

Research on "Nan Gong" in the Bronze Inscriptions of the Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou Dynasty

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Abstract

The term "Nangong" first appears in the inscription on the Da Yu Ding, referring to a significant figure within the Nangong lineage during the Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou Dynasty. After the excavation of the Yeji Mountain Cemetery in Suizhou, "Nangong" once again attracted attention. The Nangong lineage, after Nangong Shi, bifurcated into the "Nangong" and "ZengHou" branches. The bronzes unearthed with the inscription "Nangong" originate from two primary sources: the Nangong lineage within the royal domain and the Zeng state in the southern territories. Both major lineages venerated "Nangong" as their ancestor. Yu, the owner in the Da Yu Ding, also known as Nangong Yu, was a collateral descendant of Nangong Shi. Nangong Mao served as the secondary ancestor for the lineage within the royal domain, honoring Nangong Shi as "Nangong". The Zeng state lineage, however, regarded ZengHou Jian as "Nangong", the inaugural ZengHou and the eldest son of Nangong Shi, thus representing the "Nangong" of the Zeng state. ZengHou Kang, the son of "Nangong", cast bronze inscribed with "Kao Lie Nangong" in honor of his father.

Keywords

Inscription on Da Yu Ding; Nangong; The Zhou Dynasty.

1. Introduction

The inscription "Nangong" first appears in the bronze Da Yu Ding from the Western Zhou period. The inscription reads, "Made this precious bronze for Ancestor Nangong", indicating that King Kang ordered Yu to emulate Nangong. In 1979, the Nangong Hu Chime was unearthed in Fufeng County, Shanxi Province. The inscription mentions Situ Nangong Hu, who refers to "Nangong" as his ancestor. In 2013, archaeological materials from the Yejiashan site in Suizhou revealed the name "Nangong" in the inscription "Kang made precious sacrificial bronze for his deceased father Nangong"[1].

Academic research on "Nangong" primarily focuses on his identity[2], family lineage[3], and the enfeoffment of the Zeng state[4]. Tang Lan identified Nangong as Dan Jizai. Subsequent in-depth studies were conducted by Li Xueqin, Luo Yunhuan, Huang Fengchun, and Zhu Fenghan. Li Xueqin and Luo Yunhuan proposed that Nangong was Nangong Shi (Kuo), a high-ranking official in the early Zhou dynasty[5][6]. Huang Fengchun and Hu Gang supported the view that Nangong was Nangong Shi[7][8]. Zhu Fenghan and Shen Changyun suggested that he was Nangong Mao, who was enfeoffed during the reign of King Zhao of Zhou[9][10]. Cheng Hao argued that Nangong was Nangong Yao from the Tsinghua Bamboo Slips' "Liangchen"[11]. Li Xueqin, Fang Qin, and Fan Sen examined the historical events of key figures in the "Nangong" family to reconstruct the family lineage and address significant issues such as the enfeoffment and governance of the southern territories during the early Western Zhou period. Their research on Nangong and his lineage also touched upon the enfeoffment of the Zeng state and its related lineage, constructing the historical development of the Zeng state and prompting

reflection on the initial enfeoffment of the Zeng state and the relationship between the Nangong clan, Zhou, and Zeng during the early Western Zhou period.

In recent years, newly unearthed early Western Zhou inscriptions from Yejiashan and Wenfeng Pagoda have been successively deciphered and published, promising more in-depth discussions on the identity of Nangong. This paper will explore the identity of Nangong, starting from the inscriptions on the Dayu Ding, the newly discovered Zeng Hou Yu Chime, and the Zeng Gong Qiu Chime, combined with previous research.

