

Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China

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Introduction: Ideology and Power in Early China

Yuri Pines

The three centuries that preceded the establishment of the Chinese empire in 221 BCE were an age of exceptional intellectual flourishing. No other period in the history of Chinese thought can rival these centuries in creativity, boldness, ideological diversity, and long-term impact. Values, perceptions, and ideals shaped amid intense intellectual debates before the imperial unification contributed decisively to the formation of the political, social, and ethical orientations that we identify today with traditional Chinese culture. More broadly, the ideas of rival thinkers formed an ideological framework within which the Chinese empire functioned from its inception until its very last decades. It is not surprising, then, that the lion's share of studies of early Chinese history focus on the intellectual activities of what is often dubbed—somewhat misleadingly—the age of the Hundred Schools of Thought.

Several other major Eurasian civilizations witnessed similar periods of vibrant intellectual activity, the impact of which remained perceptible for centuries or millennia to come: Jewish prophets, Indian religious teachers, and Greek philosophers come immediately to mind. Some scholars, beginning with Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), have tried to explore commonalities among these intellectual breakthroughs of ca. 800–200 BCE, which Jaspers named the Axial Age (*Achsenzeit*).¹ Regardless of whether this comparative perspective is valid, it is worth noting that among the major intellectual traditions that took shape during that age, the Chinese one appears as the most politically oriented. Of course, political texts were produced in any major civilization—for example, pronouncements of Jewish prophets, Plato's *Politeia*, Aristotle's *Politika*, and the *Arthashastra*, attributed to Kautilya.² Conversely, a variety of nonpolitical texts were produced in China. The overall difference is easily observable, nonetheless. In China, one will have a hard time finding either a “Classic” (*jing* 經) or a “Masters” (*zi* 子) text from the pre-imperial or early imperial period that does not discuss such issues as the nature of rulership, ruler-minister relations, an intellectual's political involvement, ways of controlling “the people” (*min* 民), and the like. These topoi are repeatedly addressed not just in purely political treatises but also in a variety of texts that focus on ethical, religious,

1 See Jaspers 1965. For follow-up and development of Jaspers's ideas, see Eisenstadt 1986; Arnason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock 2005.

2 For the complexity of the *Arthashastra* and debates over its dating, see Olivelle 2012.

and even metaphysical issues, not to mention contemporaneous historical writings. It would not be an exaggeration to say that questions of power, authority, and proper methods of maintaining sociopolitical relations—what can be broadly defined as political thought—dominate the texts that survived the vicissitudes of history.

The preponderance of political discussions in pre-imperial texts is not surprising, given their historical context. The outburst of intellectual activity from the age of Confucius 孔子 (551–479 BCE) and his disciples onward took place against the backdrop of a severe systemic crisis. The end of the Springs-and-Autumns period (Chunqiu 春秋, 770–453 BCE) was marked by the progressive disintegration of political structures in the Zhou 周 realm. First, the Zhou dynasty's (ca. 1046–256 BCE) kings, the proud "Sons of Heaven" (*tianzi* 天子), lost their power to their nominal subordinates, the regional lords (*zhuhou* 諸侯); then the latter were eclipsed by powerful ministerial lineages within their domains; soon enough the Zhou world became entangled in a web of debilitating struggles among rival polities, between powerful nobles and the lords, and among aristocratic lineages within each polity. By the fourth century BCE, a degree of recentralization in individual polities was achieved, but interstate warfare further intensified, giving, in retrospect, the new era an ominous name: the age of the Warring States (Zhanguo 戰國, 453–221 BCE). As wars became ever bloodier and more devastating, and with no adequate diplomatic means to settle the conflicts in sight, most thinkers and statesmen came to believe that unity of "All-under-Heaven" (*tianxia* 天下) was the only means to attain peace and stability (Pines 2000a). How to bring this unity about and how to "stabilize All-under-Heaven" 定天下 became central topics addressed by competing thinkers.

Crises and bloodshed aside, the Warring States period was also an age rife with opportunities for intellectually active individuals. It was an exceptionally dynamic period, marked by novel departures and profound changes in all walks of life. Politically, the loose aristocratic entities of the Springs-and-Autumns period were replaced by centralized and bureaucratized territorial states. Economically, the introduction of iron tools revolutionized agriculture, allowing higher yields, prompting the development of wastelands, and bringing about demographic growth, as well as accelerating urbanization and a commercialization of the economy. Militarily, new technologies, such as the crossbow, as well as new forms of military organization, brought about the replacement of aristocratic, chariot-led armies by mass infantry armies staffed by peasant conscripts, resulting in a radical increase in warfare's scale and complexity. And socially, the hereditary aristocracy that dominated the Zhou world during much of the Bronze Age (ca. 1500–400 BCE) was eclipsed by a

much broader stratum of *shi* 士 (sometimes translated as “men of service”), the men who owed their positions primarily to their abilities rather than their pedigree.³ These profound changes required new approaches to a variety of administrative, economic, military, social, and ethical issues: old truths had to be reconsidered or reinterpreted. For intellectuals eager to tackle a variety of new questions, this was the golden age.

Of the above developments, the rise of the *shi* appears as singularly consequential. Originally, *shi* were the lowest segment of the hereditary aristocracy, mostly minor siblings of powerful lineages, who made their living primarily as the aristocrats’ retainers. Yet by the fifth century BCE, as many aristocratic lineages were destroyed in bloody internecine struggles, the *shi* moved to fill the void at the top of the ruling apparatus. Many rulers found it expedient to promote *shi*, who lacked independent military and economic power and were not in a position to threaten their lords directly, and whose administrative and military skills often were higher than those of hereditary nobles. The stratum of *shi* duly expanded to comprise both former nobles who had lost their positions and ambitious commoners; active and aspiring officeholders. Not all the *shi* were intellectually active, but many of them were. Among these, one segment was particularly important: the so-called Masters (*zi* 子). These Masters were the intellectual leaders of the *shi*; and they, together with disciples and followers, were the producers of the vast majority of the texts with which we associate the intellectual flowering of the Warring States period.

The *shi* in general, and Masters in particular, were both the major beneficiaries of the administrative overhaul of the Warring States period and its driving force. The replacement of hereditary officeholding with a flexible pattern of employing people according to their abilities opened multiple avenues of advancement to ambitious and talented individuals. Facing numerous challenges, rulers of the age were in need of skilled employees with a variety of expertise: military officers able to lead huge armies; civilian administrators able to increase the state’s control over its human and natural resources; economic specialists able to boost agricultural production; and many more. Yet specific issues aside, fundamental questions remained about the functioning of this newly formed bureaucratic state that had to be addressed. How to restore the monarch’s authority, which had reached its nadir by the end of the Springs-

3 The best introduction in English to the transformation that took place in the Warring States period is Lewis 1999a, except that Lewis ignores the iron revolution (for which, see, e.g., Wagner 1993). For a comprehensive discussion in Chinese, see Yang Kuan 1998. For a focused discussion of the manifold transformations that took place in the most powerful Warring States period polity, Qin 秦, see Pines et al. 2014: 18–32.

and-Autumns period? How to ensure smooth relations at the top of the government apparatus? How to prevent officials in the center and in local administration from abusing their ever-increasing power? How to retain the loyalty and obedience of generals without curbing their initiative and autonomy of command? How to make the people fight for their ruler? How to continue to extract resources from the populace without overburdening it and without causing emigration or, worse, rebellion? How to train devoted, loyal, and skilled officials? How to identify individuals who deserve to enter government service, and what skills should they possess? These questions could not be addressed by narrow specialists alone; rather, they required broad generalists who would be able to put forward their vision of the proper functioning of the society and the state. They required political thinkers.

