

## **The Towers of Yue**

Olivia Roving Milburn  
Seoul National University

### **Abstract**

This paper concerns the architectural history of eastern and southern China, in particular the towers constructed within the borders of the ancient non-Chinese Bai Yue kingdoms found in present-day southern Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong provinces. The skills required to build such structures were first developed by Huaxia people, and hence the presence of these imposing buildings might be seen as a sign of assimilation. In fact however these towers seem to have acquired distinct meanings for the ancient Bai Yue peoples, particularly in marking a strong division between those groups whose ruling houses claimed descent from King Goujian of Yue and those that did not. These towers thus formed an important marker of identity in many ancient independent southern kingdoms.

Keywords: Bai Yue, towers, architectural history, identity, King Goujian of Yue

### **Introduction**

This paper concerns the architectural history of eastern and southern China, in particular the relics of the ancient non-Chinese kingdoms found in present-day southern Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian and

Guangdong provinces. In the late Spring and Autumn period, Warring States era, and early Han dynasty these lands formed the kingdoms of Wu 吳, Yue 越, Minyue 閩越, Donghai 東海 and Nanyue 南越, in addition to the much less well recorded Ximin 西閩, Xiyue 西越 and Ouluo 甌駱.<sup>1</sup> The peoples of these different kingdoms were all non-Chinese, though in the case of Nanyue (and possibly also Wu) the royal house was of Chinese origin.<sup>2</sup> This paper focuses on one single aspect of the architecture of these kingdoms: the construction of towers. The architectural skills to build towers were indubitably first developed by Huaxia people, and hence the decision to construct such buildings might be seen as a sign of assimilation. In fact however these towers seem to have acquired meanings for the ancient non-Chinese people of the south which are distinct from those recorded in early Chinese texts. The first of these towers were constructed in the kingdom of Wu. After Wu was conquered by the kingdom of Yue in 473 BCE the rulers of Yue also built a number of towers for themselves. With the collapse of the kingdom of Yue in the 330s BCE, a wave of refugees was released across south-eastern and southern China, as a result of which the peoples in this region experienced a great florescence in their culture. By the end of the Warring States era and into the Han dynasty individuals claiming descent from the Yue royal family had come to power in a number of southern kingdoms. As a mark of their association with the ruling house of Yue these kings ordered the construction of numerous towers within their territories. This paper will argue that these towers represented an important and highly visible sign of difference between those southern peoples whose monarchs claimed descent from the Yue royal house and those that did not.

- 1 For a detailed discussion of the history and culture of these kingdoms, their relationship with each other, and the problems of discerning ethnic links between them; see Brindley 2003.
- 2 For the history of the ruling house of Nanyue see Sima 1964, 113:2967–2978. For discussions of the ancestry of the royal house of Wu see for example Wei 1990, pp. 14–31; see also Zhang 1982, p. 35. The theory that the Wu royal family may indeed have been ethnically distinct from the people that they ruled is supported in Xie 2000, p. 34.

### The Towers of the Zhou Confederacy

The word *tai* 臺 is conventionally translated either as tower, terrace or platform. From the Spring and Autumn period (771–475 BCE) onwards these buildings were constructed to allow rulers of the states of the Zhou confederacy to survey their domains and strike awe into their enemies. Towers were often built as part of palace complexes, but were also constructed in conjunction with parks or gardens, and as such might fulfil the function of hunting lodges. The construction of towers represents the result of an important change in the perception of what constitutes a prestigious ritual or ceremonial centre which took place at this time. Older palaces and official or religious spaces occupied enormous areas of land; the significant ceremonies enacted within were concealed from view and the emphasis was on enclosure and solemnity adding to the mystique of the ruling elite. The building of towers, on the other hand, represented not just the power and authority of the ruling elite in terms of the spatial area they could command, but also their conquest of a third dimension: the air. Lest this assertion might seem to be exaggerated, it is worth noting that this interpretation is sanctioned by many Han dynasty accounts.<sup>3</sup> However, since the architectural knowledge of the time did not admit the building of multi-story structures, towers had to be constructed around a core of pounded earth. This gave the external appearance of a much taller structure than was actually the case.

Building a tower was originally the prerogative of the Son of Heaven, for within this ritual space he communed with Heaven and received its mandate.<sup>4</sup> However, in the Spring and Autumn period, as the feudal lords increasingly encroached upon the privileges of the Zhou king, they began to construct their own towers. There are numerous references in historical texts to the towers constructed by

3 See Wu 1999, pp. 669–673. For an account of a tower reaching to the floating clouds; see Wang 1986, p. 134; for an account of the Zhongtian tai 中天臺 (Piercing Heaven Tower) constructed in the kingdom of Wei; see Zhao 1989, p. 165 [“Cishe 刺奢”].

