

馮夢龍：東周列國志·第五回

## *Chronicles of the Eastern Zhou Kingdoms:* **Chapter Five**

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### **The Duke of Guo is Favoured, Zhou and Zheng Exchange Hostages Lu and Song Raise Troops to Help the Wei Renegade**

We return to Duke Zhuang of Zheng 鄭莊公, who now learnt that Ducal Grandson Hua 公孫滑 was leading troops to attack the state. The Duke asked his ministers for a solution. Ducal Son Lü 公子呂 said:

‘As the saying goes, “Cut weeds while sparing their roots, and they will grow back in spring”. Ducal Grandson Hua was fortunate enough to escape death, and now he is mobilizing the troops of Wei against us. Clearly, the Lord of Wei does not know about Younger Brother of Gong’s 共叔 crime of treason and attacks on Zheng, which is why he sends his troops to help Hua in the name of rescuing his grandmother. In my humble opinion, it would be best to prepare an official letter and send it to the Lord of Wei to explain the situation, such that he will surely pull his troops back. Then, once Hua is left isolated, we can capture him without having even to fight.’

‘All right,’ replied the Duke and immediately had an envoy deliver a letter to Wei. Duke Huan of Wei 衛桓公 received the letter, which read:

‘Esteemed and revered Lord of Wei, I, Wusheng 寤生, humbly salute you and submit this letter to you. Misfortune has been in our family and a feud has erupted between brothers related by blood, truly putting us to shame with respect to our neighbouring state of Wei. I had granted my brother the large citadel of Jing along



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with other lands and never did I lack fraternal piety. But in return, he only created discord by taking advantage of our mother's affection for him, which confirms his irreverence. As I bore in mind the importance our forebears placed on protecting our heritage, I had no choice but to eliminate him. As for my mother, Lady Jiang 姜氏, because of her blind affection for my brother Duan 段, her heart was not at peace, and therefore she retreated to the castle of Ying, but I have already taken her back with me to provide for and wait upon her. Now, the renegade Hua has concealed from you the wrongs of his father while seeking refuge in your great state. It is because you did not know of these dishonourable acts that you sent your troops to my state. After careful introspection, I believe I have committed no offence. Lord of Wei, I beg you to join me in bringing these disgraceful traitors to justice and to not hurt our neighbourly friendship. My humble state will be immensely grateful!

After reading the letter, Duke Huan of Wei was greatly astonished and said: 'It was Younger Brother Duan who was dishonourable and brought on his own demise. By deploying my troops for the sake of Hua, I have actually aided a renegade.'

He then immediately sent an envoy to withdraw the troops back to his state of Wei. Before the envoy arrived, the troops of Hua had already attacked and taken the city of Linyan while it was unprepared. Greatly angered at this, Duke Zhuang ordered Grand Master Gao Qumi 高渠彌 to lead two hundred chariots to battle for Linyan. By then, the troops of Wei had already withdrawn and Ducal Grandson Hua was left completely isolated, so he abandoned the city of Linyan and fled back to Wei. Ducal Son Lü took advantage of this victory to chase the enemy and went straight to the outskirts of the Wei capital. Duke Huan of Wei then held a large assembly with his ministers and asked which tactic to adopt in defense. Ducal Son Zhouxu 公子州吁 came forward and said: 'When waters come, we block them with soil. When troops arrive, we counter them. What is there to hesitate about?'

Grand Master Shi Que 石碣 made his address: 'No, we must not fight! The troops of Zheng are only here because we helped Hua in his treason. As we have received a letter from the Lord of Zheng, it is best to answer it with a letter presenting our apologies for what has happened. This way, we can have the Zheng troops withdraw without taxing our soldiers.'

'Indeed,' replied the Lord of Wei, 'it is as you say.' He immediately ordered Shi Que to prepare a letter and send it to the Lord of Zheng. The letter said:

‘I, Wan 完, in turn salute you, esteemed and revered Lord of Zheng and High Minister. I wrongly listened to the words of Ducal Grandson Hua who claimed that you, esteemed Lord, killed your brother, imprisoned your mother, and left your nephew no place to shelter himself. That is why I deployed my troops. But, as I have read your letter, I now know about the treason of the Grand Younger Brother of Jing, and my regrets are beyond words. On that very day, I immediately withdrew my troops from Linyan, and, if I may abide by your scrutiny, I shall have Hua bound up and delivered to you in the hope of restoring our good relations. Revered Lord of Zheng, my only wish is for you to consider!’

