“THE ONE THAT PERVADING THE ALL” IN ANCIENT CHINESE POLITICAL THOUGHT: THE ORIGINS OF “THE GREAT UNITY” PARADIGM∗

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Why does [the Chun qiu] begin with “the King’s first month?”—To magnify the unified rule [da yitong 大一統] (Gongyang zhuan, Yin 1)

The immense pluralism of Chinese political thought of the Zhanguo era (戰國 453-221) is well known. The contending “one hundred schools” (baijia 百家) suggested diverse, and sometimes mutually exclusive visions of the proper mode of rule, social systems, ruler-minister relations, human nature, social mobility, warfare, human relations with the transcendental, and almost all other aspects of political, social, economic, military, and religious life. Despite these varieties, one can distinguish certain basic ideas Zhanguo thinkers held in common. The most important of these is, probably, the unanimous rejection of the Eastern Zhou (東周, 772-256) multi-state system, and the consequent advocacy of the ideal of unified rule. This common ideal of the Zhanguo thinkers had a strong impact on subsequent Chinese political thought; moreover, its impact is well perceived in current Chinese political culture. This unanimous rejection of anything but the politically unified realm allowed the resurrection of the Chinese empire after frequent periods of disunion, internal turmoil and foreign conquest.

Most scholars in China and abroad recognize the importance of the “Great Unity” (da yitong 大一統) paradigm in Chinese po-

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1 Hereafter all dates are before the common era, unless indicated otherwise.
litical culture.² It is less clear, however, when and how this ideal emerged. Some trace its origins to the Former Han dynasty (206 BCE-8 CE); others suggest that it appeared in the Later Han (25-220 CE) or due to the idealization of the Han rule during the subsequent period of disunion (220-589); while yet others regard the Sui-Tang unification (589-906) as the crucial period during which the ideal of unitary state was formed.³ Scholars similarly disagree about the reasons for the emergence of the “Great Unity” ideal. Recently, in a most iconoclastic study, Edward Schafer argued that this ideal was nothing but a myth, “a persistent dream, an unachieved ideal of an archaic golden age,” while Prasenjit Duara similarly suggested that the quest for unity was mostly a production of traditional imperial historiography.⁴ Contrarily to these views, I would like to suggest that the Da yitong paradigm was not a mere historiographic convention or legitimiz-


ing device, but a reasonable political solution to the immanent state of anarchy embedded in the multi-state system in Chinese history. To clarify this point I shall trace the origins of this ideal to show, first, that the Great Unity paradigm was not an outcome of, but rather a precondition for the imperial unification of 221 BCE; and second, that the Zhanqiao thinkers’ quest for unity was not a search for a “non-existent chimaera,” as Schafer suggested, but a rational response to the disintegration of the Eastern Zhou multi-state order.

In the first part of this paper I shall outline the dissolution of the international order of the Chunqiu period (春秋, 722-453) and the subsequent abandonment of the statesmen’s attempts to build a viable multi-state system. The evolution of the quest for unity among Chunqiu and Zhanqiao thinkers will be discussed next. In the concluding section I shall make some comments on the impact of the Great Unity ideal on Chinese political culture throughout the imperial period and thereafter.

A. The Futile Search for International Order

The relative stability of the early Zhou gradually eroded during the Western Zhou period (1045-772). As generations passed, kinship ties between the Zhou kings and the overlords (zhuhou 諸侯) weakened and could no longer ensure royal supremacy, while a steady decline in dynastic military and economic power further undermined its dominance. The collapse of the Western Zhou in 771 ushered in a new multi-polar world, where old rules of inter-state hierarchy based on the overlord’s rank and proximity to the Zhou house were gradually replaced by new ones, which reflected primarily an actual balance of power among rival states. The first two centuries of the Eastern Zhou were a period of incessant search for a viable international order. Yet none of these attempts to restore stability could cope with the advancing disintegration of the Zhou system.

We may discern three major stages in the Chunqiu search for a viable multi-state order. The early Chunqiu international system was dominated by Zhou ritual norms (li 禮). Particularly under the hegemony of Lord Huan of Qi (齊桓公, r. 685-643), li became a proxy of international law. Later, as the unilateral hegemony of Lord Huan faded and li was all but abandoned, international relations were managed in the framework of the so-called alliance system, led by the contending superpowers of Jin 晉 and Chu 楚.
This system, however, also proved inadequate to stabilize interstate relations, and even the unique peace conferences held in the states of Song 宋 (546) and Zheng 郑 (541) were to no avail. In the late Chunqiu years, brutal hegemonies of the southern and south-eastern states of Chu, Wu 吴 and Yue 越, which lacked even the pretense of abiding by accepted rules of managing inter-state relations, marked the final collapse of the international order. The Zhanguo world was dominated by the notion that might is right; and as no serious attempt was made to preserve a viable multi-state system, the solution for international turmoil had to be sought elsewhere.

