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Serving All-under-Heaven: Cosmopolitan intellectuals of the Warring States period

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Abstract

Qin imperial unification in 221 BCE is often conceived of as the 'unification of China'. Although from the long-term perspective of Chinese history this view is surely valid, it obscures some of the major trends of the Warring States period (453–221 BCE). Back then, the Zhou ('Chinese') world was moving in the direction of the internal consolidation of large territorial states amid increasing political and cultural separation from their neighbours. This process unmistakably recalls similar developments in early modern Europe, where, as is well known, these resulted in the formation of nation-states. In China, by contrast, the development trajectory was markedly different. The potential transformation of the competing Warring States into fully fledged separate entities never materialized. The unified empire was eventually accepted as the sole legitimate solution to political turmoil, whereas individual states were denied the right to exist. Why, despite strong parallels, did the Chinese development trajectory ultimately diverge so conspicuously from what happened in modern Europe?

In search of an answer, this article focuses on the extraordinary role played by politically active intellectuals of the Warring States period. By prioritizing the common good of 'All-under-Heaven' over that of an individual polity, by denigrating local identities, and by rejecting the legitimacy of regional states, these intellectuals paved the way for the political unification of the Zhou world long before it occurred. This article addresses the idealistic and egoistic reasons for this choice and explores the cosmopolitan undertones of the universalist outlook of the Warring States-period intellectuals.

Keywords: Chu; cosmopolitanism; identities; intellectuals; Qin; Warring States; Zhou

Introduction

Speaking of cosmopolitanism in the Zhou 周 era (*circa* 1046–255 BCE) may sound odd to many. All too often it is assumed that the early Xia 夏 or Huaxia 華夏 ('Chinese') were self-centred, proud in their tradition, and despised the aliens as culturally and morally deficient.[1] For sure, we do not expect to discover among them the respect

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[1] For a recent reiteration of this view, see, for example, R. B. Ford, *Rome, China, and the barbarians: Ethnographic traditions and the transformation of empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

for outsiders that is usually associated with cosmopolitanism. Although not a few thinkers—such as the authors of *Mozi* 墨子 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子—questioned the Huaxia cultural superiority,[2] their voices do not represent the mainstream view of Zhou cultural elites.

To justify my use of the term 'cosmopolitanism' for the Zhou era, it may be useful to consider the Zhou world not as a nascent empire but as an equivalent of Europe: a sub-continent with considerable cultural cohesiveness but by default not a politically unified realm. Europeans had their memories of unity under the Roman empire, and dwellers of the Zhou world remembered the erstwhile unity under Western Zhou 西周 (*circa* 1046–771 BCE) rule. In both cases the cultural impact of these early unifying entities on their respective realms remained immense. However, neither memories of past unity nor common elite culture sufficed to create unity in the present. Much like pre-modern and modern European polities, those of the Zhou oikoumenē were engaged in internecine wars that became more bitter and devastating, especially as we advance into the Warring States (Zhanguo 戰國) era (453–221 BCE). And as I hope to demonstrate in what follows, the internal consolidation of the competing Warring States was accompanied by a process of mutual estrangement that curiously resembles similar processes in European modernity. It would not be difficult to imagine the Zhou realm following the European trajectory of separation into competing 'nation-states' with distinct political and cultural identities.

And yet, as is well known, China's trajectory was markedly different. The age of bitter inter-state rivalry ended with the imperial unification that thereafter became the default choice of Chinese elites for millennia to come. In what follows I will argue that the difference is not accidental. Rather, the cultural and political fragmentation of the Zhou world was checked and reversed primarily due to the extraordinary choice of the politically active intellectuals of that age. These intellectuals, the Masters (*zi* 子), their disciples and followers, explicitly rejected local identities and affiliations, and proudly proclaimed their devotion to 'All-under-Heaven' (*tianxia* 天下)—that is, the entire known civilized world.[3] I shall analyse the reasons for this peculiar 'cosmopolitan' choice and end with a few observations about the lessons it offers regarding the intellectuals' role in shaping national identities.

Three clarifications are needed at the beginning of this article. First, my choice of a comparative perspective that highlights parallels between pre-imperial China and modern Europe (rather than with the Greco-Roman world) is not arbitrary. As I shall try to demonstrate in the third section below, the state formation processes in Warring States-period China share more similarities with those in modern Europe

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[2]Y. Pines, 'Beasts or humans: Pre-imperial origins of Sino-barbarian dichotomy', in *Mongols, Turks and others*, (eds) R. Amitai and M. Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 75–79; and J. Riegel, 'Master Kong versus Master Mo: Two views of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism in the early Chinese philosophical tradition', in *The Ashgate research companion to multiculturalism*, (ed.) D. Ivison (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 286–293 (for *Mozi*).

[3]For the justification of the term 'intellectuals' for *shi* 士, the 'men of service', see Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Shi yu Zhongguo wenhua* 士與中國文化 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), pp. 1–3. Unlike Yu Yingshi, I prefer to use the term 'intellectuals' not for the entire broad *shi* elite but to its small but exceptionally influential segment of Masters and their followers.

than with the early Mediterranean world dominated by city-states.[4] Second, my focus in what follows will be on the historical context of nascent Chinese 'cosmopolitanism'. By contrast, I am less concerned with the increasingly popular topic of whether or not Confucianism or other aspects of a traditional Chinese world view are compatible with or conducive to modern cosmopolitan ideas.[5] And third, my focus is decidedly on pre-imperial China, the age of political fragmentation. It is not my goal to address cosmopolitan tendencies in the unified empire, where such leanings are more expected to come to the fore.[6]

The aristocratic age

Archaeological discoveries of recent decades have revolutionized our understanding of China's past. The previously widespread uncritical acceptance of Chinese political mythology, which postulated the existence of a single legitimate locus of power on China's soil since the very inception of civilization there, gave way to a polycentric perspective.[7] It is now widely accepted that multiple Neolithic cultures interacted for millennia in the basins of the Yellow and Yangzi rivers, and beyond, none of

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[4]Curiously, the city-state parallel is more fitting to many (albeit not all) Chinese polities of the aristocratic Bronze Age (*circa* 1500–400 BCE). See more in M. E. Lewis, 'The city-state in Spring-and-Autumn China', in *A comparative study of thirty city-state cultures: An investigation conducted by the Copenhagen Polis Center*, (ed.) M. Herman Hansen (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 2000), pp. 359–374; and M. E. Lewis, *The construction of space in early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 136–150; cf. Y. Pines, 'Bodies, lineages, citizens, and regions: A review of Mark Edward Lewis' *The construction of space in early China*', *Early China*, vol. 30 (2005), pp. 174–181. For the most systematic (albeit not necessarily entirely accurate) attempt to compare state formation processes in early China and modern Europe, see V. T.-b. Hui, *War and state formation in ancient China and early modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For another brief but very engaging take on this parallel, see Li Ling 李零, '"Guan Gong zhan Qin Qiong" de kexingxing yanjiu (dai qianyan)' '關公戰秦瓊'的可行性研究 (代前言), in Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu xukao* 中國方術續考 (Beijing: Dongfang, 2001), pp. 6–10.

[5]For the latter topic, see, for example, Riegel, 'Master Kong versus Master Mo'; P. J. Ivanhoe, 'Confucian cosmopolitanism', *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 42, no. 1 (2014), pp. 22–44; S.-H. Tan, 'Cosmopolitan Confucian cultures: Suggestions for future research and practice', *International Communication of Chinese Culture*, vol. 2 (2015), pp. 159–180; Chen Xunwu, 'Confucianism and cosmopolitanism', *Asian Philosophy*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2020), pp. 40–56; Ouyang Xiao 欧阳霄, '"Tianxia" and "Renlei mingyun gongtongti": A revival of cosmopolitanism in a Chinese cultural disguise?', *Journal of Global Ethics*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2021), pp. 1–10. For an inspiring analysis of a 'pan-Huaxia' world view, reflected in early Chinese literary production, as compatible with cosmopolitanism, see A. Beecroft, *Authorship and cultural identity in early Greece and China: Patterns of literary circulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Another possibly relevant study, which I was not able to read by the time I prepared this article, is S. Xiang, *Chinese cosmopolitanism: The history and philosophy of an idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023).

[6]For a classical treatment of cosmopolitanism in imperial polities, see M. Lavan, R. E. Payne and J. Weisweiler (eds), *Cosmopolitanism and empire: Universal rulers, local elites, and cultural integration in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[7]L. von Falkenhausen, 'The regionalist paradigm in Chinese archaeology', in *Nationalism, politics, and the practice of archaeology*, (eds) P. Kohl and C. Fawcett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 198–199, demonstrates the shift of the paradigm on the basis of the changes in the monumental *Archaeology of ancient China*, edited by K. C. Chang. In its earliest edition—K. C. Chang, *The archaeology of ancient China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963)—the author still postulated a nuclear area of the Wei 渭, Fen 汾, and Yellow rivers through which agriculture and political complexity spread all over China, whereas by the fourth edition published in 1986, Chang had adopted a radically different perspective of a 'Chinese interaction sphere'.

them obviously superior to others.[8] This situation changed, albeit slightly, at the beginning of the Bronze Age. Whereas China's first historical dynasty, the Shang 商 (*circa* 1600–1046 BCE), was not an extensive empire as was later imagined, it definitely enjoyed cultural, technological, and military superiority over its neighbours. Politically speaking as well, the Shang became the major locus of gravity in the East Asian subcontinent.[9]

The Shang's superior position was inherited and further strengthened by its successor, the Zhou dynasty. For over two centuries, the Zhou enjoyed indisputable dominance in the Yellow River basin and further to the south into the basins of the Han 漢 and Huai 淮 rivers.[10] Even as the dynasty's military power waned, it maintained its prestige as the religious and cultural centre of the oikoumenē. No other ruler—even those who proclaimed themselves 'kings' (*wang* 王)—dared to appropriate the appellation used exclusively by the Zhou kings, 'Sons of Heaven' (*tianzi* 天子). And when, in the ninth century BCE, the Zhou court initiated major ritual reform aimed at solidifying the sociopolitical hierarchy and preserving the kings' superiority vis-à-vis the regional lords (*zhuhou* 諸侯), this reform was duly implemented throughout the entire Zhou realm.[11] Crises and problems notwithstanding, the Zhou kings remained the realm's leaders.