In the interstate market of talent of the Warring States period, the rulers represented the demand side; on the supply side were intellectually active members of the *shi* stratum, especially the Masters and their disciples. In general, the *shi* lacked independent sources of stable and sizable income, and for most of them, government service—either as regular officeholders or as the ruler's personal advisers—was the best means of bolstering their economic position and social prestige. Their activities were normally not confined to a single state; rather, they traveled freely throughout the Zhou realm, seeking employment at one of the competing courts or, at least, patronage by one of the courtiers. Their attitudes toward political involvement differed: some, like Confucius and his followers, considered service a means of moral self-realization; others (e.g., the authors of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子) vehemently opposed serving the government, viewing such work as filthy, dangerous, and ultimately futile. Yet, differences aside, it may be safely assumed that most Masters—like the majority of *shi*—were either directly engaged in serving the rulers or at least aspired to do so. This close relation to the government provides yet another explanation for the predominance of political topics in their writings.⁴

That most intellectually active *shi* sought government employment does not mean, however, that they—or at least their leaders, the Masters—were satisfied with the position of the ruler's obedient servitors. Rather, they sought employment on their own terms, as the moral and spiritual guides of society, of rulers and commoners alike. Emboldened by the high demand for their services and inspired by the overall dynamism of their age, the competing Masters aimed at directing the state and, ultimately, All-under-Heaven, toward

4 For the rise of the *shi* and their attitudes to political service, see Pines 2009: 115–162. For a different view, see Lewis 1999b: 53–97; cf. also Liu Zehua 2004: 22–39, 113–119; Yu Yingshi 1987: 26–33.

peace, tranquility, and orderly rule. Paraphrasing Karl Marx, we may assert that, in distinction to Western philosophers, the Masters' goal was not just to explain the world but to change it.⁵

This combination of society's—and especially the rulers'—urgent need for political advice and the resultant employment opportunities for and high social prestige of intellectually active individuals explains the extraordinary richness and sophistication of political thought in the Warring States period. One cannot but be impressed by the broad range of questions discussed: for example, the nature of the ruler's authority, of social hierarchy, and of the commoners' political role; proper ways of distributing material wealth and of waging war; the search for metaphysical, moral, or divine stipulations for the sociopolitical order; elaboration of ethical norms applicable to the elite and those applicable to the population at large; how intellectuals interact with power holders, and to whom they should owe allegiance (to the ruler, the state in its entirety, or their moral principles alone); the limits of obedience and the right to dissent or rebel. The perennial relevance of many of these questions explains the ongoing appeal of pre-imperial thought, or at least some of its strands, not only throughout the imperial millennia but even in contemporary China (see below).

The political thought of the Warring States period was not only immensely rich but also remarkably diverse. In this fragmented world, no government could impose effective political orthodoxy; nor was there any institution on a par with religious establishments elsewhere able to impose—or even just to define—orthodoxy in the intellectual realm. Even upon a cursory reading of the texts by different thinkers, the sheer variety of approaches and the evident absence of politically “forbidden zones” are striking. Some ascertained the divinity of Heaven and deities, while others rejected it; some advocated the political involvement of the intellectuals, while others ridiculed it; blatant militarists debated with staunch pacifists; supporters of state activism rivaled advocates of laissez-faire policy. Even when the overwhelming majority of the thinkers agreed on certain principles—such as the monarchic form of rule—this did not diminish radical divergences among them. Thus, Mengzi 孟子 (ca. 380–304 BCE), a staunch monarchist in theory, asserted that the ruler who malfunctions may be replaced and that an immoral sovereign deserves to be overthrown, while Han Fei 韓非 (d. 233 BCE), in contrast, demanded outlawing even the discussion of past nonhereditary power transfers as intrinsically subversive. On the other end of the spectrum, the authors of the *Zhuangzi*, one

5 “Philosophers were only *explaining* the world in various ways, but the task is *to change it*” (Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” [1845], cited from Marx and Engels 1976: 5, italics in original).

of the few texts that express direct opposition to any organized state, compared the rulers—even the best of them—to criminals who deserve neither respect nor allegiance.⁶

Ideological pluralism of the Warring States period reflected the rulers' remarkable tolerance of unconventional ideas. When the rulers did persecute offenders, they seem to have targeted primarily offensive action or, less frequently, offensive speech, but never offensive ideas. Judging from our sources, the worst punishment for controversial views was only termination of the thinker's employment. Whenever a Master (such as Han Fei) was executed, this was invariably due to his political involvement and not because of an unacceptable ideological stance. It was only after the imperial unification that these tolerant attitudes were reduced, and the atmosphere for dissenters became much chillier. Throughout the Warring States period intellectual openness seems to have been the rule.⁷

The richness of early Chinese political thought; its sophistication, breadth, and diversity; its ongoing relevance; and the considerable impact of at least some of the thinkers on the actual functioning of their states and on the future trajectory of the Chinese world—all these hallmarks make the study of this topic exceptionally rewarding both for historians of China and for scholars engaged in studies of comparative political thought. Yet, somewhat surprisingly, Chinese political thought remains woefully underresearched. Of the many thousands of publications in China, Japan, and the West that explore pre-imperial Chinese philosophy, only a small fraction focuses on the political content of the Masters' texts. In the West, in particular, studies of early Chinese political thought remain relatively underdeveloped both within the narrowly defined field of early China studies and in broader, comparative studies. It is against this background that we launched the conference which yielded this volume.⁸

6 See Pines 2009: 34–36 and 71–72 (for Mengzi), 97–100 (for Han Feizi), 79–80 and 157–158 (for Zhuangzi).

7 It is worth noticing that voices against excessive pluralism were raised from among the late Warring States intellectuals, most notably Xunzi 荀子 (d. after 238 BCE) and Han Fei; their views might have contributed directly to the assault on private learning soon after the imperial unification of 221 BCE. See more in Pines 2009: 172–184.

8 This conference, “Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China,” was held in May 2012 at the Institute for Advanced Study, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Between Endorsement and Indifference: Ebbs and Flows in Studies of Early Chinese Political Thought

Interest in political aspects of early Chinese thought has waxed and waned during the last century or so. In China, since the late nineteenth century, ideas of pre-imperial and early imperial thinkers were often employed as foils in debates over the country's paths to modernity. This "resort to the past to serve the present" peaked in the early 1970s during the "Anti-Confucian Campaign" launched by Mao Zedong's wife, Jiang Qing 江青 (1914–1991), and her henchmen. At the apex of this campaign, the struggle between the so-called Legalists (*fajia* 法家) and Confucians (*rujia* 儒家) was imagined as a perennial conflict between progressives and reactionaries that permeated Chinese history from its earliest days well into the current struggle of supporters of Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976) against various "deviationists" (normally against the "rightists" 右傾分子). With hundreds of thousands of students, workers, and peasants involved in writing collective essays that extolled the "progressive" Shang Yang 商鞅 (d. 338 BCE) and denounced Confucius as the "servitor of slave-owners," who was "like the rat who crosses the street and everybody shouts 'Hit him!'" (人人喊打的過街老鼠), the politicization of studies of early Chinese thought attained very grotesque forms.⁹

Coincidentally, the 1970s also witnessed an early peak of interest in early Chinese political thought in the West. It was then that Frederick W. Mote translated the first volume of Hsiao Kung-chuan's 蕭公權 comprehensive *History of Chinese Political Thought* (Hsiao 1979), while Sebastian de Grazia called his collection of translations from early Chinese texts *Masters of Chinese Political Thought* (1973). Perhaps the most blatant example of the political reading of early Chinese texts is by a Soviet dissident, Vitaly Rubin, whose *Individual and State in Ancient China* (1976) can be read as an inversion of the Maoist anti-Confucian campaign: here Shang Yang is treated as a fascist totalitarian, Mozi 墨子 (ca. 460–390 BCE) as a communist totalitarian, Zhuangzi as a dangerous anarchist, while Confucius stands for humanism and the right of an individual to fight against the oppressive state.¹⁰ Yet Rubin's book remained an exception:

9 For the Anti-Confucian Campaign (more precisely, "criticize Lin [Biao 林彪, 1907–1971], criticize Confucius" [*pi Lin pi Kong* 批林批孔] campaign), see Louie 1980: 97–136; Perelomov 1993: 372–386. For an eyewitness account, see Liu Zehua 2012. For a general background for the campaign, see MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006: 366–373. For a sample of its production, see Xiao Gan 1974; cf. pieces collected in Li Yu-ning 1977.

10 Rubin's study was published (under the title *Ideology and Culture of Ancient China*) in the Soviet Union in 1970 but was banned immediately thereafter due to the author's application to emigrate to Israel. It was republished in Russian in Rubin 1999: 8–76.

never again were ancient Chinese thinkers mobilized to fight ideological battles of the West.