After reading the letter, Duke Zhuang said: ‘Now that Wei has admitted to its wrong, what else need I ask for?’

We return to Lady Jiang, Mother of the State. When she heard that Duke Zhuang had raised troops to attack the state of Wei, she feared that Ducal Grandson Hua might be killed and that the lineage of the Grand Younger Brother might be ended, so she went to Duke Zhuang and plaintively begged him: ‘In the name of our former lord, the late Duke Wu, please spare Hua’s life!’

For fear of hurting his mother’s feelings and also reckoning that, as Ducal Grandson Hua was now isolated and helpless and no longer posed any threat, Duke Zhuang replied to the Lord of Wei with a letter which simply said:

‘As per your guidance, I am pulling my troops back and hope that our states are now back on good terms. As for Hua, although he has committed a crime, he is my renegade brother’s only child, and so I beg you to let him remain in your honourable land so that he may carry on the lineage of his father Duan.’

In the meantime, Duke Zhuang completely withdrew the troops led by Gao Qumi. As for Ducal Grandson Hua, he eventually died of old age in Wei, but that is a story for another time.

We return to King Ping 平王. Duke Zhuang had not been in office at the Royal Court for a long time, during which Duke Jifu of Guo 虢公忌父 happened to come to court and finding each other like-minded, the King said to the Duke of Guo: ‘From father to son, the Lords of Zheng have had authority for years, yet, it has now been a long time since the Lord of Zheng last attended to his duties. So, I wish to have you administer the court and take charge for the nonce; I ask you to please not decline this offer.’

The Duke of Guo touched his head to the floor and said: ‘If the Lord of Zheng hasn’t come to court, it must surely be that some mishap has occurred in his state.

If I take his place, not only will he bear a grudge against me, but his resentment will even reach to Your Majesty. That is why I dare not receive this order!

Repeatedly apologizing, the Duke declined the offer and returned to his state. As it turned out, while Duke Zhuang had physically remained in his state, he had left some of his men in the royal capital to inquire about the affairs of the court and report the slightest activity to him. Now that the King had shown his intent to assign the administering of the court to the Duke of Guo, how could Duke Zhuang not learn about this? That same day, he immediately went to the Zhou court by carriage. After completing the formalities of an audience with the King, he made his address: 'With the blessing of Your Majesty, my father and I have consecutively administered this court. I truly have no abilities and am unworthy of my current post, so I now wish to bow out, relinquish my title of High Minister and retire back to my state, where I shall continue to observe my proper duties as Your Majesty's subject.'

King Ping said: 'As you hadn't attended your duties for a long time, my heart was filled with anxiety. But now that you have come here, I feel relieved and delighted, just like a fish back in water. Why do you say such things?'

Duke Zhuang made another address: 'In my state, there was a rebellion led by my renegade brother and so I neglected my duties at court for many days. But as things there are mostly settled I have hurried to the court by night. However, from what I've heard on the road, word has it that you intend to entrust the Duke of Guo with administering the court. My abilities can never rival his, so how would I dare hold a post without fulfilling its duties and give offense to my king?'

When King Ping heard Duke Zhuang mention the Duke of Guo, his heart felt shame, his face reddened, and he was only able to say: 'I hadn't seen you for a long time and I knew that there was an incident in your state. That is why I wanted the Duke of Guo to act on your behalf temporarily for a few days while awaiting your arrival. But he has repeatedly refused and I have already let him return to his state. What is there for you to worry about?' Duke Zhuang made yet another address: 'The political matters at court are the affairs of the King, not that of any minister such as myself, so the right to employ ministers lies in your hands. As the Duke of Guo is able and equal to assisting in the administering of the court, it is appropriate that I renounce my position. Otherwise the ministers will see me as greedy for power and oblivious of the proper time to step down. I hope Your Majesty will bear this in mind.'

