bamboo-strip text is the names of the “three dukes” (*san gong* 三公): Bi Huan 畢鯁, Jing Li 井利, and

Mao Ban 毛班 . The latter two are seen in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, not only resolving a corruption in the received text, but also having important significance for the study of the Western Zhou system.⁸

The second example pointed out by the editors—regarding the “three dukes”—is extremely important. Strip 9 of the bamboo-strip texts contains the following passage:

公惹拜 𠄎 𠄎 曰奪孳 𠄎 乃詔繹𠄎 𠄎 萊利毛班 𠄎 曰三公懋父滕

The corresponding passage in the “Zhai Gong” chapter of the *Yi Zhou shu* reads as follows:

祭公拜手稽首曰允乃詔畢桓于黎民般公曰天子謀父疾維不廖

Traditional readers of the “Zhai Gong” text had no way of understanding the meaning of the six characters “*bi huan yu li min ban*” 畢桓于黎民般 . Kong Chao 孔晁 (*fl.* A.D. 265), the earliest commentator on the *Yi Zhou shu*, explained the passage as follows:

般，樂也。言信如王告盡治民樂政也

Ban is “to enjoy”; it means it is really as the king has reported “completely to rule the people and to enjoy the government.”

He seems to have understood the *bi* 畢 of the passage as an adverb, meaning “completely” (expressed in his comment as *jin* 盡), *li* 黎 as a verb meaning “to rule” (*zhi* 治), and *ban* 般 as “to enjoy” (*le* 樂). This could only be regarded as nothing more than a guess on his part, but based on the passage as found in the received text there is probably no better reading. With the publication of the “Zhai Gong zhi gu ming” text in *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian*, we find that this passage originally read “*bi huan jing li mao ban*” 繹𠄎萊利

8 Li Xueqin 李學勤, ed., *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian*, Vol.1 清華大學藏戰國竹簡第一冊 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2010), 173.

毛班。In the course of the text's transmission, the passage—and especially its last four characters—has been miscopied to such an extent that there is almost no way to recognize it as the same text. The character *jing* 莖 was doubtless first simplified as *jing* 井, and then must have been subsequently miscopied as 于, whereas the character *li* 利 must have been elaborated as *li* 黎, *mao* 毛 miscopied as the graphically similar *min* 民, and *ban* 班 read as a phonetic loan for *ban* 般. The four characters *jing li mao ban* 莖利毛班 of the bamboo-strip text are relatively easy to understand as two names, just as the Qinghua editors have pointed out; Jing Li and Mao Ban are the names of two important officials at the time of King Mu, both of their names appearing in bronze inscriptions of that period. If we examine the text of the bamboo strip further, we see that there is a punctuation mark (厶) added after the preceding two characters 繹𠄎, indicating that these two characters should be read separately from the following characters. Moreover, the following sentence in the bamboo-strip text also mentions the “three dukes,” making it clear that 繹𠄎 is almost certainly the name of another minister of King Mu, i.e., Bi Huan 畢桓. It is possible that all three of these names appear in bronze inscriptions from the time of King Mu, as I will examine in more detail below.

Because of the textual corruptions in the transmission of the “Zhai Gong” chapter of the *Yi Zhou shu*, the name of King Mu's minister Mao Ban was lost from the stage of history, not to be resurrected again until Yu Xingwu read the *Mu tianzi zhuan* together with the *Ban gui*. Now, in the “Zhai Gong zhi gu ming” text, it is seen again. In the same text, the name Mao Ban is linked with that of Jing Li. Just as the editors of *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhushu* have intimated, the name Jing Li similarly “appears in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions.” Other scholars have also already noted this in connection with the *Mu tianzi zhuan*, the first to make this association probably being Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 (1911–1966). In the new edition of his *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* 西周銅器斷代 (The periodization of Western Zhou bronzes), he pointed out with respect to the *Li ding* 利鼎: “The patron of this vessel is perhaps none other than the Jing Li of the *Mu tianzi zhuan*, though this is a point that still

requires further verification.”⁹ The *Li ding*, inscription number 02804 of the *Yin Zhou jinwen Jicheng* 殷周金文集成 (Complete collection of Yin and Zhou bronzes; hereafter *Jicheng*), is currently in the Historical Museum of Capital Normal University (*Shoudu shifan daxue lishi bowuguan* 首都師範大學歷史博物館). Its inscription reads:

Li ding 利鼎

唯王九月丁亥，王客于般宮。并白內右利立中廷北鄉。王乎乍命內史冊命利曰：易女赤市、繅旂，用事。利拜跣首，對揚天子不顯皇休，用作朕文考溲白隤鼎，利其萬年子孫永寶用。

It was the ninth month, *dinghai* (day 24), the king entered into the Ban Palace. Jing Bo entered at the right of Li and stood in the central courtyard facing north. The king called out to the Maker of Commands the Interior Secretary to command Li in writing, saying: “I award you red kneepads, a bridle and pennant; use them to serve.” Li bowed and touched his head to the ground, daring in response to the Son of Heaven’s illustriously august beneficence herewith making for my deceased-father Zi Bo this offertory caldron; may Li for ten-thousand years have sons and grandsons eternally to treasure and use it.

Because the inscription mentions “Jing Bo” 并白 as the court guarantor (the so-called *youzhe* 右者), most scholars have assumed that this vessel should be dated to the mid-Western Zhou period, the time when a Jing Bo was the most prominent official at the royal court. However, the *Li ding* displays a standard late Western Zhou vessel shape (see Fig. 1), making it very unlikely that the vessel could date as early as



Fig.1 *Li ding*

9 Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* 西周銅器斷代 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 149.

the reign of King Mu.¹⁰

Li Xueqin subsequently published a more positive discussion of this question. In his article “The Mu Gong *gui gai*-cover and Its Significance for the Periodization of Bronze Vessels,” Li first transcribed one unclear character in the inscription on the Mu Gong *gui gai* 穆公簋蓋 (*Jicheng* 04191) as *li* 利 (the entire sentence thus reading *wang hu Zai Li ci Mu Gong bei nian peng* 王乎宰利易穆公貝廿朋, “the king called out to Steward Li to award Mu Gong twenty strands of cowries”), and then went on to provide the following extended discussion of this name:

Among the bamboo texts discovered in the Western Jin at the Ji Tomb is the received version of the *Mu tianzi zhuan* (including what the “Shu Xi zhuan” 束皙傳 of the *Jin shu* 晉書 refers to as “Zhou Mu wang *meiren* Sheng Ji *si shi*” 周穆王美人盛姬死事 (The Death of King Mu of Zhou’s Beauty Sheng Ji), in which are mentioned such different individuals as Mao Ban 毛班, Jing Li 井利 and Feng Gu 逢固. Mao Ban was a real historical figure, as has already been demonstrated by the King Mu-period bronze vessel *Ban gui*, so that even though the *Mu tianzi zhuan* has some mythological flavor, it is not entirely imaginary. Jing Li was also an important official at the time of King Mu. According to the *Mu tianzi zhuan*, he and Feng Gu “commanded the six armies.”

Comparing the sixth chapter of the *Mu tianzi zhuan* with the *Zhou li* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou), it is clear that Jing Li’s office was that of *zai* 宰 (Steward). The *Zhou li* mentions a *da zai* 大宰 (Great Steward), *xiao zai* 小宰 (Minor Steward), and *zai fu* 宰夫 (Stewards), which in other texts are all called simply “steward.” The description given for the responsibility of “Stewards” states: “In all of the textual matters of state, he handles the admonishments as well as the furnishings and implements, in all cases making them available. For great and minor funerals, he handles the admonishments

10 For this illustration, see: 首都師範大學歷史博物館免費開放周 gao57527.blog.163.com. The illustration has only recently become available. Prior to this time, many other specialized studies of bronze vessels have also dated the vessel to the mid-Western Zhou period; see, for instance, Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院考古研究所, ed., *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng shiwen* 殷周金文集成釋文 (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, Institute of Chinese Studies, 2001), #2804; Shanghai bowuguan Shang Zhou qingtongqi mingwen xuan bianxiezu 上海博物館商周青銅器銘文選編寫組, ed., *Shang Zhou qingtongqi mingwen xuan* 商周青銅器銘文選 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), #200.