In retrospect, the end of the Western Zhou is regarded as the irreversible breakdown of the Zhou order. Yet for the early Chunqiu statesmen this outcome was not at all obvious, and the Zhou legacy continued to influence many aspects of their lives. Especially in the early Chunqiu, the newly emerging multi-state system functioned in accord with the Zhou rules of international ritual, the most important of which was revering the Zhou Son of Heaven (tianzi 天子); in the early Chunqiu an irreverent attitude to the Zhou king could result in a punitive expedition against the culprit. The major problem of this system, obvious already in the late eighth century, was that the ritual supremacy of the Sons of Heaven was not substantiated by economic and, most importantly, military power. The growing disparity between the name and the actuality demanded a readjustment of the extant order. This, indeed, happened, under the aegis of Lord Huan of Qi— the first and the most powerful of the Chunqiu “hegemons” (ba 巴).

Lord Huan skillfully combined military superiority with legitimacy, derived from the support of the Zhou Son of Heaven. Throughout his career Lord Huan, together with his famous aide Guan Zhong (管仲, d. 645), never failed to display a reverent attitude towards the king, despite the latter being a de facto protégé of the powerful Qi leader. Lord Huan furthermore strictly


6 Lord Huan demonstrated his reverence to the Zhou king during the assault
abided by international etiquette norms, even though while acting as the king’s surrogate he redirected part of the inter-state ceremonies from the Zhou court to that of Qi. Moreover, to prove his unshakable adherence to the li norms which prohibited, among other things, the annihilation of weak states, Lord Huan generally refrained from willful annexations; indeed, the most remarkable feature of his policy, lauded throughout subsequent ages, was “preserving ruined states, continuing interrupted sacrifices” (cun wang guo, ji jue si 存亡國，繼絕祀). In addition, Lord Huan’s explicit adherence to international ritual norms even encouraged him to intervene in the struggles over succession in neighboring states to protect the legitimate heirs and to punish the usurpers.

These actions underline Lord Huan’s strong commitment to preservation and improvement of the multi-state system and may explain why the Qi leader became a paragon of the good hegemon throughout the Chunqiu period and thereafter. Nonetheless, despite Lord Huan’s positive image, the foundations of his international order proved to be too shaky. Aside from his military superiority, Lord Huan’s prestige relied on two major factors, namely the support of the Son of Heaven, who remained the main source of legitimacy in the Zhou world, and the explicit commitment to preserve weak states, which introduced a degree of stability to inter-state relations of that age. But as both these pillars of the ritual-based multi-state system collapsed within few decades following Lord Huan’s death, the entire international order based on unilateral hegemony faded away.

The most important development of mid-Chunqiu international politics was the rapid decline of the Zhou kings’ position.

on Chu in 656, and during the Kuiqiu 真丘 meeting in 651; Guan Zhong behaved similarly during the 648 court visit.

7 See Guliang zhuan 髡閔傳, in Shisanjing zhushu, Xi 17, 8: 2398. Although at the earlier stage of his career Lord Huan annexed the statelets of Tan 端 in 684 and Sui 梁 in 681, he abandoned this practice as his hegemony was established. To the contrary, Lord Huan restored in 661-659 the states of Wei 魏 and Xing 翕 which had been destroyed by the Di 戰 tribesmen; and in 646, he restored the state of Qi 齊, a victim of Song 宋 aggression.

8 Lord Huan intervened in the succession struggles in Lu in 661-660 and in Jin in 651. Reportedly, he refrained from annexing the state of Lu because of the latter’s explicit adherence to Zhou ritual norms (Zuo, Min 1: 257). Furthermore, Lord Huan refrained from assisting the rebellious Prince Hua 太子華 of Zheng, since such action would violate international ritual norms (Zuo Xi 7: 317-18).
New leaders who succeeded Lord Huan were less inclined to display reverence towards powerless Sons of Heaven. The change became explicit soon after Lord Huan’s death, when Lord Wen of Jin (晋文公, r. 636-628), the second of the prominent Chunqiu hegemons, openly challenged the superiority of King Xiang (襄王, r. 651-619). In 635, Lord Wen arrogantly demanded sumptuary privileges of the Zhou kings; when the king disagreed, Lord Wen retaliated by summoning the king to the inter-state meeting of 632.\(^9\) This appalling disregard of ritual norms dealt a mortal blow to royal prestige. Throughout the sixth century Zhou kings were progressively marginalized, as their nominal protectors, the lords of Jin, rarely bothered themselves even with inviting royal envoys to the inter-state meetings.\(^10\) Within few decades kings ceased to be players of any importance on the international scene.

