

# *The “King”: The Identity Construction of Duke of Zhou in Jinteng in the Pre-imperial Period*

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**Abstract:** The *Jinteng* (金縢) is a famous chapter in the *Shangshu*. In addition to the *Shangshu*, the bamboo slips in the collection of Qinghua University also contain a text about Zhou Wu Wang You Ji Sou Zi Yi Dai Xian Wang Zhi Zhi, and the overall plot is similar to the *Shangshu Jinteng*. This paper pays particular attention to the depictions of rituals in the two versions of the *Jinteng* of the pre-imperial period. With the help of the principle of sympathetic magic proposed by Frazer, it is concluded from the analysis of the ritual depictions and specific texts in the *Jinteng* that the identity of Zhou Gong may be constructed as an obscure “King”. However clarifying the changes in the construction of the identity of the Duke of Zhou, it is also possible to understand and expand the ideologies of different political systems behind the texts.

**Keywords:** Duke of Zhou, *Jinteng*, identity construction.

## 1. Introduction

In *Jinteng*, King Wu, who destroyed the Shang Dynasty, becomes gravely ill. In a selfless prayer to the three monarchs, the Duke of Zhou sought King Wu's well-being. Following the offering, the Duke of Zhou sealed the incident's record in a metal-bound coffer. Rumors caused the Duke of Zhou to depart to the East once King Cheng came to power. A terrible tragedy later befell the Zhou kingdom, after King Cheng unlocked the metal-bound coffer, he realized Zhou Gong's loyalty. King Cheng went to the countryside to welcome the Duke of Zhou, so the harvest was plentiful. In China, studies on the *Jinteng* mainly focus on the exegetical problems of the text itself, and most scholars have adopted a research method based on the Chinese Confucian tradition for the image of the Duke of Zhou, while only a small number of scholars have adopted the Western method of literary criticism and comparative vision. Based on a close reading of the texts of the two versions of the *Jinteng*, this paper aims to draw on the principle of sympathetic magic proposed by Frazer to comprehend the construction of the identity of the Duke of Zhou as a “King” in the pre-imperial period, as reflected in the versions of the *Shangshu* and the Qinghua Manuscripts.

## 2. “Jinteng” in the Pre-imperial Period

This paper uses the text of two versions of *Jinteng* to explore the identity construction of the Duke of Zhou in the pre-imperial period. It is divided into three main parts. The first focuses on the differences between *Jinteng* in the Qinghua Manuscripts and *Shangshu*. In the second part, comparing the two

texts, it is possible to realize that both the *Shangshu* version and the Qinghua Manuscripts version are composite texts in early China, and the re-interpretation of the story of the Duke of Zhou in different historical contexts is in response to different needs. In the third part, the essay focuses on a detail shared by all two versions: the Duke of Zhou “built three raised platforms.”(三坛同壇) This behavior can be used to expose the construction of the Duke of Zhou’s identity as “King” in pre-imperial texts through the “Homoeopathic Magic” of Frazer’s sympathetic magic theory.

### 2.1. Comparison of *Jinteng* in Qinghua Manuscripts and in the *Shangshu*

In the bamboo slips in the Qinghua University collection, there is a text named *Zhou Wu Wang You Ji Sou Zi Yi Dai Xian Wang Zhi Zhi* [1], which is similar to the content of the *Shangshu*. Compared to the received version, the Qinghua manuscript *Jinteng* shows the following differences:

- The content of the prayer is different, and it is not mentioned that “Yi Dan Dai Mou Zhi Shen(以旦代某之身)”.
- There are different records of when King Wu of Zhou conquered the Shang Dynasty.
- It contains a description of the progression of King Wu of Zhou’s illness in the received version.
- The description of “Zhougong ju dong”(周公居東) is different in two versions.
- It has a clear chronological narrative, such as “this year (是歲也)”.
- The divination is not mentioned.

### 2.2. Composite Texts: the Qinghua Manuscripts and the *Shangshu*

To begin with, it must be clarified whether the two texts are the same. However, scholars have many different opinions on the writing time of the two texts and could not reach a consensus. In the Qinghua Manuscripts, the bamboo slips belong to the middle to period of the Warring States, late 4th century B.C.E., according to tests carried out by the Laboratory at Peking University. Nevertheless, it is uncertain whether the text was written at the same time, as it is possible that the text was copied. In the *Shangshu* version, there is a wide divergence of opinions at the time of writing. For example, Wang Guowei believed that *Jinteng* was a work from the early Zhou Dynasty [2], and Chen Mengjia also holds a similar view. Yet, some scholars, such as Gu Jiegang, believe that *Shangshu* was written during the Eastern Zhou Dynasty [3]. Moreover, because of the long interval, they are not of much value to the documenting in the eleventh century B.C.E., of the Western Zhou.