for the minor officers, and is in charge of performances. At the funerals of the Three Dukes and Six Ministers as well as those of officials, he is in charge of the officers and supervisors.” The commentary of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 states: “‘Great funerals’ are those of the king, queen, and heir apparent. ‘Minor funerals’ are for consorts and lower. ‘Minor offices’ are of the ‘sire’ rank, while for ‘great offices’ the Chief Steward handles the admonishments.” Chapter six of the *Mu tianzi zhuan* records the funeral of King Mu’s consort, who had gone with the king on a procession but caught a cold and died. The funeral was presided over by the crown prince Yi Hu 伊扈 (the future King Gong) as the master-of-mourning, with the king’s eldest daughter as the mistress-of-ceremony. After the ritual wailing, the master-of-mourning Yi Hu came crying out of the shed, with his family members and kinsmen, as well as all present following him. Those in attendance wailed and then cleared away the food and serving implements. All of the officers each attended to his task, all wailing in exit. Jing Li managed the affair, leaving last and gathering all together. The commentary of Guo Pu 郭璞 says: “The reason that Jing Li was the last to leave by himself is because he was in charge of all of the funerary goods and needed to collect them. Someone has said that Jing Li was dilatory and out of rank in his exit, and therefore was put in fetters.” At the time of the burial, King Mu commanded that the “burial rules for a queen were to be observed,” and “before and after the funeral and among all the mourners, Jing Li was in charge of bells and flags and all of the accoutrements.” From King Mu on down, everyone gave presents and “Jing Li then accepted them,” which is to say that he placed the presented items into the tomb. These records suggest that the role played by Jing Li in the funeral was at the head of the supervisors and that he was in charge of the funerary goods, perfectly consistent with the responsibilities of the steward. For this reason, Steward Li in the inscription on the Mu Gong *gui gai* is very possibly the Jing Li of the text.¹¹

Professor Li’s discussion is very perceptive. The Mu Gong *gui gai* is without question a vessel of King Mu’s reign, and so if the inscription did mention Jing Li as steward it would be very important information. However, this is by no means certain. Not only is the steward’s lineage name (i.e., Jing 井) not given, but what is more Professor Li’s transcription of his name, 利, as *li* 利 also

11 Li Xueqin, “Mu Gong *gui gai* zai qingtongqi fenqi shang de yiyi” 穆公簋蓋在青銅器分期上的意義, *Wenbo* 文博 1984.2: 7.

seems to be questionable.¹² Thus, perceptive as it is, Professor Li's argument remains unpersuasive. Despite this, elsewhere in his article he mentions another inscription on the Shi Ju *fangyi* 師遽方彝 (*Jicheng* 09897), which does in fact mention a “Steward Li,” and for which the characters are not at all in doubt. The inscription reads:

Shi Ju *fangyi* 師遽方彝

佳正月既生霸丁酉，王才周康甯，鄉醴。師遽蔑曆，吝。王乎幸利易師遽珮圭一、環章四，師遽拜頷首，敢對揚天子不顯休，用乍文且它公寶罍彝，用勺萬年無疆，百世孫子永寶。

It was the first month, after the growing brightness, *dingyou* (day 34), the king was at the Kang Dormitory in Zhou, feasting wine. Captain Ju was praised for his accomplishments and befriended. The king called out to Steward Li to award Captain Ju a jade scepter and four jade tablets. Captain Ju bowed and touched his head to the ground, daring in response to extol the Son of Heaven's illustrious beneficence, herewith making for Ancestor Ta Gong this treasured offertory vessel, with which to entreat ten-thousand years without limit, and a hundred generations of descendants eternally to treasure it.

Although “Li” here is again only a personal name and there is no way to be sure what lineage he belonged to, since this vessel was certainly cast at the time of King Mu, and indeed it is probably even possible to say that it was cast early in his reign, therefore just as Professor Li Xueqin has argued, it is quite likely that Steward Li is none other than the Jing Li of the *Mu tianzi zhuan*.