This change was of far-reaching consequences for Chunqiu international life, as it induced a redefinition of the nature of hegemony. As long as the Zhou kings’ prestige remained intact, the hegemon who enjoyed their support could claim ritual supremacy over other overlords. Now, as arrogant Jin leaders largely absolved themselves of the pretension to act on behalf of the Son of Heaven, this meant that their international power derived primarily from their military superiority. But similar claims could be made—and actually were made—by other states as well. Powerful overlords, rulers of Chu, Qin 嬴, and Qi, refused to submit to Jin’s hegemony. Without adequate ritual means to impose its authority, Jin had to rely primarily on coercion, which indeed happened. The legitimacy vacuum created with the decline of Zhou prestige was never effectively filled in.

Aside from the decline of the royal authority, the changing attitudes towards the destiny of tiny states also marked the breakdown of Lord Huan’s legacy. The need to attain new lands—the
major source of the political and economical well-being of the overlord—invalidated the ritual imperative to preserve extin-
guished polities.\textsuperscript{11} Annexations occurred during Lord Huan’s 
hegemony as well, but it was after his death that their pace visibly 
intensified.\textsuperscript{12} In the first generations after Lord Huan, an appeal 
to the principle of preserving ruined states could occasionally 
influence policy-makers,\textsuperscript{13} but by the mid-Chunqiu it became ri-
diculous. In 548, the eminent Zheng leader, Zi Chan 子產, 
remarked:

> In antiquity, the Son of Heaven’s territories were one qi (a thousand li 
squared), while the overlords’ were [only] one tong (a hundred li 
squared), and so on in decreasing order. Now great states already [have] 
many qi—how could this be without invading the smaller [states]?\textsuperscript{214}

Four years later Sima Hou 司馬侯 of Jin frankly admitted:

> Yu 爰, Guo 爾, Jiao 稼, Hua 眀, Di 竄, Yang 義, Han 悟, Wei 維—all of them 
belonged to the Ji 紫 clan, but thanks to [annexing] them Jin became 
great. If small states were not invaded, where would we get [lands] to seize? 
Since lords Wu and Xian we have annexed many states—who can regulate 
this?\textsuperscript{15}

Zi Chan’s and Sima Hou’s candor reveals a profound change in 
the statesmen’s attitude towards international ritual norms. In the 
mid-seventh century, Lord Huan restored the extinguished poli-
ties; other seventh-century rulers occasionally emulated his exam-

\textsuperscript{11} Newly acquired territories could be distributed as allotments to the ruler’s 
relatives and allies, or become dependencies (xian 縣), ruled by an appointed 
oficial; incomes from such dependencies enhanced the ruler’s revenues. In 
each case, acquiring new lands was essential to the ruler who hoped to withstand 
both domestic and foreign challenges. Moreover, since the mid-Chunqiu period, 
powerful aristocratic lineages likewise invaded weaker polities to acquire more 
land.

\textsuperscript{12} See Hsu Cho-yun’s statistics for the pace of state annihilations (\textit{Ancient} 
Huan’s reign almost all the annexations occurred at the hands of Chu, Qin and 
Jin, that is in the areas beyond the effective control of Qi.

\textsuperscript{13} For instance, in 639 Cheng Feng 成鳳, mother of Lord Xi of Lu (魯惠公, 
r. 659-627), persuaded her son to intervene and restore the state of Xugou 胤句 
(\textit{Zuo}, Xi 21: 392), and in 632 Lord Wen of Jin was dissuaded from extinguishing 
the state of Cao 藪 (\textit{Zuo}, Xi 28: 474). In both cases a successful appeal was made 
to the Zhou ritual and to Lord Huan’s model.

\textsuperscript{14} (\textit{Zuo}, Xiang 襄 25: 1106).

\textsuperscript{15} (\textit{Zuo}, Xiang 29: 1160). Lords Wu 舜 and Xian 墨, ruled 
Jin from 678 to 651.
ple. One century later, however, two of the most respected statesmen considered these sentiments obsolete. The unrestrained quest for lands, a lack of normative or institutional arrangements which could prevent annihilation of tiny states, and the increasing cynicism of politicians undermined the relative stability created by Lord Huan. Prominent leaders no longer believed in the possibility of ensuring a viable multi-state order; having arrived to the conviction that might is right, they acted accordingly.

When the ritual-based order of Lord Huan’s age collapsed, it was replaced by the so-called system of alliances, the only meaningful attempt to recognize bi-polarity or even multi-polarity as a norm of functioning of the Chinese world. Alliance leaders (meng zhu 部主), Jin in the north and Chu in the south, sought to replace the Zhou kings as a legitimate focus of power. They protected their allies from outer enemies, played the role of arbiter in intra-alliance conflicts, and intervened to resolve internal conflicts in allied states. The elaborate ceremony of a common oath emphasized the ritual superiority of the leader of an alliance, who presided over the ceremony, was the first to smear sacrificial blood, and in all likelihood was responsible for drafting the text of the common oath.