The collapse of the Western Zhou polity in 771 BCE and the ensuing turmoil marked the end of the realm's political unity. The waning centuries of the Bronze Age—the Springs-and-Autumns period (Chunqiu 春秋, 770–453 BCE)—were marked by accelerating political disintegration. First, the Zhou kings lost the semblance of control over the regional lords; these lords were in turn eclipsed by their nominal underlings, the heads of major ministerial lineages; and in due time, the ministerial lineages themselves became engulfed in endless inter- and intra-lineage feuds. All too often a minor dispute between two nobles resulted in an armed clash between their houses, evolving into rebellion against the local lord, and eventually bringing the military intervention of the polity's neighbours. The resultant war of all against all and the loss of basic political stability may be considered the deepest systemic crisis in Chinese history prior to the first half of the twentieth century.

What was the impact of political fragmentation on elite identities? On the one hand, we observe an interesting phenomenon of the aristocrats' strong loyalty to their

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[8]G. Shelach-Lavi, *The archaeology of early China: From prehistory to the Han dynasty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[9]The scope of Shang's territorial control changed over time and perhaps never extended much beyond the middle to the lower reaches of the Yellow River, but this territory was incomparably larger than those of other contemporaneous polities. Some of these polities did attain a high degree of technological sophistication (the Sanxingdui 三星堆 findings come immediately to mind), but evidently Shang was superior in terms of the scope of its bronze production, its military technology (war chariots), and, most notably, in terms of being the exclusive centre of writing. P. R. Goldin, 'Some Shang antecedents of later Chinese ideology and culture', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 137, no. 1 (2017), pp. 121–127; Li Min, *Social memory and state formation in early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 230–311.

[10]Li Feng, *Landscape and power in early China: The crisis and fall of the Western Zhou, 1045–771 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[11]L. von Falkenhausen, *Chinese society in the age of Confucius (1000–250 BC): The archaeological evidence* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, UCLA, 2006), pp. 29–74ff; cf. P. N. Vogt, *Kingship, ritual, and royal ideology in Western Zhou China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 176–196.

home state. In their capacity as hereditary ministers, the leading nobles conceived of themselves as 'masters of the people' (*min zhi zhu* 民之主), who owed allegiance primarily to the 'altars of soil and grain' (*sheji* 社稷), that is to the state, in the name of which they could even defy the ruler himself.[12] On the other hand, this state-focused allegiance did not result in cultural parochialism. On the contrary, aristocrats from across the Zhou world maintained remarkable cultural cohesiveness based on their common adherence to the ritual norms inherited from the Western Zhou age. The most unequivocal manifestation of this common adherence can be observed archaeologically. Aristocrats' tombs display strong commonalities in terms of the correlation between the occupant's rank and the size of their tomb, ritual paraphernalia, the size of mortuary assemblages, and the like. Inscriptions on bronze vessels coming from all parts of the Zhou realm display similar commonalities in their ritualistic language.[13] Regional differences in the shape of the bronze vessels and even in the shape of written characters existed, for sure, and increased in the wake of what Lothar von Falkenhausen calls the 'Middle Springs and Autumns Ritual Restructuring',[14] but these were modifications within the common ritual framework rather than abandonment of this framework.

It is worth emphasizing here that the common ritual culture encompassed not only the core Zhou states but also peripheral polities, such as Qin 秦 and Chu 楚. In the latter years of the Springs-and-Autumns period, this culture was adopted even by the elites of the non-Sinitic states of the southeast, Wu 吳 and Yue 越. Their acculturation, which eventually resulted in the expansion of the Zhou oikoumenē, was a complex process. Even the adoption of favourable genealogy that connected the ruling houses of Wu and Yue to the Zhou dynastic founders and the sage demiurge Yu 禹 respectively was not enough to immediately shed the image of cultural Otherness associated with the southeasterners. However, pejorative attitudes notwithstanding, the ruling elites of Wu and Yue—as well as of some other non-Sinitic polities, including the Rong 戎—were eventually absorbed into the Zhou cultural sphere. What mattered was not ethnicity but rather mastering ritual norms.[15]

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[12]For the designation 'masters of the people', see *Zuozhuan*, Xuan 2.3a, Xuan 15.2, Xiang 22.7, and Zhao 5.5. *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (the *Zuo Tradition* or *Zuo Commentary* on the *Chunqiu* 春秋 [*Springs-and-Autumns Annals*]) is our major source of information on China's aristocratic age. *Zuozhuan* and the canonical *Chunqiu* 春秋 *Annals* are cited according to the divisions adopted in Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990; rev. edn); and in S. Durrant, W.-y. Li and D. Schaberg, *Zuo tradition/Zuozhuan commentary on the 'Spring and Autumn Annals'* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016). For loyalty to the altars rather than to the ruler, see Y. Pines, 'Friends or foes: Changing concepts of ruler-minister relations and the notion of loyalty in pre-imperial China', *Monumenta Serica*, vol. 50 (2002), pp. 43–49; for the altars as representing the collective entity of the state dwellers, see Masubuchi Tatsuo 增淵龍夫, *Chūgoku kodai no shakai to kokka* 中國古代の社會と國家 (Tokyo: Kōbun, 1963), pp. 139–163.

[13]For analysing mortuary assemblages of the Springs-and-Autumns period, see Falkenhausen, *Chinese society*; Yin Qun 印群, *Huanghe zhongxiayou diqu de Dong Zhou muzang zhidu* 黃河中下游地區的東周墓葬制度 (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001); for bronze inscriptions, see Huang Tingqi 黃庭頎, *Zhu le gongming: Chunqiu qingtong liqi mingwen de yanbian yu tese* 鑄勒功名—春秋青銅禮器銘文的演變與特色 (Taipei: Wanjuan, 2019).

[14]Falkenhausen, *Chinese society*, pp. 326–369.

[15]For the Wu and Yue elites' gradual accommodation of Zhou ritual culture, see L. von Falkenhausen, 'The waning of the Bronze Age: Material culture and social developments 770–481 B.C.', in *The Cambridge history of ancient China: From the origins of civilization to 221 B.C.*, (eds) M. Loewe and

The peculiar situation of ongoing social and cultural cohesiveness of the Springs-and-Autumns period nobles, notwithstanding political cleavages, can be better understood once we recall that the aristocrats' identity was primarily social rather than based on their polity. Aristocrats from different polities routinely intermarried, which was mandated by the norms of clan exogamy, but, with a very few exceptions, did not marry the commoners of their own state. They interacted during frequent diplomatic meetings, and even on the battlefield often displayed adherence to common norms of ritualized chivalry. Under duress, a noble could escape to a neighbouring polity where his original rank was recognized and he could expect to be employed and granted an allotment; some of these fugitives forged impressive careers in the new state.[16] Judging from the depictions in *Zuozhuan*, nobles from across the Zhou world shared a common textual culture, spoke a mutually intelligible language (which was evidently significantly removed from the colloquial language of the commoners), and performed common ceremonies. In all likelihood, they felt much closer to a foreign noble than to the 'wilderness men' (*yeren* 野人, i.e. those from outside the capital) of their own polity.[17] It is time to see what happened to these trans-Zhou sociocultural identities in the new, post-aristocratic age of the Warring States.

China's early modernity? The age of the Warring States

The Warring States period was witness to the most profound economic, social, administrative, and intellectual change. Loose aristocratic polities of the Springs-and-Autumns era were replaced by centralized and profoundly bureaucratized entities. The hereditary aristocracy of the Bronze Age was absorbed into a much broader meritocratic elite of men-of-service (*shi* 士, originally the term used for the lowest segment of nobility). The new *shi* ministers were less powerful than their aristocratic predecessors, allowing the rulers to restore firm control over the governing apparatus. And this apparatus itself became incomparably more active than before. The 'iron revolution', which had brought about a dramatic increase in agricultural productivity, gave birth to the new agro-managerial state, dedicated to bolstering

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Ed. L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 525–539; and Falkenhausen, *Chinese society*, pp. 271–284; for tensions around their cultural belonging, see Y. Pines, *Foundations of Confucian thought: Intellectual life in the Chunqiu period, 722–453 B.C.E.* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), pp. 117–118; and Pines, 'Beasts or humans', pp. 85–86. For the Rong case, the most notable example is that of the renowned statesman, Hu Yan 狐偃 (appellative Zifan 子犯), whose Rong origins are almost never mentioned in the received or transmitted texts but can be discovered by a careful juxtaposition of different pieces of information in *Zuozhuan*. Note that Hu Yan's inscription on Zifan-*bianzhong* clearly identifies him as a conservative Zhou noble rather than a cultural outsider. Y. Pines, *Zhou history unearthed: The Bamboo manuscript* Xinian *and early Chinese historiography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), pp. 82–84.

[16]To illustrate this point suffice it to mention one example. In 576 BCE, after the execution of Jin's high minister Bo Zong 伯宗, Zong's son, Zhouli 伯州犁, fled to Chu and was appointed to a high ministerial position there. In 541 BCE, when Bo Zhouli was likewise slandered and killed, his grandson, Bo Pi 伯嚭, fled to Wu, and headed the Wu government until Wu's collapse in 474 BCE, when he shifted service to the victorious Yue. Thus, four generations of the Bo family occupied important positions in the four mightiest states of their era.

[17]For the 'wilderness men' vis-à-vis the 'capital dwellers' (*guoren* 國人), see Tian Changwu 田昌五 and Zang Zhifei 臧知非, *Zhou Qin shehui jiegou yanjiu* 周秦社會結構研究 (Xian: Xibei daxue chubanshe, 1996), pp. 161–183.

agricultural output through the development of fallow lands, initiation of irrigation and water conservancy projects, controlling the production of iron tools and their dissemination to peasant households, and the like. Parallel to these, the replacement of aristocratic chariot-based armies with mass infantry armies staffed by peasant conscripts prompted yet another dramatic change in the state's functions. Administrators had to learn how to mobilize, train, and motivate the entire male population; how to monitor its movements; and how to apprehend and punish absconders. Henceforth the state had to control its subjects to an extent unthinkable during the aristocratic age.[18]

These developments unmistakably resemble those in modern Europe between *circa* the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. There we also encounter profound socioeconomic revolution, replacement of loose aristocratic polities with centralized bureaucratic states, mass conscription and new modes of warfare, an unprecedented degree of state intervention in and control of the lives of its subjects, and the like. Parallel to this, Europe witnessed consolidation of the territorial state, fixation of the state boundaries, ideas of state sovereignty, strengthening of separate ethnonational identities, and, eventually, the formation of a nation-state, based on the presumption of desired congruence between the state and ethnicity. The features of the newly emerging European nation-state are conveniently summarized in a recent study by Opello and Rosow:

> The nation-state is a type of politico-military rule that, first, has a distinct geographically defined territory over which it exercises jurisdiction; second, has sovereignty over its territory, which means that its jurisdiction is theoretically exclusive of outside interference by other nation-states or entities; third, it has a government made up of public offices and roles that control and administer the territory and population subject to the state's jurisdiction; fourth, it has fixed boundaries marked on the ground by entry and exit points and, in some cases, by fences patrolled by border guards and armies; fifth, its government claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical coercion over its population; sixth, its population manifests, to a greater or lesser degree, a sense of national identity; and, seventh, it can rely, to a greater or lesser degree, on the obedience and loyalty of its inhabitants.[19]

The seven features enumerated above can be grouped into three: first, territoriality (geographically defined territory, clearly separated from other polities, within which the government exercises exclusive jurisdiction; features one, two, and four), the government's direct control over its territory (features three and five), and the population's display of national identity which ensures its obedience and loyalty (features six and seven). It is remarkable that the first two sets are fully present in Warring States China.