In this way, of the three names mentioned in the “Zhai Gong zhi gu ming” text, at least “Jing Li” and “Mao Ban” are “seen in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions,” just as the editors of *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian* have suggested. Although there is no way to be sure that the first name, written in the “Zhai Gong zhi gu ming” as 羅鯨, is similarly attested in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, nevertheless it is very likely that this name is also seen in

¹² Although the transcription of the character as *li* 利 seems to be questionable, it is found also in Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo ed., *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng shiwen* (at #4191).

the *Mu tianzi zhuan*. Chapter four of that text contains the following passage:

己巳，至于文山，西膜之所謂□，觴天子于文山。西膜之人乃獻食馬三百、牛羊二千、稌米千車，天子使畢矩受之，曰：□天子三日游于文山。於是取采石。

On *dingsi* (day 54), arriving at Wenshan, which in the western regions is called ... , they feasted the Son of Heaven on Wenshan. The men of the western region then presented three hundred feed horses, two thousand cows and sheep, and a thousand cartloads of grain. The Son of Heaven sent Bi Ju to accept them, saying: ... Son of Heaven for three days traveled on Wenshan, there collecting colored stones.

The 繹𩇑 of the Qinghua “Zhai Gong zhi gu ming” text very likely refers to the same person as the Bi Ju 畢矩 here, so that the statement by the Qinghua editors that “the *Mu tianzi zhuan* also has a Bi Ju, but we do not know whether he is to be related with this Bi Huan,” is exceptionally cautious.¹³ The lower right-hand element of 繹 is 畢, and should be the main component of this character, which is to say that the other components are mere elaborations or decorations. “Bi” was an important lineage in the Western Zhou period, often seen in contemporary bronze inscriptions. Limiting ourselves just to the mid-Western Zhou period, the Bi lineage figures in inscriptions on the following vessels: Peng Zhong *ding* 棚仲鼎 (*Jicheng* 02462: “Bi Huai” 畢媿), Bi Xian *gui* 畢鮮簋 (*Jicheng* 04061: “Bi Xian” 畢鮮), Duan *gui* 段簋 (*Jicheng* 04208: “Bi Zhong” 畢中), Wang *gui* 壘簋 (*Jicheng* 04272: “Bi royal family” 畢王家), and the Yong *yu* 永盃 (*Jicheng* 10322: “the man of Bi Captain Tong” 畢人師同). It is clear that the Bi lineage and the Zhou royal house had a very close relationship. Moreover, it is possible that 𩇑 and 矩 are essentially just two different transcriptions of the same archaic character. Although the “bird” signific (i.e., 鳥) of 𩇑 and the “arrow” signific (i.e., 矢) of 矩 seem to be very different, in the received text of the “Zhai Gong” chapter the corresponding character is written as *huan* 桓, which is to say with a “wood” signific (i.e., 木); the difference between an “arrow” signific and a “wood” signific is

13 Li Xueqin, ed., *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian*, Vol.1, 177, n. 23.

perhaps rather less great.¹⁴ As for the difference between the 亘 of the two “Zhai Gong” texts and the 亘 of the *Mu tianzi zhuan*, they are so close in form that if they are not two different transcriptions of the same archaic character, then they may simply be a later scribal corruption.¹⁵

In addition to the three names discussed above, the “Zhai Gong” also supplies one other bit of extremely important information concerning the officials mentioned in the *Mu tianzi zhuan* and especially their relationship with King Mu-period bronze inscriptions. However, once again, because of problems involved with the transmission of the text and the decipherment of bronze inscriptions, until recently this information has also been overlooked by scholars. This information concerns the main figure mentioned in the “Zhai Gong” text: Zhai Gong Moufu 祭公謀父. Zhai Gong Moufu also appears several times in the *Mu tianzi zhuan*, even though his lineage name is written as *kui* 鄴 rather than *zhai* 祭, and his personal name is not recorded. However, the *Mu tianzi zhuan*’s earliest commentator, Guo Pu 郭璞 (A.D. 276–324), had already pointed out that Kuifu 鄴父 is none other than Zhai Gong Moufu, who he further identified as the author of the *Shi jing* 詩經 poem “Qi zhao” 祈招.¹⁶ As suggested by Guo Pu, Zhai Gong Moufu is indeed well known from other texts, including the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 and the *Guo yu* 國語. In the *Zuo zhuan* (12th year of Duke Zhao 昭公), we read: “In the past when King Mu wanted to expand his desires and travel throughout the world, so that his wagon tracks and horse prints would be found everywhere, Zhai Gong Moufu wrote the poem “Qi zhao” in order to put a brake on the king’s desires.” Elsewhere in the same text, at the 24th year of Duke Xi 僖公, where it records that “Zhai Zhou Gong *zhi yun ye*” 祭周公之允也 (Zhai was descended from the Duke of Zhou), and at the 1st year of Duke Yin 隱公, where it says that “Zhai Bo *lai*” 祭伯來 (Zhai the Elder came), the commentary by Du Yu 杜預 (A.D. 222–284) reads: “Zhai *guo bo jue zhuhou wang qingshi zhe*” 祭國伯爵諸侯王卿士者 (Zhai was a lineage with the rank of royal official of the state level). The “Junguo