The excessively political reading of the Masters' texts in the 1970s gave way to a lack of interest in their political messages after the early 1980s. In China, as ideological fervor receded, studies of the Masters were largely dissociated from the realm of politics. There, this depoliticization of studies of China's intellectual history was to a certain extent counterbalanced by the emergence of focused examinations of early Chinese political thought and political culture¹¹ and later by reemergent interest in the relevance of the past to the country's present (see below). In the West, the change was much more radical. To be sure, the political preoccupation of early Chinese thinkers is normally acknowledged in major studies, but it is also strongly de-emphasized, as is evident, for instance, in Benjamin I. Schwartz's seminal *The World of Thought in Early China* (1985). Another major introductory study of early Chinese thought, A.C. Graham's *Disputers of the Tao* (1989), postulates the primacy of the search for the "way to order the state and conduct personal life" in the Masters' literature and contains many insightful observations about their concrete political views; but Graham's declared focus is on "*how* the thinkers think," not the content of their proposals.¹² Many other scholars tend to disregard the political ideas of early thinkers altogether: hence, although studies of Chinese political thought continued to be published in the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond, their proportion within the growing corpus of studies of the Masters' texts has become ever more minuscule.

The shift away from the political aspects of the Masters' literature may to a certain extent reflect scholars' uneasiness with the vulgar politicization of these texts in the past; but it is more fundamentally related to what may be called a "philosophical bias" of Western research. The recognition of early Chinese thought as "philosophy" has been a lengthy (and still ongoing) process, in which the definition of the philosophical discipline remains firmly in the hands of scholars of Occidental philosophy, while Sinologists in the field often have to adapt themselves to disciplinary parameters established by their colleagues (cp. Van Norden 1996; Defoort 2001). It seems that Hegel's derisive

11 This renewed interest in the concepts of "political thought" and "political culture" may be related to the resurrection of political sciences departments in Chinese universities in the 1980s, after these were closed during much of Mao's era.

12 See Graham 1989: 3 and 8, respectively. Graham appears to be more at ease with the political content of Chinese thinkers' ideas than Schwartz, who eschews all mention of political ideas in his introduction and appears very much on the defensive when acknowledging the political content of, for example, Confucius's thought (Schwartz 1985: 102–117).

judgment of Confucius as “only a man who has a certain amount of practical and worldly wisdom—one with whom there is no speculative philosophy” (Hegel 2009: 107) still haunts many Sinologists with a philosophical background. As a result, they tend to prefer discussions of abstract and “speculative” matters in early Chinese thought at the expense of practical and this-worldly issues, of which political thought is most prominent.

To demonstrate this tendency to shift away from political issues, suffice it to review the manifold studies on such an eminent thinker as Xunzi 荀子 (d. after 238 BCE). The vast majority of these focus on Xunzi’s views on human nature, mind, Heaven, and epistemology, with incomparably less discussion dedicated to his views on rulership, ruler-minister relations, or the proper distribution of material resources, even though these themes occupy a significant part of the eponymous text.¹³ Other thinkers who are considered “too practical,” such as Shang Yang, are sometimes simply glossed over. For instance, David S. Nivison’s chapter, “The Classical Philosophical Writings,” in the *Cambridge History of Ancient China* (Nivison 1999) dedicates only a few words to Shang Yang, whose ideas are covered more thickly in Mark E. Lewis’s chapter, “Warring States: Political History,” in the same book (Lewis 1999a). This choice is not a matter of Nivison’s individual preferences: rather, it reflects a widespread lack of interest in Shang Yang and other “Legalists” among scholars of early Chinese philosophy. Only very recently can we see the seeds of change (see more below).¹⁴

Given the lackluster interest in early Chinese political thought among Sinologists, its neglect among the comparatists is not surprising. Four decades ago,

13 For such treatment of Xunzi in general studies of early Chinese thought, see Nivison 1999: 790–799; cf. Graham 1989: 235–267. For a similar trend in Xunzi-related monographs and collected volumes, see, e.g., Machle 1993; Kline and Ivanhoe 2000; Cua 2005. For major exceptions, see Goldin 1999; and esp. Sato 2003.

14 As I noticed a few years ago (Pines 2009: 225n18), the number of works published in English since the 1980s on the subject of the so-called nominalist (*mingjia* 名家) Gongsun Long 公孫龍 was four or five times larger than that of studies that deal with the *Shang jun shu* 商君書 (*Book of Lord Shang*), attributed to Shang Yang, although the latter is much more influential, better preserved, and much longer and allows for significantly more research than the remains of Gongsun Long’s text. Notably, while the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* contains a lengthy discussion of the “school of names,” neither Shang Yang nor even such a brilliant political thinker as Han Fei is included (as of 2013; in 2014 an entry entitled “Legalism in Chinese Philosophy” was added; Pines 2014). A rare exception in the field is a recent (2011) volume of the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* dedicated to the “Legalists”; in this issue, see esp. Goldin 2011a, which explains the inadequacy of the term “Legalism.”

John Schrecker (1974: 462) lamented that “political theorists in the contemporary West have virtually ignored the Chinese tradition.” He attributed this neglect to “a parochialism in space and time which deeply infects Western intellectual life.” Sadly, little has changed since then. For the majority of scholars of political thought (or “political philosophy”) worldwide, the Chinese case remains terra incognita. Early Chinese political thought is not mentioned at all in the six volumes of the *Cambridge History of Political Thought*, nor is it discussed in the journal *History of Political Thought*; it is absent from the “political philosophy” sections in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,¹⁵ is ignored by *The Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science* (Bealey 2003), and is only cursorily mentioned in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (1986) and Mark Bevir’s *Encyclopedia of Political Theory* (2010). Surely, there are laudable exceptions (see, e.g., Anthony Black’s *A World History of Ancient Political Thought* [2009]), but overall, the Western-centric bias in studies of political thought remains strongly visible.

Insofar as we speak of Sinology proper, one does not need much effort to prove that the shift away from the political thought of early thinkers is counterproductive. But what would comparatists gain from incorporating Chinese ideas? It is not my intention to debate here whether the study of early Chinese thought would be—to paraphrase Van Norden (1996: 226)—of purely “notional” interest (i.e., serve only to expand one’s horizon) or a “real” option (i.e., would it be possible for a Western audience to learn something useful from ancient Chinese ideas?).¹⁶ What is important for me is to notice at least several aspects of early Chinese political thought that make it particularly worthwhile for comparative analysis.

First, early Chinese political thought is notable for its intrinsic connection with political practice. As argued above, Chinese thinkers were less engaged in abstract theorizing than in providing concrete recipes on how to direct the realm toward peace and stability. Insofar as this stability was overwhelmingly envisioned as attainable only under a universal empire ruled by an omnipotent monarch, the imperial unification of 221 BCE may justifiably be considered as the materialization of the thinkers’ hopes. While the empire deviated in many aspects from its architects’ recommendations, its fundamental functioning mode was undoubtedly shaped by the ideas, ideals, and premises of

15 See <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/S099> for Routledge; <http://plato.stanford.edu/> for Stanford.

16 Van Norden’s (1996: 226) analysis of a “real” option (in which case “going over” new ideas is recommendable) and a “notional” one (which can maximally provide “some inspiration for thoughts about elements missing from modern life”) is borrowed from Williams 1985.

the thinkers of the Warring States period. This provides us with an excellent case study for analyzing the dialectical connection between the political ideas and their actualization. This case study is all the more interesting when we recall that the Chinese empire became—at least on the ideological level—the single most durable polity in human history. The cumulative impact of pre-imperial thought on this durability makes the study of this thought all the more rewarding.¹⁷

Second, the practical orientation of Chinese thought allows reassessment of the nature of political theories in general. For some observers the preoccupation of Chinese thinkers with the practical consequences of their ideas at the expense of theoretical abstractions appears as intellectual weakness; but this should not necessarily be so. It may be argued, conversely, that the insistence by many Chinese thinkers on the need to test theoretical constructs in practice is actually the major strength of their approaches. Xunzi stated with utmost clarity: “it is better to implement rather than just understand: learning should culminate in implementation.”¹⁸ That this statement comes from one of the most sophisticated philosophers is revealing. It may be tempting to think of Xunzi’s view as representing what should be a norm rather than an aberration in the history of political thought: the idea’s validity should be tested against the possibility of its actualization. In Chinese political thought this prioritization of praxis over pure theorizing remained the hallmark of eminent thinkers for centuries. It may be of some interest to recall that it was also prominently advocated by the single most influential—even if hugely controversial—modern Chinese political thinker: Mao Zedong.¹⁹

The emphasis on the implementability of one’s ideas shaped not just the content of Chinese thinkers’ proposals but even their ways of argumentation.