The discussion of the writing time led to an exploration of the relationship between the two versions. Nearly all studies contend there is a one-way linear relationship between the two versions and consider one version to be an earlier version and the other to be a later copy. In addition, Li Xueqin believes that the two versions come from two transmission systems [4], while Li Rui argues that the two versions have the same source but different transmission systems [5]. However, these views share a common belief that *Jinteng* has an original text and that the text is a linear development from one to the other.

This presumption of “Urtext” is problematic, because it cannot explain why *Shangshu Jinteng* has more descriptions of divination and words of prayer. What is more, it also fails to explain why there is a significant difference in the focus between the two texts. In the *Shangshu*, *Jinteng* clearly mentioned the self-sacrifice of the Duke of Zhou, and on the following day the king recuperated. However, in the narrative of the Qinghua Manuscripts, It is not an individual's life or death that matters most, but the kingdom's destiny [6]. It can be seen that the two *Jinteng* are two parallel texts. They have different historical contexts and meanings. Therefore, the relationship between them is not simply a copy of the text, but a reproduction of the text.

It should be realized that there may not exist a single unified *Jinteng*. That is to say, in the pre-imperial period, based on the reassembling of materials, there may exist many different, independent parallel texts about *Jinteng*. And what we can read now, no matter whether in the *Shangshu* or Qinghua Manuscripts, is only one of the many possibilities of expression, and not the only form. In addition, They are also one of the possibilities for narrating the relationship between the Duke of Zhou, King Cheng, and King Wu of Zhou during the pre-imperial period.

### 2.3. The “King”: The Identity Construction of Duke of Zhou in “Jinteng” in the Pre-imperial Period

First, it needs to be clear that in the Zhou dynasty kingship system, Zhou Gong possessed the legitimacy to inherit the throne. For example, it is evident that it was possible for Zhou Gong to succeed his brother, King Wu, as the Son of Heaven, as recorded in the *Yi Zhoushu Du yi* (《逸周書度邑解》) [7] that declaring the Duke of Zhou to be his heir apparent rather than King Cheng, King Wu stated, “Now that our brothers are succeeding each other, what is the purpose of approaching our milfoil stalks and turtles? I shall now prove this by proving the concubine's son.”

Second, the identity of the Duke of Zhou is somewhat ambiguous due to the fact that titles such as “King (王)” and “ruler (君)” in pre-Qin texts are often confused with the title of the Son of Heaven. For instance, in the *Shangshu Jinteng*, the interpretation of the term “the one man (予一人)” has given rise to many discussions. Some scholars, such as Gu Jiegang, believe that it is the self-proclaimed title of the Duke of Zhou [3], while Cheng Yuanmin believes that it is the self-proclaimed title of the King, not the Duke of Zhou [8].

Furthermore, the ritual of the Duke of Zhou's prayer also implies identity construction. In both versions of the *Jinteng* from the pre-imperial period, there are same depictions of the prayer rituals:

And on that leveled platform, the Duke of Zhou built three raised platforms. The Duke of Zhou stood on an elevated platform he had created on the southern edge of the leveled ground, clutching a gui-tablet and a bi-disk.

In this series of ritual practices, the focus should be on the act that Duke of Zhou “Constructed a single raised platform on the southern side.” That is, there are not just three elevated platforms in the rituals, but four elevated platforms. What is even more important is the behavior of Duke of Zhou, who stood on the fourth elevated platform, which took him out of the ground and into a dimension as high as that of his ancestors. It means that he is entering a sacred ritual space and it also explains the need for another “Scribe (史)” to announce the prayer document to the former kings cause the Duke of Zhou needs to be silent in the ritual space [9].

However, this ritual was not the general ritual of the Zhou dynasty as recorded in the *Liji*. In the Zhou ritual system, both the son of heaven and the feudal lords can set up elevated platforms and yards(壇) for sacrifice, but there is a difference in the number. As recorded in the *Liji Jifa* (禮記祭法) [10]: The monarch constructed seven temples dedicated to his ancestors, each featuring a high altar and a corresponding surround. A feudal ruler constructed five ancestral temples for himself, each with an altar and a space cleared around it.

Zhou Gong “made one elevated platform on the southern side”, this behavior is not in line with either the rituals of the Son of Heaven or the rituals of the feudal lords.

