

Chou Kung Biography

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Biography

Chou kung (active ca. 1116 B.C.) was one of the most revered figures in Chinese history. Confucius considered him the model minister whom all potential officials should emulate.

Chou kung, or the Duke of Chou, was born during the Shang dynasty (1766-1122 B.C.). His original name was Chi Tan and his family came from the Wei River valley of Shensi Province. His father, known as Wen wang, or the Cultured King, had revolted against the Shang, and Chou kung's older brother, Wu wang, or the Martial King, overthrew the Shang and established the Chou dynasty (1122 B.C.). Chou kung was his brother's chief adviser in planning military and political strategy. After the conquest Chou kung was given the fief of Lu, located on the eastern seaboard in what is now Shantung Province.

Chou kung did not immediately go to his fief but remained with his brother to help him run the government. Many of the policies Wu wang adopted were originally suggested by Chou kung. Wu wang died in 1116 B.C. and was succeeded by his infant son, known as King Ch'eng. Since Ch'eng was too young to assume full power, Chou Kung set himself up as regent. Chou kung's action was interpreted by some as an attempt to assume the throne for himself, and his two brothers, Kuan Shu and Ts'ai Shu, were particularly suspicious of his motives. Just after the conquest they had been put in charge of supervising the son of the conquered Shang king, who had been given a small fief in eastern China. When Chou kung declared himself regent, the two brothers revolted and rallied around the Shang heir in an ostensible attempt to reestablish the Shang rule. Chou kung immediately sent out an army to the east and defeated the rebellious forces. He put to death the Shang heir and Kuan Shu and exiled Ts'ai Shu.

Chou kung served as regent for 7 years; he resigned when King Ch'eng reached maturity but continued to advise him. Chou kung was responsible for supervising the building of the new capital, which was moved from the Wei valley to Loyang in north-central China. He also is credited with composing instructions to the young king in administering his government. The exact date of Chou kung's death is unknown, but it must have been shortly after King Ch'eng took power.