14 See, for instance, He Linyi 何琳儀, *Zhanguo guwen zidian: Zhanguo wenzi shengxi* 戰國古文字典——戰國文字聲系 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 1217.

15 *Ibid.*, 1050, 459.

16 *Mu tianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳 (*Sibu beiyao* ed.), 1.2b.


zhi” 郡國志 (Record of Commanderies and States) of the *Han shu* 漢書 states:


中牟有蔡亭，即祭伯國，在今鄭州東北十五里，蓋圻內之國家也。

In Zhongmou, there is a Cai Pavillion, which is from the state of Zhai the Elder; it is fifteen *li* northeast of present-day Zhengzhou, a state within the territory of Qi.

Moreover, the *Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年, which was discovered in the same tomb as the *Mu tianzi zhuan*, not only contains records of Zhai Gong Moufu, but also mentions a Zhai Gong Xinbo 祭公辛伯 as an official of the preceding King Zhao. The annals for the 19th year of King Zhao states that “Zhai Gong Xinbo *cong wang fa Chu*” 祭公辛伯從王伐楚 (Zhai Gong Xinbo followed the king to attack to Chu), to which the Qing dynasty commentator Lei Xueqi 雷學淇 (*jinshi* 1814) remarked: “This Zhai Gong, who was a younger brother of Bo Qin 伯禽, drowned together with the king in the Han River; his son was Moufu, and King Mu referred to him as his Ancestor Zhai Gong.”¹⁷

While all of this shows beyond doubt that Zhai Gong was an important official of King Mu, until about ten years ago it had seemed that his name was not seen in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. However, in 1998 new evidence surfaced when the Guodian 郭店 bamboo-strip texts were published. Among these texts was the “Zi yi” 緇衣, which quotes the following passage from the “Zhai Gong zhi gu ming” (i.e., the “Zhai Gong” chapter of the *Yi Zhou shu*):




 公之顧命曰毋以小口敗大口，毋以卑御人疾莊後，毋以卑御士息士大夫卿士

 *Gong's Retrospective Command* states: “Do not use petty ... to defeat great ..., do not use favored consorts to pain the queen, and do no use favored comrades to trouble the officers and ministers.”¹⁸

Shortly after this text was made public, Li Xueqin published an article entitled “Explaining the Guodian Bamboo-Text Zhai Gong zhi gu ming,” in which he

17 Lei Xueqi 雷學淇, *Zhushu jinian yizheng* 竹書紀年義證 (1810; rpt. Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1971), 308 (20.53b).

18 Jingmen shi bowuguan 荊門市博物館 ed., *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), #22.



pointed out that the graph  should in fact be read as *zhai* 祭.¹⁹ More than this, Professor Li also related this graph to the graph  seen in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. The graph , seen in the Hou Chuo *fangding* 厚趙方鼎 and Lüe *ding* 寧鼎 inscriptions, was previously transcribed as *lian* 謙, but it would seem that Professor Li's new transcription as *zhai* is certainly correct. These inscriptions read as follows:

Hou Chuo *fangding* 厚趙方鼎



佳王來各于成周年，厚趙又饋于公。趙用乍昏文考父辛寶尊，其子子孫永寶。束

It was the year that the king came from entering into Chengzhou; Hou Chuo was rewarded by Zhai Gong. Hou Chuo makes for his cultured deceased-father Xin this treasured offertory caldron; may sons' sons and grandsons eternally treasure it. Clansign