King Ping said: ‘You and your father have contributed great merit to this kingdom, which is why both of you have been entrusted with crucial court matters. And for over forty years, the king and his ministers have always been on good terms, but now that you doubt my heart, I have no way of making myself clear to you! If you insist on not trusting me, I shall order Crown Prince Hu 太子狐 sent to Zheng as a hostage. What about that?’

Duke Zhuang bowed twice and refused, saying: ‘To attend to or to relinquish court matters is the responsibility of a minister. Under what principle could the Son of Heaven entrust me with a hostage? I fear everyone would say that I am coercing you; I would deserve ten thousand deaths!’

King Ping said: ‘Not at all. As you have used proper methods to rule your state, I want the Crown Prince to observe the customs of Zheng, and it could also dispel this current suspicion. If you keep declining this, you will be placing the blame on me.’

Yet, not daring to accept the order, Duke Zhuang refused again and again. The Hundred Ministers then made their address: ‘We have now deliberated on this. If His Majesty does not send a hostage, the suspicions of the Lord of Zheng will not dissipate. Yet, if only His Majesty sends a hostage, this will make the Lord of Zheng an unrighteous subject. But if both His Majesty and the Lord of Zheng exchange hostages, unpleasant suspicions from both sides will dissolve and both the benefice of His Majesty and the righteousness of the High Minister can be achieved.’

‘Indeed,’ said King Ping, ‘this is the best way!’

Therefore, Duke Zhuang sent someone for Feudal Heir Hu 世子忽, who then stayed as hostage in Zhou, and the Duke expressed his gratitude to the King. Likewise, Crown Prince Hu was sent as hostage to Zheng. A court scribe later criticized this incident of hostage exchange, saying that it amounted to the utter loss of all proprieties between a king and his minister. His poem said:

The hearts of trusted brothers formerly knew no selfishness,  
How derisive for them to so suspect each other.  
Like streets merchants, they traded hostages,  
And from then on, royal precepts deteriorated.

After the hostages were exchanged, the Lord of Zheng remained in Zhou to assist the King in administering the court, and there were no further incidents.

After having reigned for fifty-one years, King Ping passed away. The Lord of Zheng, acting as regent of the court along with Duke Heijian of Zhou 周公黑肩, ordered Feudal Heir Hu to return to Zheng, and he also escorted Crown Prince Hu back to Zhou, where he was to ascend to the throne. Yet, chagrined by his father's death and grief-stricken over the fact that he had been unable to stand by his father in his final days or even attend his burial, the prince passed away soon after arriving in the capital. His son, Lin 林, ascended to the throne and became King Huan 桓王. All the feudal lords came to attend Prince Hu's funeral as well as to pay their respects to the new Son of Heaven. It was the Duke of Guo who arrived first; he acted in perfect observance of the proprieties and everyone revered him.

Pained that his father had died because of being held hostage in Zheng, and seeing that the Lord of Zheng had alone been administering the court for a long time, King Huan felt suspicious and uneasy. He consulted with Duke Heijian of Zhou in private: 'As the Lord of Zheng once held the former Crown Prince hostage in his state, he surely must have little esteem for me. I fear there will be disharmony between us. Now, the Duke of Guo shows true deference in his handling of affairs and I wish to have him administer the court. What do you think?'

Duke Heijian of Zhou made his address: 'The Lord of Zheng is merciless and ungrateful, and has shown no loyalty or obedience as a subject. Yet, from the time Zhou moved east to this city of Luo, the accomplishments of Jin and Zheng for the Royal Court have been great. This is the first year of your reign, and if you suddenly take administrative power away from Zheng and hand it to someone else, the Lord of Zheng will become angered and resentful, and he will turn unruly. This must not fail to be considered.'

'Yet,' replied King Huan, 'I cannot sit idly by and be controlled by him. I have made up my mind.'

The next day, at the morning court audience, the King told the Lord of Zheng: 'As you were the High Minister of our former king, I dare not ask you to stay in a post that's beneath you and to serve with the other officers of my reign. You may be at your ease from here on.'

Duke Zhuang replied to the King: 'I should have resigned long ago and I now beg to be excused.' He then left the court, filled with indignation. He told people: 'That fickle youth is not worthy of my help.'