2. "Nan Gong" and the related historical facts

2.1. "Nangong" and Yu in the Da Yu Ding Inscription

The term "Nangong" appears three times in the Da Yu Ding inscription. Yu was the grandson of "Nangong". The Da Yu Ding inscription records that Yu was appointed by King Kang, served as the deputy of Rong Bo, and was in charge of military and political affairs, deeply trusted by the Zhou king. The inscription records the year as "the twenty-third year of the king", which is generally considered to be the twenty-third year of King Kang [12]. The inscription records the Zhou king's instructions to Yu, expressing his desire to emulate the virtues of the former kings Wen and Wu, and hoping that Yu could emulate his ancestor "Nangong" to assist him in managing the army, clarifying the laws, and governing the four directions. "Nangong" was Yu's ancestor, highly respected, and active during the time of King Wen and King Wu of Zhou. Yu had a fief and was highly valued by King Kang of Zhou. The Xiao Yu Ding inscription also records the ceremony of presenting captives and rewarding after the conquest of the Gui Fang [8]. It can be seen that from "Nangong" to "Yu", the Nangong clan held a prominent position in the Zhou dynasty.

Mr. Wang Guowei believed that "Nangong" was Nangong Kuo, also known as Nangong Shi, who followed King Wu in the conquest of Shang, and was one of the important ministers who assisted King Wen and King Wu in the early Zhou dynasty. The "Nangong" mentioned here comes from the Da Yu Ding. The name "Nangong Kuo" first appeared in the "Shangshu·Junshi": "Only King Wen was able to cultivate harmony with our Xia, and also with Guo Shu, Hong Yao, San Yisheng, Tai Dian, Nangong Kuo". Li Xueqin also proposed that Nangong Kuo was Nangong Shi, also known as Bo Kuo [5].

What is the relationship between "Nangong" and "Nangong"? The "Nan" in "Nangong" should be an abbreviation of "Nangong". Yang Yachang and Hu Lingui believe that the clan name of the Nangong clan was abbreviated as "Nan", and the first generation of the Nangong clan was Nangong Kuo [13]. He was an important minister during the reigns of King Wen and King Wu of Zhou, and had experienced "King Wu's destruction of Shang". Regarding the lineage of Nangong Kuo's descendants and Yu's lineage, Li Xueqin believes that Nangong Kuo's descendants were divided into two branches, one branch remained in the Zhou dynasty, holding prominent positions in successive generations, and was called the Nangong clan, while the other branch was the feudal lords of the Zeng state, far away in the Jiangnan region.

In the early Western Zhou dynasty, in addition to Nangong Kuo, there was also Nangong Mao recorded in the documents of the Wangji. When King Cheng died, Nangong Mao was appointed as a minister to assist King Kang, and may have been the eldest son of the Nangong clan. The "Shangshu·Guming" records, "The next day, Yichou, King (Cheng) died. The Grand Protector ordered Zhong Huan and Nangong Mao to give Qi Hou Lu Ji two dry spears and tiger responsibilities to meet the son Zhao outside the south gate". Nangong Mao's main activities were during the reigns of King Cheng and King Kang. Based on the estimated activity period of Nangong Kuo, Nangong Mao may have been the son of Nangong Kuo [10].

Nangong Mao is also recorded in the documents. The Nangong Hu Chime inscription has "ancestor Nangong, second ancestor Gongzhong Bifu's family". "Gongzhong" is most likely

Nangong Mao, who inherited the title of his ancestor Nangong and served in the court. Nangong Hu was a member of the Nangong clan, whose ancestor was "Nangong" and second ancestor was "Gongzhong", and Nangong Hu may have been a descendant of Yu. From the inscription, it can be known that "Gongzhong" was a person of the early Western Zhou dynasty. Huang Jinqian believes that he was ZengHou Kang after "Nangong" [14], and estimated that the bronze inscription "Gongzhong" of the early and mid-Western Zhou dynasty should be a person of the Kang and Zhao periods, the son of the first ZengHou "Nangong", and the second ZengHou. However, this view confuses the Nangong clan within the royal domain and the Nangong clan within the fief, which conflicts with the Zeng lineage. Wang Hongxing believes that the earliest three generations of ZengHou were ZengHou Jian, ZengHou Bosheng, and ZengHou Kang [15]. The third generation of the Nangong clan was Yu, the owner of the Da Yu Ding. Huang Fengchun believes that Yu was the third generation of the Nangong clan [8]. In the early Western Zhou dynasty, the lineage of the first three generations of the Nangong clan within the Wangji was: Nangong Kuo (Shi) - Nangong Mao - Yu. "Nangong" was Nangong Kuo, who entered the service during the reign of King Wen of Zhou, assisted King Wu in the conquest of Shang, and was awarded the fief to build the Zeng state in the early years of King Cheng. "Gongzhong" inherited the title in the late years of King Cheng, inherited the position of "Nangong" in the Zhou royal family, and remained in the Wangji to continue serving the Zhou royal family. Yu inherited the title in the twenty-third year of King Kang of Zhou. In the twenty-fifth year, he won a great victory in the conquest of the Gui Fang, which was recorded in the Xiao Yu Ding, and it was already the end of the Kang period. Yu's grandfather "Nangong's" "Nan" is an abbreviation of Nangong, and "Nangong" is also the ancestor of the Nangong clan, the famous minister Nangong Shi in the early Zhou dynasty, who had a close relationship with the Zeng state.