4 See Wang 1990, p. 36.

the lords of the Zhou confederacy during this period. The very first non-royal towers are recorded in the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals): in 663 BCE Lord Zhuang of Lu 魯莊公 (r. 693–662 BCE) built himself no less than three towers. The first, known as the Quantai 泉臺 or Kuiquantai 逵泉臺, was built in the spring of that year outside the city of Lang 郎. In the summer, a second tower was built at the city of Xue 薛. In the autumn, the third tower was built at the city of Qin 秦.<sup>5</sup> Lord Zhuang's example in building a tower was enthusiastically followed by a number of his peers. For example according to the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo's Tradition) account for the year 645 BCE Lord Mu of Qin 秦穆公 (r. 659–621 BCE) also built a tower for himself.<sup>6</sup>

Occasionally there are references in ancient texts to the trouble that could be caused by the construction of towers, projects that often involved major changes to the landscape as a suitably grand approach was designed and the pounded-earth core constructed. In 556 BCE, Huang Guofu 皇國父 of the state of Song became Prime Minister of that state and decided to build a tower for his ruler, Lord Ping of Song 宋平公 (r. 575–532 BCE). It was recorded that so many men were drafted in to work on this great project that it interfered with the collection of the harvest.<sup>7</sup> This is an unusual account of the human costs of such a project. The majority of references to these towers in ancient texts describe their social function as places from which the feudal lords of the Zhou confederacy surveyed their domains, set out on hunts, and where they met and feasted with noble companions. Constructing these towers was a matter of considerable prestige, and this was the aspect of the matter that occurred most frequently to those who commissioned the building of towers, and whose views were recorded in ancient texts.

5 See Yang 1981, pp. 248–249 [Zhuang 31].

6 See Yang 1981, p. 358 [Xi 15].

7 See Yang 1981, pp. 1032–1033 [Xiang 17].

## Gusu Tower

Although many feudal lords and rulers in the Spring and Autumn period constructed towers for themselves, a couple of outstanding magnificence were built during this time. The most famous of these was the Gusutai 姑蘇臺 (Gusu Tower) built in the kingdom of Wu. It is not known which monarch was responsible for the construction of the Gusu Tower since both King Helü of Wu 吳王闔閭 (r. 514-496 BCE) and King Fuchai of Wu 吳王夫差 (r. 495-473 BCE) have been credited with ordering that it be built.<sup>8</sup> This was also not the only tower constructed by the kings of Wu; the “Ji Wudi zhuan 記吳地傳” (Record of the Lands of Wu) chapter of the *Yuejue shu* 越絕書 (Lost Histories of Yue) which provides the most extensive surviving description of the landscape and architecture of this ancient kingdom records a further three: two Shetai 射臺 (Archery Towers) and the Santai 三臺 (Triple Tower).<sup>9</sup> Of all the known Wu towers the Gusu Tower was by far the most important, for it was built at Gusu Mountain – a site sacred to the people of Wu – and also periodically functioned as the seat of government of this kingdom.<sup>10</sup> By the Han dynasty a number of tales had accreted around the Gusu Tower, of which perhaps the most significant are those which describe it as not just a physical manifestation of the power and wealth of Wu but also as a monument to a major victory over the kingdom of Yue in 494 BCE. There is an extensive tradition recorded in many ancient texts that the Gusu Tower was constructed with timbers presented as tribute by the defeated king of Yue. According to the “Jiushu 九術” (Nine Skills) chapter of the *Yuejue shu* the construction of Gusu Tower was

8 See for example the entry in the Tang dynasty encyclopaedia which resolves the problems of contradictory statements in ancient texts by saying that King Helü of Wu built the tower and King Fuchai enhanced it; Ouyang 1999, p. 1119.

9 See Yuan and Wu 1985, pp. 8, 15 [“Ji Wudi zhuan”]. Recent excavations in the vicinity of Shihu 石湖 (Stone Lake) south of Suzhou have revealed a Wu kingdom era pounded-earth tower base, but it is not known if this is related to any of the structures recorded in the *Yuejue shu*. See Zhengxie Suzhou shi Huqiu qu weiyuanhui 2000, p. 29.

10 See Yuan and Wu 1985, p. 9 [“Ji Wudi zhuan”].

used by King Goujian of Yue 越王勾踐 (r. 496-465 BCE) as a weapon against his greatest enemy; by giving exceptionally fine timbers to King Fuchai he hoped to tempt him into committing even more deeply to a ruinously expensive and unpopular prestige project:

Then [King Goujian] made his people [cut down] beautiful trees, ornamenting them with white jade discs and inlaying them with gold in the form of dragons and serpents. Afterwards he sent Grandee Zhong to present them to Wu... The king of Wu was very pleased. Shen Xu (Wu Zixu) remonstrated: “This is not right. Your Majesty must not accept this. In the past [King] Jie [of the Xia dynasty] built the Numinous Gate and [King] Zhou [of the Shang dynasty] built Deer Tower. As a result, *yin* and *yang* were not in harmony, and the five grains did not ripen in season.<sup>11</sup> Heaven sent down disasters so that their countries were ruined and they died. If your majesty accepts this, it will cause disaster in the future.” The king of Wu did not listen to him, but accepted [this present] and built the Guxu (Gusu) Tower. For three years they gathered the building materials and then after a further five years it was completed. From this eminence you could see two hundred *li*. Passers-by [wept to see] the dead bodies along the roads.<sup>12</sup>

於是作為策楯， 嬰以白璧， 鏤以黃金， 類龍蛇而行者。  
乃使大夫種獻之於吳... 吳王大悅。申胥諫曰：“不可。王勿受。  
昔桀起靈門， 紂起鹿臺， 陰陽不和， 五穀不時， 天與之災，

11 Liu 1993, p. 44, suggests changing the wording of the *Yuejue shu* at this point from the original: *wu gu bu shi* 五穀不時 (the five grains did not ripen in season) to: *wu gu bu shou, han shu bu shi* 五穀不熟寒暑不時 (the five grains did not ripen, hot and cold weather came out of season). This amendment is suggested based on the related text found in the *Wu Yue chunqiu* 吳越春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue); see Zhou 1997, p. 144 [“Goujian yinmou waizhuan 勾踐陰謀外傳”].