On the same day, he rode back to his state in a carriage. Feudal Heir Hu led a crowd of officers outside the city ramparts to greet his father and asked him the reason for his return. When Duke Zhuang explained to his people that King Huan would no longer employ him at court, they all decried the injustice. Grand Master Gao Qumi came forward and said: 'For two generations, our lords have made tremendous contributions to Zhou. Furthermore, never was the former Crown Prince treated discourteously while he stayed here as hostage. And now, the King has discarded our lord to employ instead the Duke of Guo. How unjust! Why not raise our troops, take the Zhou capital, depose this king, and instate in his place a worthy successor? Of all the feudal lords under Heaven, who does not fear Zheng? Sire, such an effort by you, the leading nobleman, can surely be accomplished!'

'No,' said Ying Kaoshu 穎考叔, 'we must not do this! The ethics of a subject toward his king are comparable to those of a son toward his mother. Sire, if you cannot bear hating your mother, how can you bear hating your king? Please endure this for a year or so, and then when you go to Zhou and pay your respects to the King, he will surely be remorseful. Sire, do not let a morning's anger tarnish the loyalty of our former lord, who died honourably for his king.'

It was then Grand Master Zhai Zu 祭足 who spoke: 'In my humble opinion, we should combine the advice of both ministers. Sire, my suggestion is to lead troops straight to the border of Zhou, claim that we had a poor harvest this year, and take all the crops between Luo and Wen. If the King sends an envoy to reproach us, then we will have an excuse for launching an attack. And if, on the other hand, there are no words from the King, then, my Lord, it will still not be too late for you to go to court and pay your respects.'

Duke Zhuang approved of the Grand Master's plan and ordered him to lead a battalion and take action as he saw fit.

Zhai Zu marched with his troops to the border of Luo and Wen, where he declared: 'This year, our state had a poor harvest and is short of food, so I hereby ask the commissioner of the city of Wen for a thousand *zhong* of millet.'

But the Grand Master of Wen refused on grounds that he had received no such order from the King. Zhai Zu said: 'Now the wheat and barley here have just ripened and can readily provide food. I can take the grain myself. There is no need to ask!'

He then ordered his soldiers to take sickles with them into the fields, divide into groups, reap all the crop, and return to Zheng with their chariots fully loaded with



grain. Zhai Zu himself led a squadron of elite men and patrolled back and forth in support. As the city commissioner knew the Zheng troops were strong, he did not dare engage them in battle. Zhai Zu rested his soldiers at the border for three some months and then marched to the region of Chengzhou. This was in autumn, in the middle of the seventh lunar month, and when the Grand Master saw that the early rice in the fields was already ripe, he told his men to disguise themselves as merchants and hide the chariots in villages nearby. Then, at midnight, the troops exerted themselves to reap all the crop at once, and by the time drums sounded the break of dawn, all the grain had been carried away with not a single grain of rice left in the fields surrounding Chengzhou. When the garrison commander learnt about this and gathered his men from out of the citadel, the Zheng troops were already long gone.

Both cities sent letters to the capital of Luo and presented to the King reports on Zheng troops harvesting and stealing the grain crop. The King was greatly angered and just when he was about to raise troops and have Zheng answer for its crime, Duke Hejian of Zhou made his address: ‘Your Majesty, even though Zhai Zu of Zheng has stolen our grain, it is a trifling matter that occurred at the border, which the Lord of Zheng might not have been informed of. Sire, nothing would be more regrettable than having kinship ties with Zheng severed because of a moment of slight anger. Besides, if the Lord of Zheng has a burden on his conscience, then he is bound to come here on his own to apologize and restore good relations with us.’

King Huan approved the Duke’s address, but he also ordered the reinforcement of the garrisons along the Zhou boundary and to allow no external troops across the border. And the affair of the raided crops of rice and wheat was no longer bothered about.

When the Lord of Zheng found that the King had absolutely no intention to blame him, his conscience, as expected, became burdened and he then decided to go to the Royal Court and pay his respects. He was about to depart when someone suddenly announced: ‘An envoy from the state of Qi has arrived.’