2.2. "Nangong" and the first ZengHou

The designation "Nangong" frequently appears in the inscriptions of the Zeng state. Newly discovered bronze inscriptions from two ZengHou tombs mention "Nangong". Huang Fengchun posits that "Bo Shi" in the ZengHou Yu Chime inscription is the same person as "Nangong", namely Nangong Shi [16]. Zhu Fenghan suggests that the "Gaozu" in the Zeng Gong Qiu Chime inscription refers to Nangong Shi, who established the "Imperial Ancestor Nangong" in the southern lands, inheriting Nangong Shi's title [9]. The ZengHou Yu Chime, unearthed from Tomb No. 1 at Wenfeng Pagoda, the first half of the records, "In the first month of the king's reign, on the auspicious day of Jiawu, ZengHou Yu said: Bo Kuo, is in a high position, assists King Wen and King Wu of Zhou, to punish the Yin, to pacify the world; the king sent Nangong to establish a residence in Natu, the lord managed the Huaiyi, overseeing Jiangxia" [17]. This indicates that "Nangong" was an ancestor of the ZengHou, the first enfeoffed lord who received the mandate to establish a state in Natu. Another inscription on a Chime made by ZengHou Yu, which reads "Yu Ying's great-grandson", further suggests that "Nangong" came to the Jiangnan region as a member of the Ji lineage, aligning with the two ge inscriptions unearthed in Suizhou, where Zeng Muhou's son, Ji Yi, identifies himself as a "grandson of the Zhou king" [18]. Although not a direct descendant of Wen, Wu, or the Duke of Zhou, he belonged to the Ji clan nobility.

This analysis then considers the early Western Zhou's high-ranking clan enfeoffment, specifically the issue of the eldest and secondary sons being enfeoffed. The Records of the Grand Historian: The Duke of Zhou of Lu states, "(King Wu of Zhou) enfeoffed the Duke of Zhou Dan at Qufu, the former site of Shao Hao, and he became the Duke of Lu. The Duke of Zhou did not accept the enfeoffment, remaining to assist King Wu... When the Duke died, his son Bo Qin had already received the enfeoffment, and he became the Duke of Lu". The Records of the Grand Historian: The Duke of Zhao of Yan states, "The eldest son was enfeoffed, while the second son remained in the Zhou court, succeeding as the Duke of Zhao" [19]. These records reflect the early Western Zhou's enfeoffment practices. During King Wu's reign, the Shandong region was not

yet under Zhou control. Only after the Duke of Zhou's eastern expedition, which suppressed the reChimeion of the Dongyi, was it possible to enfeoff lords in the former Shang-Yan territory. Therefore, Bo Qin's enfeoffment in Lu likely occurred during King Cheng's reign. Bo Qin was the first enfeoffed lord of Lu, hence the title "Lugong". Zhu Fenghan believes that Bo Qin was likely left in Yan to establish the state of Lu after the Duke of Zhou's eastern expedition and the subjugation of Yan [20]. This was not only a case of a son succeeding his father's enfeoffment but also where the Duke of Zhou's legacy was passed on, "The passing on of importance, is the passing on of the ancestral temple, land, title, and people" [21], indicating that the Lu Hou branch, outside the capital, was the main lineage of the Duke of Zhou's clan, while the Duke of Zhou's family within the capital and his other sons could only be considered minor lineages [22]. This provides insight into the enfeoffment of the "Nangong" lineage and the development of the family within the capital.