12 Yuan and Wu 1985, p. 83 [“Jiushu”]. Qian 1956, p. 38, suggests an amendment of the original text, so that it reads *dao si xiang ku* 道死巷哭 (the streets [were full of] dead bodies and the lanes [resounded with the sound of] weeping).

邦國空虛，遂以之亡。大王受之，是後必有災。”吳王不聽，遂受之而起姑胥臺。三年聚材，五年乃成。高見二百里。行路之人，道死尸。

The precise motive for building the Gusu Tower is not made clear in any ancient text. Possibly this is because the Gusu Tower was actually built over the course of many years in the reigns of several kings of Wu. The ultimate fate of this tower is also the subject of conflicting legends. The first tradition, derived from the account given in the “Wuyu 吳語” (Stories of Wu) chapter of the *Guoyu* 國語 (Stories of the States), records that in 482 BCE the Yue army attacked Wu, took King Fuchai of Wu’s son the Crown Prince You 吳太子友 prisoner, and burned the Gusu Tower in an act of revenge. If the construction of the Gusu Tower was intended to represent in physical form the humiliating defeat inflicted on the kingdom of Yue a decade earlier, there is nothing intrinsically unlikely in the victorious army on the occasion of their first great incursion into Wu taking the time to go and put this monument to the torch.<sup>13</sup> Though the destruction of the Gusu Tower by fire at the time of the first invasion of Wu by Yue is the older tradition, a second and much more popular story concerning the fate of this building was recorded in the *Wujun zhi* 吳郡志 (Gazetteer for Wu Commandary). In this Song dynasty gazetteer, a quotation is given from a text called the *Jianjie lu* 鑒誠錄 (Account of the Mirror of Admonitions) which states that the Gusu Tower was destroyed for building materials which were then used in a temple dedicated to King Fuchai of Wu:

The *Jianjie lu* says: “The story has been handed down for generations that this temple was built with wood that came from chopping up the Gusu Tower.” In the Tang dynasty the presented

13 See Shanghai shifan daxue guji zhenglizu 1978, p. 604 [“Wuyu”]. The same story is given with some minor variations in the *Wu Yue chunqiu*; see Zhou 1997, p. 87 [“Fuchai neizhuan 夫差內傳”].

scholar Chen Yu (*jinsi* 792) once [wrote a poem entitled] “On the Temple to Fuchai.”<sup>14</sup>

《鑿誠錄》云：“世傳此廟折姑蘇臺木創成。”  
唐陳羽秀才嘗題夫差廟。

The poem by Chen Yu, a native of the city of Suzhou, entitled “Ti Fuchai miao 題夫差廟” (On the Temple to King Fuchai), also sometimes known by the alternative title “Jing Fuchai miao 經夫差廟” (On Passing by the Temple to King Fuchai) survives, and does indeed mention the use of timbers from Gusu Tower in the construction of a temple dedicated to the memory of the last king of Wu:

Gusu Tower was built with timbers over a thousand years old,  
Chopped up to make for [King] Fuchai a temple to house his  
numinous spirit.  
Banners completely cover the desolate dusty earth,  
I do not know for whom the flutes and drums are played.<sup>15</sup>

姑蘇臺上千年木，刻作夫差廟裏神。  
幡蓋寂寥塵土滿，不知簫鼓樂何人？

The present text of the *Jianjie lu* which quotes Chen Yu’s poem contains no other references to the reuse of timbers from the Gusu Tower to build a temple dedicated to King Fuchai. It is striking that in many imperial era traditions concerning the conflict between the ancient kingdoms of Wu and Yue, the portrayal stresses the ongoing links between them and the frequent symmetry of their experiences. The ingrained animosity between them seems not to have been able to overcome this intimate connection. Thus, timbers used in the

14 See Fan 1999, p. 166.

15 See He Guangyuan: *Jianjie lu*, p. 67. For the alternative title to this poem, and a version with slightly different wording; see Li Fang (ed.): *Wenyuan yinghua*, 320:15a.



construction of the Gusu Tower were taken from the forests of Yue and cunningly worked were sent by King Goujian to Wu to delude his greatest enemy. In later legends, having once been used by King Fuchai of Wu in building the Gusu Tower, these timbers were taken down and used in the construction of a temple dedicated to his memory after the troops of Yue had overrun his kingdom.

### King Goujian's Towers

The kings of Yue probably did not build towers until the time of King Goujian. When they finally began to construct towers, the royal family of Yue seem to have been exceptionally enthusiastic builders, and the “Jidi zhuan 記地傳” (Record of the Lands [of Yue]) chapter of the *Yuejue shu* records some seven examples. Furthermore in the wake of the conquest of Wu, King Goujian is said to have moved his seat of government to the site of the Gusu Tower. Given the symbolic importance of this tower within the history of both kingdoms and its overwhelming dominance in any discussion of tower-construction within the non-Chinese kingdoms of the ancient south, it is likely that King Goujian's towers were modeled upon this earlier Wu example. The first recorded Yue towers are the Zhaijietai 齋戒臺 (Ritual Purification Tower) built at Jishan 稷山, the Guaiyoutai 怪游臺 (Investigating Anomalies Tower) at Guishan 龜山, and the Changtutai 昌土臺 (Glorious Earthen Tower) – location unknown – all of which are specifically said to have been constructed by King Goujian of Yue.<sup>16</sup> According to the “Jidi zhuan” the first two were definitely religious buildings, since the former was the site of purification