Lüe *ding* 寧鼎

佳王伐東尸，公令寧眾史旗曰：呂師氏眾有嗣後或伐貊。寧孚貝，寧用乍饗公寶尊鼎。

It was when the king attacked the eastern Yi; Zhai Gong commanded Lüe and Secretary Ju saying: “Take the Captains of the Guards and the supervisors of the rear countries to hit and attack Mo. Lüe captured cowries, and Lüe herewith makes for Yuan Gong this treasured offertory caldron.

These two vessels both seem to date to about the time of King Kang or King Zhao, and it would seem from the *Lüe ding* inscription that  Gong was a commander of the Zhou army, in line with the record in the *Zhushu jinian* that Zhai Gong Xinbo was a lieutenant of King Zhao in his attack on Chu; from this, it seems quite possible that  Gong is none other than Zhai Gong

19 Li Xueqin, “Shi Guodian jian Zhai Gong zhi gu ming” 釋郭店簡祭公之顧命, *Wenwu* 文物 1998.7: 44–45.

Xinbo. Of course, this is not direct bronze inscriptional evidence for the King Mu-period official Zhai Gong Moufu. However, since Moufu was only one generation removed from this evidence, it should at least corroborate that this name recorded in the *Zhushu jinian* was in fact an important personage of the reign of King Mu.

There can probably be little doubt that these figures mentioned in the *Mu tianzi zhuan* are also seen in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. In addition to these important officers, there is another name that appears several times in the *Mu tianzi zhuan*, either as Feng Gu 逢固 or Feng Gong 逢公. In his article on the Mu Gong *gui gai* quoted above, Li Xueqin already mentioned this figure. The name appears in chapters 2, 4 and 5 of the *Mu tianzi zhuan*:

辛巳，入于曹奴之人戲，觴天子于洋水之上，乃獻食馬九百，牛羊七千，糴米百車。天子使逢固受之。

On *xinsi* (day 18), we entered into the Caonu people's games, and they feasted the Son of Heaven on the bank of the Yang River, and then contributed 900 feed horses, 7000 cattle and sheep, and 100 cartloads of grain. The Son of Heaven sent Feng Gu to receive them.²⁰

丙寅，天子至于鉞山之隊，東升于三道之墜，乃宿于二邊，命毛班、逢固先至于周，以待天子之命。

On *bingyin* (day 3), the Son of Heaven arrived at the ridge of Jian Mountain, and climbed eastwardly to the ascent of the Three Roads and then camped at the Two Sides, commanding Mao Ban and Fang Gu to arrive first at Zhou in order to await the Son of Heaven's command.²¹

天子筮獵莘澤，其卦遇訟，逢公占之，曰：訟之繇，藪澤蒼蒼，其中□，宜其正公。戎事則從，祭祀則烹，畋獵則獲。□飲逢公酒，賜之駿馬十六，絺紵三十篋。逢公再拜稽首。

The Son of Heaven divined about hunting at Duckweed Marsh, the result met with being *Song* hexagram. Feng Gong prognosticated it, saying: “*Song*'s oracle is: ‘Duckweed swamp is so verdant, It's midst so Appropriate for the upright

²⁰ *Mu tianzi zhuan*, 2.3b.

²¹ *Mu tianzi zhuan*, 4.4a.



Fig.2 Feng Mofu you

duke.’ Military affairs will be accordant, sacrifices will be happy, and hunts will have catches.” ... toasted Feng Gong with liquor, and awarded him sixteen fine horses and thirty cases of fine gauze. Feng Gong bowed twice and touched his head to the ground.²²

It is possible that this “Feng Gu” is also to be seen in a King Mu-period bronze inscription, though the evidence is admittedly not very certain. The Shanghai Museum has in its collection a vessel that Chen Peifen 陳佩芬 refers to as Feng Mofu you 夆莫父卣 (*Jicheng* 05245), and which she says is a “mid-Western Zhou vessel.”²³ As can be seen in the illustration above, this vessel’s most striking feature is the recumbent long-tailed birds filling the entirety of both the vessel and its lid. As Ms. Chen points out, this feature “mainly belongs to the period of Kings Mu and Gong, so that this *you*-bucket should also belong to this period, more or less at the beginning of the mid-Western Zhou period.” I would differ from Ms. Chen slightly when she says that this decor feature “mainly belongs to the period of Kings Mu and Gong,” and would suggest instead that it is certainly unique to the time of King Mu, and indeed can even be more finely periodized to the early years of King Mu’s reign (more or less in agreement with Ms. Chen when she dates the vessel to

²² *Mu tianzi zhuan*, 5.4b.

