

# On the “Turbulence Brought by Tyrants” in the Ancient Shu State

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**Abstract:** The period of Kaiming regime, known as the late Shu culture period, is the later stage of the ancient Shu state. During the reign of Kaiming, brilliant culture was created and pushed the ancient Shu culture forward. But it was finally destroyed by the Qin State in the north. In fact, the fundamental reason why Shu was destroyed by Qin lies in the gap between them. The national strength of Qin was obviously higher than that of Shu. The “turbulence brought by tyrants” inside Shu is just an excuse for Qin to conquer the place.

## 1. Introduction

From the handed-down document, *Records of State-Huayang* and the findings of current scholars, we can see that the demise of ancient Shu under the Kaiming regime can not be separated from its internal cause, that is, the “turbulence brought by tyrants” (Jie Zhou Zhi Luan). The ruler’s wanton consumption and inhumane management lead to the intensification of internal contradictions; eventually contradictions become irreconcilable and the country is annihilated, just like the Xia Dynasty destroyed by tyrant Jie and the Shang Dynasty destroyed by tyrant Zhou in legends. However, from Qin’s conspiracy of destroying Shu and its management of Shu after conquering the place, the ancient Shu State under the Kaiming regime did not have internal contradictions as serious as recordings in literature and documents. This article intends to explore whether there was such serious “turbulence” in the ancient Shu State from that perspective.

## 2. The Conspiracy of Qin to Conquer Shu

The conspiracy of Qin State to occupy the land of Shu is recorded in *Records of State-Huayang: Records of Shu*. “King Hui of Qin wanted to conquer Chu; ministers discussed the issue. ‘Shu is a remote country in the west neighboring barbarian tribes. We can conquer the place.’ Cuo Si-ma and Lieutenant Zhen-huang Tian said, ‘Shu is in turbulence brought by tyrants, and the country is rich. It has silk, gold and silver which are enough for military use. Shu is connected with Chu by waterway. With crack soldiers lived in this area, we can float to the east on big ships, and reach the region of Chu. Conquering Shu means conquering Chu; conquering Chu means unify the whole country.’ The king said, ‘that’s good.’”

The story is also recorded in *Strategies of the Warring States: the Qin State*, which is earlier than *Records of State-Huayang*. “Cuo Si-ma and Yi Zhang argued in front of the King Hui of Qin. Si-ma wanted to conquer Shu. Zhang said, ‘it is better to conquer the State of Han.’ The king said, ‘Tell us the reason, please.’ Answer, ‘...Today’s Shu is a state located in Western border, and has advantages of barbarian tribes. Soldiers need to fight hard but it’s difficult to gain the fame; occupying the place cannot bring material benefits’... Si-ma said: ‘...Today’s Shu is a state located in Western border, and has advantages of barbarian tribes. Now it is in turbulence brought by tyrants. If we fight the battle, we can conquer the place as easy as jackals chasing the flock of sheep. The place conquered can expand our territory; the wealth we take can enrich our people. If we do not hurt civilians, the people there will submit themselves to the rule of Qin...It is better to conquer the State of Shu.’ The king said, ‘Good! I adopt your opinion.’”

From the documents, both the *Records of State-Huayang* and the earlier *Strategies of the Warring States* mentioned Shu was in “turbulence brought by tyrants”. However, the records lay more emphasis on the benefits of conquering Shu land to the Qin State. Shu has abundant natural

resources and developed economy; it can strengthen the power of the Qin State. *Strategies of the Warring States* recorded, “The place conquered can expand our territory; the wealth we take can enrich our people.” *Records of State-Huayang* contained, “the country is rich. It has silk, gold and silver which are enough for military use.” It can be seen that the strong economic strength of Shu lure the rulers of Qin State. Then, the problem arises. If the Shu State had the so-called “turbulence brought by tyrants”, the internal affairs must be unstable. How can the state gain strong economic power? The state of Qin wanted to destroy Shu and get its land and wealth; maybe the so-called “turbulence brought by tyrants” is a reason of attacking proposed by counselors of Qin.

### 3. The Downfall of Shu: War between Shu and Qin

As for the war between Shu and Qin, *Records of State-Huayang: Records of Shu* recorded the process in detail. “In the autumn of the fifth year of King Zhoushen’s Reign, Yi Zhang, Cuo Si-ma, Wei-mo Du and other Qin generals went to conquer Shu from the Shiniu Road. The King of Shu fought in the Jiameng Pass but was defeated. The king fled to Wuyang and was killed by the Qin army. The prince and his teacher retreated to Fengxiang and died in Bailushan. The Kaiming regime was destroyed. The regime handed down for twelve generations. In October of winter, Shu was conquered.”