The Nangong clan, sharing the Ji lineage with the Zhou, and Nangong Kuo, also known as "Bo Kuo", were highly regarded in the pre-Zhou era. He was one of the "Four Friends of King Wen" and made significant contributions during King Wu's conquest of Shang. Historical records do not specify that Nangong Kuo was the son of a king, suggesting that the Nangong clan was likely a branch of the Ji lineage that separated early on.

Bo Kuo's eldest son established the Zeng state in the south during the early Zhou period, while Gongzhong was his second son, the heir to the Nangong clan in the royal domain. Similar to how the Duke of Zhao was enfeoffed in Yan, but his son Ke succeeded him in Yan, Nangong's status in the early Zhou was comparable to that of the Duke of Zhao and the Duke of Zhou. He was enfeoffed in Zeng, but he did not personally take up the enfeoffment, which was instead carried out by his descendants. The Zeng Hou Yu Chime inscription, "The king sent Nangong to establish a residence in Natu", and the Zeng Gong Qiu Chime inscription, "Imperial Ancestor established in the southern lands" and "Imperial Ancestor Nangong", indicate that "Nangong" was the first Zeng Hou to arrive in the enfeoffed territory of Zeng. The first Zeng Hou of the Zeng state, "Nangong" was not Nangong Kuo, as mentioned in the inscriptions "Bo Shi" and "Gaozu", but rather a descendant of Nangong Kuo, who inherited the title of "Nangong", thus becoming the first Zeng Hou.

Cheng Hao suggests that the descendant who inherited the title of Nangong was Nangong Yao, also known as Zeng Hou Jian [11]. "Nangong Yao" is mentioned in the Tsinghua Bamboo Slips, Good Ministers, which lists the wise rulers and their advisors from the ancient Yellow Emperor to the Spring and Autumn period. The Tsinghua Bamboo Slips: Good Ministers states, "King Wen had Hong Yao, Tai Dian, San Yisheng, Nangong Shi, and Nangong Yao". The inscription "Zeng Hou Jian" from the M65 tomb at Yeji Mountain, Suizhou, is identified by Li Xueqin as the first Zeng Hou [5]. Furthermore, the Douzi Ding inscription from the tomb of Zeng Hou Jian's wife, M2, suggests that Feng Shi believes that "Jian" and "Yao" are related in meaning, thus Zeng Hou Jian used "Jian" as his name, and "Yao" as his style [23].

The inscription on the Nangong Fangzuo Gui unearthed from the tomb of Marquis Zeng Hou Yi (M111) reads, "Kang made a precious bronze for the illustrious deceased father, Nangong". Zeng Hou Kang claimed to be the son of Nangong. Scholars generally identify this "Nangong" as Nangong Kuo, based on the Da Yu Ding and the Nangong Hu Chime. However, this identification presents chronological difficulties for Zeng Hou Kang as the third Zeng Hou, given the extended time span. If Zeng Hou Kang was indeed the son of Nangong Kuo, the time elapsed would be considerable. Nangong Kuo's active period, as evidenced by "Bo Kuo, assists King Wen and King Wu of Zhou" places him between King Wen and King Wu, aiding King Wu in the overthrow of the Shang dynasty. If Zeng Hou Kang was his son, he would have lived through the reigns of at least Kings Cheng, Kang, and Zhao, which is unlikely.