Yet the grandeur of alliance ceremonies

17 For details on state annihilation in the Chunqiu-Zhanguo period, see Chen Pan 駐斕 Chunqiu dashi biao lieguo juexing ji cunmie biao zhuandao 春秋大事表 列國滅絕及存滅表奏等. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1988, (rev. ed.).
18 The alliance (meng 部) required a solemn ceremony which included preparing a written oath, sacrificing an animal, and smearing its blood on the participants’ lips. The text of the oath was kept in special repositories (mengfu 部府). Deities were invoked to guard the oath. Allies met periodically to renew (literally “rewarm,” xun 煥) the alliance; in certain cases they assembled without performing an oath ceremony. Such assemblies (hui 會) were considered less binding than an alliance, since they invoked no deities and no written oath. For the detailed description of meng see W.A.C.H. Dobson, “Some Legal Instruments of Ancient China: The Ming and the Meng,” in: Chow Tse-tsung, ed., Wen-Lin: Studies in Chinese Humanities (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); Mo Jinshan 莫金山, “Chunqiu lieguo menghui zhi yanbian 春秋列國會之演變, Shixue yuekan 史學月刊, 1 (1996), 14-18; Susan R. Weld, “The Covenant Texts at Houma and Wenxian,” in: Ed. L. Shaughnessy, ed., New Sources of Early Chinese History: An Introduction to the Reading of Inscriptions and Manuscripts (Berkeley: Society for Study of Early China, 1997), 154-160. For the leader’s responsibility for the text of the common oath, see Weld (although her study is based on the Houma
did not suffice to fill in the vacuum of legitimacy created with the decline of the Zhou house; solemn oaths could neither stop the infractions of mutual obligations nor prevent allies from shifting their allegiances. Besides, the co-existence of two contending alliances was a source of constant tension and warfare. These factors, in the final account, prevented the alliance system from becoming a cornerstone of viable international order.

Lack of respect for alliance obligations, and particularly shifting allegiances, became the major malady of the mid-Chunqiu period. The state of Zheng alone changed sides no less than ten times within a period of fifteen years (612-597), thereby invalidating the meaning of the alliance oaths. Statesmen’s appeals to the principle of mutual trust (xin 信) were in vain; similarly ineffective was reliance on deities as guardians of the alliance. A common reaction to these arguments is represented by the Chu sima, Zi Fan 子反, who justified in 576 his intention to discard an alliance with Jin, with a frank statement:

When the enemy’s [conditions] are favorable [to our attack], then we shall advance—what alliance exists [in such case]?  

Zi Fan had little concern for the moral aspects of his treachery; nor did he fear divine retaliation. His cynical attitude towards alliances was shared by many other contemporary statesmen, as alliances, concluded between the head of the aristocratic lineage and his retainers and followers, we may plausibly assume that inter-state alliances followed a similar pattern. The question of precedence in smearing sacrificial blood was of primary importance, as exemplified in frequent struggles over this issue: for instance, between Chu and Jin during the 546 and 541 alliances, between Wei 韦 and Cai 蔡 in 506, and between Jin and Wu in 482. Alliances by definition imposed hierarchic order and implied inequality. Mark Lewis correctly asserted that alliances were primarily a vehicle of one state’s hegemony over another (Sanctioned Violence in Ancient China [Albany: SUNY Press, 1990], 44-5).

Zheng was allied with Jin in 632-612. In 608 it concluded an alliance with Chu; in 606 it re-established friendly ties with Jin only to abandon it for Chu in 603; next year another alliance with Jin was concluded; in 599 Zheng shifted its allegiance to Chu and then immediately back to Jin; in 598 an alliance with Chu was concluded, betrayed and re-established once more in 597.

Invocation of deities was a common part of the alliance formula. For instance, the oath of the 632 northern states’ alliance said: “If anybody betrays this alliance, let him be punished by the numinous deities, let him lose his army; let him enjoy no fortune in his state and let this be extended to his grand-grandsons, young and old alike” (Zuo, Xi 28: 466-467; cf. Xi 28: 470; see also Weld, “Covenant texts”).

may be vividly illustrated by the twisting politics of the state of Zheng—the major victim of the Jin-Chu conflict. Tired of incessant incursions of Chu and Jin armies throughout the 560s, Zheng ministers finally decided to resolve their troubles through a cunning plan. Zi Zhan suggested concluding an alliance with Jin, then to betray it, and thus provoke Jin into a renewed incursion, causing a massive Jin military build-up in Zheng. This would prevent further Chu military expeditions and stabilize the Zheng-Jin alliance. Jin would gain Zheng’s allegiance; Zheng would secure itself with the help of the Jin forces. The plan was realized in 562. Its most interesting aspect was the first alliance of Zheng with Jin—the one which Zheng immediately intended to betray. Jin attempted to enforce Zheng’s submission by an extremely elaborate oath, invoking an impressive number of divine authorities, not seen elsewhere in the Zuo zhuan:

Every participant of our alliance will not accumulate grains, nor monopolize profits [of mountains and rivers], neither shelter criminals, nor keep traitors. [Everybody] should help others in case of natural calamity, share likes and dislikes and support the royal dynasty. If anybody violates this order, then will the Lord Inspector, the Lord of Alliances, [deities] of famous mountains and rivers, all the deities and all those who accept sacrifices, [spirits of] former kings, former lords, ancestors of the seven clans and the twelve states, [all these] numinous deities will punish him, may he lose his people, his life cut, his lineage be destroyed, his state and family overthrown.