16 See Yuan and Wu 1985, p. 59 [“Jidi zhuan”]. The location of the first and the last of these towers seems to have been completely lost; the site of the second was used for a Buddhist temple founded in 473, the Baolin si 寶林寺. After the reconstruction of 874, this temple was renamed the Yingtian si 應天寺, the name it used for the rest of the imperial era. The only remnant of this temple to survive is the pagoda constructed in 1524; badly damaged in a fire in 1910 which reduced the structure to just the brick core, it was heavily restored in 1985. See Zhou 2004.

ceremonies performed by the king whenever he entered or left his capital, while the second was used for the performance of divination ceremonies and the observation of celestial phenomena. It is quite possible that the third should also be understood as a religious building of some type, though the description of the function of this tower given in the “Jidi zhuan” is extremely cryptic and difficult to interpret.

In a somewhat different category is the Guantai 觀臺 (Observation Tower) which according to the “Jidi zhuan” was built by King Goujian when he moved his capital north to Langye. The issue of whether or not King Goujian did in fact move his capital into Shandong province remains enormously controversial, and continues to provoke considerable scholarly debate.<sup>17</sup> The function of this tower was apparently symbolic: “from it he could look out over the Eastern Sea” (*yi wang Donghai* 以望東海).<sup>18</sup> This structure seems to have been intended to give a concrete expression to King Goujian’s determination to govern not only his own people but also the Waiyue 外越 (Outer Yue) living on islands far out to sea, and thus while not directly a religious structure may nevertheless have had considerable symbolic significance for the Yue monarch. The “Jidi zhuan” records a further three towers whose construction is not attributed to any specific king of Yue. The first of these is the Jiatai 駕臺 (Carriage Tower) built on a pounded earth base some six hundred *bu* (852 m) in circumference. The base of the Zhongzhitai 中指臺 (Repose Tower) was of similar dimensions. Finally the Litai 離臺 (Separate Tower) was built on a base five hundred and sixty *bu* (795 m) in circumference.<sup>19</sup> Though the size of the base of each of these towers is recorded, their function and significance is not known.

17 According to the *Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年 (Bamboo Annals) the move of the capital to Langye in fact only took place in 468 BCE, during the reign of King Goujian’s son; see Hong Yixuan: *Zhushu jinian*, B:19a. The problems associated with the theory that King Goujian moved his capital to Langye and constructed a tower there are discussed in Gu 1987, pp. 31–32.

18 Yuan and Wu 1985, p. 58 [“Jidi zhuan”].

19 See Yuan and Wu 1985, p. 59 [“Jidi zhuan”]. Though these towers are mentioned in many imperial era gazetteers, the only reference made to them is

No trace now survives of these towers documented in Han dynasty texts. However, throughout the imperial era one of the sights of Shaoxing was the Yuewangtai 越王臺 (King of Yue's Tower), which was said to have been located within the boundaries of the city since the time of King Goujian.<sup>20</sup> (An alternative theory as to the provenance of this tower states that it was built during the Sui dynasty by Yang Su 楊素 (d. 606) who held the title of the title of Duke of the kingdom of Yue (Yueguo gong 越國公), in 591).<sup>21</sup> This tower is said to have originally stood at the top of Wolong shan 臥龍山 only to be moved to its present location by the Prefect Wang Gang 汪綱 in 1222, as part of his major remodeling of the city. This tower was rebuilt many times in the course of its history, and the current structure dates to 1980, the previous tower having been destroyed when the Japanese took the city.<sup>22</sup> This is the only tower located within the borders of the ancient kingdom of Yue to have survived in some form to the present day.

In addition to the Yuewangtai, imperial era gazetteers for Shaoxing record a number of other towers constructed by King Goujian of Yue, not mentioned in the *Yuejue shu* or any other ancient text; these include the Wangwutai 望烏臺 (Watching Crows Tower) which is said to have commemorated an auspicious omen observed when King Goujian entered the borders of Wu and was mobbed by red crows, and the Hetai 賀臺 (Congratulations Tower) built to celebrate the conquest of Wu.<sup>23</sup> In the case of the former tower, the vermilion

in quotations derived from either the *Yuejue shu* or the *Wu Yue chungiu*; see for example Zhang 1990, pp. 601–602; and Dong 1983, p. 143.

20 See Zhong and Luo Haidi 2004, p. 40.

21 The theory that this tower was in fact first built by Yang Su is favoured by a number of modern scholars; see for example Liang 2002, p. 25. Some accounts suggest that Yang Su's tower was not built in Shaoxing itself, but in Taihe county 泰和縣; see for example Li Xian: *Ming yi tongzhi*, 56:17a.