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[18] For the overview of these new trends, see Yang Kuan 楊寬, *Zhanguo shi* 戰國史 (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1998; rev. edn); M. E. Lewis, 'Warring states: Political history', in *The Cambridge history of ancient China*, (eds) Loewe and Shaughnessy, pp. 587–650.

[19] W. C. Opello and S. J. Rosow, *The nation-state and global order: A historical introduction to contemporary politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), p. 3.

Let us start with the most notable parallel between the Warring States-period polities and the modern European entities, namely, the territorial integration of the newly formed Warring State. This integration was a natural by-product of the state's need to control all of its land resources and all of its inhabitants. Not only all the arable lands had to be measured, recorded, allocated to peasants, and taxed, but the state also sought to oversee its 'mountains, forests, marshes, swamps, valleys and dales' from which benefits could be extorted.[20] All the inhabitants had to be registered for the sake of taxation, conscription, and general surveillance. These tasks were performed by the increasingly assertive government apparatus, which penetrated society down into the tiniest hamlets, resembling what Eric Hobsbawm considers the hallmark of the modern state, namely reaching 'down to the humblest inhabitant of the least of its villages'.[21] This apparatus in turn was subjugated to strict, centralized supervision, with meticulously designed rules regulating the officials' performance. Vestiges of the autonomous power of aristocrats, the hallmark of the Springs-and-Autumns period, were eliminated. The central government attained full control over the land and its dwellers.[22]

Territorial integration of individual states was accompanied by the increasing separation from rival polities. The separation was instituted through administrative regulations that monitored movements of population and merchandise into neighbouring polities; legal distinctions between the native and foreign populations; and, most visibly, long protective walls, which separated the 'inner' and 'outer' realms. These walls were defensive in their nature, but they had far-reaching symbolic significance, changing not only the physical but also the mental landscape. The land outside the boundaries became a dangerous *terra incognita*, departure into which was

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[20] *Book of Lord Shang* 6.2 ('Suan di' 算地) and 15.1 ('Lai min' 徠民), cited in Y. Pines (trans.), *The book of Lord Shang: Apologetics of state power in early China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). According to the *Book of Lord Shang*, the arable land accounted for *circa* 60 per cent of the state's territory, which reflected the realities of the central Yellow River basin: Y. Pines, 'Waging a demographic war: Chapter 15 ('Attracting the people') of the *Book of Lord Shang* revisited', *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung*, vol. 46 (2023). For the state's increasing economic penetration into 'mountains, forests, marshes, swamps, valleys and dales', see Falkenhausen, *Chinese society in the age of Confucius*, part 3.

[21] E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; 2nd edn), p. 80.

[22] For some aspects of the bureaucracy's activism, administrative centralization, and control over the bureaucrats, see, for example, R. D. S. Yates, 'State control of bureaucrats under the Qin: Techniques and procedures', *Early China*, vol. 20 (1995), pp. 331–165; R. D. S. Yates, 'The Qin slips and boards from Well No. 1, Liye, Hunan: A brief introduction to the Qin Qianling County Archives', *Early China*, vol. 35–36 (2012–2013), pp. 291–330; R. D. S. Yates, 'The economic activities of a Qin local administration: Qianling County, Modern Liye, Hunan Province, 222–209 B.C.E', in *Between command and market*, (eds) E. Levi-Sabattini and C. Schwermann (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 244–317; M. Korolkov, *The imperial network in ancient China: The foundation of Sinitic empire in southern East Asia* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 91–169; M. Korolkov, '(Political) community: Grassroots social units in ideology and practice of the early Chinese empires', *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung*, vol. 46 (2023); and Sun Wenbo 孫聞博, 'Shang Yang's promotion of the county system and the county-canton relations: An analysis based on official titles, salary grades and the size of the employed personnel', (trans.) Yuri Pines, *Bamboo and Silk*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2020), pp. 344–338. Most of these discussions are based on the documents from the Imperial Qin (221–207 BCE), and also highlight the Qin's difficulties in attaining full control over the recently conquered territories; but their observations are overall relevant for the late Warring States period in general.

considered an inauspicious event that required a special exorcist ritual, similar to the ritual performed upon leaving one's native settlement.[23]

The above trends demonstrate remarkable similarities between the state-building process in the Warring States era and in modern Europe. But what about the third group of nation-state features outlined by Opello and Rosow, namely, the formation of separate national identities? Here, China's trajectory was different, but even this difference should be qualified. The political, physical, and legal separation among the competing polities was conducive to cultural separation as well.

New social realities could contribute towards cultural alienation among competing states. Recall that with the demise of hereditary aristocracy, the appeal of the Zhou ritual culture weakened. Common ritual norms were not abandoned altogether, but they could no longer serve as the glue that held together the elites' transregional cohesiveness. The new elites, some of whose members had risen from the lower social strata, were more diversified culturally than their Bronze Age predecessors. The incremental divergence in the material and, to a lesser extent, written culture[24] of major states is well documented by material, paleographic, and textual evidence. This diversification is particularly evident in the changing image of powerful peripheral states, Qin in the northwest and Chu in the south. Their case studies exemplify the impact of centripetal forces on the Zhou world.[25]

A common misperception, based on an uncritical reading of a few statements scattered in the Warring States-period texts that are echoed in Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (*circa* 145–90 BCE) *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記), is the identification of Qin and Chu as the perennial cultural Other of the Zhou world.[26] However, recently discovered material and paleographic data allow us to correct this view. The state of Qin in particular was the staunch ally of the Zhou house and the custodian of Zhou's ancestral lands in the Wei 渭 River basin. Whereas early Qin rulers attempted to position themselves

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[23]For the inauspiciousness of departure from a native state, see Qin, 'Almanacs' ('*Ri shu*'), in *Qin jiandu heji shiwen zhushi xiuding ben* 秦簡牘合集釋文注釋修訂本, Chen Wei 陳偉 et al. (eds)(Wuhan: Jing Chu wenku bianzuan chuban weiyuanhui and Wuhan Daxue chubanshe, 2016), vol. 1, p. 250 (slips 177–178); for exorcist rituals, see Hu Wenhui 胡文輝, 'Qin jian "Ri shu—chu bang men" xin zheng' 秦簡《日書—出邦門》新證, *Wenbo* 文博, no. 1 (1998), pp. 91–94. For an example of monitoring cross-state trade, see L. v. Falkenhausen, 'The E Jun Qi metal tallies: Inscribed texts and ritual contexts', in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, (ed.) M. Kern (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 79–123. For an example of legal distinction between natives and foreigners, see, for example, a Qin legal regulation from the Shuihudi Tomb 11 hoard in *Qin jiandu*, vol. 2, pp. 392–293 (slips 145 and 144). For the early walls, see Y. Pines, 'The earliest "Great Wall"? Long wall of Qi revisited', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 138, no. 4 (2018), pp. 743–761.

[24]For the proliferation of local variations in the characters' transcriptions during the Warring States period, see Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, *Chinese writing*, (trans) G. L. Mattos and J. Norman (Berkeley CA: The Society for the Study of Early China, 2000), pp. 78–89.

[25]For the survey of both cases, see the articles collected in C. A. Cook and J. S. Major (eds), *Defining Chu: Image and reality in early China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009) (for Chu); Y. Pines, L. von Falkenhausen, G. Shelach and R. D. S. Yates (eds), *Birth of an empire: The state of Qin revisited* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014) (for Qin).

[26]For the summary of these statements, see Y. Pines, 'Reassessing textual sources for pre-imperial Qin history', in *Синологи мира к юбилею Станислава Кучеры. Собрание трудов*, (eds) S. Dmitriev and M. Korolkov (Moscow: Institut Vostokovedeniia RAN, 2013), pp. 236–263 (for Qin); Y. Pines, 'Chu identity as seen from its manuscripts: A reevaluation', *Journal of Chinese History*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2018), pp. 2–5 (for Chu); see also below in the text.

as surrogates of the Zhou kings, they were careful not to cross the Rubicon of overt subversion. In fact, well into the fourth century BCE, Qin was a relatively conservative state, which preserved the Western Zhou culture more than its eastern peers.[27] The case of Chu was different: its relations with the Zhou house had already soured by the tenth century BCE, and its leaders' appropriation of the royal title early in the Springs-and-Autumns period was a major breach of ritual decorum. That said, judging from early Chu mortuary assemblages and inscriptions on bronze vessels from Chu tombs, it is clear that this state was an inseparable part of the Zhou cultural oikoumenē.[28]

Textual evidence supports the above picture. With regard to Qin, not a single text dated prior to the fourth century BCE hints at its alleged 'barbarianism' (although *Zuozhuan* records the surprise of a Lu statesman about Qin not being 'uncouth' [*lou* 陋]).[29] Concerning Chu, the attitude is more ambiguous: whereas in *Zuozhuan* it is never identified as a 'savage' (*manyi* 蠻夷) state, it is clearly treated as somewhat separate from the Xia 夏 core and as the ultimate challenger of the Zhou royal clan (the Ji 姬).[30] Yet once we move into the Warring States period, we encounter a clearer enmity and strongly pronounced pejorative attitude. In particular, Chu's association with 'barbarians' becomes commonplace. This association is reiterated throughout *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu* 國語), even though the overall view of Chu in this text is far from negative, and some of its sections even contain laudatory comments.[31] A pejorative view of Chu is more explicit in the *Gongyang Commentary* 公羊傳 on *Chunqiu*, composed in the second half of the Warring States period. Chu is consistently identified there as a 'barbarian' (*yi* 夷 or *yidi* 夷狄) state; it is oddly claimed to have no ranked nobles (which is patently wrong, judging from the *Chunqiu* itself), and it is frequently treated with undisguised enmity.[32] One of these statements in *Gongyang* is particularly notable:

楚有王者則後服, 無王者則先叛。夷狄也, 而亟病中國。南夷與北狄交, 中國不絕若線。

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[27]L. von Falkenhausen with G. Shelach, 'Introduction: Archaeological perspectives on the Qin "unification" of China', in *Birth of an Empire*, (eds) Pines et al., pp. 37–51.