From *Records of State-Huayang*, we can see that in the face of the invasion of Qin Army, the Kaiming regime made active resistance. The king, the prince and the officials in the ruling group all united to resist the attack and fought until the last moment. Moreover, Qin’s destruction and occupation of Shu was because Qin’s military strength was much higher than that of Shu. There was no traitor in Shu who collaborated with the Qin State. Therefore, we need to question that whether there was “turbulence brought by tyrants” in Shu. If there was “turbulence brought by tyrants”, the internal contradictions must be sharp. Why no one inside the country wanted to collude with Qin and overturn the state? In the face of the attack, the emperor and ministers of Shu united to resist the invasion and fought until the last moment. If Shu really had the “turbulence brought by tyrants”, then, in the war of resistance, the react should be in a state of disunity. Obviously, in the face of the Qin army’s attack, the King of Shu commanded the battle and personally went to the frontline. But the overall strength of Shu was much lower than that of the Qin State. It should be noted that after the Shang Yang Reform, the national strength of Qin increased greatly. The Shu State, on the contrary, was located in remote areas. It stood still and refused to make progress. Finally its national strength was inferior to that of the Qin State. They could not resist the attack of Qin and eventually went to demise. Yu Duan pointed out in *General History of Sichuan: Pre-Qin Volume*, “After the death of Shu... not all the princes of the Kaiming regime surrendered to Qin. The Anyang Prince of Shu led his troops with 30,000 people southward, and finally arrived at Jiaozhi to establish a dynasty, which lasted for more than a hundred years.”

This also reflects that there should be no serious “turbulence brought by tyrants” in Shu. If the internal contradictions were really sharp, how can 30,000 people be willing to follow the Prince Anyang to move southward after the demise of Shu? How can the regime established by him lasted for more than a hundred years? Obviously, “turbulence brought by tyrants” in Shu is only the excuse of the Qin people.

### 4. Qin’s “Ji Mi Policy” in Shu: Conciliate and Control

After Qin occupied the land of Shu, in order to consolidate its rule, the policy of “Ji Mi” was initially adopted. Er-hu Luo explained the rule in his book *Southwest China in the Qin and Han Dynasties*, “in Southwest China... there are great differences between different regions and nationalities... When the Qin Empire just conquered these areas, it was impossible to completely copy the inland way of governing and managing, nor could it adopt a unified way to govern and manage all nationalities. In addition, the remnants of the former ruling parties were still strong. If the Qin state completely deprived their power and chose to govern the place by themselves, social unrest and resistance would arise in these ethnic areas. For these reasons, the Qin and Han

governments adopted a special way of domination in the southwestern minority areas, which is called the 'Ji Mi' rule."

An important manifestation of Qin's "Ji Mi" policy in Shu is the establishment of Shu Hou (Marquis under the emperor). According to the current data, they were Shu princes, or Shu Gong Zi, rather than Qin princes. It should be noted that the Qin State has gone through the Shang Yang Reform and adopted the the system of prefectures and counties. The rulers appoint officials according to military exploit, which severely attacked the old system of succession based on the blood relationship. Qin changed into a bureaucratic country. Moreover, the reform of the Qin State is the most thorough. Therefore, after the reform, the feudalism is no longer the mainstream. In the war between Qin and Shu, the commanders of Qin were Yi Zhang, Cuo Si-ma and Wei-mo Du. There were no recordings of Qin princes. According to the spirit of Shang Yang reform, it was impossible to appoint Qin princes as Shu Hou. After studying, En-zheng Tong also pointed out in his book *Ancient Bashu*, "according to Chronicle of Qin, the King of Zhao reigned for 56 years; then his son, the King of Xiaowen succeed to the throne. *The Biographic Sketches of the First Emperor of Qin* recorded, 'the King of Xiaowen succeed to the throne at the age of 53'. The King of Xiaowen should be born in the fourth year of Zhao's reign. Other sons of the King of Zhao should be one or two years old in the seventh year of Zhao's reign when Shu Hou was commissioned. It was impossible for these young princes to take the position of Shu Hou. Moreover, the brothers of the King of Zhaoxiang only had the titles of Gao Ling Prince and Jing Yang Prince; they could not be the marquis. In fact, the *Historical Records: Biography of Yi Zhang* recorded that the King Hui of Qin 'decided to conquer Shu; in October, the place was occupied. The King of Shu became Hou. Zhuang Chen became the prime minister of Shu'. *Strategies of the Warring States: the Qin State* also contained, 'the Lord of Shu became Hou'. All these documents proved that Shu Hou should be the descendants of the former King of Shu."

If there was serious "turbulence" in Shu, the Kaiming Reign must lose people's support. Why did the rulers of Qin appointed the former Prince of Shu to keep the stability of the aboriginal people? The rulers of Qin established and then abolished the position of Shu Hou for three times. Why they could not abolish it at one time? That was because the princes of Shu took the position of Shu Hou. They were prestigious in this area. For instance, the killing of Shu Hou Yun by the King of Qin is recorded in *Records of State-Huayang: Records of Shu*. "The king was furious, and ordered Cuo Si-ma to send Yun a sword of suicide. Yun and his wife were frightened and commit suicide... Shu people buried Yun in outer suburbs... Seventeen years later, it was known that Yun was innocent and died unjustly. The envoy buried him inside the city. At first it was hot and dry; after three months it rained a lot. In July, it was impossible to take a carriage because of the flood. The funeral car went to the north gate of the city and suddenly fell into the ground. Therefore, the Shu people named the North Gate as Xianyang Gate, and built a temple to worship Shu Hou Yun. The spirit of Yun had the superhuman strength of controlling the forces of nature; Shu people went to the temple and prayed for rain and sun during bad days."