Duke Zhuang received the envoy, who extended a request from Duke Xi of Qi 齊僖公 to meet at the Stone Gate embankment. As it happens, Duke Zhuang had wanted to forge ties with Qi and so he went to the meeting at the Stone Gate. There, the two rulers met, sipped sacrificial blood, and pledged alliance, vowing

to be as brothers and always help each other in the hour of need. Duke Xi then asked: 'Is Feudal Heir Hu married, yet?'

'No, he isn't,' replied the Lord of Zheng.

Duke Xi then said: 'My beloved daughter, although not yet of marriageable age, is very astute and talented. If you do not consider her unworthy, I would like her to become the heir's bride-to-be.'

Duke Zhuang politely expressed his thanks, and on the day he returned to his state, he told Feudal Heir Hu about the marriage proposal. At that, Hu replied: 'A wife is meant to match with her husband, and that is why a wife is also called a matching half. Now, Zheng is small, while Qi is large, and large and small do not match, which is why, father, I do not dare marry into a family above ours.'

Duke Zhuang said: 'But it is the Lord of Qi who wishes this marriage, not us. And if you become his son-in-law, we can rely on Qi at all times. My son, why do you decline this?'

Hu replied: 'The true man aspires to stand on his own. How can he look to marriage for support?'

Duke Zhuang was pleased at his son's resolve, so he did not press him. Later, an envoy from Qi arrived, who, learning that the Feudal Heir of Zheng did not wish for the marriage, returned to his state and reported this to Duke Xi, who said with admiration: 'The Feudal Heir of Zheng is a true example of modesty! My daughter is still very young, so I shall wait and discuss this again with him on another day.'

People of later times derided in a poem those who wed for wealth and prestige as being inferior to Hu of Zheng in rightly declining that marriage offer. The poem went:

In any marriage, the two families should be of comparable social rank,  
High and low, there is much to ponder.  
How laughable are sons of commoners who yearn to marry above themselves,  
And who gather all their wealth to buy one mere bridal veil.

One day, as Duke Zhuang of Zheng was discussing with his ministers about paying his respects to the Zhou court, suddenly news came of the death of Duke Huan of Wei. Duke Zhuang asked the envoy from Wei for details and learnt that the Wei ruler had been murdered by Ducal Son Zhouxu. Duke Zhuang stomped the floor and lamented: 'Our state will soon be attacked!'

His ministers asked: 'Sire, why do you reckon so?'

‘Zhouxu,’ replied Duke Zhuang, ‘is known for his belligerence. Now that he has rebelled and usurped power in his state, without a doubt, he will start rattling sabres to show his might. And as Zheng and Wei have been at odds for some time, he will surely begin by testing his troops on Zheng. We must thus prepare for battle.’

And to speak now of how Zhouxu of Wei assassinated his ruler. We begin with the wife of Duke Zhuang of Wei. The younger sister of Dechen 得臣, the Prince of Qi, she was known as Zhuang Jiang 莊姜, a lady of beauty but with no children. There was a second wife, from the state of Chen, named Li Gui 厲嬀 who was also without issue. However, her younger sister, named Dai Gui 戴嬀, also wedded the Duke, and bore him two sons, named Wan 完 and Jin 晉. Zhuang Jiang was not of a jealous nature: not only did she raise Wan as though he were her own, but she also presented another court lady to the Duke of Wei, who was favoured by the Duke and bore him a son, Zhouxu. He was of a violent and unruly disposition, liked the arts of combat and enjoyed talking about warfare. The Duke of Wei was blindly fond of Zhouxu and indulged him in everything. Grand Master Shi Que once admonished the Duke on this: ‘I have heard that to love a son one has to teach him righteousness and not lead him into vice. Overindulgence brings about arrogance, and arrogance gives rise to disorder. Sire, if your intent is to have Zhouxu inherit the lordship, then make him feudal heir now. And if that is not your intent, then you should restrain him a little, so as to avoid the calamities of arrogance, luxury, license, and dissipation.’ But the Duke of Wei did not listen.