Therefore, the "Nangong" mentioned in the Da Yu Ding is not the same as the Zeng Hou Nangong. Nangong Kuo, like the Duke of Zhou and the Duke of Shao, remained in the royal domain to

serve the Zhou royal family and was not actually enfeoffed in the State of Zeng. Consequently, no related tombs have been discovered in Zeng. The initial enfeoffment of Zeng is not recorded in historical texts. According to Zuo Zhuan, Zhao Gong 26th year: "When King Wu conquered Yin, King Cheng pacified the four directions, and King Kang gave rest to the people, they established their maternal uncles and younger brothers to protect Zhou". Based on the research of Gu Jiegang and others, the Western Zhou dynasty's efforts during the reign of King Cheng were focused on suppressing the reChimeions of Wu Geng, the Three Guardians, and the Eastern Yi[24]. It can be inferred that the enfeoffment of the "Nangong" family, the ZengHou lineage, occurred during the reign of King Kang of Zhou. Nangong Kuo received a royal decree to lead the extensive "Southern Territory Campaign" during the reigns of Cheng and Kang and was nominally enfeoffed as the ruler of Zeng. However, it was his son who actually went to Zeng to assume the role of the enfeoffed lord. His activities in the southern states align perfectly with the inscription on the Chime of ZengHou Yu: "Establishing a residence in the fertile land, the lord protects the Huaiyi, overseeing Jiangxia". Therefore, the first ZengHou, the "Nangong" and "ZengHou" of the Zeng inscriptions, belonged to the "Nangong" family. They were enfeoffed in the Suizhou area of the southern states during the reign of King Kang of Zhou and remained as marquises until the state was destroyed by Chu during the Warring States period.

3. Discussion of the Identity of "Nangong"

Regarding the identity of "Nangong", several scholars propose that "Nangong" refers to a single individual. Li Xueqin suggests that Nangong assisted Kings Wen and Wu in their campaign against the Shang, aligning with the achievements and era of Nangong Kuo; therefore, Nangong is Nangong Kuo. Tang Lan posits that "Dan" and "Ran" are borrowed characters for "Nan", and Dan (Ran) Jizai is Nangong[25]. Shen Changyun argues that the founding of the Zeng state occurred during the reigns of Kings Cheng and Kang, or during the reign of King Kang, and that Nangong, the first enfeoffed ruler of Zeng, should be Nangong Mao from Shangshu•Guming[10]. Cheng Hao identifies Nangong as the eldest son of Nangong Kuo, the occupant of Tomb M65 in the Yeja Mountain cemetery, and Nangong Yao, who appears in the Tsinghua Bamboo Slips Liangchen, received a royal decree to inherit the Zeng state on behalf of his father, becoming the first ruler of Zeng and being called Nangong Yao[11].

Conversely, other scholars suggest that "Nangong" was not a title exclusive to one person. Zhu Fenghan believes that the first Nangong was Nangong Kuo, and the Nangong clan's main lineage preserved the title of Nangong throughout the Western Zhou period, with the Nangong title being inherited by the eldest son of the Nangong clan[9]. Wang Entian argues that the Nangong in the Da Yu Ding inscription refers to Nangong Kuo, but the Nangong, the first ruler of the Zeng state in the ZengHou Yu Zhong inscription, should be his grandson, Yu[26]. Tian Chengfang suggests that there were at least three Nangongs: Bo Kuo, the great-grandfather; the father of ZengHou Kang, and ZengHou Kang himself[27]. Huang Yifei believes that Nangong was the first ZengHou established in the southern lands, namely ZengHou Jian, the occupant of Tomb M65 in the Yeja Mountain cemetery, but the title of Nangong could be inherited by successive Marquises of Zeng, and each ZengHou could be called Nangong[28].

Firstly, in terms of appellation, the title "Gong" underwent internal changes during the Western Zhou period. "Gong" served both as a term of endearment and a title of respect. Within the royal domain of the Western Zhou, those serving the Zhou royal family were sometimes referred to as "Mou Gong", using the name of their fiefdom before "Gong". Most of these "Gong" were close relatives of the Zhou royal family, including those with fiefdoms within the royal domain and those from outside the domain. Generally, only the first enfeoffed ruler was qualified to be called "Gong"[29]. Secondly, in conjunction with the principle of the eldest son inheriting the fiefdom, the early Western Zhou "Nangong" family was divided into two branches: "Nangong"

and "ZengHou", which can well explain the changes in the identity of "Nangong". Our understanding of the identity of Nangong should no longer conflate the Nangong clan within the royal domain and the Zeng state outside the domain, but rather require investigation and verification based on the development of specific lineages.