17 There was considerable disagreement among the editors of this volume as to what exactly constitutes the empire’s “durability.” It should be clarified that speaking of durability does not mean glossing over ruptures, discontinuities, and periods of severe malfunctioning that plagued the Chinese empire. What is important for me are significant continuities, primarily on the ideological level but also in terms of manifold political practices. See more in Pines 2009, 2012.

18 知之不若行之。學至於行之而止矣。 *Xunzi* IV.8: 142 (“Ru xiao”).

19 For Mao’s discussion of the relation between theory and practice, see his 1937 essay “On Practice” 實踐論 (Mao Zedong 1975: vol. 1, 295–309). In the course of his long career, Mao forsook his erstwhile pragmatism, allowing himself to be misled by empty ideological chimeras; but his dictum of integrating theory with practice was resurrected after his death by Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904–1997) and Deng’s allies, eager to dismantle the disastrous legacy of Mao’s last years. For Mao’s thought, see Schram 1989. For Deng’s appeal to “practice,” see MacFarquhar 1993: 317–321.

Thus, the Masters often built their arguments not around carefully constructed syllogisms but around historical analogies, most often through historical anecdotes, which allowed the audience to analyze advantages or disadvantages of certain types of political action in concrete situations (Goldin 2013b). This style of argumentation, in turn, was conducive to intellectual flexibility: the very fact that historical narratives could normally be interpreted in more than one way cautioned a reader against excessive ideological rigidity and encouraged him to adjust ideas to ever-changing circumstances.²⁰ The resultant flexibility and adjustability of political ideas may be one of the major sources of the remarkable vitality of Chinese political culture. Closer integration with the historical dimension may also benefit political thought elsewhere.

Last, but not least, engagement with Chinese political thought may be a rewarding experience for comparatists because that thought is rich with ideas that were not strongly articulated elsewhere. Some of these ideas—such as the quest for a universal empire ruled by an omnipotent monarch—may have only a “notional” interest for modern political philosophers in the West, but others may well belong to Van Norden’s “real” option. For instance, the concept of meritocracy and the idea that intellectuals have a political commitment may be of some practical value in our time, even though it would be foolhardy to see them squarely as adequate remedies to the maladies of Occidental political culture.²¹ More controversially, even the elitist view of the sociopolitical hierarchy as reflective of a moral and intellectual division between the “superior men” (*junzi* 君子) and the “petty men” (*xiao ren* 小人)—challenging as it is to the normative understanding of political equality in the West—may deserve attention from those who are not happy with the current form of political democracy. At a minimum, the very possibility of pondering the relevance of early Chinese ideas to modern political challenges is indicative of the future perspectives that the systematic study of Chinese political thought can open to the general field.

20 For the use of historical narratives (especially anecdotes) to convey ideologically important information, see Schaberg 2001, 2011. For the inherent multiplicity of the messages conveyed by historical narratives, see the excellent study by Li Wai-yee (2007). For the close relation between historical anecdotes and the concept of “expediency” (*quan* 權), which allowed the flexible implementation of guiding moral and political principles, see Gentz’s chapter (chap. 3) in the present volume. On “expediency” or “Primacy of the Situation,” see also Goldin 2005b; cf. Vankeerberghen 2005–2006.

21 For engaging attempts to consider the relevance of Chinese meritocratic ideas to current political practices, see, e.g., Bell and Li 2013; Bell 2015.

Reengaging Early Chinese Political Thought: Modernizers versus Historians

In recent years, interest in early Chinese political thought is again reemerging both in China and in the West. Among many reasons for this phenomenon, one should be singled out as particularly interesting: a renewed search for the relevance of traditional Chinese thought to China's future. Decades of remarkable economic growth and the resultant social transformation have hollowed out much of China's Marxist ideology, creating a void of cultural and political orientations. Among intellectuals who search for the country's path toward renewed cultural and ideological prowess, the voices of those who draw inspiration from the country's rich past are becoming ever stronger, and their impact is palpable even within the top echelons of the Communist Party of China (CPC).²² This, in addition to a parallel increase in the appeal of Chinese traditional culture, primarily Confucianism, to members of the sizable Chinese diaspora worldwide, has helped to fuel interest in China's traditional ideologies among political scientists and political philosophers in China and—increasingly—the West.

This revival of interest in Chinese traditional culture—or, for short, “Confucian revival”—is a heterogeneous phenomenon, whose participants differ markedly in terms of their ideological and political agendas, as well as their disciplinary affiliations. The movement is by no means confined to academic circles but is much broader: its adherents come from different social strata and have highly distinctive perceptions of what constitutes Confucianism (Billioud 2010). Even among academic participants the differences are huge. Some are members and supporters of the CPC, and some are its bitter foes; some want to reconcile Confucianism with Western democratic ideas, while others hope that it provides an alternative to Western liberal democracy; some look at Confucianism as a possible repository of universal values, while others are primarily interested in filling the cultural void in China itself; some turn to the past only as a source of general inspiration, while others search there for viable political models with which to mend or replace the current sociopolitical system.²³ Revivalists come from many disciplinary affiliations, but overall within

22 In October 2014, the all-powerful Politburo of the CPC conducted a special study session dedicated to the relevance of the past to the country's present (http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-10/13/c_1112807191.htm, accessed November 18, 2014). See also Buckley 2014.

23 Among Western political scientists, the most active promoter of interest in traditional Chinese thought is Daniel Bell (see, e.g., Bell 2008). Among the most prolific expatriate

the academy their voices are clearly dominated by political scientists and philosophers.

Parallel to the flood of Confucian revivalism, there is a palpable increase in scholarly interest in early Chinese political thought within the narrowly defined field of early China studies. Even a brief search through such an essential tool as Paul R. Goldin's *Ancient Chinese Civilization: Bibliography of Materials in Western Languages* (2014) will show that more articles and monographs on this topic have been published in the West during the last five years (2009–2013) than during the preceding four decades. While some of these publications are clearly related to the Confucian revival, many more diverge—quite considerably—from this trend. Actually, the gap between studies of early Chinese political thought generated by historians and by, for example, political scientists appears at times to be so huge that one wonders whether or not a dialogue between these two avenues of investigation is possible at all.

The reasons for methodological distinctions between scholars who analyze early Chinese political thought through the prism of its modern applicability and those who investigate it in the context of early Chinese history are obvious and do not require further discussion. Yet we should not dismiss a possibility of establishing a creative dialogue and mutual fertilization. For political scientists it would require more attentiveness to the historical context of early Chinese ideas and to their actualization before and after the imperial unification; for historians it would require paying more attention to broader implications of our topics of study beyond the specific period under discussion. Speaking from a historian's point of view, I believe that broad and engaging topics can be addressed without sacrificing methodological rigor. It is with this in mind that we organized the conference that called upon scholars of early Chinese history, literature, paleography, and philosophy to tackle broad issues in early Chinese political thought. The results of this conference—attended by twenty researchers from East Asia, Europe, Israel, and the United States—are presented in this volume.

Our conference pursued two goals. First, we aimed at discussing broad topics, such as the nature of rulership, ruler-minister relations, and the legitimating devices employed by Chinese rulers to sustain their power and maintain

Chinese promoters of the Confucian revival, one must mention Tu Wei-ming (Du Weiming 杜維明) and Yü Ying-shih (Yu Yingshi 余英時); cf. Tu Wei-ming 2010 and Yu Yingshi 2005. For views of current promoters of the Confucian revival in China, see, e.g., Yan Xuetong 2011; Bai Tongdong 2012; Jiang Qing 2013. Several volumes of *Contemporary Chinese Thought* and other journals have explored the phenomenon of the Confucian revival in China.

control over the population. Second, in doing so, we did not dispense with our methodological tools, such as careful contextualization, philological research, and in-depth textual analysis, but rather tried to demonstrate that these tools are essential for the proper analysis of the political thought of the Warring States period. We believe that addressing problems of the texts' dating, of intertextuality, of their rhetorical devices, of historical and archeological context, and the like is crucial if we want to make a meaningful statement about ideas concerning power and authority in pre-imperial and early imperial China.