[28]Xu Shaohua 徐少華, 'Chu culture: An archaeological overview', in *Defining Chu*, (eds) Cook and Major, pp. 21–32.

[29]*Zuozhuan*, Wen 12.5. For Qin's image in *Zuozhuan*, see Pines, 'Reassessing textual sources', pp. 241–248.

[30]Pines, *Zhou History unearthed*, p. 124.

[31]See Xu Yuangao 徐元誥, *Guoyu jijie* 國語集解, collated by Wang Shumin 王樹民 and Shen Changyun 沈長雲 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 5.4, p. 186 ('Lu 魯 2'); 14.12, p. 430 ('Jin 晉 8'); 18.7, p. 527 ('Chu楚 2'). The *Discourses of the states* utilizes many of the materials that served the compiler of *Zuozhuan*, but its compilation was evidently later than that of *Zuozhuan* and the text clearly represents a Warring States-period standpoint. For laudation of Chu in *Guoyu*, see *Guoyu* 16.1: 464–468 ('Zheng' 鄭), analysed in Pines, 'Chu identity', pp. 14–15.

[32]Liu Shangci 劉尚慈, *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan yizhu* 春秋公羊傳譯注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), Zhuang 10, p. 130; Xi 21, p. 241; Zhao 16, p. 540. For the nature and dating of *Gongyang zhuan*, see J. Gentz, *Das Gongyang zhuan: Auslegung und Kanoniesierung der Frühlings und Herbstannalen (Chunqiu)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001); and J. Gentz, 'Long live the king! The ideology of power between ritual and morality in the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳', in *Ideology of power and power of ideology in early China*, (eds) Y. Pines, P. R. Goldin and M. Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 69–117. For the existence of ranked nobles (*dafu* 大夫) in Chu, see, for example, the *Chunqiu* entry in Xi 28.6 *et saepe*. For a rare instance of positive treatment of Chu in *Gongyang zhuan*, see Gentz, 'Long Live the king', pp. 79–82.

Chu is the last to submit when there is a True Monarch, and the first to rebel when there is none. They are barbarians (*yidi*) and intensely hate the Central States. When southern savages and northern barbarians established ties, the Central States were like a thread due to be cut.[33]

This statement—which, after the canonization of the *Chunqiu* and its commentaries early in the imperial era, shaped the image of Chu for millennia to come—marks Chu as the epitome of the cultural and political Other. Chu is the malevolent polity which can be subjugated only during the reign of the True Monarch (*wangzhe* 王者, i.e. the monarch that rules All-under-Heaven rather than a regional state), and even then will forever remain prone to rebel. Coupled with a few other pejorative statements towards Chu, e.g. in *Mengzi* 孟子 and *Records of the Historian*,[34] *Gongyang*'s statement represents a profound change in Chu's image among segments of the educated elite of northern states. A state that was originally placed somewhere on the spectrum between the Huaxia and the malevolent savages, by the Warring States period Chu was more readily identified with the latter.

In the case of the state of Qin, the change is even more stark. Again, the *Gongyang* commentary may be the earliest text to identify Qin with aliens, although the compilers seemed to remain unsure where Qin's real cultural belonging was.[35] Yet this hesitancy disappears once we come to the *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策), a first century BCE compilation largely based on Warring States-period anecdotes. Qin is portrayed in the text as a state that 'has common customs with the Rong and Di ["savages"]; a state with a tiger's and wolf's heart; greedy, profit-seeking and untrustworthy, which knows nothing of ritual, propriety and virtuous behavior' 秦與戎、翟同俗, 有虎狼之心, 貪戾好利而無信, 不識禮義德行.[36] Elsewhere it is designated as 'the mortal enemy of All-under-Heaven' 秦, 天下之仇讎也.[37] This exclusion of Qin from the civilized All-under-Heaven (*tianxia* 天下), situating it beyond the pale, recurs elsewhere.[38] The harshness of these pronouncements can be explained by their context—bitter polemics between supporters and opponents of Qin at the courts of

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[33]*Gongyang zhuan*, Xi 4, p. 203. The alleged ties between southern 'savages' and northern 'barbarians' refer to the simultaneous attacks on the Central States by northern Di 狄 groups and the southern Chu.

[34]For Mengzi's denigration of Chu (amid praise of Chu personalities who were attracted by the Central States' culture and were able to transcend their 'savagery'), see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Mengzi yizhu* 孟子譯注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 5.4 (3A4 in Western editions). For the statement that the men of Chu are just 'monkeys who were washed and capped' (*mu hou er guan* 沐猴而冠), see Sima Qian 司馬遷 et al., *Shiji*, annotated by Zhang Shoujie 張守節, Sima Zhen 司馬貞 and Pei Yin 裴駰 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 7, p. 315.

[35]Pines, 'Reassessing textual sources', pp. 252–255.

[36]He Jianzhang 何建章, *Zhanguo ce zhushi* 戰國策注釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1991), 24.8, p. 907 ('Wei魏3'); a similar passage appears in the Warring States-period text, *Zhanguo zonghengjia shu* 戰國縱橫家書 unearthed at Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb no. 3 in 1973: Mawangdui Han mu boshu zhengli xiaozu 馬王堆漢墓帛書整理小組, *Mawangdui Han mu boshu (san)* 馬王堆漢墓帛書 (三) (Beijing: Wenwu, 1983), 16, p. 52.

[37]*Zhanguo ce* 14.17, p. 508 ('Chu 楚 1').

[38]Y. Pines, 'Changing views of *tianxia* in pre-imperial discourse', *Oriens Extremus*, vol. 43, no. 1/2 (2002), pp. 109–113. For other instances of pejorative remarks about Qin, see *Zhanguo ce* 2.3, p. 49 ('Xi Zhou西周') and 20.10, p. 726 ('Zhao 趙 3'). At one point, even a Qin statesman acknowledges long-term hatred of 'All-under-Heaven' towards Qin (*Zhanguo ce* 5.15, pp. 194–95 ['Qin 秦 3']).

rival Warring States. Polemical context aside, it is clear that, much like Chu, the image of Qin in the eyes of Zhou elites had changed profoundly.

What are the reasons for this new image of Chu and Qin? To a certain extent it could be a by-product of new cultural traits that appeared in both states and distinguished them from their peers. For instance, Chu burials of the Warring States period show plenty of new distinctive features, such as the proliferation of painted lacquer and silk artefacts at the expense of ritually important bronzes, distinctive ornaments with 'a curious blend of the fantastic with the real',[39] and an abundance of religious motifs, unseen elsewhere in the Zhou world.[40] In the case of Qin, the change was more dramatic. The reforms associated with Shang Yang 商鞅 (d. 338 BCE) brought about a complete social overhaul. Old aristocratic ranks were abolished and replaced by a new system of ranks of merit granted to valiant soldiers and diligent tillers.[41] All of a sudden, Zhou ritual paraphernalia vanished from Qin tombs; instead we encounter entirely new forms of burials, mortuary assemblages, and even tomb shapes.[42] These archeologically observable changes were undoubtedly part of a broader sociocultural transformation that brought about the markedly pronounced cultural distinctiveness of Qin's dwellers vis-à-vis the rest of the Zhou world.

The novel cultural traits promulgated by the ruling elites of Qin and Chu were not necessarily a result of their conscious desire to distinguish themselves from the rest of the Zhou realm. Some of these changes may reflect unrelated religious, technological, and aesthetical developments.[43] Others might have emerged due to the influence of the recently subjugated non-Zhou population on Qin and Chu elites. Furthermore, the influx of people from previously marginalized lower strata in the elite ranks, most notably in Qin in the aftermath of Shang Yang's reforms, can explain the greater visibility of previously unnoticeable local customs.[44] Whatever the explanation, however, it is plausible that the newly acquired cultural traits contributed to the estrangement of Qin and Chu dwellers from the rest of the Zhou world.

Objective differences aside, what prompted the outburst of anti-Chu and, more notably, anti-Qin sentiments was the context of ever-escalating warfare. Perpetual bloody conflicts, especially those initiated by the exceptionally aggressive Qin state,

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[39]J. So, 'Chu art: Link between the old and new', in *Defining Chu*, (eds) Cook and Major, p. 40.

[40]So, 'Chu art', pp. 33–47; Xu, 'Chu culture'; cf. Li Ling, 'On the typology of Chu bronzes', (ed. and trans.) L. von Falkenhausen, *Beiträge zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Archäologie*, vol. 11 (1991), pp. 136–178.

[41]Y. Pines 'Social engineering in early China: The ideology of the *Shangjunshu* (*Book of Lord Shang*) revisited', *Oriens Extremus*, vol. 55 (2016), pp. 17–24.

[42]G. Shelach and Y. Pines, 'Secondary state formation and the development of local identity: Change and continuity in the state of Qin (770–221 B.C.)', in *Archaeology of Asia*, (ed.) M. T. Stark (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 202–230.

[43]For example, L. von Falkenhausen, 'Mortuary behavior in pre-imperial Qin: A religious interpretation', in *Religion and Chinese society: A centennial conference of the École française d'Extrême-Orient*, (ed.) J. Lagerwey (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient), vol. 1, pp. 109–172.

[44]For instance, the rapid proliferation of the so-called catacomb burials in Qin after Shang Yang's reforms (Shelach and Pines 'Secondary state formation', pp. 214–216) may well reflect the impact of indigenous northwestern populations (Falkenhausen, *Chinese society*, pp. 205–213). Conceivably, this previously marginalized segment of Qin's population advanced socially due to the new system of the ranks of merit, becoming much more visible among the Qin elites.

fuelled mutual hatred among dwellers of rival states. Warfare, as insightfully analysed by Anthony Smith,[45] is a powerful agent of ethnic cohesiveness, on the one hand, and inter-ethnic cleavages, on the other, and it was doubly so during the Warring States period. By then, the aristocratic chivalry of the Springs-and-Autumns period was all but forgotten. Armies of peasant conscripts acted with deplorable—almost 'modern'—violence against both enemy combatants and civilians.[46] In the case of Qin, which made the decapitation of enemy soldiers the surest way for combatants to climb the social, economic, and even political ladder, armies became particularly notorious for their ruthlessness. Large-scale execution of prisoners of war, destruction of the enemy's infrastructure, expulsion of the occupied population from its lands, and so on generated bitterness and mutual alienation.[47] A letter of a Qin conscript stationed in the recently occupied Chu lands in which he complains about the defiant natives and warns his addressee not to travel to the 'new territories', the inhabitants of which are 'bandits' (*dao* 盜),[48] provides us with a rare glimpse of sentiments among the lower strata. Scattered textual evidence show that these sentiments were not exceptional.[49] Plausibly, it was among the lower strata of peasant conscripts, who were also the main victims of bloody conflicts, that the inter-state cleavages of the Warring States began visibly to acquire 'national' dimensions.