As mentioned above, the "Nangong" mentioned in the Da Yu Ding inscription was active around the time of Kings Wen and Wu of Zhou. This "Nangong" entered service during the reign of King Wen of Zhou, assisted King Wu in conquering the Shang, and his son "Gongzhong" inherited his position in the late reign of King Cheng of Zhou, continuing to serve the Zhou royal family within the royal domain. His grandson "Yu" inherited the title in the twenty-third year of King Kang of Zhou, as recorded in the Da Yu Ding. In the twenty-fifth year, he achieved a great victory in the campaign against the GuiFang, which was recorded in the Xiao Yu Ding, belonging to the late Kang era. However, the "Nangong" mentioned in the bronze inscriptions unearthed from the Zeng state was active during the reigns of Kings Cheng and Kang of Zhou, and was the ancestor of the ZengHou, the first enfeoffed ruler who received the order to establish a state in "Natu" and the King of Zhou ordered him to "govern and prepare the HuaiYi, and oversee Jiangxia"[30]. Therefore, we speculate that these two "Nangong" mentioned in the bronze inscriptions of different lineages do not refer to the same person, but are actually two generations.

From textual and epigraphic evidence spanning the early Western Zhou to the late Eastern Zhou periods, we observe numerous records concerning the Nangong and ZengHou lineages. The designation "Nangong" held significant influence within these clans. The Da Yu Ding inscription, which mentions "Ancestor Nangong", confirms that the first "Nangong" was an important ancestor of the Yu lineage. The "Nangong" referenced in the Da Yu Ding inscription is Nangong Shi, also known as Bo Kuo. Yu is generally considered a figure from the reign of King Kang, making Nangong, as Yu's "Ancestor", at least his grandfather. The association of Bo Kuo with the Nangong lineage is further supported by the Nangong Hu Chime inscription, which references "the ancestor Nangong, the Yazu Gongzhong Bifu's family". Following Bo Kuo, the Nangong lineage may have established a separate branch within the royal domain, referring to their ancestor Nangong Kuo as "Nangong", thus explaining the "Yazu" designation for this branch. Yu, the subject of the Da Yu Ding, was also known as Nangong Yu, a branch of Nangong Shi. Nangong Mao served as the "Yazu" of this branch, within the royal domain's Nangong system, venerating Nangong Shi as "Nangong". The "Nangong" of the ZengHou lineage and this "Ancestor Nangong" were of different generations, referring to the first ZengHou, who was enfeoffed in the State of Zeng in Suizhou. The State of Zeng, located in the Jiangnan region, was a major lineage, thus the terms "Gaozu" and "Huangzu" were used.

The Zeng Gong Qiu Chime inscriptions, which distinguish between Bo Kuo and Nangong using the terms "Gaozu" and "Huangzu", provide crucial insights into the "Nangong" of the ZengHou lineage outside the royal domain. The Zeng Gong Qiu inscription states, "Greatly illustrious Gaozu, who assisted the civil and martial achievements of Zhou. Virtuous Bo Shi, cautious and of virtue..."[31]. The Zuo Zhuan notes, "In the fifteenth year of Duke Zhao... and formerly your Gaozu Sun Boyan managed the records of Jin", with Kong Yingda explaining that "the ancestor of nine generations is called Gaozu, signifying a distant ancestor". The inscription also includes, "Ping Yinshi ordered Huangzu, established in the southern lands... to offer sacrifices to their Huangzu Nangong". The distinction between "Gaozu" and "Huangzu Nangong" is clear. "Gaozu" could refer to one or more ancestors no later than the great-grandfather, or specifically to the appointed ruler or the founding ancestor. In bronze inscriptions, "Huangzu" could refer to a grandfather or ancestors beyond the grandfather[32]. These terms are distinct. Based on the context of the Zeng Gong Qiu inscription, the "Gaozu" refers to figures from the reigns of King Wen and King Wu of Zhou, while "Huangzu Nangong" refers to figures from the reigns of King Cheng and King Kang of Zhou. "Gaozu" should be "Bo Kuo" and should not be confused with

"Huangzu Nangong". Furthermore, considering the structure of the text, the ZengHou would not use two different names to refer to the same ancestor when offering sacrifices.