This oath was pronounced in the presence of others by the Zheng leaders who intended to violate their obligations immediately thereafter, and indeed carried out their plans. It demonstrates the deep decline in the value of alliances in the late Chunqiu period. As statesmen’s belief in divine retribution declined, invoking the entire divine army to guard the oath became meaningless; only actual armies carried weight, as their systematic incursions wreaked havoc in the state of Zheng.

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22 I.e. will not accumulate grains in the case of natural calamity in the neighboring country, but rather support the neighbors. See, for instance, Qin’s assistance to Jin in 647.

23 凡我同盟、毋匿粟、毋匿刑、毋匿奸、毋匿贼、毋匿盗、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵、毋匿窺.rm、毋匿縵。十二州者，州名、州川、州山、州水、州居、州教。[Zuo, Xiang 11: 989-90]. Twelve states of seven clans are the participants of the alliance; Jin, Lu, Wei, Cao and Teng (Ji clan), Zhu and Smaller Zhu (Cao clan), Song (Zi clan), Qi (Jiang clan), Ju (Ji clan), Qi (Si clan) and Xie (Ren clan).

24 The above discussion requires modification of W. Dobson’s argument that “meng never lost its religious force and sanctions. ... [T]he religious beliefs which
Since neither alliances nor ritual norms could normalize interstate ties, Chunqiu statesmen became increasingly cynical about the possibility of a reasonable and non-violent international order on the whole. This trend is best exemplified by the changing views of the nature of international leadership throughout the Chunqiu period. Although many sympathized with the model of Lord Huan, a powerful yet mild international leader, who protected small states and preferred the power of non-coercive virtue (de) to naked force, few sixth-century leaders believed in their ability to emulate this mode of conduct. They realized that only the leader who can enforce compliance could become a true hegemon, even though his behavior might diverge from ritual or moral norms. Thus, whereas most early Chunqiu discussants believed that strict adherence to de would suffice to ensure the hegemon’s dominance, by the mid-Chunqiu this notion was no longer considered realistic.

The change was gradual. From the late seventh century the Zuo zhuan speakers began emphasizing punishments (xing or fa) and awesomeness (wei) as indispensable attributes of the hegemon, along with non-coercive de. Step by step, de was losing its importance. In a major policy discussion held in 597, the head of the

underlie it are never questioned.” (“Some Legal,” 278; cf. Weld, “Covenant Texts,” 389-401, 428; Lewis, Sanctioned Violence, 45-6). We must distinguish between the religious formula of the alliances and the actual degree of respect towards the divine guardians of the oaths. For more on the diminishing faith in deities’ prowess and in their mere existence, see Yuri Pines, Aspects of Intellectual Developments in the Chunqiu Period (722-453 B.C.) (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998), 129-137.

De is one of the most multifaceted terms in ancient Chinese political and ethical discourse. In the context of hegemony discussions, de primarily, although not exclusively, referred to mild, non-coercive means of exercising the leader’s power; it was often mentioned along with complementary opposites as “force” (li), “punishments” (xing or fa) and “awesomeness” (wei). In Western Zhou-Chunqiu discourse de also meant “charisma, mana,” and “moral virtue.” For more on the evolution of the meaning of de, see Vassili Kriukov, “Symbols of Power and Communication in Pre-Confucian China (On the Anthropology of De),” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 58 (1995), 314-33; Kominami Ichirô, “Tenmei to toku”天命と勧, Tô hô Gakuhô, 64 (1992), 1-59; Al. S. Martynov, “Kategoriiia de—sintez ‘poriadka’ i ‘zhizni’ ”, in: L.N. Borokh et al., eds., Ot Magicheskoj Sily k Moral’nomu Imperativu: Kategoriiia De v Kitajskoj Kul’ture (Moscow: Vostochnaia Literatura, 1999), 26-75; Pines, Aspects, 97-109, 232-51, 353-58. For the notion of de as a major attribute of Lord Huan’s hegemony, see Zuo, Xi 4: 292; Xi 7: 317; Xi 9: 327.