22 See Liang 2002, p. 25.

23 See Xu et al. 2003, p. 70. According to the early Qing gazetteer for the region, the story of the king of Yue being mobbed by red birds was originally derived from the *Shiyi ji* 拾遺記 (Supplementary Amplification of Tales), a compilation

bird was a long-standing emblem of the south within Zhou culture, and apparently these birds held a similarly positive place within the mythology of the peoples of the ancient kingdoms of Wu and Yue.<sup>24</sup> Slightly further afield, standing within the boundaries of Xiaoshan county 蕭山縣, was a further Yuewangtai, again attributed to the great King Goujian of Yue. This particular tower is unusual in that it has an exceptional rich cultural legacy; after being immortalized by Li Bai 李白 (701-762) in the poem “Song youren xun Yuezhong shanshui 送友人尋越中山水” (On Seeing off a Friend and Going in Search of the Landscapes of Yue) it was subsequently commemorated by many later generations of poets:

Having enquired the way to [Kuaiji] Mountain, I set off on my  
 way,  
 What an appropriate place for such a talented man as Xie  
 [Lingyun (385-433), to be born]!  
 Springs drip down from a thousand cliffs,  
 Trees intertwine through ten thousand valleys.  
 The eastern peaks run crosswise to Qinwang Mountain,  
 The western hills encircle the Yue tower.  
 The limpid waters of the lake shine like a frosty mirror,  
 The frothy waves come from snow-covered mountains.  
 This autumn [landscape awaits] Mei Cheng’s brush,  
 The Wu region [deserves to be toasted] by Zhang Han’s cup.  
 How many elegant scenes are to be found here,

completed in 370. This story is however not found in the present transmitted text. See Wang 1683, 9.1a.

24 For an extensive analysis of the symbolism of the red bird and its association with southern China; see Schafer 1967, pp. 261–264. For an interesting story concerning the auspicious appearance of a red bird to King Helü of Wu; see Wang 1985, p. 229 [“Bianwen” 辨問]. For evidence of bird-worship in Yue culture; see Xu 2005, p. 172.

Sooner or later I will have to turn towards Tiantai!<sup>25</sup>

聞道稽山去, 偏宜謝客才。  
 千巖泉灑落, 萬壑樹縈迴。  
 東嶺橫秦望, 西陵拱越臺。  
 湖清霜鏡曉, 濤白雪山來。  
 八月枚乘筆, 三吳張翰杯。  
 此中多逸興, 早晚向天台。

In addition to this Li Bai poem, gazetteers for Xiaoshan county include such works as “Deng Yuetai 登越臺” (Climbing the Yue Tower) by the Tang dynasty poet Song Zhiwen 宋之問 (d. 712, *jinshi* 675), an untitled poem on the subject of this tower by the Buddhist monk and Grand Preceptor Yao Guangxiao 姚廣孝 (1335-1418), also the poem “You Yuewangtai 遊越王臺” (On visiting the Tower of the King of Yue) by Zhao Gong 趙恭 of the Ming dynasty.<sup>26</sup> Only the Guangzhou towers have a comparable cultural legacy, though the historical significance of other Yue towers might be much greater.

### The Yue Diaspora

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the kingdom of Yue collapsed in around 330 BCE, when these lands were conquered by the kingdom of Chu. Refugees from the Yue ruling elite traveled southwards and took up residence among the local peoples, in some cases taking control and eventually establishing new kingdoms of their own. The pre-Han history of these kingdoms is not recorded, and

25 Qu and Zhu Jincheng 2007, p. 970. The importance of Li Bai in establishing the cultural credentials of a number of sites in Zhejiang province is considered in Zou 2004.

26 The most extensive collection of literature on the Xiaoshan county Yuewangtai is given in Huang 1990, p. 170. See also Zhang and Yang Shilong 1970, pp. 721, 2380.

the earliest of these to be documented is the kingdom of Minyue which was recognized by Han Gaozu 漢高祖 (r. 202-195 BCE) in 202 BCE. This official acknowledgement of the position of King Wuzhu of Minyue 閩越王無諸 was followed by the recognition of King Yao of Donghai 東海王搖 (a kingdom also known as Dongou 東甌 after the name of its capital) in 192 BCE. The nature of the relationship between these two Fujianese monarchs is not known, but they are both said to have claimed descent from King Goujian of Yue and used the same clan name: Zou 騶.<sup>27</sup> The kings of Minyue and Donghai were not the only distinguished Han dynasty individuals to claim descent from the great Yue monarch, others include the famous general Mei Xuan 梅鋗, but they were unique among the ruling families of contemporaneous independent southern kingdoms.<sup>28</sup>

After the accounts of their recognition by the Han emperor, these two kingdoms then disappear from the textual record until 135 BCE, which is the year that King Ying of Minyue 閩越王郢 was murdered by his younger brother, who then crowned himself King Yushan of Dongyue 東越王餘善. That same year, Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 141-87 BCE) enfeoffed Lord Chou of Yao 繇君丑 as the king of Yueyao 越繇王 to continue the sacrifices of the Minyue kings. Lord Chou of Yao is described in the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian) as having been King Wuzhu of Minyue's grandson. The position of this king seems to have been largely honorific (if not existing purely in the imagination of the Han court) given that King Yushan of Dongyue was actually governing the lands nominally controlled by the king of Yueyao, and his monarchy was also recognized by the Han. In 111 BCE, the Han armies were turned against the king of Dongyue, a campaign said to have been provoked by his temerity in having an official seal carved naming himself as Wudi 武帝 (the Martial Emperor). As the Han armies approached the capital, King Yushan of Dongyue was murdered in a palace coup led by King Jugu of Yao

27 See Sima 1964, 114:2979.

28 The Mei family remained an important southern clan for many generations; see Fan 1988, p. 152. The claim that they were descended from King Goujian of Yue is discussed in detail in Zhu 1984, pp. 26-29.