I have argued in the above discussion that a variety of cultural and political processes, some of which resemble those in early modern Europe, contributed towards the formation of nascent local ('national'?) identities in the Chinese world of the Warring States period. And yet, as noted at the beginning of this article, the subsequent

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[45]A. D. Smith, 'War and ethnicity: The role of warfare in the formation, self images and cohesion of ethnic communities', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4 (1991), pp. 375–397.

[46]In the aristocratic age (for example, medieval Europe and Springs-and-Autumns period China), war was primarily a matter for professionals (warrior aristocracy), which prompted certain codes of military chivalry; besides, the size of the armies was relatively small, and so was the number of victims of warfare. In the age of mass conscription (modern Europe, Warring States-period China), this changed, leading to the escalation both in the armies' size and the number of casualties, especially as chivalric codes were gradually abandoned. Moreover, as the differences between combatant and non-combatant populations (or infrastructure, such as granaries) became blurred, this legitimated, under certain circumstances (albeit not consistently), the systematic targeting of non-combatants, adding more destruction and bloodshed. This observation does not imply, of course, that horrific violence was introduced only with the age of mass conscription, but that its scope increased dramatically.

[47]The dry account in the 'Basic annals of Qin' 秦本紀 chapter of the *Records of the historian* (based on Qin's chronicles) is sufficient to understand the scope of violence against combatants and non-combatants alike that accompanied Qin campaigns. See just a single extract in *Shiji* 5, pp. 212–214, which also shows the steady increase in the number of victims.

[48]E. L. Shaughnessy, 'Military histories of early China: A review article', *Early China*, vol. 21 (1996), p. 181; cf. A. J. Barbieri-Low, *The many lives of the first emperor of China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022), pp. 116–125 (who translates 'bandits' as 'thieves' on p. 121). The letter postdates the empire's formation, but clearly the sentiments expressed there were equally strong before the final round of the wars of unification.

[49]The sense of popular resentment among dwellers of different states can be further exemplified by such instances as the case of Shangdang 上黨 Commandery of the state of Han 韓, whose dwellers defied the decision of their ruler to yield the territory to the state of Qin and preferred instead surrendering it to the culturally closer state of Zhao 趙. Another instance of the hatred of Qin among the broader strata of society is a Chu popular saying 'even if only three households remain in Chu, it will be Chu that destroys Qin' (*Shiji* 73, pp. 2332–2333 and 7, p. 300).

development trajectory of the Warring States world differed markedly from that of modern Europe. While in Europe nation-states became accepted (at least throughout most of the twentieth century) as the only legitimate form of state organization, in China territorial states were replaced by the unified empire established by the state of Qin after it conquered the Chinese world in 221 BCE. Henceforth, local identities rapidly lost their political importance; they became a source of intellectual curiosity for the imperial *literati* rather than a matter of political concern.[50] What happened to the localism of the Warring States? Why did it wane? To answer this, we shall turn now to the role of pre-imperial thinkers in diluting local identities.

Transcending local identities: The intellectuals' choice

The role of European intellectuals in fostering, strengthening, or even forging national identities of their peoples is well known.[51] Insofar as our above discussion is correct, and parallel developments between Europe and China did take place, it is time to ask what was the reaction of Chinese intellectuals—that is, the intellectually active segment of the *shi* stratum—to the process of cultural and political fragmentation of the Zhou world? Do we have evidence of the endorsement of local identities in the texts of the 'Hundred Schools of Thought' (*zhuzi baijia* 諸子百家)? To answer this question, let us start with a statement by Mengzi 孟子 (*circa* 380–304 BCE), one of the leading thinkers of that era:

> 「有事君人者, 事是君, 則為容悅者也。有安社稷臣者, 以安社稷為悅者也。有天民者, 達可行於天下而後行之者也。有大人者, 正己而物正者也。」

> There are servants of the ruler. They are satisfied with serving a specific ruler. There are ministers of the altars of the soil and grain. They are happy with bringing peace to the altars of soil and grain. There are the people of Heaven. Their self-realization is to implement only whatever can be implemented in All under Heaven. There is the great man. He rectifies himself and everything is rectified.[52]

Mengzi divides the men of service into four groups. At the apex stands the superhuman 'great man', who exemplifies Mengzi's personal ideal. Three lower stages are occupied by normative men of service who seek self-realization in the political realm. Of these, the lowest position is occupied by personal retainers whose allegiance is offered exclusively to their master. Above are average ministers, who are concerned with the welfare of the state. Yet above them we find 'the people of Heaven' (*tian min* 天民), whose focus is All-under-Heaven rather than a single polity. The term 'the people of Heaven' is rarely used in pre-imperial texts, and when it is employed it usually just means 'all the people'. In the above context, however, it can be read as a Chinese equivalent to the Greek *kosmopolitēs*, 'citizen of the world'. These men of service—the second best

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[50]Lewis, *The construction of space*, pp. 189–229.

[51]See, for example, B. Giesen, *Intellectuals and the nation: Collective identity in a German Axial Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); R. G. Suny and M. D. Kennedy, *Intellectuals and the articulation of the nation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

[52]*Mengzi* 13.19 (VIIA19).

segment of their stratum—transcend the boundaries of their state and are committed to realizing their ideals in the entire subcelestial realm.

Mengzi's laudation of the 'people of Heaven' as standing above the regular ministers of an individual state reflects a common perception in the Warring States-period political thought. The political discourse of that age is strongly oriented towards *tianxia* (All-under-Heaven) as the ultimate goal of political action. The term *tianxia* itself was quite marginal in the Western Zhou to the mid-Springs-and-Autumns period. It becomes more visible in the second half of the *Zuozhuan* narrative, where it refers primarily to the Zhou oikoumenē as the realm of common cultural norms.[53] By the Warring States period, by contrast, the usage of the term *tianxia* increases exponentially and the term becomes much more politically meaningful. Take, for instance, one of the earliest Warring States-period texts, the core chapters of the *Mozi* 墨子, which are perhaps the closest in terms of their dating to Mozi's lifetime (*circa* 460–390 BCE).[54] These chapters repeatedly refer to 'possessing All-under-Heaven' (*you tianxia* 有天下, 14 times), 'being a king of All-under-Heaven' (*wang tianxia* 王天下, eight times), 'ruling All-under-Heaven' (*zhi tianxia* 治天下, 23 times), and the like. This political usage is prevalent in most of the later Warring States-period texts.

Then what about an individual state and its 'altars of soil and grain'? They do remain the focus of concern of most thinkers. Chapters of texts such as *Guanzi* 管子 and the *Book of Lord Shang* 商君書, as well as many speeches scattered throughout the *Stratagems of the Warring States* discuss at length about how to benefit a specific state (e.g. Qi or Qin) by fostering economic, military, or even demographic policies that would strengthen it at the expense of its neighbours. Notably, however, even in these cases, an individual state is not the ultimate goal of political action but rather an instrument to attain universal rule. Defending one's state against predatory neighbours is a legitimate goal, but it is a temporary means only; nobody seems to concern themselves with the state's ultimate 'independence'. Not a single Warring States-period political or historical text of which I am aware displays any interest in maintaining, not to mention bolstering, a local ('national') identity; nowhere do we encounter anything akin to 'patriotism'. The only notable exception is the famous *Chu Songs* (*Chuci* 楚辭). Without entering into discussions about their authorship and dating, we can state that at the very least some of them—such as 'Lamenting Ying' ('Ai Ying' 哀郢) or 'The Fallen for the State' ('Guo shang' 國殤)— display a

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[53] Pines, 'Changing views of *tianxia*', pp. 102–103.

[54] My inference is based on the historical information in these chapters (that is, chapters 8–37 of the current *Mozi*). For instance, the fact that these chapters mention the state of Yue as one of the major powers suggests the composition before *circa* 390 BCE, when Yue started weakening, en route to eventual disintegration: Y. Pines, 'Dating a pre-imperial text: A case study of the *Book of Lord Shang*', *Early China*, vol. 39 (2016), pp. 179–180; for Yue's history during the apex of its power, see Chen Minzhen 陳民鎮, 'Qinghua jian *Xinian* suo jian "Shandong shiqi" Yue guo de junshi yu waijiao' 清華簡《繫年》所見'山東時期'越國的軍事與外交, in *Qinghua jian yu Rujia jingdian: guoji xueshu yantao-hui lunwenji* 清華簡與儒家經典國際學術研討會論文集, (eds) Jiang Linchang 江林昌 and Sun Jin 孫進 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2017), pp. 205–213; Pines, *Zhou history unearthed*, pp. 113–116. For different views of the dating of *Mozi*'s chapters, see C. Defoort and N. Standaert, 'Introduction: Different voices in the *Mozi*: studies of an evolving text', in *The Mozi as an evolving text: Different voices in early Chinese thought*, (eds) C. Defoort and N. Standaert (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 1–34.

strongly pronounced Chu identity.[55] But it is precisely this exception that highlights the complete absence of such identity-focused texts elsewhere.

Sceptics may question the legitimacy of *argumentum ex silentio*, especially as it is well-known that most pre-imperial texts were collated and possibly edited by the early imperial scholars, who could have eliminated politically 'subversive' passages from ancient works. Yet nowadays the above observations can be validated thanks to a series of major paleographic discoveries, specifically from the state of Chu, the focus of the *Chu Songs*' lamentations. Take, for instance, historical and quasi-historical texts unearthed (or looted) from Chu tombs. Sarah Allan was the first to note their 'cosmopolitan' content.[56] Thus, most historical anecdotes discovered in Chu tombs deal with events and personalities from other polities and are not related to Chu history. My own study demonstrated that even when these anecdotes do deal with Chu's past, they do not display anything that can be remotely identified as Chu sensitivities (such as lamenting its defeats, lauding its military successes, or bolstering the prestige of its royalty). The same observation is applicable *mutatis mutandis* to the entire corpus of heretofore published Chu historical texts. Overwhelmingly, these texts present Chu history in such a neutral manner that some scholars doubt whether they were produced by Chu scribes at all. Speculation aside, it is clear that these texts are simply identity-neutral. They neither present the kings of Chu as rightful replacers of the Zhou kings, nor do they treat Chu as an 'alternative civilization' to that of Zhou. Such discourse in all likelihood did not exist in the Warring States period.[57]

We search in vain in historical and quasi-historical texts from the state of Chu for anything akin to an emphasis on 'blood, land and the nation's honor', which became the hallmark of modern European nation-state-oriented thought, as exemplified, for instance, by Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872).[58] Nor can we find there ideas of Chu's exclusivity. Chu is treated as part of the larger oikoumenē from which it cannot be meaningfully dissociated. Even the historical text that deals purely with Chu local history—the *Chu Residences* (*Chuju* 楚居)—emphasizes Chu's connection to the Shang dynasty and, through it, to the broader Huaxia world.[59] In other texts, we cannot even find any concern with Chu local history. For instance, the *Rongchengshi* 容成氏 manuscript from the collection of Shanghai Museum presents the early history of the realm from primordial rulers to the dawn of the Zhou dynasty as if the realm had

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[55] See Jin Kaicheng 金開誠, Dong Hongli 董洪利 and Gao Luming 高路明 (eds), *Qu Yuan ji jiaozhu* 屈原集校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), pp. 485–506 and 282–287; for the latter poem, see also Barbieri-Low, *Many lives*, pp. 125–127. For the Chu poetry, see M. Kern, 'Early Chinese literature, beginnings through Western Han', in *The Cambridge history of Chinese literature. Vol. 1: To 1735*, (eds) Kang-I Sun Chang and S. Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 76–86. For a fascinating account about the dialogue between Chu poetry and the *Canon of poems*, see M. Hunter, 'To leave or not to leave: The *Chu Ci* 楚辭 (Verses of Chu) as response to the *Shi Jing* 詩經 (Classic of odes)', *Early China*, vol. 42 (2019), pp. 111–146.