Shi Que had a son, named Shi Hou 石厚, who befriended Zhouxu and often rode chariots with him to go hunting or harass villagers. Shi Que gave his son fifty lashes as punishment, locked him in an empty residence and would not allow him to leave it. But Shi Hou climbed over the residence’s wall and fled to Zhouxu’s residence, where he had all his meals with the Ducal Son and simply never returned home. There was nothing Shi Que could do about it. Later, when the Duke of Wei passed away Ducal Son Wan inherited the lordship and became Duke Huan. But Duke Huan was weak-spirited, and knowing that he could accomplish nothing, Shi Que resigned from office and remained at home, no longer attending to affairs of the state on grounds of old age. Zhouxu therefore grew even more unscrupulous and spent his days and nights conniving with Shi Hou to usurp power. At that time, news that King Ping had passed away arrived, and as Lin, or

King Huan, had recently ascended the throne, Duke Huan of Wei decided to visit Zhou to present his condolences for the late king and to congratulate the new king.

Shi Hou told Zhouxu: 'At last, our great plans will come to fruition! Tomorrow, when the lord sets out for Zhou, you can hold a farewell banquet in his honour at the West Gate and have five hundred armoured soldiers hide outside the gate in advance. After a few rounds of wine, reach for the dagger inside your sleeve and stab him with it. And if any of his men refuse to submit to you, have them beheaded on the spot. Then, the lordship will be at your fingertips.'

Zhouxu was delighted. He first gave Shi Hou the order to lead five hundred warriors to lie in ambush outside the West Gate, then drove a carriage himself to escort Duke Huan to the West Gate quarters, where a banquet had been prepared. He bowed and offered wine to his brother: 'My Lord and brother, for this long journey ahead, I bid you farewell with this simple meal and a few cups of wine.'

Duke Huan said: 'Dear brother, you shouldn't have troubled yourself. I am only leaving for a month or so, but I must trouble you to carefully administer the state during my absence.'

'Yes, my Lord and brother,' replied Zhouxu, 'please rest assured.'

After half a round of wine, Zhouxu stood up, filled a gold cup with wine and offered it to Duke Huan. The Duke drank it down and, to return the courtesy, he also filled a cup and offered it to Zhouxu. Zhouxu held out his hands to receive the cup, but feigned clumsiness and dropped it to the floor. He then hastily picked it up and went to clean up himself. Unaware of the trickery, Duke Huan had another cup filled up to offer it again to Zhouxu, who, taking advantage of this opportunity, suddenly leaped behind Duke Huan, pulled out a dagger and stabbed him in the back. The blade pierced through his chest and the Duke died instantly from this fatal wound. This occurred on the *wushen* day of the third lunar month in the spring of the first year of King Huan's reign [719 BCE]. The ministers accompanying Duke Huan knew that Zhouxu's martial powers exceeded all theirs, and seeing that Shi Hou had five hundred armoured soldiers surrounding the quarters, they reckoned their force unequal to Zhouxu and Shi Hou, and therefore could do little but surrender. The corpse of the defunct lord was carried in an empty chariot, placed in a coffin and buried; it was claimed that the lord had died from sudden illness. Zhouxu then assumed the lordship in his place and made Shi Hou Senior Grand Master. As for Duke Huan's younger brother, Jin, he fled to the state of Xing. A court scribe lamented in a poem

how the overindulgence of the late Duke Zhuang of Wei had caused Zhouxu's rebellion. The poem said:

In the education of sons, one must teach them righteousness,  
For raising them into arrogance and dissipation always brings disaster.  
Thin as were his ethics when Duke Zhuang of Zheng defeated his brother,  
Nothing compares to the tragedy of Duke Huan's helpless death.

Three days after Zhouxu seized the throne, he heard much commotion outside, all talking of his brother's assassination. At that, he summoned Senior Grand Master Shi Hou to consult with, and asked: 'I wish to show the might of our troops vis-à-vis neighbouring states so as to subdue my people. Which state do you reckon we should attack?'

Shi Hou made his address: 'We have no enmity with any of the neighbouring states, except for Zheng. Years ago, to quell a rebellion by Ducal Grandson Hua, the troops of Zheng came to strike at us. At the time, our former lord pled guilty and begged for forgiveness, which truly shamed our state. Sire, if you are to launch an attack, it must be on none other than Zheng.'