繇王居股. For this he was rewarded by the Han emperor with the title of Marquis of Dongcheng 東成侯 and given a fief of ten thousand households. It was King Jugu of Yao who surrendered his people to the Han in 110 BCE, an event that marks the end of the recorded history of the independent Yue kingdoms of Fujian.<sup>29</sup>

### The King of Yue's Towers

There have been a number of attempts by scholars to quantify the impact made by the Yue ruling elite diaspora on the cultures of the peoples living within the borders of what is now Fujian province. These have generally focussed on the changes in pottery styles and designs that took place at this time, likewise the sudden development in the use of bricks and tiles. In addition this diaspora brought with them the architectural knowledge to be able to build such large-scale structures as palaces and city walls, metal-working technologies such as high-quality bronze work and iron smelting, and the use of Chinese characters.<sup>30</sup> The ability to build towers was part of their advanced architectural knowledge, and as such must have affected a considerable and striking change to the southern landscape. However the kingdoms of Minyue, Donghai and Dongyue are so poorly recorded in contemporary texts that their construction of towers is not mentioned at all. The importance of this architectural interest in changing the landscape of the region in the early Han dynasty is only revealed in much later gazetteers and local histories, and the date of these structures (though not their cultural or historical significance) have in some cases been confirmed by modern archaeology. Towers are reported in imperial era gazetteers to have been extant within the

29 See Sima 1964, 114:2979–2984; Ban 1962, 95:3847–3863. The problematic relationship between the kings of Minyue is considered in detail in Yang 1998, pp. 2–26, who follows the *Shiji* in giving Lord Chou of Yao as the grandson of King Wuzhu of Minyue, and suggests that the brothers Ying and Yushan were his first cousins.

30 This list of characteristics is derived from Qiu 2007, p. 36.

boundaries of what is now Pucheng 浦城縣, Shaowu 邵武縣, Taining 泰寧縣, Jianning 建寧縣, Minhou 閩侯縣 and Nanping counties 南平縣 in Fujian province. Of these the tower at Shaowu is the only one to have been destroyed completely – the 凸-shaped pounded earth base, approximately 2m high, 27.5m east to west, 16m north to south was razed in 1958 as part of the Great Leap Forward Campaign.<sup>31</sup> As a result this tower, said in local gazetteers to have been built by King Wuzhu of Minyue for use when hunting, now survives only in the many references to high-quality ancient pottery turned up by farmers in the vicinity and in poems such as that by the Daoist cleric Huang Xidan 黃希旦 (1033-1074):

The overgrown tower is pillowed among ancient mounds,  
 In the past the king of Yue enjoyed his leisure here.  
 Where is the road that the royal carriage took now?  
 There is just the melancholy sight of sere grasses and autumnal  
 trees.<sup>32</sup>

荒臺枕古邱，伊昔越王遊。  
 輦路今何在？淒涼草樹秋。

The towers in Taining and Jianing counties are also attributed to King Wuzhu of Minyue, and as with the Shaowu county tower they are said to have been built to facilitate hunting.<sup>33</sup> The pounded earth base of the Jianning county tower has been excavated; this structure is

31 The destruction of the tower is described in Shaowu shi difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1993, p. 1116.

32 This poem and others on the subject of the Shaowu county Yuewangtai are quoted in Zhang and Li 1978, 1:7b–8:a.

33 The tower at Jianning county is described in He 1990, p. 498. Gazetteers for Taining county do not explicitly mention a tower here, though a travelling palace built in King Wuzhu of Minyue's hunting grounds is regularly recorded, however the literature about this place makes frequent reference to the presence of a tower; see for example Shi and Xu 2008, p. 678.



approximately 2m high and covers an area of 280m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>34</sup> The existence of the Nanping county tower is recorded in gazetteers but no purpose is given, neither is there any indication of which monarch constructed it.<sup>35</sup> Both the Minhou and the Pucheng towers are universally attributed in local gazetteers to King Yushan of Dongyue; the former is said to have been built to commemorate a particularly auspicious occurrence when the king caught a white dragon while fishing nearby (hence the alternative name for this site of Diaolongtai 釣龍臺, Catching a Dragon Tower), the latter supposedly constructed for use as a signal beacon.<sup>36</sup> This interpretation of the Pucheng tower may in fact be a reflection of later usage of this site, for this is by far the best recorded of any ancient tower in Fujian given that the pounded-earth base was repeatedly reused throughout the imperial era. The history of the Pucheng site is extremely interesting. Recent archeological excavations have demonstrated that Yuewangshan 越王山 where this tower is located was indeed a major Dongyue site. A trapezoid walled city has been excavated here, covering an area of 510,000m<sup>2</sup>, though archaeologists failed to find any signs of King Yushan of Dongyue's royal palace which tradition states was located in the eastern corner of this site. The pounded earth base of the Pucheng county tower survives, 3m high and covering an area of 60m<sup>2</sup>; since 1982 this has been subject to a provincial level *baohu danwei* 保護單位 (protection unit).<sup>37</sup>

The early history of this tower is not recorded. However the Qing dynasty gazetteer for Pucheng county compiled by Weng Tianyou 翁天祐 and Weng Zhaotai 翁昭泰 records the late imperial era history of the tower in some detail, and also includes the text of the

34 The excavation of this site is mentioned in Pucheng xian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1994, p. 1053.

35 See Wu and Cai Jianxian 1974, p. 313.

36 The Minhou county tower is described in the Ming dynasty general gazetteer for the region; see Huang 1996, p. 66; see also Zhu and Zheng 2001, p. 203. The Minhou county tower is said to have a pounded-earth base large enough to seat one hundred people and more comfortably; see Hao Yulin et al.: *Fujian tongzhi*, 62:3b.

