

The Ruler and the Families: Crisis

Save for Dìng-gūng, the brother of Jāu-gūng, who came to the rulership as an adult, these last four rulers all had long reigns. It was the first of them, followed by the second, who sought to find support within the state in members of the loyal Shú clan, not in the established and threatening Three Families. This brought to a head a long simmering question: who owns the state? In one view, it was the possession of the ruler who inherited it. In another view, the state was a functional entity whose concern was its survival and well-being, whoever might be in charge of it. This was in the air. We have seen Jàu Dùn acting out, in Jìn, in peace as well as war, the role of a leader who was not the lineal inheritor of that state. And we have seen more than one ruler killed, as the chronicle puts it, not by a given assassin, but as it were by the state itself.

The crisis came under Jāu-gūng. Following the practice of Syāng-gūng, he had been relying for diplomatic and other assistance chiefly on the Shú clan, and less on the long-established Three. The tension between these groups became such as to present a danger, and Jāu-gūng left the state in 0517, being hosted by Chí, with later support from Jìn. This government in exile is a unique episode in Chinese history, and gives us a sort of anatomy of how the states of that time were organized, and how then worked, or failed to work, in practice.

Jāu-gūng's return was negotiated between Jìn, himself, and those left behind in Lǚ. He died before it could be made, but his brother succeeded him as Dìng-gūng, taking up the struggle to protect the ruler's freedom of decision from those below who had different ideas about state policy.

To those thrilling days of yesteryear, we now turn:

§17. Syāng-gūng 襄公 (0549-0542)	000
Jìsūn Hángfǔ 季孫行父 of Lǚ (4), 000	
§18. Jāu-gūng 昭公 (0541-0510)	000
Shú Gūng 叔弓 of Lǚ (2), 000	
Jìsūn Yì-rú 季孫意如 of Lǚ, 000	
§19. Dìng-gūng 定公 and Chí, (0509-0495)	000
Wú 吳, 000	
Confucius' Disciples, 000	
§20. Aī-gūng 哀公 (0489-0479)	000
Ywè 越, 000	

These last four reigns have a special interest for modern readers: they include the entire lifetime of Confucius. We will note along the way places at which the contribution of Confucius to the new state – the form of state that was beginning to emerge in this period – can be discerned in the record.