Zhouxu said: 'Qi and Zheng have pledged alliance at Stone Gate and they are united as one power. If we attack Zheng, then Qi will come to its aid. How can the army of Wei rival the armies of those two states?'

Shi Hou made another address: 'At present, among the states which do not share our ancestral line, the state of the Duke of Song surpasses with its large size. And among those who do share our ancestral line, the state of our Uncle of Lu supersedes in being respected. Sire, if we are to strike Zheng, then we must send envoys to Song and Lu to request the assistance of their troops, and at the same time we can ask the armies of Chen and Cai to join us. With the armies of five states striking together, we would surely win!'

Zhouxu said: 'Chen and Cai are small and have always shown obeisance to the King of Zhou. They surely know of the recent friction between Zheng and Zhou and will undoubtedly come if we call upon them to strike at Zheng. But Song and Lu, on the other hand, are large states; how can we force them to join us?'

Shi Hou made yet another address: 'My Lord, you only know one side of the story and not the other. Years ago, Duke Mu of Song 宋穆公 inherited the lordship from his elder brother, Duke Xuan 宣公. Then, when Duke Mu was about to die, he decided to reciprocate the virtues of his late brother and therefore bypassed

his own son, Ping 馮, to instate in his place his brother's son, Yuyi 與夷. Resentful of his father and envious of Yuyi, Ping fled to Zheng. The Lord of Zheng received him and has since long wished to raise troops and attack Song so as to help him overthrow Yuyi. So, to collude with us and strike at Zheng must be exactly what Yuyi wishes for. As for the state of Lu, it is fully controlled by Ducal Son Hui 公子翬, who wields command over the state's troops and completely disregards the ruler of Lu. If we bribe him generously, the troops of Lu will without doubt go into action.'

Zhouxu was greatly pleased. On the same day, he immediately appointed three envoys to go to Lu, Chen, and Cai, only unsure of whom to appoint to go to Song. Shi Hou recommended a man named Ning Yi 寧翊, who was from the region of Zhongmou, saying: 'This man has a silver tongue and can be entrusted with this mission.'

Zhouxu followed the advice and appointed Ning Yi to go and request the assistance of the troops of Song. Duke Shang of Song 宋殤公 asked Ning Yi: 'What is the reason for your attack on Zheng?'

Ning Yi answered: 'The Lord of Zheng is without virtue: he killed his own brother and imprisoned his own mother. And when Ducal Grandson Hua sought refuge in my state, Zheng would not allow it and raised troops to strike at us. My former lord feared the power of Zheng, so he presented his apologies in spite of the indignity. Today, my ruler wishes to avenge the disgrace inflicted upon my former lord, and that is why he seeks the assistance of your great state to strike at our common enemy.'

Duke Shang said: 'But I have never been at odds with Zheng. Is it not a bit much to say that it is our common enemy?'

At that, Ning Yi said: 'Please dismiss your attendants and I will tell you all.'

Duke Shang motioned his palace attendants to leave, leaned forward on his seat, and asked: 'What do you wish to tell me?'

Ning Yi began by asking: 'Whom did you inherit the lordship from?'

Duke Shang answered: 'It was passed on to me by my late uncle, Duke Mu.'

'Yet,' said Ning Yi, 'it is a long-standing convention that when rulers pass away, their sons inherit the throne. Now, by abstaining from instating his own son in favour of you, Duke Mu no doubt embraced the virtue of the ancient Emperors Yao and Shun, but Ducal Son Ping is now resentful for losing the lordship. Though he dwells in Zheng, his heart hasn't forgotten his native state of Song for a moment. And as he is hosted by the Lord of Zheng, the bond between them is strong. Once

the Lord of Zheng raises his troops in support of Ping, and if the people of Song do not turn their backs on him in remembrance of the kindness of Duke Mu, then, with a rebellion from within and attacks from without, your rule will be in peril! The plan I propose today in the name of striking at Zheng is in fact for you to eradicate a deeply imbedded peril. Lord of Song, if you lead the attack, my state will deploy all its troops, along with the three armies of Lu, Chen, and Cai, and if we all work together, it will not be long before Zheng crumbles!’