There is one other common point of our articles: all of us are firmly grounded in the temporal and geographical setting in which the ancient texts were produced. Some scholars nowadays argue that "Confucianism transcends time" and that "Confucianism transcends culture" (Tu Wei-ming 2010: 249–251). The contributors to this volume do not have a uniform view of this issue. Yet whatever our attitudes to the potentially universal and modern validity of Confucianism or of any other strand of early Chinese thought, we all share a common belief that this thought should first of all be introduced within its own context and on its own terms (cf. Skinner 1992: ix–xv). Only then can we start a meaningful discussion about the relevance of China's past to its present.

The Structure of This Volume

This volume is divided into two parts. The first explores some of the foundational ideas and concepts that were formed during the pre-imperial age and later contributed toward shaping the Chinese imperial system and, in particular, toward dynastic legitimation. By speaking of "legitimation" we do not refer to specific legitimation devices as applied by different dynasties or different rulers (for these, see, e.g., Chan 1984; Wechsler 1985) but to what may be called the fundamental legitimacy of any ruling dynasty: the requirement to ensure political unity of All-under-Heaven; the concept of Heaven's Mandate (*tian ming* 天命); and adherence to political models associated with the paragons of the past. Each of the chapters discusses one of these ideas and notions, and each problematizes it.

The first chapter is by Paul R. Goldin, "Representations of Regional Diversity during the Eastern Zhou Dynasty." Goldin explores one of the major riddles of early China: the increasing regional diversity on the eve of the imperial unification of 221 BCE. As has been shown in previous research, it was during the Warring States period that the quest for political unification of "All-under-Heaven" (*tianxia* 天下) became exceptionally powerful, eventually becoming the centerpiece of Chinese political culture and the cornerstone of dynastic

legitimacy for millennia to come (Pines 2000a; 2012: 11–43). This quest for political unity shaped the philosophical and even spatial perceptions of the thinkers of the Warring States period, who postulated, for instance, the absolute priority of the whole (e.g., “All-under-Heaven”) over its parts (e.g., the regions) (Lewis 2006).

Intuitively, one would expect that the evolution of the idea of unity should come in tandem with increasing cultural homogenization of the Zhou realm; but as Goldin shows, this was *not* the case. Actually, the Eastern Zhou 東周 period (770–256 BCE) witnessed an increasingly pronounced regional diversity, reflected through distinctively regional artistic expression, variations in burial practices, the appearance of local history-writing in regional polities, or accentuation of regional differences in military and economic texts. And yet this recognition of regional diversity did not generate an ideology of political regionalism, as it did, for instance, in modern Europe. Goldin emphasizes that, at the very least, on the textual level, it was clear that “the regions of China are diverse, but together they constitute a complete and closed system.” Even geographic and astrological constructs emphasized the “conception of China as a great whole containing a number of discrete subdivisions.” How and why did the idea of a unified “China”—referring here to the Warring States world (i.e., territory that is roughly associated with what we call today “China proper” except for its southernmost parts)—evolve before the real imperial unification? Why did it develop during a period of increasing regional diversification? Why did the processes of increased territorial integration in each of the component states, outlined by Goldin, not give place to local separatism? How—and to what extent—was the “China” that was unified in 221 BCE related to the loose entity of the Western Zhou 西周 period (ca. 1046–771 BCE)? Full answers to these questions will require further research.

The political unification of the subcelestial realm was one of the cornerstones of dynastic legitimacy in China; the notion of Heaven’s Mandate was another. This notion appeared as early as the Western Zhou period (although debates on the precise dating of its emergence continue: cf. Kern 2009; Luo Xinhui 2012), and after a relative lull during the Eastern Zhou, it was resurrected as the fundamental legitimation device in the Han period, most notably after Wang Mang’s 王莽 (r. 9–23 CE) interregnum. Normally, the idea that the dynasty’s rule is mandated by the supreme deity, Heaven, should be considered a classical instance of religious legitimation, which was common worldwide (e.g., in the ancient Near East). And yet, Heaven was a peculiar supreme deity. In marked distinction to, for example, Near Eastern gods, Heaven of the Zhou age was not only highly depersonalized but also lacked a direct means of

communicating its will to the populace. No prophet spoke on its behalf, no sacred scriptures explicated its will, and aside from occasionally sending down portents and omens (the meaning of which was highly contestable), Heaven remained separated from the people.²⁴ The primary religious means of ascertaining Heaven's will was divination, but it is difficult to assess how much the results of divination influenced policymakers (cf. Kern, forthcoming-a). Early sections of the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poems*) and the *Shujing* 書經 (*Classic of Documents*) do refer, albeit infrequently, to divination, but almost never to omens. These texts emphasize that Heaven's will can be inferred primarily from the analysis of human affairs (especially, but not exclusively, ex post facto from the success or failure of a dynastic contender); and it is through proper maintenance of human affairs that one should attain Heaven's Mandate. This emphasis on human, rather than divine, matters is so strong that a leading scholar of early Chinese religion, Poo Mu-chou, averred that "the religion of the [Z]hou court was more akin to a type of political philosophy" (1993: 30). Even if somewhat overstated, this view reflects a substantial difference between the conceptualization of the supreme deity in China and elsewhere.

Yet while it is common among scholars in China and elsewhere to reduce the Heaven-centered religion to "a type of political philosophy," there are also indications that the real picture was by far more complex. In her chapter "Omens and Politics: The Zhou Concept of the Mandate of Heaven as Seen in the *Chengwu* 程寤 Manuscript," Luo Xinhui 羅新慧 analyzes a short manuscript from the collection of bamboo texts that were apparently looted from a Warring States period tomb from the state of Chu and then acquired by Tsinghua (Qinghua 清華) University on the Hong Kong antiquities market. The manuscript, named *Chengwu* by its editors, appears to be an early variant of a long-lost chapter from the *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書 (*Lost Documents of Zhou*) collection. Luo demonstrates that the manuscript comprises two sections, of which the first is earlier, datable possibly to the Springs-and-Autumns or early Warring States period; while the second part is probably from the middle Warring States period. The two sections represent highly distinct views of the

24 The "Tian zhi" 天志 ("Heaven's Intent") triplet of the *Mozi* remains an exceptional text in the pre-imperial corpus insofar as it speaks confidently on Heaven's behalf. Even these chapters, though, treat Heaven much less as a revelational deity and more as an abstract symbol of justice. For a later development of the *Mozi* doctrine of Heaven, as exemplified in the "Fa yi" 法儀 chapter, see Standaert 2013. In the imperial period, by contrast, attempts were made—usually but not exclusively by various religious movements, especially those associated with religious Daoism—to establish direct links with Heaven (for a curious relation between *Mozi* and later Daoism, see Goldin 201b).

transfer of the Mandate to the Zhou people. The first section narrates a prophetic dream of the future King Wu of Zhou 周武王 (d. ca. 1043 BCE); the dream promises the Zhou overthrow of the Shang. This indirect revelation of Heaven's will is followed by elaborate sacrifices, after which the Mandate is unequivocally granted to the Zhou. The second section of the manuscript presents an entirely different way of attaining the Mandate. The importance of the dream and of sacrifices is downplayed, while the importance of King Wu's proper political behavior is emphasized.

Luo suggests that this short text reflects tensions around conceptualizations of Heaven's Mandate and of Heaven's interaction with humans. It seems that, at least among some segments of the educated elite, Heaven was conceptualized as a revelational deity, while for other thinkers this idea was potentially damaging to the dominant interpretation of Heaven's Mandate as something that was bestowed in recognition of human actions alone. The implicit tension between the two parts of *Chengwu* may reflect, then, a broader tension between different views of Heaven's interaction with humans. It may be interesting to notice in this regard that the resurrection of the idea of Heaven's Mandate under the Han 漢 dynasty (206/202 BCE–220 CE) brought about a rise of interest in omens and portents to a degree unheard of in the Warring States period texts (see, e.g., Loewe 1996; Kern 2000b). The topic of distinct conceptualizations of Heaven and the manifestations of its will certainly requires further research.