37 See Qiu 1994; see also Lin and Zhao 1993.

“Yuewangtai ji 越王臺記” (Record of the King of Yue’s Tower) by Zhu Bingjian 朱秉鑑 (*jinshi* 1787) which was written to commemorate the 1795 restoration of the site. As a result it is known that the ancient pounded earth base was used for a new structure in 1646, when the District Magistrate Li Baozhen 李葆貞 sponsored the rebuilding of the tower.<sup>38</sup> This seems to have been connected with ongoing military campaigns against what are described as “shankou 山寇” (mountain bandits) in the region; this eventually ended when general Li Xiu 李繡 executed the ringleaders outside the Jinfengmen 金鳳門 gate to the city. In 1767 the tower was rebuilt by locals including Meng Yuan 孟遠, Liu Tingzhen 劉廷楨 and Zhang Lu 張露. This tower fell down in an autumn storm in 1794 only to be restored the following year by Zhang Lu’s son, Zhang Shichao 張士超 and Xu Yanghao 徐養浩, who wrote a commemorative record in addition to that by Zhu Bingjian mentioned above. In 1858 this tower was burnt down by “kou 寇” (bandits) – possibly as part of the Taiping rebellion though this is not explicitly stated in any source. The tower was rebuilt in 1875 only to be burnt down accidentally in 1893.<sup>39</sup> Since that time there has been no building here, leaving the Shaoxing tower as the only Yuewangtai to have survived into modern times. The Pucheng tower does however have a small cultural legacy, mainly in the form of Qing dynasty nostalgic poetry, of which the following poem entitled “Yuewangtai” by Chen Zhuo 陳焯 (1733-after 1806) is a typical example:

The tradition of hegemony passed away long ago,  
 This overgrown tower is the only thing to have survived to the  
 present day.  
 As the clouds roll by the Minyue are even further in the past,  
 Their glamour and wealth superfluous to this riverine landscape.<sup>40</sup>

霸業久銷歇，荒臺今尚存。

38 This is also mentioned in Li and Hai 1992, p. 844.

39 See Weng and Weng 1967, pp. 67, 759–760.

40 Quoted in Weng and Weng 1967, p. 894.

雲連閩越遠, 錯繡餘川原.

The towers built in Fujian represent a significant architectural achievement by the Yue diaspora, and it affected a lasting change to the landscape of the region. Although subsequently many other towers were built within this region, this did not happen until nearly one thousand years later. The Minyue, Donghai, and Dongyue towers therefore provided a highly visible cultural link with the kingdom of Yue. This was no doubt of particular importance to the royal families of these kingdoms who claimed descent from King Goujian of Yue, a very prolific tower builder. These towers formally represent a blood relationship and a cultural association between these early Han dynasty Fujianese kingdoms and the Eastern Zhou dynasty kingdom of Yue.

### **Interpreting the Fujianese Towers of Yue**

In gazetteers and local histories, a number of explanations are put forward for the significance and contemporary usage of the Minyue, Donghai and Dongyue towers, focusing mainly on their use as part of the amenities of hunting parks and as signal-towers. It is likely that there was indeed some kind of difference in usage between different towers, since they vary so enormously in size, from that in Pucheng county which is a mere 60m<sup>2</sup> to that which formerly stood in Shaowu county and which measured some 440m<sup>2</sup>. It is also worth reiterating that none of these towers are mentioned in Han dynasty texts, indeed the first detailed descriptions only appear in gazetteers from the Ming dynasty onwards. As a result in many cases the earliest references to these towers are found in literature, particularly poetry, which means that the focus is on romantic images of ancient ruins rather than precise historical information. Given that the interpretations of these sites are based on popular legends transmitted over the course of some fifteen centuries (and possibly influenced by later uses of the surviving bases of these towers) their validity is highly questionable.

In order to interpret the Fujianese towers of Yue it is perhaps relevant to consider the towers built in Nanyue, a kingdom contemporary with Minyue, Donghai and Dongyue with its capital at what is now the city of Guangzhou, but which differs from them in having an ethnically Chinese royal family with no links to King Goujian of Yue. Nanyue was the only other ancient southern kingdom to build towers. Founded by Zhao Tuo 趙佗 (also known by the title King Wu 南越武王, r. 203-137 BCE), originally an official sent south during the Qin dynasty, the kingdom of Nanyue lasted through five kings before the capital was burnt to the ground and their lands incorporated into the Han empire in 111 BCE. Given the important role played by towers in the public and ritual life of the rulers of the Zhou confederacy prior to the unification of China, it is hardly surprising that a man like Zhao Tuo would have been interested in constructing such prominent buildings.<sup>41</sup> How the meaning and significance of these buildings for the first king of Nanyue differed from that of the lords of the Central States in the Spring and Autumn period and Warring States era, the kings of Wu and Yue, and indeed his near contemporary tower-builders in Minyue and Donghai is not known, however it is suggestive that later gazetteers assign very different constructions to some of the Nanyue towers as opposed to those built in the Fujian region.