From the *Records of State-Huayang*, we can also see that the Shu Prince, who was named as Shu Hou, was deeply popular with the people. After being assassinated by the King of Qin, he was missed by Shu people, and even be worshipped as a god, which eventually forced the King of Qin to redress an injustice for him in order to ease the mood of people. Moreover, after the killing of Shu Hou Yun, the King of Qin continued to appoint another Shu Prince as Shu Hou. It shows that Shu Hou is an important "Ji Mi" policy of the Qin State to consolidate its rule in the area of Shu. It also reflects that the rule of Kaiming Regime was favored by Shu residents in the past.

In addition, Qin people immigrated to Shu in large numbers, which is recorded in *Records of State-Huayang*. "The area had a large population. Thousands of families of Qin people came here to live." The recording indicates that there were a large number of Shu people live in this area. In order to consolidate the rule, Qin rulers had to migrate to Shu to enlarge the basis of its rule. Combined with the fact that Qin rulers appointed Shu Princes as Shu Hou, it is obvious the Shu Hou who gained support from Shu people panicked the rulers of Qin. Therefore, the rulers of Qin need to move Qin people to Shu to consolidate their ruling foundation. It was not until the rule of the Qin

State was firmly established in Shu that the Qin ruler killed the last Shu Hou, Wan. From then on, instead of setting up Shu Hou, the ruler of Qin directly changed the Shu Land into the Shu County of Qin State and established Shu Shou (guardian) to directly control the land. The Shu Land was finally transformed into the Shu County of the Qin State, and the Qin System could be implemented smoothly in Shu Land.

At the same time, we should also notice that even after abandoned the system of Shu Hou and introduced Qin system, Qin still respected the customs and concepts of the indigenous people in Shu. This also shows that the rule of the ancient Shu State was still deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. If the internal contradictions were exacerbated because of the “turbulence brought by tyrants”, the system and concepts of Qin should be implemented smoothly in this area. Bing Li, the Shu Shou who controlled the flood is an example. The *Records of State-Huayang* says, “five stone rhinoceros are made to repel the water spirit.” For ancient Shu people, 5 is a lucky number. *Records of State-Huayang: Records of Shu* contains the passage. “The king of Kaiming is called as Congdi Emperor... They did not have posthumous titles. But there were mainly five colors, so they were called as Qing (blue), Chi (red), Hei (black), Huang (yellow) and Bai (white) Emperors.” It can be seen that during the reign of Kaiming, Shu people regarded 5 as an auspicious number. Yu Duan also pointed out in his research monograph, the *Ancient Shu State*, that “the number of ‘five’ had a special significance in the religion of Shu people... The first five emperors of Kaiming were called as Emperors of five colors. Most of the bronze wares unearthed from a royal Kaiming tomb (Xindu Muhuang Tomb) were made of five pieces in one group. Kaiming concubines included five women; the people were divided into five Ding; the mountain was called as Wufu (five women); the tomb was called as five Ding. Bing Li followed the Shu people’s tradition and made five stone rhinoceros to repel the water spirit. So many mysterious ‘five’ was related to the King of Shu.” It can be seen that, the Qin ruling group consolidated its rule in Shu because they paid attention to respecting the beliefs of the aboriginal people. Even after abandoning the Shu Hou system and directly managing this area through Shu Shou, the Shu Shou Bing Li also paid attention to respecting and utilizing the beliefs of the local people in the process of water control, which helped to mobilize the enthusiasm of Shu people and solve the problem of flood in Shu effectively. Bing Li could gain the respect of the Shu people and be remembered, not only for his success in controlling the flood, but also for his respect for original cultural concepts and beliefs. It also shows there was no serious “turbulence brought by tyrants” in the ancient Shu State under the Kaiming regime. After conquering this area, Qin rulers have to follow the management style of the ancient Shu state to ease the contradiction and consolidate its rule.

## 5. Conclusion

From the conspiracy of Qin to occupy Shu, the war between Qin and Shu, and Qin’s management of Shu after occupation, it can be seen that Shu was not in serious “turbulence brought by tyrants” as Qin people said. If Shu was in serious “turbulence” and had sharp internal contradictions, it would be impossible for them to have the economic strength that makes Qin rulers drool with envy. In the face of invasion, no one in Shu colluded with the enemy and betrayed the state. On the contrary, the emperor and ministers of Shu persisted in fighting with their enemies until the last minute. After the Qin state conquered Shu, it did not rapidly popularize the Qin system in this place. On the contrary, the Qin ruling group respected the cultural concepts and beliefs of the Shu people and adopted the “Ji Mi policy” to rule, which eased the contradictions and gradually consolidated the rule. These evidences show that there was no serious internal contradiction in Shu under the Kaiming regime, nor the “turbulence brought by tyrants” as Qin people said.

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