²³ Chen Peifen 陳佩芬, *Xia Shang Zhou qingtongqi yanjiu* 夏商周青銅器研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 2004), Vol. 2b, 370–71.

“more or less at the beginning of the mid-Western Zhou period”).

This Feng Mofu *you* shows at least that there was a Feng 逢 (i.e., 逢) lineage active at the time of King Mu. Extending this speculation (or perhaps just this guess) one step further, is it possible that the name “Gu” 固 of the *Mu tianzi zhuan*’s Feng Gu represents some sort of distortion of the name of the patron of the bronze vessel: 昔? Admittedly, the shapes of 固 and 昔 are quite different. However, it is possible that *gu* 固 would be an elaboration of an earlier *gu* 古, which is much more similar to 昔; indeed, if they were not just two different transcriptions of one and the same archaic character, it is possible that the character in the *Mu tianzi zhuan* has been corrupted in the course of its copying and recopying.

Of course, this is nothing more than a guess. However, before closing I would like to offer one more piece of real evidence that has been recently unearthed. In 2004–2005, in Hengbei 橫北 Village, Jiangxian 絳縣, Shanxi, archaeologists excavated a very large cemetery.²⁴ In tombs M1 and M2 of this cemetery were found inscribed bronze vessels commissioned by a Peng Bo 棚伯. The following three inscriptions are fairly representative of them:

Peng Bo zuo Bi Ji ding 棚伯作畢姬鼎

棚伯作畢姬尊鼎，其萬年寶。

Peng the Elder makes for Bi Ji this offertory caldron; may for ten-thousand years it be treasured.

Peng Bo ding 棚伯鼎

佳五月初吉，棚伯肇作寶鼎，其用享考于朕文考，其萬年永用。

It is the fifth month, first auspiciousness, Peng the Elder initiates the making of this treasured caldron; may it be used to offer filial piety to my cultured deceased-father; may for ten-thousand years it be eternally used.

Peng Bo Cheng gui 棚伯倂簋

佳廿又三年初吉戊戌，益公蔑棚伯倂曆。右告令金車旂。倂拜手稽首，對揚

24 Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 山西省考古研究所, Yuncheng shi wenwu gongzuozhan 運城市文物工作站, and Jiangxian wenhuaju 絳縣文化局, “Shanxi Jiangxian Hengshui Xi Zhou mu fajue jianbao” 山西絳縣橫水西周墓發掘簡報, *Wenwu* 2006.8: 4–18.

公休，用作朕考寶尊。偁其萬年永寶用享。

It is the twenty-third year, first auspiciousness, *wuxu* (day 55); Yi Gong praised Peng Bo Cheng's accomplishments, and also reported to command him a bronze chariot and pennant. Cheng saluted with his hands and touched his head to the ground, in response extolling the duke's beneficence, herewith making for my deceased-father this treasured zun-vase. May Cheng for ten-thousand years eternally treasure and use it to make offering.

Although the initial archaeological reports suggested that this Peng 棚 was unknown in the traditional literary record, Li Xueqin immediately pointed out that this name should correspond to the place-name Peng 颯 seen in the *Mu tianzi zhuan*.²⁵ It appears already in chapter 1 of that text:

辛丑，天子西征至于颯。河宗之子孫颯柏檠且逆天子于智之口，先豹皮十、良馬二六。天子使并利受之。癸酉，天子舍于漆澤，乃西釣于河，以觀口智之口。……天子飲于河水之阿。天子屬六師之人于颯邦之南、滲澤之上。……（《穆天子傳》卷1頁1反-2正）