The "Gaozu" in the Zeng Gong Qiu Chime inscription is Bo Kuo, also known as Bo Shi, while "Nangong" is ZengHou Jian, the first ZengHou appointed by King Zhao, who was enfeoffed in the southern lands. Subsequent ZengHou venerated him as "Huangzu Nangong". Bo Shi, the "Greatly illustrious Gaozu" and "Huangzu Nangong" established in the southern lands, were not the same person; they should be considered father and son. Although Bo Shi was not enfeoffed in the State of Zeng, he was still considered the founding ruler of Zeng. Therefore, the Nai Jia Chime states, "Bo Shi received the mandate"[33]. After Nangong Shi's death, ZengHou Jian, as his eldest son, inherited the "Nangong" title. Shortly thereafter, the Zhou king enfeoffed Jian in the State of Zeng as a Hou[34], as evidenced by the phrase "The king sent the mandate to Nangong".

The identity of "Nangong" is now relatively clear. After Nangong Shi, the Nangong lineage formed the "Nangong" and "ZengHou" systems. Bronzes bearing "Nangong" inscriptions include those from the Nangong lineage within the royal domain, such as the Da Yu Ding and the Nangong Hu Chime. Yu, also known as Nangong Yu, was clearly from the Nangong Shi's branch, the Nan Zhong lineage, with Nangong Mao as the Yazou of this branch, who revered Nangong Shi as their ancestral "Nangong". The other category includes those from the State of Zeng, "established in the southern lands", as evidenced by inscriptions on artifacts such as the Nangong Fangzuo Gui, the Zeng Gong Qiu Chime, and the ZengHou Yu Chime. Both lineages venerated "Nangong" as their Huangzu. ZengHou Jian was the first ZengHou, the "Nangong" of the State of Zeng. ZengHou Kang was the son of "Nangong", and the Nangong Fangzuo Gui unearthed from his tomb bears the inscription, "Kang made the precious bronze for the deceased father Nangong".

4. Conclusion

As an abbreviation of Nangong, "Nangong" refers to the "Ancestor Nangong" of the Nangong lineage. He was the grandfather of Yu, the main bronze of the Da Yu Ding, and the ancestor of Nangong Hu, the Sitou of the Nangong Hu Chime. "Nangong" was also a significant figure in the development of the Zeng state, the first enfeoffed lord within the ZengHou system of the southern territories. The "Nangong" lineage diverged after Nangong Shi. During the Western Zhou period, the "Nangong" family effectively split into two branches: one remained in Zongzhou, available for the king's command and military campaigns. This branch, as indicated by the bronze inscriptions, refers to Nangong Shi. The other branch was enfeoffed in the Zeng state to manage the southern territories and fortify the borders. The "Imperial Ancestor Nangong" referenced by the ZengHou lineage was the first ZengHou, ZengHou Jian.

Throughout the Western Zhou period, apart from Nangong Shi himself, his descendants are rarely mentioned in historical records. This scarcity complicates the study of the "Nangong" family and their true identity, leading to a limited understanding of the role the "Nangong" lineage played in assisting the Zhou court and securing the realm during the early Zhou dynasty. By integrating transmitted texts with unearthed bronze inscriptions, researching the true identity of "Nangong" is of great significance for understanding the enfeoffment of the Zeng state and its first lord, the lineage of the Yejiashan Zeng state cemetery, the background of the Zhou enfeoffment system, and the Zhou kings' management of the southern territories. The study of "Nangong" is not only related to the early history of the Zeng state but also to the early history of the entire Western Zhou dynasty, providing crucial clues for connecting the Zeng lineage.

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