[56] S. Allan, *Buried ideas: Legends of abdication and ideal government in recently discovered early Chinese bamboo-slip manuscripts* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 2015), pp. 58–59.

[57] Pines, 'Chu identity'.

[58] A. M. Banti, 'Sacrality and the aesthetic of politics: Mazzini's concept of the nation', in *Giuseppe Mazzini and the globalisation of democratic nationalism*, (eds) C. A. Bayly and E. F. Biagini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 68.

[59] Pines, *Zhou history unearthed*, pp. 134–137.

always been unified. Regional states—either Chu or others (it is possible that the text was composed outside Chu)[60]—do not play any role in the narrative. The realm was unified in the past, and it should be unified in the future.[61]

This brings me to the political bottom line of the competing thinkers—their unanimous emphasis on political unification of All-under-Heaven as the only way to bring peace and stability to the war-torn Zhou world. Since I have explored this discourse of political unity elsewhere, I do not want to repeat myself here. Suffice to say that the quest for political unification of the realm became 'the one that pervades the all' in Warring States-period political thought.[62] From peace-loving *Mengzi* to the warmongering *Book of Lord Shang*, from *Mozi* to *Laozi* 老子, from the *Gongyang* tradition to *Han Feizi* 韓非子—all the texts agree that 'stability is in unity' (定于一);[63] the debates revolve only around ways to attain unification, not around its ultimate desirability. This by itself suffices to explain why local identities were not endorsed by the competing thinkers. These identities would simply hinder the attainment of the glorious goal of unification, and as such they were undesirable.

The *tianxia* focus of pre-imperial China's thinkers is self-evident; but should it be viewed as a truly cosmopolitan outlook or just as promulgation of transregional pan-Huaxia ('Chinese') identity? To put it differently: what were the contours of the due-to-be-unified subcelestial realm? Did it include the entire known world or, rather, was it confined to the Zhou oikoumenē? The answer is not simple. Certain thinkers clearly endorsed a limited view of would-be unification as focused on the Zhou lands only. This conservative vision is represented for instance in 'The Tribute of Yu' ('Yu gong' 禹貢), now a chapter in the canonical *Classic of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經). The text (composed in the Warring States period) explains how the legendary demiurge Yu, having subdued the flood, organized the world into Nine Provinces (*jiu zhou* 九州). The Nine Provinces (the precise location and names of which vary from one text to another) are fundamentally congruent with the territories of China proper, i.e. with the Zhou realm. This terrestrial organization implies that the entire known world is a complete and closed system, organized in a grid of 3X3, which cannot be meaningfully altered.[64] The immutability of this scheme is even more explicit in the parallel 'field-allocation' (*fen ye* 分野) astrological system, which divides the sky into nine partitions associated with each of the provinces below. As noted by Paul R. Goldin, this association meant that 'no tenth region [to the Nine Provinces] could ever have been added. There would simply have been no tenth part of the sky to identify with it.'[65]

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[60]V. Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, 'The Han River as the central axis and the predominance of water: Questioning the claim of "No Chu-related traits" in the view of terrestrial space in the *Rong Cheng Shi* manuscript (fourth century B.C.E)', *Early China*, vol. 44 (2021), pp. 143–235.

[61]Pines, *Zhou history unearthed*, pp. 142–144.

[62]Y. Pines, '"The one that pervades the all" in ancient Chinese political thought: The origins of "the great unity" paradigm', *T'oung Pao*, vol. 86, nos. 4–5 (2000), pp. 280–324.

[63]*Mengzi* 1.6 (1A6).

[64]V. Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, 'Ritual practices for constructing terrestrial space (Warring States–early Han)', in *Early Chinese religion. Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC –220 AD)*, (eds) J. Lagerwey and M. Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), vol. 1, pp. 629–636.

[65]P. R. Goldin, 'Representations of regional diversity during the Eastern Zhou dynasty', in *Ideology of power and power of ideology*, (eds) Pines et al., p. 44.

The Nine Provinces scheme (the origins of which may well precede the Warring States period) is purely Sinocentric, as it glosses over the areas associated with alien ethnicities. An alternative Sinocentric vision, which is also present in 'The Tribute of Yu' as well as in several other texts, is more attentive to the aliens' presence. It divides the world into five (elsewhere nine) concentric zones: the internal ones are ruled directly by the Son of Heaven and his regional lords, while the external ones are inhabited by the aliens and banished Chinese criminals.[66] Here the alien periphery is incorporated in the realm under the control of the Son of Heaven, but this incorporation is primarily symbolic.

Both the Nine Provinces and the Five Zones models represent a particularistic and partly or fully exclusivist vision of future unification. Yet this particularism was challenged in other texts where the true universality of the ancient paragons' deeds was emphasized, leading to the understanding that future unification should equally encompass both the Central States and the alien periphery.[67] The inclusive vision is most clearly pronounced in the *Gongyang Commentary*. In commenting on the *Chunqiu* record about the northern lords' meeting with a Wu envoy, the commentary states:

曷為殊會吳？外吳也。曷為外也？《春秋》內其國而外諸夏，內諸夏而外夷狄。王者欲一乎天下，曷為以外內之辭言之？言自近者始也。

Why does [*Chunqiu*] particularly emphasize meeting the Wu [envoy]?—It considers Wu external. What does 'external' mean?—*Chunqiu* considers its state (Lu) internal, and All the Xia ('Chinese') external, considers All the Xia internal, and Yi and Di (aliens) external.—[But] the True Monarch wants to unify All-under-Heaven, so why talk of internal and external?—This means that he must begin with those who are close.[68]

The ultimate target of the unification is the entire world, encompassing both Chinese and aliens. Current divisions into 'internal' (Chinese) and 'external' (alien lands) are a temporary means to facilitate unification. This inclusive view of future unification clearly dominated the discourse of the Warring States period, cautious voices notwithstanding.[69] It is time to ask: what were the sources of this optimism of pre-imperial thinkers with regard to truly comprehensive unification? Did they not expect insurmountable difficulties in attaining this goal?

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[66]Sun Xingyan 孫星衍, *Shangshu jin guwen zhushu* 尚書今古文注疏 (1815), (eds) Sheng Dongling 盛冬鈴 and Chen Kang 陳抗 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998; rpt), 3, pp. 202–206.

[67]See, for example, Wu Yujiang 吳毓江, *Mozi jiaozhu* 墨子校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1994), 15, p. 160 ('Jian'ai zhong 兼愛中').

[68]*Gongyang zhuan*, Cheng 15, p. 417. See also Xi 4, p. 203 for the eventual incorporation of the alien periphery under the True Monarch.

[69]See Y. Pines, 'Imagining the empire? Concepts of "primeval unity" in pre-imperial historiographic tradition', in *Conceiving the empire: China and Rome compared*, (eds) F.-H. Mutschler and A. Mittag (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 67–90 for further details. But note also that Han Fei 韓非 (d. 233 BCE), writing on the eve of imperial unification, considered the lands of Yue (roughly China's southeastern coastal territories) as too difficult to control and hence irrelevant for a future unifier. See Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), 11, p. 246 ('Gu fen' 孤墳).

I think that this optimism reflects two peculiarities of pre-imperial Chinese thought: the thinkers' good historical but limited geographical knowledge. History provided multiple examples of erstwhile 'barbarians' who became fully assimilated into a broader Chinese culture. During the Warring States period in particular, the Sinitic states expanded into peripheral areas inhabited by alien ethnicities, and although this expansion was not necessarily peaceful, it did not encounter prolonged resistance by the local populations. The successful incorporation of areas such as the Sichuan basin, Liaodong peninsula, and the southern reaches of the Yangzi basin into the Zhou world proved the feasibility of assimilating aliens.[70] A similar conclusion could be drawn from an equally successful assimilation of multiple alien ethnicities who inhabited enclaves in between the Sinitic states during the Springs-and-Autumns period, but vanished from subsequent historical accounts. Moreover, even powerful polities established by non-Sinitic ethnic groups, such as the southeastern Wu and Yue or later northern Zhongshan 中山,[71] eventually adopted the written and ritual culture of the Central States, losing much of their Otherness in the process. The resultant expansion of the Zhou civilization was conducive to the optimistic belief that the entire known world should eventually become 'a single family'.[72]

Another possible reason for the thinkers' universalistic optimism is their meagre knowledge of the outside world. China was never hermetically isolated from civilizations in central, southern, and western Eurasia, as can be demonstrated by technological transfer and the import of prestige goods from afar already seen during the Bronze Age.[73] Yet China's contacts with the outside world remained too limited for the elites to be well-informed of the existence of faraway loci of sedentary civilization. Wherever the outside world is mentioned in pre-imperial texts, it is invariably confined to areas in the immediate vicinity of China proper.[74] Even the steppe nomads do not merit particular attention. All this was to change in the aftermath of the imperial unification of 221 BCE, when the encounter with the steppe and, later, the realization that 'All-under-Heaven' is incomparably broader than the East Asian subcontinent, caused a major reappraisal of the nature of 'universalism'.[75]

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[70]See S. F. Sage, *Ancient Sichuan and the unification of China* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992) (for Sichuan); and Korolkov, *The imperial network* (for the areas to the south of the Yangzi).