The third major leg of dynastic legitimacy during the imperial period was the adoption of a ritual, political, and intellectual framework associated with the paragon rulers of the past. The dictum to emulate the former wise kings or meritorious ancestors is strongly pronounced as early as the Western Zhou chapters of the *Shujing* and many contemporaneous bronze inscriptions; evidently, the idea of learning from the past belongs to the earliest layers of Chinese political thought. Yet during the Warring States period this idea was no longer taken for granted. In an age of rapid changes, the past was no longer uniformly revered; and not a few thinkers questioned its authority altogether. Facing the need to reconcile the legacy of the past with the rapidly changing world, some thinkers became engaged in either reinterpreting old traditions or inventing new ones; it was during that age that new paragons were invented or old ones were imagined in a new way, and texts attributed to them or associated with them were created. This process of reshaping the tradition ended, inconclusively, only in the Han dynasty, when certain interpretations of the past were canonized, while others were abandoned altogether. These efforts of imperial court Erudites and exegetes did not bring about a uniform understanding of the venerated tradition, but they did create a certain common

framework within which the debates over the proper interpretation of the past were henceforth conducted.²⁵

Two chapters in this volume deal with the texts that were formed during the late pre-imperial or early imperial period and that presented their distinct visions of the past as guidelines for the present and for the future. One of these texts is the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳 (*Gongyang Commentary*) to the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (*Springs-and-Autumns Annals*). The *Chunqiu* is the historical chronicle of the state of Lu 魯, the compilation (or editing) of which is traditionally attributed to Confucius. The *Gongyang zhuan* teaches the reader to discern the “great meaning” 大義 of the *Chunqiu* supposedly encoded there by Confucius through “subtle words” 微言. During the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE), the *Chunqiu*, in its *Gongyang* interpretation, was elevated to the position of the summa of Confucius’s political wisdom, while the *Gongyang zhuan* itself became a singularly important text and a focus of intensive exegetical efforts. Although from the Latter Han on, the importance of the *Gongyang zhuan* receded, it was occasionally “rediscovered” and re-promoted by various statesmen and political thinkers, most notably by the famous late imperial reformer Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) and, most recently, by the current Chinese political thinker Jiang Qing 蔣慶 (b. 1952).²⁶ What is common to Kang, Jiang, and many other adherents of the *Gongyang zhuan* is their reading of its message through the prism of the Han and Qing 清 (1644–1912) exegesis. The result is odd: the constructs that are based on the *Gongyang zhuan* often depart considerably from the original content of the text.

Against these trends, Joachim Gentz, in his “Long Live the King! The Ideology of Power between Ritual and Morality in the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳,”

25 For the invention and reinvention of the legendary and semilegendary past, see Gu Jiegang (1926) 1988, a somewhat-outdated but still insightful study; for the process of formation of the uniform vision of the past and of canonical tradition, see, e.g., Lewis 1999b.

26 In the post-Han era, there was a sharp decline in exegetical works on the *Gongyang zhuan* and even in references to its exegesis during court discussions. The *Gongyang zhuan* was invoked at times as a foil to the “too historical” *Zuo zhuan*, which was derided by some classicists for missing “the great meaning” 大義 of the *Chunqiu*. Yet even these scholars (such as Lu Chun 陸淳 [d. 806] and his eighth-century predecessors or, much later, Zhu Xi 朱熹 [1130–1200]) do not appear to be particularly inspired by or interested in the *Gongyang zhuan* as such. The same holds for the scholars, such as Sun Fu 孫復 (992–1057), who adopted the basic ideas of the *Gongyang* exegesis but preferred to claim direct inspiration from the *Chunqiu* rather than from its commentary (Li Jianjun 2008: 89–119). See more in Huang Kaiguo 2013: 424–447. For Kang Youwei’s resurrection of the *Gongyang zhuan*, see Huang Kaiguo 2013: 651–730. For a broader context of *Chunqiu* studies, see Zhao Boxiong 2004. For Jiang Qing’s views, see Jiang Qing 2013.

sets out to restore the original outlook of the *Gongyang zhuan* and its major ideological premises. Gentz's study is based on his earlier explorations of the nature and exegetical strategies of the *Gongyang zhuan* (Gentz 2001, 2005) but goes further toward demonstrating the complexity of *Gongyang* exegesis and the intrinsic link between its form and its content. Gentz analyzes the peculiarity of the text by highlighting not just its explicit ideas but also its "meaningful silences that have to be interpreted as specific statements of a particular ideological position" (p. 101). These silences are revealing: for instance, crucial ethical terms that permeate Zhou literature, such as "virtue" (*de* 德) and "filial piety" (*xiao* 孝), are absent from the *Gongyang zhuan*, markedly distinguishing this text from those of Confucian lore. Gentz furthermore explores internal tensions in the *Gongyang zhuan* between rigid and supposedly unshakable ritual rules, on the one hand, and the importance of expediency, or "weighing" (*quan* 權), which should guide moral action outside the ritual framework, on the other. In Gentz's analysis, the *Gongyang zhuan* is far more sophisticated than most readers would admit; and it is also a highly distinctive work whose ideological stance has no clear parallels among pre-imperial texts. Gentz places its stance "somewhere between a traditional person-centered monarchy, in which the concepts of virtue (*de*), loyalty, and filial piety are central, and a new, impersonal system operating on the basis of an abstract set of highly efficient ruling techniques and bureaucratic rules" (p. 105). The text furthermore defines "an ideal realm of royal authority and power independent from the actual existence of an adequate ruler" (p. 116). As Gentz shows, the sublime message of the *Gongyang zhuan* was flexible enough to be endorsed by both Emperor Wu and his critics.

Martin Kern, in his "Language and the Ideology of Kingship in the 'Canon of Yao,'" tackles another major canonical text: "Yao dian" 堯典 ("Canon of Yao"), the first chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書 (aka *Shujing*, *Classic of Documents*). "Yao dian" narrates the rule of two major paragon sovereigns of antiquity: Yao 堯 and Shun 舜. In most historical accounts, the most famous act of each was to abdicate in favor of a worthier candidate: according to Warring States period legend, Yao yielded the throne to his worthy minister, Shun, who later similarly abdicated in favor of another worthy minister, Yu 禹 (Allan 1981; Pines 2005a). However, the "Yao dian" story is not about abdication (Yao's abdication to Shun is mentioned only briefly, while Shun's is not mentioned at all). Rather, it presents Yao and Shun as two models of rulership, embedding in a single text the full range of implicit tensions between different concepts of monarchy.

"Yao dian" is a notoriously difficult text, in part because of its archaizing language, which bewildered commentators from the Han period on. Kern departs from the traditional reading of the text and presents a novel

interpretation of the “Yao dian” as a work of political rhetoric that presents two distinct models of kingship. Yao is treated in the text as an archaic charismatic ruler who acts idiosyncratically and whose personal voice is fully heard, especially when he contradicts his officials. Shun, on the other hand, is portrayed as an impersonal ruler, who presides over a well-functioning bureaucracy and performs a series of highly ritualized acts, which do not require any display of the ruler’s individuality. It is not difficult to infer that for most imperial court officials (and in all likelihood for the text’s compilers), it was Shun, rather than Yao, who was a real model for the emperor to emulate. These courtiers’ ideal would be a compliant and depersonalized ruler who performs his tasks meticulously but who does not overrule his officials and whose activism does not depart from the ritually prescribed framework. Why then does the text present two distinct models? Were these considered complementary, reminiscent of Kantorowicz’s (1957) idea of the “king’s two bodies,” or was Shun presented as a proper response to Yao’s individualistic mode of rule? If, as many scholars (Kern included) suggest, the Shun section of the “Yao dian” was edited by the court Erudites of the First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇 (emp. 221–210 BCE), then it may be surmised that they tried thereby to direct this activist and individualist ruler toward a more ritualistically regulated mode of rule, which would make the emperor more compliant with his bureaucrats. Taken more broadly, the distinct modes of rule of Yao and Shun embed the perennial tension between individualist and depersonalized monarchs throughout Chinese history.²⁷

The articles in the first part of this volume differ in their content, angle of analysis, and even methodology. Yet there is one common point that recurs in each of the analyses: the intrinsic presence of multiple tensions in Chinese political thought. Tensions existed between unity and diversity; between the emphasis on human affairs when dealing with Heaven and the omenological approach; between inviolable ritual norms and the dictates of political expedience; between a charismatic and a depersonalized mode of rule; and so on. These tensions, which permeate most Chinese political texts and, *mutatis mutandis*, Chinese political culture in general, are not incidental. Rather, as argued by Liu Zehua 劉澤華 (2006), they reflect what he dubs the *yin-yang* 陰陽 structure of Chinese political culture: the coexistence of ostensibly contradictory statements and premises, which complement rather than negate each other.²⁸ This multiplicity of messages and meanings explains in particular why canonical texts, such as those analyzed by Gentz and Kern, could be used to

²⁷ For this tension, see Pines 2012: 44–75.