See Zuo, Xi 15: 366; Xi 25: 434; Wen 7: 563.
Jin government, Shi Hui (Fan Wuzi), urged his fellow officers to refrain from engagement with the powerful King Zhuang of Chu (楚莊王, r. 612-591). Shi stated that King Zhuang was a virtually irresistible adversary, since he skillfully combined *de*, *xing* and proper military and administrative policy. Shi Hui’s opponent, Xian Hu (先縠), disagreed with Shi’s proposal. He argued that whatever advantages King Zhuang possessed, Jin could not allow itself to avoid engagement, since its hegemony derived exclusively from military superiority, and any leniency towards the enemy would be unforgivable. For Shi Hui, thus, *de* was one—but not the only—component of a hegemon’s power; while Xian Hu entirely dismissed the importance of *de*, arguing that only military might mattered. Despite their differences, both statesmen agreed, therefore, that *de* alone was insufficient to ensure international superiority. This discussion foreshadowed a major shift in the notion of hegemony which occurred throughout the sixth century.

The sixth century *Zuo zhuan* speeches reflect the bifurcation of the concept of hegemony between the traditional view that emphasized virtue, and the new, cynical assumption that naked force is the most important pre-condition for attaining international dominance. While statesmen from the small states continuously espoused *de* as the only quality essential for a hegemon to ensure his position, Jin and Chu leaders dismissed these views. Desperate cries for an international leader who would secure order and protect the tiny states were dismissed by the superpowers’ representatives. A short dialogue may illustrate this point. In 582, Jin invited its allies to “rewarm” (i.e. renew) their alliance. The head of the Lu government, Ji Wenzi (季文子), resented Jin’s arbitrary policies, and declined the invitation:

Ji Wenzi said [to the head of the Jin government], Fan Wenzi (范文子): Your *de* is not strong, of what use is the renewal of the alliance?

Fan Wenzi answered: We are diligent in consoling [the overlords], broad-hearted in treating them, firm and strong in controlling [them], [use]

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27 See *Zuo*, Xuan 12: 722-726.

28 The most significant of sixth century discussions on virtuous hegemony was that of the Qi statesman, Guo Zuo (郭佐), who tried in 589 to dissuade the victorious Jin army from humiliating the defeated Qi (*Zuo*, Cheng 2: 797-98; see also Xuan 11: 711; Xiang 9: 969; Xiang 11: 993-94; Xiang 24: 1085). For the small states representatives’ desperate hopes for a merciful hegemon who would put an end to the international turmoil, see *Zuo*, Cheng 7: 832; Zhao 16: 1376.
numinous deities to tie them [by alliances]; mild to the submissive, and yet invade the duplicitous—this is second to de.\textsuperscript{29}

Powerless, Ji Wenzi had to resort to moral arguments to protect the interests of his state. His invocation of de, however, did not impress the Jin leader. Though politely admitting that force is “second to virtue,” Fan Wenzi disillusioned his partner, reminding him of Jin’s ability to “invade the duplicitous,” which meant that Jin’s hegemony relied primarily on its military superiority. Fan Wenzi’s contemporaries shared his belief in the ultimate superiority of naked force. Three years later, Zi Fan of Chu ridiculed the polite speeches of the Jin envoy, saying that the only possible meeting between the leaders of both states would take place on the battlefield; and several years later Zheng ministers admitted that the only principle that guided their foreign policy was “to follow the strongest.”\textsuperscript{30}

In this atmosphere of increasing cynicism, when most statesmen abandoned whatever hopes their predecessors might have cherished for attaining international stability, a last major attempt to revitalize the alliance system was made, namely the 546-541 peace conferences. In 546, the Song sima, Xiang Xu 向戌, used the stalemate in the Jin-Chu conflict to gather the hostile superpowers and their allies for an unprecedented peace meeting.\textsuperscript{31} The resultant peace agreement implied the merger of two conflicting groups into one super-alliance, headed simultaneously by Jin and Chu. However, the atmosphere of mutual mistrust and the general belief in naked force as the only compelling argument undermined the agreement from the very beginning. Already at the first meeting in 546 a quarrel over precedence occurred: who would be the first to smear sacrificial blood on his lips? The issue was of crucial importance: he who smears the blood first would gain ritual—and political—advantage over other allies.

Chu leaders decided to resolve the matter in the easiest possible way: they arrived at the meeting wearing armor, thus indicating their readiness to obtain precedence by force. The lingyin

\textsuperscript{29} 謝文子曰：得道不徵，得道何為？文子曰：徵以義之，徵以德之，徵以役之，又以要之，義服而威服，徳之次也。 (Cheng 9: 842-843).

\textsuperscript{30} See Zuo, Cheng 12: 857-58; Xiang 9: 971.

\textsuperscript{31} See the detailed discussion on the 546 conference in Kano Osamu 彩原秀, “Chûgoku kodai no aru hibusô heiwa undô” 中国古代の求める非武装平和運動, Gunji shigaku 軍事史学, 13, 4 (1978), 64-74.
(head of the government), Zi Mu 子木, dismissed his colleagues’ criticism: “Chu and Jin have lacked mutual trust for a long time, [seeking] only benefit in [their] undertakings. If [our] wishes are fulfilled, who needs to talk of trustworthiness?” The bitter resentment of the Jin delegates, and the Jin envoy Shu Xiang’s claims that the treacherous Chu would “lose the overlords’ [support]” were of little consequence. In 541, Zi Mu’s successor, lingyin Wei 国, again overawed the overlords with military might. To avoid another humiliation, the Jin envoys suggested to “re-warm” the 546 alliance without conducting a new alliance ceremony. This was their acknowledgment of the inefficacy of the alliance system as a whole.