On *xinchou* (day 38), the Son of Heaven campaigned, arriving at Peng. Peng Bo Zhao, the descendant of the River Ancestor, met the Son of Heaven at Zhi's ..., ten leopard skins and twelve fine horses. The Son of Heaven sent Jing Li to accept them. On *guiyou* (day 10), the Son of Heaven resided at Poison Oak Marsh, and then to the west of it went fishing in the River, in order to view ... Zhi's ... The Son of Heaven toasted at the bluff over the River's water. The Son of Heaven assembled the men of the six armies at the Oozing Marsh to the south of Peng country.²⁶

This passage follows immediately after entries mentioning that the “Son of Heaven campaigned northward and then cut across the Zhang 漳 River,” that he “arrived at the foot of Jian 鉞 Mountain,” and that the “Son of Heaven campaigned westward and then cut across the ascent at Yu 隃 Pass.” Professor Li has pointed out that based on these locations, the *Mu tianzi zhuan*'s Peng 颯 should be the same place as the Peng 棚 state mentioned in bronzes from

25 Li Xueqin, “Jiangxian Hengbei cun mudi yu Peng guo” 絳縣橫北村墓地與颯國, *Zhongguo wenwu bao* 中國文物報 2007.9.14: 5.

26 *Mu tianzi zhuan*, 1.1b-2a.

Jiangxian. From the inscription on the Peng Bo zuo Bi Ji *ding* (the first of the three Peng Bo inscriptions translated above), it is clear that Peng Bo was married to a woman of the Bi 畢 lineage of the royal Ji 姬 surname, and from the inscription on the Peng Bo Cheng *gui* (i.e., the last of the three Peng Bo inscriptions translated) that Peng Bo Cheng received an award from the important royal official Yi Gong 益公. This is all consistent with the *Mu tianzi zhuan*'s narrative concerning Peng, such that it would seem that this record too cannot possibly be entirely fictional.

At the beginning of this paper, I pointed out that the *Mu tianzi zhuan* seems to be a historiographical enigma: on the one hand, its contents are “nonsensical and not to be believed” and full of “exaggerations,” such that it seems to be a “*chuanqi*” 傳奇 (legendary) sort of text from the Warring States period, but on the other hand its contents are not at all without historical basis. Having compared several of the names that appear in the *Mu tianzi zhuan* with names of royal official that appear in bronze inscriptions from the time of King Mu, we have seen that it is by no means the case that only the name Mao Ban appears in both; in fact, these two different sources share at least three or four other names in common. While it is certainly not impossible that the legend of a single such official could have been transmitted through six or seven centuries, it is hard to imagine that a cluster of four or five such names could have been remembered—all together—over such a long period. It seems that we have to conclude that the core of this text should be traced back to some sort of contemporary source in the Western Zhou period. What this source may have been, and how it may have been transmitted to the Warring States period are important questions that remain to be answered.

《穆天子傳》與穆王銅器

夏含夷

芝加哥大學東亞語言與文明系

《穆天子傳》在西晉武帝咸寧五年（公元 279 年）出土於汲郡（即現在河南省汲縣）的古墓裏（傳統說法謂是魏襄哀王 [公元前 318–296 在位] 的墓），記載了周穆王西行及其與西王母見面之事，是中國出土文字資料中最有名、最重要的文獻之一。歷來文獻學專家一直辯論《穆天子傳》的著作年代與性質，是穆王時代的起居注抑或後期的追憶？雖然 20 世紀以來，普遍認為《穆天子傳》是戰國時代的作品，可視之為中國最早的小說。但古文字學家也注意到《穆天子傳》中的內容與周穆王時代的銅器銘文偶爾有所關聯。最顯著的例子是《穆天子傳》提及的毛班，其人即班簋銘文裏提到的班。本文考察《穆天子傳》裏另外三四個重要大臣，諸如井利、祭公、畢矩和逢固，指出其都出現於穆王時代銅器銘文上，且均為穆王的重臣。因此，本文結論是《穆天子傳》的源頭可以追尋到西周時代，這個源頭是如何傳流到戰國時代至今還不清楚，需要進一步研究。

關鍵詞： 金文 周穆王 《穆天子傳》 清華簡