²⁸ It should be clarified that Liu Zehua uses the *yin-yang* pair purely in a metaphorical sense; he does not refer to actual *yin-yang* philosophy.

both bolster the ruler's power and constrain it, to quell the opposition and to empower it. This understanding should be kept in mind when we discuss modern usages of Confucianism. The same ideology can contribute toward strengthening the Party's power and toward its curtailment; it can be utilized by the regime's guardians and by its critics. On a more general level, the persistent tensions in Chinese political thought and political culture imbue these with considerable adjustability to ever-changing circumstances and, as noted above, may explain their ongoing vitality.

In the second part of our volume we go down the sociopolitical ladder to explore relations between the ruler and his ministers and between the state and its subjects, the commoners. These relations were also characterized by multiple contradictions. In particular, the ministers had to navigate carefully between their commitment to monarchic order, in which all the imaginable power was supposed to be granted to the supreme sovereign (Liu Zehua 2000; Pines 2009: 25–53), and their sense of self-esteem as intelligent and responsible political actors. Immense tensions characterized ruler-minister relations throughout the imperial millennia, but they were even more acute in the pre-imperial period, when the coexistence of multiple loci of power weakened the rulers vis-à-vis their aides. Not surprisingly, many ministers of that age adopted a haughty attitude that would not be tolerated under the unified empire. For instance, proud hereditary ministers of the aristocratic Springs-and-Autumns period viewed themselves as sharing the ruler's responsibility for the altars of soil and grain (*sheji* 社稷)—that is, for the state—and treated the lord as mere *primus inter pares*. By the Warring States period, ministers' relative standing vis-à-vis the sovereign declined; but their pride did not. Actually, in the new meritocratic age, many ministers felt that insofar as they owed their position to superior skills, while the ruler owed his primarily to pedigree, they should be treated as the ruler's equals or even as his guides and not as mere servitors (Pines 2009: 115–180). How to maintain this proud stance without jeopardizing the monarchic principle of rule became a source of concern for many political thinkers of the age.

One of the most interesting examples of the immense tensions generated by the ministers' simultaneous commitment to the overarching principle of monarchism and to their own sense of self-esteem is the case of Han Fei, explored by Romain Graziani in his chapter “Monarch and Minister: The Problematic Partnership in the Building of Absolute Monarchy in the *Han Feizi* 韓非子.” Han Fei is arguably the most authoritarian-minded of early Chinese thinkers; nobody can match the harshness of his pronouncements against scheming ministers; nobody else displays such a resolute commitment to safeguarding the ruler's authority. Han Fei is deeply pessimistic about the possibility of

maintaining amicable relations between the ruler and his ministers. Having postulated the rule of self-interest as the supreme principle of political life (Goldin 2005a: 58–65; 2013a), he dismisses the idea of ruler-minister friendship, entertained by many of his contemporaries, as a daydream: rather, as he says, their coexistence is based on “a hundred battles that are fought daily” 上下一日百戰.²⁹

So, did Han Fei support limitless autocracy? Not necessarily. First, as a potential minister himself, he was aware that total alienation between the ruler and the ministers would be detrimental to his own position; hence, *pace* his own antiministerial philippics, he introduces the figure of a reliable and fully committed adviser, whom the ruler should heed. And second, more substantially, Han Fei was also painfully aware of the monarch’s potential inadequacy. Repeatedly, he speaks of stupid monarchs who gravely damaged their state by disregarding good advice. Graziani concludes that “the monarch is both metaphysical fantasy and recurring nightmare to the author(s) of the *Han Feizi*” (p. 177). How to resolve this nightmare? The text fluctuates between the advocacy of an omnipresent and omniscient sovereign who controls every imaginable aspect of life in his state and the recommendation to the ruler to nullify himself, to refrain from activism and let the officials act in his stead and on his behalf (the latter alternative would curiously resemble the Shun model depicted in the “Yao dian”). Neither alternative is good, though: ultimately, as Graziani shows, Han Fei fails to provide a viable solution for the proper ruler-minister partnership or devise an ideological construct that “allowed room for a minister of his kind” (p. 180). Han Fei’s achievement lies elsewhere, though. An astute analyst, Han Fei diagnosed multiple maladies of the monarchic system, from which it continued to suffer for the next two millennia. Ironically, the thinker most committed to the perfection of the ruler-centered political order was the one most aware of the problems of individual rule.

The *Han Feizi* is renowned for its antiministerial views, but its approach is a distinct minority in the corpus of received political writings from the Warring States period. One of its marked antipodes is the *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 (*Annals of Master Yan*), discussed by Scott Cook in his chapter “The Changing Role of the Minister in the Warring States: Evidence from the *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋.” The *Yanzi chunqiu* is a collection of anecdotes about the exemplary minister from the late Springs-and-Autumns period state of Qi 齊, Yan Ying 晏嬰 (aka Yanzi, ca. 580–500 BCE). Yan Ying figures prominently in the major history of the Springs-and-Autumns period, the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo Commentary*), which records a series of his speeches that are singularly bold in their

29 *Han Feizi* 11.8: 51 (“Yang quan”); see also Pines 2013a: 73–77.

denigration of rulers' incompetence and assertion of the minister's position as the ruler's equal (Pines 2013c: 70–80).³⁰ In particular, he insists that a minister should owe exclusive loyalty to the altars of soil and grain rather than to an individual ruler. This view is largely echoed in the *Yanzi chunqiu*. There Yan Ying appears even more audacious, arrogating to himself the right to intervene in any imaginable sphere of his lord's activities: from appointments and dismissals of officials to policymaking to mere entertainment. The lord is depicted as even more deferential to criticism than he is in the *Zuo zhuan*.

Cook attempts to locate the *Yanzi chunqiu* anecdotes within a broader lore of pre-imperial and early imperial discussions of ministerial loyalty. His conclusion—which will surprise the readers accustomed to dismissing the *Yanzi chunqiu* as a late Warring States or Han period text—is that most of its component anecdotes reflect the intellectual milieu of the early Warring States period, if not the Springs-and-Autumns period itself. This tentative conclusion will certainly require corroboration in further research; but it suffices to show the importance of the too-often-ignored *Yanzi chunqiu* as a source for analyzing ministerial ethics of the pre-imperial age.

As noted above, historical anecdotes were a peculiar genre that enjoyed high popularity from the Warring States to the early Han period (cf. Schaberg 2011); and some of the reasons can be inferred from Cook's analysis. It seems that anecdotes allowed the authors to convey their message on politically sensitive topics with much greater security than could be done through direct theorizing. Thus, the concept of ministerial loyalty as reflected in Yan Ying-related anecdotes poses a minister as a highly intelligent and autonomous political player, whose loyalty is owed to the state rather than to the ruler personally, and who has the right and the duty to disobey the ruler on matters of importance. Moreover, as one of the anecdotes related by Cook suggests, the ruler was not even supposed to exercise his will on matters of rewards and punishments unless his decision was approved by his ministers. It is significant that such subversive ideas were almost never aired directly but remained hidden among historical narratives. This demonstrates that the genre of anecdote is essential for a full understanding of the complexity of political ideas of the Warring States period.

The two final chapters of the second part of this volume focus on the interaction of the state with the lower strata. This topic is rarely raised in studies of early Chinese political thought, and when it is discussed, the discussion

30 For the debates about the dating and nature of the *Zuo zhuan* and its reliability as the source for the intellectual history of the Springs-and-Autumns period, see Schaberg 2001; Pines 2002a; Li Wai-yee 2007.

normally focuses on what is called *min ben* 民本 (people as a root) thought—that is, views of the “people” (normally referring to the lower strata) as the *raison d'être* of the polity, whose well-being should be of primary concern to the rulers and the ultimate goal of political action.³¹ In our volume we do not focus on *min ben* thought but rather on ideas and practices aimed at achieving the state’s control over the populace. After all, a common concern of the Warring States polities and of the subsequent empire was to fully utilize the state’s material and human resources, to keep the population compliant, and to ensure a decent livelihood for the inhabitants so as to prevent dissent. How this control was conceptualized and maintained is the focus of chapters 7 and 8.