The violent atmosphere at the peace conference was only a prelude to the subsequent infraction of the peace agreements and the rapid disintegration of the alliance system as a whole. Soon after the 541 meeting, Chu lingyin Wei dismissed his nephew, King Jia’ao (晁啟, r. 544-541), and established himself as a new king, posthumously known as King Ling of Chu (楚靈王, r. 540-529). This ruthless and energetic leader whose actual power was comparable to that of Lord Huan of Qi, lacked whatever pretensions his predecessors might have displayed to abide by norms of ritual and mutual trust. After pondering for a while the advantages of applying the norms of international etiquette when dealing with the overlords, King Ling finally decided to resort to naked force as the only appropriate language of international intercourse. At the apex of his career, King Ling intended to humiliate his arch-rival, the state of Jin, by mutilating the visiting head of the Jin government, Han Qi 韩起, and castrating a leading Jin noble, Shu Xiang. Although King Ling’s aides, fearful of possible consequences, dissuaded him from this plan, the incident marked the complete demise of international ritual norms. Throughout his brief career, King Ling missed no opportunity to annex weaker states and to use military force against his neighbors. His plans to “attain all under Heaven” failed, but his rule may be considered for all practical purposes as the coup de grâce to the attempts to stabilize the Chunqiu multi-state system.33

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32 Zuo, Xiang 27: 1131.
33 See Zuo, Zhao 4: 1250; Zhao 5: 1267-68; Zhao 13: 1350. For more about King Ling, see Abe Michiko 安部道子, “Guanyu chunqiu shidai de Chu wangquan” 國關于春秋時代的楚王權, in: Hubei sheng Chushi yanjiuhui 湖北省楚史研 究會, Chu lishi yanjiu zhuanti 楚歷史研究事務 (n.p., 1983), 257-262.
In 529 King Ling was overthrown, and his brutal hegemony ended. However, the ritual facade of inter-state relations was irreversibly lost. Even the traditional-minded Jin statesman, Shu Xiang, came to the conviction that without “manifesting awesomeness” (shi wei, 示威) Jin would not be able to restore its prestige.\(^{34}\) Jin leaders accordingly behaved with increasing arrogance. In 503, for instance, two Jin nobles, acting on behalf of the head of the Jin government, Zhao Jianzi (趙箎子), decided to teach the treacherous Lord Ling of Wei (衛靈公, r. 534-493) a lesson. At the alliance ceremony they claimed that Wei could not be considered an independent state, but rather was a dependency of Jin; they then seized Lord Ling’s arm and pushed it into the vessel with sacrificial blood. Such an awful humiliation would have been unthinkable in early Chunqiu years but became common at the end of the sixth century.\(^{35}\)

The ascendancy of the southern powers, Wu and Yue, in the late sixth and the early fifth centuries marked the further deterioration of established norms of international life. These southern rulers, with only a superstitious commitment to the Zhou ritual culture, never ceased to astonish statesmen form the Central Plain either with unreasonable demands for a ten-fold increase of tribute obligations, or the arrest of an overlord during the alliance meeting, or a resort to arms to enforce precedence at the alliance ceremony.\(^{36}\) Under such conditions even Confucius’s disciple, Zi Gong (子贡), mocked Wu pretensions to invoke ritual norms in the international relations.\(^{37}\)


\(^{35}\) For the Lord Ling of Wei affair, see Zuo, Ding 8: 1566. Another example occurred in 510, when the lingyin Zi Chang of Chu arrested the rulers of two of Chu satellites, Tang and Cai, who refused to offer him bribes, and held them in custody for three years. Superpowers evidently discarded even the semblance of ritual propriety.

\(^{36}\) See Zuo, Ai 7: 1640-41; Ai 12: 1672; Guoyu, [Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1981], “Wu yu” 15.6, pp. 605-6 for the aforementioned cases. It is worth remembering that neither Wu nor, particularly, Yue belonged to the Zhou ritual system prior to the late sixth century BCE; in all likelihood they were culturally and ethnically distinct from the Zhou world. See Lothar von Falkenhausen, “The Waning of the Bronze Age: Material Culture and Social Developments 770-481 BC” in: M. Loewe and Ed. L. Shaughnessy, eds., The Cambridge History of Ancient China, From The Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 525-39.