Therefore, it is worthwhile to interpret this ritual act from a comparative perspective. First, in the prayer ritual of the *Jinteng*, the three elevated platforms are set up for the “Three Kings (三王),” that is, the ancestors of the Zhou dynasty: King Tai of Zhou (太王), King Ji of Zhou (王季) and King Wen of Zhou (文王). The act of the Duke of Zhou standing on the elevated platform is essentially an imitation of the ancestors in the same ritual. For the construction of the ritual, it is clear that although

the “Three Kings” do not exist physically, their spiritual incarnations stand on the three elevated platforms.

This imitation is reminiscent of the “Homoeopathic Magic” [11] mentioned by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. Frazer suggested that, on the premise of believing in the existence of sympathetic action at a super-distance between people or objects, people believed that they could achieve what they wanted to do through imitation which is also called “Homoeopathic Magic”. And the act of Duke of Zhou standing on the elevated platform was likely an association with the spiritual incarnation of his ancestors. The ancestors had already passed away, so it was impossible for the real ancestors to stand on the elevated platforms, but a series of people represented by Duke of Zhou still believed that by standing on the elevated platform they would be able to enter the sacred ritual space and communicate with their ancestors by ritual. Thus, this behavior is likely a manifestation of what Frazer calls “Homoeopathic Magic” in the ritual accounts of early Chinese texts.

Meanwhile, standing on the elevated platform is also likely to be a construction of Zhou Gong’s identity as a King. It is worth noting that the man standing at the elevated platform is the Duke of Zhou but not the “two dukes (二公)” mentioned at the beginning of the *Jinteng*, and although the identity of the “two dukes” is not conclusive, it is certain that all three of them were not the King, as the text explicitly mentions that the king at this time was the King Wu of Zhou. There is a lot of speculation about the identity of the “two dukes”, of which Meyer believes that *Zhou Wu Wang you ji* seems to address a broad, nonspecific audience [12]. This essay tends to adopt Meyer’s view that the identity of the two dukes is likely to be known to a specific group of audience, but it is now impossible to recreate the same cultural context. Although the identity of the Duke of Zhou is relatively clear compared to the Two Dukes, it is still unclear why it is the Duke of Zhou who performs the ritual rather than someone else. What qualifies Zhou Gong to interact with ancestors with the status of the Son of Heaven compared to others? Thus, Duke of Zhou may not be a performer of the ritual because he meets certain conditions, but rather the act of performing the ritual gives Duke of Zhou a certain identity. The act of imitating the three kings standing on the elevated platform may be an unconscious construction of the Duke of Zhou’s identity as the king.

However, the Duke of Zhou was not constructed as a king at the beginning, but was rewritten as a result of changing political ideologies concerning the system of inheritance. Gu Jiegang argues that identity constructions about Duke of Zhou’s kingship were prevalent from the mid-to-late Warring States period to the Han Dynasty [3]. Unlike Zheng Xuan’s construction of the benevolence and virtue of Zhou Gong in his annotations of the *Shangshu* in the Han dynasty, the *Jinteng* texts of the pre-imperial period focus more on the emphasis on the legitimacy of the succession of Zhou Gong’s kingship. Thus Magnus Ribbing Gren argued that The Warring States disputes between proponents of hereditary succession and those who claimed that leaders should be chosen based on achievements rather than pedigree may help explain the substantial differences between the *Shangshu* and Qinghua Manuscripts.[6]

### 3. Conclusion

The two versions of the *Jinteng* text in the pre-imperial period are two parallel texts. There is no simple linear relationship between the *Jinteng* in the *Shangshu* and in the Qinghua Manuscripts. There is no original text of *Jinteng*, and the specific content of the text may change according to different needs in different contexts. The two versions of *Jinteng* that we have now are only one of the many possibilities for the *Jinteng* to be narrated. And in both versions, there is a shared depiction of the same ritual, and this description is not in line with the account of the rituals of the Zhou dynasty in the *Liji*. If interpreting it according to Frazer’s principle of homeopathic magic, it suggests that the act of the Duke of Zhou ascending the elevated platform may have been an imitation of an imagined ancestral behavior and thought it could be a way to communicate with our deceased ancestors.

Meanwhile, this act of imitation also constructs the Duke of Zhou's identity as a king. Duke of Zhou may not be a performer of the ritual because he meets certain conditions, but rather the act of performing the ritual gives Duke of Zhou a certain identity. Finally This construction is likely to have been caused by changes in political ideology regarding the system of succession to the throne, that is, the debate in the Warring States between proponents of hereditary succession and those who contended that leaders should be chosen based more on accomplishments than ancestry.

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