In his chapter, “Ideologies of the Peasant and Merchant in Warring States China,” Roel Sterckx probes one of the central topics in pre-imperial and early imperial thought: what he calls the ideology of “agriculturalism”—namely, the prioritization of agriculture over commerce. Quite often, “agriculturalist” ideas in early China are read through the prism of the Han dynasty discourse that designated the peasants as superior to the merchants and emphasized the absolute importance of agriculture for the state’s economic prowess. Yet Sterckx shows that a systematic reading of major pre-imperial texts alters this picture. First, the peasant was lauded not so much because of his economic contribution to society but because he was more governable and stable, since his mental simplicity or even stupidity made him more amenable to the ruler’s control. Second, merchants were only rarely and exceptionally singled out in Warring States period texts as unwelcome parasites; actually, aside from the *Shang jun shu* 商君書 (*Book of Lord Shang*), contemporaneous writings refrain from overall assaults on merchants. This suggests in turn that the antimercantile shift, which placed farmers at the top and relegated merchants to the bottom of society, was largely a Han intellectual product. The reasons for this shift of priorities since the early Han period require further discussion.

Charles Sanft’s chapter, “Population Records from Liye: Ideology in Practice,” focuses on a topic that has never been discussed in the context of early Chinese political thought: population registration and documents concerning the government’s reach into the lower strata. The discovery of an imperial Qin county archive from Qianling County 遷陵縣, near the modern town of Liye 里耶 (Hunan), is one of the most fascinating archeological finds of recent decades, as it grants our first opportunity to understand the functioning of early

31 Not a few scholars have tried to find in the *min ben* the seeds of China’s supposedly indigenous democratic thought; see, e.g., Tan 2003: 132–156; Nuyen 2000; cf. Zhou Guitian 2001. For a radically different interpretation of *min ben* ideology as paternalistic rather than democratic, see, e.g., Zhang Fentian 2009. See more in Pines 2009: 187–218; Sabattini 2012.

imperial bureaucracy at the lowest levels of society. Sanft's analysis of the unearthed documents reveals an immensely efficient state apparatus, able to register the population in a remote corner of the newly conquered realm immediately after its military occupation and even able to trace fugitive debtors when they left the county. This tight control over human resources immediately invokes the image of Qin as a paradigmatic case of "agro-managerial despotism" akin to the model depicted by Karl A. Wittfogel in his seminal *Oriental Despotism* (1957). Yet Sanft views the matters differently. For him, "Qin systems for registering and monitoring the populace" "supported the creation and exercise of political power" that functioned not necessarily through coercion but "through monitoring and managing" (pp. 268–269). Qin institutions "functioned as tools more sophisticated than mere enablers of brute force. They were media by which the Qin promulgated their ideology" (p. 269). Sanft's study reminds us that treating an early Chinese state as a purely coercive institution is a gross simplification.

This volume ends with an epilogue by Liu Zehua, "Political and Intellectual Authority: The Concept of the 'Sage-Monarch' and Its Modern Fate," which differs substantially from the other contributions. First, in terms of period covered, Liu's article is not confined to early Chinese thought but rather presents a panoptic view of Chinese traditional political culture and its impact that extends to Mao Zedong and beyond. Second, the article is polemical. Liu criticizes some of the current proponents of China's re-Confucianization. This is done not only for political reasons, although it is clear that Liu Zehua dislikes the potential negative impact of the resurrection of China's traditional values, particularly Confucian ones, on the possibility of political liberalization. Rather, Liu also opposes China's turn backward to its tradition, not as a political activist (he is not), but as a historian and particularly as a scholar of traditional Chinese political thought and political culture.

The source of Liu Zehua's dissatisfaction with the so-called New Confucians (*xin rujia* 新儒家) is related less to Confucianism per se and more to the proliferation of uncritical views about the past in the Chinese intellectual community and among the general public. According to the new "patriotic" fashion, the past is presented in an increasingly affirmative way as the source of the nation's "five-millennia-old" glory; the unpleasant pages of China's history are glossed over; and critical approaches toward the intellectual legacy of both the imperial and the pre-imperial age are visibly receding. Embellishment of the past is evident not just on a quasi-official level (e.g., in museums) and on a popular level (movies, TV serials, etc.) but also on the academic level, as an increasing number of incomprehensibly laudatory accounts of China's past in general and its traditional political culture in particular are being published

annually.³² For a critical historian such as Liu, these accounts are no less disturbing than the vehement attacks on traditional values during the Cultural Revolution. They flatten Chinese history, distort the past, and are detrimental to the historical discipline in general.

Against these trends, Liu Zehua reminds us of some unpleasant and frequently toned-down aspects of traditional Chinese political culture, such as the nature of intellectual authority. While it is too often taken for granted that this authority rested firmly with the literati, Liu argues that this was not the case. Ever since the First Emperor of Qin appropriated the posture of a sage (*shengren* 聖人), this most respectable intellectual designation became an attribute of the imperial office. Although most emperors neither took their sagacity literally nor tried to impose their will on the intellectual realm, there were no legal or institutional means to prevent them from doing so. The exaltedness of the imperial position was sufficient in itself to overawe most literati; and when the emperor's ex officio position as a sage was added to his enormous power of coercion, it created a combination of political and spiritual authority that could be utilized to curtail any intellectual activities. It should be recalled here that, in the long term, the emperor's power over the realm of thought was rarely effective; but, in the short term, it could gravely affect the lives of men of letters. At least in principle, it was within the emperor's prerogative to outlaw (or promote) any doctrine, any cult, any commentary on a classical book, or any literary work. Traditional China was not totalitarian; but, as Liu Zehua implies, the roots of Mao Zedong's totalitarian rule during the last decade of his life are easily identifiable within the country's past. Promoters of the restoration of China's glorious traditional culture should pay attention to

32 See, e.g., the "*Jiashen* 甲申Culture Manifesto" published by a group of leading Chinese intellectuals in 2004. The manifesto argues, among other things: "We truly believe that Chinese culture has the Oriental qualities of emphasis on personality, on ethical norms, on altruism, and on harmony; it possesses a humanistic spirit of liberating, peaceful communication. It will provide a great intellectual enlightenment to those who consider how to reduce the problems in the current world, the problems of supreme individualism, supreme materialism, vicious competition, predatory exploitation, and all kinds of alarming and disturbing phenomena. It will illuminate those who seek peace and happiness for humankind" (<http://paper.wenweipo.com/2006/10/19/xw0610190007.htm>, accessed November 18, 2014). This simplification of traditional Chinese culture to an "all-positive" image (for which, see also, e.g., Cao Deben 2006; Jiang Qing 2013) deeply annoys Liu Zehua and like-minded critical scholars.

this unpleasant feature of the country's history and face the past in its full complexity: not only as a source of inspiration but also as a warning.³³

The First Emperor's acquisition of the status of a sage in the aftermath of the imperial unification of 221 BCE sets the temporal limit of this volume. Unification did not bring about the cessation of intellectual life, to be sure, but it reshaped its dynamics. Henceforth, the power of the throne over the members of the educated elite increased tremendously. Having monopolized the avenues of power and prestige, the imperial court could opt either to suppress men of letters (as, e.g., by the First Emperor himself during the infamous biblioclasm of 213 BCE)³⁴ or just to determine which sorts of intellectual expertise would open the routes of employment and which would close them (as was done by Emperor Wu of Han a century thereafter).³⁵ In any case, it may be said with much confidence that political unification—which realized the hopes of the great majority of Warring States period intellectuals—also brought about a considerable reduction in the intellectuals' autonomy (Ge Quan 2003). Under the imperial monopoly, intellectuals had to learn to avoid potentially dangerous topics or, at the very least, to adopt new forms of argumentation; and also the focus of their discourse shifted to a certain extent from the realm of politics to a variety of other matters. In retrospect, the imperial unification appears as a watershed in China's intellectual history. Here we focus on the ideas and ideals that preceded it. How the establishment of the empire influenced political discourse is a topic for future studies.

33 It is worth noticing that during the study session of the CPC Politburo, the current (2015) General Secretary of the CPC, Xi Jinping 习近平, cautioned against blind adoration of the past. Rather, “the good aspects [of the past legacy] should be selected and adopted; the bad ones should be discarded” (see Xinhua report, n. 22 above).

34 For various views of the Qin biblioclasm, see Petersen 1995; Kern 2000a: 183–196; Pines 2009: 180–183.

35 It is noteworthy that Emperor Wu was as intolerant toward intellectual pluralism as the First Emperor. So close are the parallels between the two that Hans van Ess (2014) even opines that the negative portrait of the First Emperor in the *Shiji* might have been constructed primarily as a means to criticize Emperor Wu.