[71]For the case of Zhongshan, see Wu Xiaolong, *Material culture, power, and identity in ancient China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[72]Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, (eds) Shen Xiaohuan 沈嘯寰 and Wang Xingxian 王星賢 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992) 9, p. 161 ('Wang zhi' 王制).

[73]Shelach-Lavi, *The archaeology of early China*, pp. 257–262.

[74]See, for example, Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋新校釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 20.1 ('Shi jun' 恃君).

[75]N. Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its enemies: The rise of nomadic power in East Asian history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and N. Di Cosmo, 'Ethnography of the nomads and "barbarian history" in Han China', in *Intentional history: Spinning time in Ancient Greece*, (eds) F. Lin et al. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2010), pp. 299–325; Pines, 'Beasts or humans'; and Y. Pines, 'Limits of All-under-Heaven: Ideology and praxis of "great unity" in early Chinese empire', in *The limits of universal rule: Eurasian empires compared*, (eds) Y. Pines, M. Biran and J. Rüpke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2021), pp. 79–110; P. R. Goldin, 'Steppe nomads as a philosophical problem in classical China', in *Mapping Mongolia: Situating Mongolia in the world from geologic time to the present*, (ed.) P. L. W. Sabloff (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2011), pp. 220–246.

Meanwhile, an optimistic expectation of a complete unification of the entire human habitat—that is, true 'cosmopolitanism'—was still warranted.

Cosmopolitan identity: Intellectuals in the talent market

Having ascertained the decisively 'cosmopolitan' outlook of pre-imperial Chinese intellectuals, and their rejection of the political and cultural fragmentation of their age, it is time now to assess the reasons for this extraordinary choice. How did it happen that none of the known thinkers of the Warring States period ever endorsed local identity? Why did these thinkers repeatedly proclaim their commitment to 'All-under-Heaven' and not to an individual state? Which factors ensured the intellectual hegemony of the inclusive and pro-unification view during the pre-imperial age?

I can think of three major factors that prompted the intellectuals' rejection of the centrifugal political and cultural trends of their age. One can be considered an 'idealistic' factor, namely the realization that peace and stability are simply unattainable at the level of an individual state. Recall that the Warring States inter-state arena was that of the zero-sum game. Without acceptable rules of inter-state coexistence, endless bloody struggle among competing polities was inevitable, and the fate of all but one polity was doomed.[76] Any domestic turmoil, such as a succession struggle or an inter-ministerial feud, could be exploited by foreign powers who would intervene directly or indirectly, rendering domestic stability in an individual state unattainable. Recall also that many ministers routinely sought to ingratiate themselves with foreign powers with a view to receiving allotments and appointments from a different polity. This situation poisoned relations at the top of the government apparatus, as no ruler could be sure of the loyalty of even his chief ministers and generals.[77] Given these circumstances, one can easily understand why the authors of *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, composed at the court of Qin shortly before imperial unification, postulated: 'When All-under-Heaven is in turmoil, no state can be secure' 天下大亂, 無有安國.[78] Prioritizing universal solutions over narrow domestic focus was a reasonable choice.

Moving on to more selfish factors, we should consider the employment patterns of the Warring States period men of service. Unlike the aristocrats of the Springs-and-Autumns period, the *shi* were not bound to a specific state; they were free to cross state boundaries in search of better appointments. This pattern developed early in the aristocratic age when the *shi* were still lowly retainers of powerful aristocratic lineages, and it continued into the Warring States period, even when some of the *shi* climbed to the very top of the government apparatus. This employment pattern had profound consequences on the world view of the *shi*.

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[76]Pines, '"The one that pervades the all"'. The predicament of a medium-sized polity is depicted with utmost clarity in Chapter 49 ('Five vermin' ['Wu du' 五蠹]) of *Han Feizi*. Han Fei (who evidently had his natal state of Han 韓 in mind) clarifies the futility of both pro- and anti-Qin alliances in ensuring the state's survival; whereas he insists that good administrative-cum-military means could prolong the state's existence, it is clear that those would bring about only a temporary respite by directing Qin to conquer other polities first (*Han Feizi* 49, pp. 1114–1115).

[77]Pines, 'Friend or foes'. This problem is a recurring topic throughout much of *Han Feizi*.

[78]*Lüshi chunqiu* 13.3 ('Qu you' 去尤); 26.2 ('Wu da' 務大).

In marked contrast to modern Europe, where the idea of employing nationally bred cadres gradually prevailed over the erstwhile openness of the boundaries (peaking during the Great War and in its aftermath), the Zhou world of the Warring States was more akin to the current global market of talent in the extra-political sphere. Employees frequently crossed state boundaries in search of better work opportunities. This behaviour was acceptable: not accidentally, any known thinker of the Warring States period served more than one state. The legitimacy of border crossing by men of service contrasts with the attempts of contemporaneous states to prevent emigration of their subjects. To be sure, there were critics of the intellectuals' cross-boundary employment pattern: the *Book of Lord Shang* (6.6) in particular lamented the situation where 'peripatetic men of service' take 'All-under-Heaven as one home … can empower themselves anywhere abroad, and … flock to any place as if to their home' 天下一宅…偏託勢於外…歸偏家.[79] Yet this indignation aside, the authors of the text seem to conveniently forget that even the person to whom the text is attributed—Shang Yang—was a scion of the Wei 衛 ruling house, who sought career opportunities in the neighbouring state of Wei 魏 before moving to Qin. Crossing borders in search of better employment was a norm, not an aberration.

This state of affairs was not just tolerated; it was in fact morally sanctioned by Confucius 孔子 (551–479 BCE) and his followers, who frequently (and perhaps justifiably) positioned themselves as the moral leaders of men of service. Confucius had not just set an example by constantly moving from one state to another, but also provided the ideological rationale for these shifts:

邦有道, 穀; 邦無道, 穀, 恥也。

When the Way prevails in the country—eat its grains (i.e. serve). When the country lacks the Way, to eat its grains is shameful.[80]

For Confucius, government service was not just for the purpose of employment but also a means of moral self-realization; hence the choice of an employer was intrinsically linked to the latter's willingness to adopt the minister's moral vision. If the employer failed to do so, proving that his state lacks the True Way (*Dao*), he—and his state—should be abandoned. In that case, seeking appointment in another country was an acceptable recourse, as Confucius's follower, Mengzi, explained:

士之仕也, 猶農夫之耕也。農夫豈為出疆舍其耒耜哉?

Holding office is to a man of service what tilling is to a farmer. Would a farmer leave behind his plough when exiting the [state's] borders?[81]

Elsewhere, Mengzi put forward what may be the boldest defence of what he conceived of as a minister's inalienable right to move to a new state:

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[79] *Book of Lord Shang* 6.6 ('Suan di').
[80] Yang Bojun 杨伯峻, *Lunyu yizhu* 論語譯注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 14.1.
[81] *Mengzi* 6.3 (IIIB3).

孟子告齊宣王曰: 「君之視臣如手足, 則臣視君如腹心; 君之視臣如犬馬, 則臣視君如國人; 君之視臣如土芥, 則臣視君如寇讎。」王曰: 「禮, 為舊君有服。何如斯可為服矣? 」曰: 「諫行言聽, 膏澤下於民; 有故而去, 則使人導之出疆, 又先於其所往; 去三年不反然後收其田舍。此之謂三有禮焉。如此則為之服矣。今也為臣, 諫則不行, 言則不聽, 膏澤不下於民; 有故而去, 則君搏執之, 又極之於其所往; 去之日遂收其田舍。此之謂寇讎。寇讎何服之有? 」

Mengzi told King Xuan of Qi: 'If a ruler regards his ministers as his hands and feet, they will regard him as their stomach and heart. If he regards them as his dogs and horses, they will regard him as a mere capital dweller. If he regards them as mud and weeds, they will regard him as a mortal enemy.'

The King said: 'Ritual requires of a minister to wear mourning for his former ruler. How in these circumstances will it be possible to wear mourning?'

[Mengzi] said: 'The ruler should follow [the minister's] remonstrance, heed his advice, and benefit the people below. If [the minister] has a reason to leave [the country], the ruler should send someone to escort him until he exits the border, and somebody to prepare the way ahead. Only if after three years abroad [the minister] did not return, the ruler might take over his fields and dwellings. This is called 'the three courtesies'. If the ruler behaves so, then it is the minister's duty to wear mourning for him. Today, remonstrance is not followed, advice is not heeded, the people below reap no benefits. When a minister has the reason to leave, the ruler has him arrested and put in chains, makes things difficult for him in the state he is going to and confiscates his fields and dwellings the day he leaves. This is what is meant by 'mortal enemy'. What reason is there to wear mourning for a mortal enemy?'[82]

This exchange is illuminating not only with regard to Mengzi's audacity vis-à-vis the rulers, but also with regard to what he considered normal, if not normative, ministerial behaviour. The minister had no fixed obligations towards the ruler and the state: he served only insofar as his political and moral demands were satisfied (which would, for sure, benefit the people below), or insofar as the ruler treated him with due politeness. Otherwise the ruler—and by extension the state—could not expect the minister's loyalty. With a remarkable measure of chutzpah, Mengzi even demanded that the ruler respected the right of the minister to leave the state in search of a better employer.[83]

The lofty moral discourse of Confucius and Mengzi may reflect their genuine conviction, but for many other men of service it served simply as a convenient veneer behind which they bargained with the rulers for better job opportunities. Han Fei 韓非 (d. 233 BCE), a cynical thinker and a brilliant political analyst of the late Warring States period, summarized:

臣盡死力以與君市; 君垂爵祿以與臣市; 君臣之際, 非父子之親也, 計數之所出也。

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[82] *Mengzi* 8.3 (IVB3).

[83] Think of a colleague in our profession demanding the university president to allow them to keep their salary and office for three years during which time the colleague tries their best to obtain gainful employment at a rival university.

> A minister brings to the rulers' market [his readiness] to exert all his strength to the point of death; a ruler brings to the ministers' market [his ability] to bestow ranks and emoluments. Ruler-minister relations are not based on the intimacy of father and child, but on the calculation [of benefits].[84]

Han Fei employed the market simile to ridicule the hypocrisy of his contemporaries who justified crossing the boundaries on moral terms; for him this was purely a matter of benefit calculation. For our discussion, the debate about the ministers' motivation is less important. What matters more is the impact of the interstate market of talent on political and intellectual dynamics of the Warring States period. This impact is twofold. First, it meant that a man of service had no reason to devote himself wholeheartedly to a single state. To justify their readiness to resign and serve an adversary of their former employer, the men of service, and particularly their intellectual leaders, the Masters, advocated commitment to a broader entity rather than a single polity, that is All-under-Heaven, as exemplified in Mengzi's statement cited at the beginning of the previous section. Second, this frequent border-crossing in search of better employment undermined the idea of ministerial loyalty, unsettling ruler-minister relations, as discussed above. The very employment pattern of the intellectually active *shi* made the multi-state order intrinsically unstable and bolstered the intellectuals' resolve to seek universal solutions of stability for all.