As Duke Shang of Song had indeed been fearful of Ducal Son Ping, these words completely accorded with his intentions and he agreed to raise troops. Minister of War Kong Fu Jia 孔父嘉, a descendant of King Tang of the Shang dynasty 殷湯王, was honest and unselfish. When he learnt that Duke Shang had paid heed to the man of Wei and was to raise troops, he admonished him thus: ‘Do not listen to this envoy from Wei! If you deem the Lord of Zheng guilty for killing his brother and imprisoning his mother, then how can Zhouxu who assassinated his brother and usurped power in his state be considered innocent? Sire, please reconsider.’

But as Duke Shang had already given Ning Yi his promise, he paid no heed to Kong Fu Jia’s admonition and set a date for raising his troops.

Ducal Son Hui of Lu accepted the profuse bribes from Wei and, without letting Duke Yin 隱公 have a say, he raised a massive army and joined with the troops of Wei. Needless to say, the armies of Chen and Cai arrived on schedule. For his noble rank, the Duke of Song was nominated as leader of the allied troops. Shi Hou led the front battalion and Zhouxu led the troops that followed, carrying abundant provisions which they generously distributed to the soldiers of the four other armies. Combined, there were a total of one thousand and three hundred chariots of the five states, who surrounded the East Gate of Zheng so tightly that not even a drop water could trickle through.

When Duke Zhuang of Zheng asked his crowd of ministers for a strategy, some advocated fighting while others were for making peace, and there was no sign of consensus among them. At that, Duke Zhuang laughed and said: ‘My ministers, it seems that none of you have any sound tactics to offer. Now, Zhouxu has just usurped the lordship of Wei and has not won support from his people. So under the pretext of some old animosity with us, he has borrowed the armies of four states to show his might to suppress his own people. Ducal Son Hui of Lu is only acting out of greed for the bribes from Wei, and this is not his ruler’s doing; while

Chen and Cai have no enmity with us, so none of those troops feel any necessity to fight against us. Only Song is truly willing to assist Wei in this attack because it resents that Ducal Son Ping has found asylum here. Now, if I have Ping leave this capital to stay in Changge, the troops of Song will naturally follow him there. I will also have Zifeng 子封 lead five hundred men out to the East Gate, where he will provoke the troops of Wei into battle, feign defeat, and flee back inside. Once Zhouxu wins a nominal victory, his goal will be fulfilled, and with things as precarious as they are in his state, how can he keep his troops here for long? So he will most certainly hurry back to his state. In fact, I hear that Grand Master Shi Que of Wei has a strong sense of loyalty and so I reckon that a rebellion will arise in Wei before long. When Zhouxu barely has enough time to fend for himself, how can he harm us?’

Duke Zhuang therefore had Grand Master Xia Shuying 瑕叔盈 lead a battalion to escort Ducal Son Ping away to Changge and then sent a messenger to the Song army, saying: ‘To escape death, Ducal Son Ping came to my humble state and I could not bear to assist in punishing him, but I have now sent him to await his sentence in Changge. Lord of Song, he is now at your disposal.’

Just as Duke Zhuang had foreseen, Duke Shang of Song moved his troops to surround Changge. Seeing that the troops of Song were leaving, the soldiers of Cai, Chen, and Lu all were also inclined to withdraw from the battlefield. Just then, it was reported that Ducal Son Lü had come out of the East Gate on his own to challenge Wei into battle, so the lords of the three states climbed the ramparts of their camps and watched things unfold from afar.

We now return to Shi Hou, who led his troops to cross swords with Ducal Son Lü. After barely a few rounds, Ducal Son Lü suddenly fled, dragging his halberd behind him. Shi Hou chased him to the East Gate, but the Ducal Son had already been let through the gate and disappeared back inside. At that, Shi Hou had all the rice in the fields by the East Gate harvested and distributed to the troops for their efforts, and gave the order to withdraw. Zhouxu asked: ‘Why are we pulling out so soon, when there is yet no victory?’

Shi Hou dismissed the attendants and explained his reasons for the withdrawal, at which Zhouxu was very pleased. What had Shi Hou told him? We will know in the next chapter.