Zhao Tuo is said to have built four towers in and around his capital city at Panyu 番禺, in modern day Guangzhou. These include the Yuewangtai for which no function or purpose is given in any imperial era gazetteer and the Bailutai 白鹿臺 (White Deer Tower) whose name commemorates Zhao Tuo's pleasure at his capture of a white deer while hunting in the vicinity. This tower is clearly comparable to the hunting towers built by the Minyue or Donghai kings, and indeed similar structures built in earlier centuries in the

41 The reports that Zhao Tuo adopted local customs and culture shocked many later historians and commentators on the short but eventful history of the kingdom of Nanyue; for a discussion of this see Hu 1999, pp. 33-38. Whether his towers were built in imitation of those of the Central States region or the Baiyue is unclear.

hunting parks of the lords of the Zhou confederacy. The remaining two towers are assigned very specific meanings. The Changletai 長樂臺 (Perpetual Joy Tower) is supposed to record Zhao Tuo's delight at having his kingdom recognized by the Han court, while the Chao Hantai 朝漢臺 (Paying Court to the Han Tower) is said to represent his debt of gratitude in physical form. According to the *Guangzhou tongzhi* 廣州通志 (Comprehensive Gazetteer for Guangzhou) the Changletai was the first to be built, this was followed by the Bailutai and Yuewangtai; finally he constructed the Chao Hantai.<sup>42</sup> This chronology is no doubt derived entirely from later constructions concerning the purpose of these towers. A quotation attributed to the *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記 (Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital) provides the earliest extant reference to any of the towers of Yue when it describes how the king of Nanyue sent a present of food to the founder of the Han empire who reciprocated with similar gifts, and how Zhao Tuo then built the Chao Hantai, climbing it on the first day of every lunar month whereupon he would make obeisance as a gesture of paying court to the Han.<sup>43</sup>

A truly vast body of literature survives concerning literati response to Zhao Tuo's towers. No doubt there are many reasons why these sites should have caught the imagination of generations of poets and writers in a way unparalleled by any other Han dynasty towers. Partly this is clearly to do with romantic images of the ancient kingdom of Nanyue, carved out of the southern wilderness by the wit and cunning of a single Chinese administrator. The suggestion that some of these towers were built to show loyalty to the Han also

42 See Hao Yulin et al.: *Guangdong tongzhi*, 64:8b-9a. The problematic accounts of Zhao Tuo's towers found in imperial era gazetteers (in particular there seems to have been confusion in many such texts as to whether the Yuewang tai and Chao Han tai were one structure or two) are discussed and clarified in the Qing dynasty compilation Liang 1982, pp. 10-13.

43 Only the account of the exchange of gifts is found in the present text of the *Xijing zaji*; see Zhou 2006, p. 145. The remainder is derived from the *Guangdong tongzhi*, 6:4a-4b. The *Xijing zaji* is attributed to Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23 CE), but in fact seems to have been compiled in around 520; see Nienhauser 1978.

triggered important responses; for lonely imperial administrators, the image of their predecessor constructing such monuments to the glory of a distant court seems to have been both a model and a consolation. To officials sent into exile in the region after offending powerful factions at court, these towers had a somewhat different message; they represented an outpost of civilization in an alien region, a reminder that unlikely as it might seem, this too was part of the Chinese world. The liminal nature of this region, and the complex responses evoked by the Nanyue towers can be seen in poems such as “Chao Hantai huaigu 朝漢臺懷古” (Cherishing Antiquity at the Paying Court to the Han Tower) by Ou Daren 歐大任 (d. c. 1544):

The Ouluo as of yore give their allegiance to the Viet,  
 These mountains and rivers are still cut off from the lands of Qin.  
 Who would have imagined that the Commandant of Nanhai (Zhao  
 Tuo)  
 Would have ended up serving as a border-defending vassal of the  
 Han?<sup>44</sup>

歐駱猶歸粵，河山尚隔秦。  
 誰令南海尉，終作漢藩臣？

### Conclusion

In the late Spring and Autumn period, architects working for the kings of Wu and Yue acquired the technical knowledge required to build towers. Just as the rulers of the states of the Zhou confederacy had done some centuries earlier, these monarchs too began to construct buildings that would dominate the landscape, sending an unmistakable message of wealth and power to all who saw them. However, out of all the many ancient southern peoples, only a handful actually constructed towers. The first were built in the kingdom of Wu, then the kingdom of Yue followed suit, then in the early Western Han

<sup>44</sup> This poem is quoted in Zhu Yizun et al.: *Ming shi zong*, 52:25a.

dynasty these towers were further imitated by the kings of Minyue, Donghai, Dongyue and Nanyue. The fact that only some ruling houses constructed these towers argues that there must be some distinction between those kingdoms who undertook such major prestige projects and those that did not. This distinction seems to lie in the self-identification of the kings responsible for the construction of towers. The kings of Minyue, Donghai, and Dongyue all claimed descent from King Goujian of Yue, a particularly powerful and charismatic ancient monarch and a prolific tower-builder; the royal family of Nanyue was originally of Chinese origin and Zhao Tuo, the founder of the dynasty, seems to have built his towers as a gesture of solidarity with the Han court and in imitation of those constructed in the Central States region.

The highly skilled, literate refugees who left the kingdom of Yue in the wake of the conquest by Chu in the 330s BCE effected a major change in the culture of the peoples among whom they came to live. Many of the technologies that they brought with them were no doubt a great deal more important than the ability to build towers. Nevertheless this resulted in a lasting change in the landscape of Fujian and Guangzhou provinces, as virtually all the pounded-earth tower bases that they constructed are still there today. Their size attests to the resources of manpower and materials available to these ancient kings, their survival to the skills of the architects. These remarkable structures demonstrate the complex cultural identity of China's ancient south.

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