The third factor that may have strengthened the *tianxia*-oriented outlook of the intellectually active men of service is a social one. By promulgating their commitment to *tianxia*, intellectuals wanted to distinguish themselves from the lower strata and even from some of their rivals within the elite ranks. Recall, first, that the very right to move freely across the boundaries was a privilege of *shi*, which distinguished them from the bulk of the population who were more tightly controlled. Recall, secondly, that within every state, the peripatetic men of service had to compete with local cadres, be it members of the ruling lineage (as in the state of Chu) or commoners who ascended the social ladder by gaining ranks of merit (as in the state of Qin). Both groups—even if for different reasons—were naturally more strongly attached to their native states. It was perhaps to weaken their rivals that intellectually active men of service adopted a discourse that postulated the superiority of the whole over its parts, of common Zhou culture over local customs, or of *tianxia* over individual states.[85]

This point brings me to the last observation: a common stance of intellectuals of different ideological convictions against local identities, as reflected in the intellectuals' joint crusade against local customs. The term 'customs' (*su* 俗), which never appears in the Bronze Age texts, proliferated in the Warring States period (especially in its second half), quickly attaining pejorative connotations of both 'localism' and uncivilized behaviour of commoners. In contrast to early modern European intellectuals, such as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who was fascinated by the discovery of

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[84] *Han Feizi* 36, pp. 851–852 ('*Nan yi* 難一').

[85] Lewis, *The construction of space*. It is tempting to relate this 'class-bound' 'cosmopolitan' outlook of the Warring States-period intellectuals to the modern phenomenon of what Craig Calhoun, 'The class consciousness of frequent travelers: Toward a critique of actually existing cosmopolitanism', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 101, no. 4 (2002), pp. 869–897, dubs 'class consciousness of frequent travelers'.

the 'Volk',[86] intellectual elites of the Warring States considered the manifestation of local customs to be undesirable and base. Thus, competing thinkers invariably advocated 'reforming' (*gai* 改), 'unifying' (*yi* 一 or *tong* 同), 'beautifying' (*mei* 美), 'altering' (*yi* 移 or *yi* 易), 'changing' (*bian* 變 or *hua* 化), or 'correcting' (*zheng* 正) diverse customs; tolerating local customs was permissible only as an ad-hoc temporary measure to gain the subjects' trust. As Mark E. Lewis has correctly observed, the very term *su* ('custom') became a pejorative adjective (akin to 'vulgar') in contemporary texts.[87] The contrast with Herder's valorization of the 'Volk' could not be clearer.

Epilogue: Intellectuals, identities, and empire building

In a few of my earlier studies, I argued that the exceptional durability of China's imperial enterprise comes from its peculiar intellectual background: the empire was envisioned (even if not preplanned) many generations before Qin's unification in 221 BCE.[88] This in turn allowed the ideal of the unified empire to retain its hegemonic position in Chinese political culture well into the beginning of the twentieth century. This, in my eyes, was the remarkable achievement of the Warring States-period intellectuals.

The discussion above shows that, aside from being the empire's architects, the thinkers of the Warring States had a less noticeable, but nonetheless similarly important, contribution to the success of the imperial enterprise. By rejecting the legitimacy of local identities, they prevented those identities from developing into a politically potent factor that could have effectively hindered unification. Thus, despite widespread hatred of Qin across the Warring States, after the unification by Qin, most of the elite members of the occupied states cooperated with the conquerors and were effectively co-opted into the Qin (and later Han) government. As a staunch critic of Qin, Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–168 BCE) admitted, a common awareness of the advantages of unification caused 'the men of service under Heaven to docilely bow before [the First Emperor's] wind 天下之士斐然鄉風…The common people hoped that they would obtain peace and security and there was nobody who did not whole-heartedly look up in reverence 元元之民冀得安其性命, 莫不虛心而仰上.'[89]

The relative ease with which the new imperial entity submerged local identities and incorporated elites of the conquered states sheds some light on the role of the intellectuals in the politicization of collective identities. Above I demonstrated that the Warring States period witnessed the growth of separate identities among the lower strata. Conceivably, members of the ruling lineages in at least some of the

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[86]R. Bauman and C. L. Briggs, *Voices of modernity: Language ideologies and the politics of inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 163–196.

[87]M. E. Lewis, 'Custom and human nature in early China', *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 53, no. 3 (2003), pp. 308–322; and Lewis, *The construction of space*, pp. 189–229; see also Pines, 'Bodies, lineages, citizens', pp. 181–187.

[88]Y. Pines, Envisioning eternal empire: Chinese political thought of the Warring States era (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009); and Y. Pines, *The everlasting empire: The political culture of ancient China and its imperial legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[89]*Shiji* 6: 283; translation adapted from B. Watson (trans.), *Records of the grand historian. Vol. 3: Qin dynasty* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1993), pp. 80–81.

states (Chu immediately comes to one's mind)[90] were similarly committed to their home polity. Yet without intellectual legitimation, nascent local identities ultimately faded and became a source of ethnographic curiosity in the unified empire rather than a politically dividing force. Bitter enmities of the Warring States period, important as they were in the immediate context of fierce inter-state struggle, remained short-lived. Aside from a very brief and inconsequential attempt to restore some of the Warring States in the aftermath of Qin's collapse (*circa* 208–202 BCE), there was no attempt whatsoever to appeal to, for example, Zhao, Chu, or Yan identity as a meaningful political factor.[91] In my eyes, this suggests that local identities were moribund, politically speaking, because they were neither fostered, nor rationalized, nor strengthened by the educated elite.

This brings me back to the comparison with the modern European experience. It may be useful at this point to make a brief excurse into the Europeans' engagement with cosmopolitanism, a topic of the recent monograph by Leigh Penman. As Penman shows, in early modern Europe cosmopolitan ideas emerged first in the context that resonates well with China, namely as a possible justification for a universal (Catholic) empire. These views, most notably evident in the writings of Tomasso Campanella (1568–1639), had little political impact, however.[92] Later, in the eighteenth century, as a 'cosmopolitan vocabulary' proliferated, there was yet another opportunity for its political utilization, especially in revolutionary France, which indeed toyed with it for a short while.[93] However, as is well known, this cosmopolitan orientation was duly rejected by French revolutionaries, who opted to strengthen the idea of *patria* (Fatherland) as the glue to consolidate the citizens' fight against foreign intruders.[94] Lacking sufficient intellectual endorsement, European cosmopolitanism (even if by this term we understand a narrowly conceived trans-ethnic unity of Christian Europe) did not become a political force to reckon with—at least not until the carnage of two world wars caused many Europeans to re-evaluate the advantages of Mengzi's dictum, 'Stability is in unity'.

Back to China: as noted above, the concept of the unified polity was duly realized there in 221 BCE. Its success would never have been possible without the intellectuals' unwavering rejection of local (proto-ethnical?) identities as politically illegitimate.

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[90]Pines, 'Chu identity', pp. 24–26.

[91]Note that in the first decades of the Han 漢 dynasty (206/202 BCE–220 CE), the eastern part of the empire was ruled by autonomous princedoms, some of which inherited the names of the extinguished Warring States. Nonetheless, even in the heyday of their autonomy, local princes did not attempt to reconstruct the bygone regional identity of their subjects in the political sphere. On the contrary, the unifying measures of the short-lived Qin dynasty—for example, in the legal, administrative (nomenclature), or economic (coinage) sphere—continued unabashedly: Korolkov, *The imperial network*, pp. 172–180.

[92]L. T. E. Penman, *The lost history of cosmopolitanism: The early modern origins of the intellectual ideal* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), pp. 15–38.

[93]For instance, on 26 September 1792, shortly after the abolition of the monarchy, the revolutionary regime honoured 18 European luminaries with the title 'Citoyens du monde': Penman, *The lost history*, p. 119.

[94]See more in D. A. Bell, *The cult of the nation in France. Inventing nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). The turn away from cosmopolitanism towards Fatherland started indisputably before the revolutionary wars. Penman shows how 'the fourth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1762) defined the word "Cosmopolite" as "one who does not recognize his *patria*. A cosmopolite is not a good citizen"': Penman, *The Lost History*, p. 119.

This choice contrasts conspicuously with the localist strategy adopted by the over-whelming majority of European intellectuals. But here comes the bitter irony of history. Chinese intellectuals—the empire's architects—were, arguably, among the major victims of the imperial unification. The end of the multi-state world meant the closure of the transregional market of talent, which was replaced by a solid state monopoly on career and social prestige. In the new regime, the power of the intellectuals vis-à-vis the throne diminished, as was dramatically demonstrated shortly after the Qin unification, when the First Emperor launched his infamous biblioclasm of 213 BCE.[95] Whereas under the subsequent regimes the intellectuals succeeded in reasserting their position as the empire's custodians, and severe suppressions on a par with the Qin's biblioclasm were relatively rare, overall, freedom of expression was thenceforth considerably curtailed. Speaking from the perspective of the intellectuals' narrow class interests, political unification of All-under-Heaven may have been a bad gamble.

And yet, I want to end on a more optimistic note (at least from China's point of view). It is true that the ideal of 'stability is in unity' was only partly realized, and the First Emperor's proud proclamation upon the conquest of the rival states that 'warfare will never rise again' 兵不復起[96] appears in retrospect as hollow propaganda. It is also true that the Chinese empire suffered from manifold weaknesses, which brought about periodic malfunctioning, recurring crises, bloody rebellions, and intermittent fragmentation. And yet one cannot but be impressed by the empire's remarkable vitality, as demonstrated by its repeated resurrection after decades and even centuries of turmoil. In the final account, a unified empire on the East Asian subcontinent not only survived for longer periods than its counterparts elsewhere, but also ensured relative stability and prosperity for many more people than would ever have been possible under the Warring States. As such, the Chinese intellectuals' desire to benefit All-under-Heaven was partly realized. In retrospect, the cessation of the Warring States era can be hailed as their major success.

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[95]Pines, *Envisioning eternal empire*, pp. 180–182.

[96]Cited from the First Emperor's inscription on Mt. Yi 嶧山 (219 BCE) in M. Kern, *The Stele inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and ritual in early Chinese imperial representation* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 2000), p. 14. For the trope of eternal peace in Qin's imperial propaganda, see Kern *The Stele inscriptions*; and Y. Pines, 'The messianic emperor: A new look at Qin's place in China's history', in *Birth of an empire*, (eds) Pines et al., pp. 258–279.