cynicism which prevailed in the late Chunqiu years may be best exemplified by the great southern statesman, Wu Zixu (伍子胥, d. 484). A self-made man whose family was executed in Chu, Wu Zixu, due to his political and military skills, found his way to the highest positions in the newly emerging superpower of Wu. Wu Zixu represented an entirely new approach to political questions. Restricted neither by moral nor ritual considerations, an outsider to the Central States, he was free of the burden of traditional values. Wu Zixu believed that military superiority was the only way to ensure Wu’s supremacy. He explained this in 494 in a speech intended to dissuade young King Fuchai (夫差, r. 495-473) from sparing Wu’s arch-enemy, the state of Yue. After mentioning the miraculous resurrection of Shao Kang’s 少康 family, the remote ancestors of King Goujian of Yue (勾践, r. 496-465), Wu Zixu stated:

Goujian is able to [treat people as] relatives, and devotes himself to bestowing goodness; in bestowing goodness nobody is forgotten, and in [treating people as] relatives, no one’s achievements are neglected. [Yue] has existed on the same lands as we do, and for generations they have been our enemy. Therefore, to overcome it but not to seize its territory, and moreover to preserve its existence, means to contradict Heaven and to prolong [the life of] the adversary. Even if you repent later, you will be unable to reverse the case. The decline of the Ji clan can be expected every day. Living among the manyi “barbarians” and prolonging the life of adversaries—if you try thereby to obtain hegemony, [you] shall certainly fail. Wu Zixu’s speech is a manifesto of a new era. Neither de, nor any other moral or legal obligations were required of the hegemon. To achieve supremacy he had to pursue his political course resolutely and spare no enemy. That the enemy, Goujian, was apparently a virtuous ruler, made him even more dangerous and the task of annihilating him more urgent. In the seventh century preserving ruined states was recognized as one of the major achievements of Lord Huan of Qi, and was seen as the quintessence of the legitimacy of his hegemony. In the early fifth century, Wu Zixu’s attitude, conversely, may be summarized by an

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39 吾爾無余心。誰不各按。只我同eced，而世為仇難。於乎克而勇取。將又春之。益天而長繚絡。後我侮之。不可今已。稱之窮也。日可後也。介在繚絡。而長繚絡。以是哀伐。必不行矣。 (Zuo, Ai 1: 1605-6).
ugly modern Chinese proverb: “Beat down the drowning dog” (da luo shui gou 打落水狗). Harsh political reality invalidated both moral norms of international behavior and whatever institutional solutions existed to resolve inter-state conflicts. International politics, as understood by Wu Zixu, were a zero-sum game, with only one possible survivor.

Wu Zixu’s speech foreshadows the new age of the Warring States. The disintegration of the ritual system and the system of alliances left the Zhanguo international scene in complete turmoil and inaugurated a war of all against all. Zhanguo statesmen attempted to preserve mutual trust among the rival states through a system of exchanging hostages, but with little if any success.\footnote{Hostages (zhi 使), usually the scions of the ruling house, were exchanged with the ally state to prevent violation of the treaties and perpetuate cordial ties. Exchange of hostages, however, did not prevent Zhanguo statesmen from betraying their allies. For the complications that arouse around hostages, see He Jianzhang 横剑章, annot., Zhanguo ce zhushi 詹固策注释 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), “Qi ce 3 祗策” 10.1: 351-53; “Chu ce 2 粵策” 15.8: 544-45; “Wei ce 2 魏策” 23.16: 880.}

The law of the jungle: “The flesh of the weak is the food of the strong” (ruo rou qiang shi 蠍肉強食)\footnote{This saying was first used by Han Yu (韓愈, 768-824 CE) in Song Futu Wenchangshi xu 詩富文章史序 to designate the law of the jungle which rules the society that lacks ritual and propriety (Ma Maoyuan 马茂元, ed., Han Changli wenji jiaozhu 韓昌黎文集校注 [Shanghai: Guji, 1986], 253.)} dominated the international life of the last pre-imperial centuries. The collapse of moral norms in Zhanguo international relations became notorious. Even if part of the stratagems presented in the Zhanguo ce 詹固策, a Zhanguo compendium of political intrigues, exaggerate the treachery, the violation of mutual obligations and relentless profit-seeking by the leading states, the general atmosphere of mutual mistrust as depicted in this compilation are beyond doubt. A reader of the Zhanguo ce easily discerns that ways of diplomacy collapsed. A speech attributed to the famous strategist, Su Qin (蘇秦, d. 284), vividly depicts the disintegration of the multi-state order:

In ancient times, envoys drove their chariots shaft against shaft, and talked about mutual ties. All under Heaven unanimously engaged [in these activities], allying horizontally and unifying vertically,\footnote{The vertical (zong 總) alliance was directed against Qin; the horizontal (heng 橫), conversely, was a pro-Qin alliance. Both alliances intermittently dominated Zhanguo foreign relations.} [but] weapons and armor were not stored, civilian means and soldiers were deployed simultaneously; overlords were confused, and mistrusted [each other]; myriad ways...
arose together, and it was impossible to arrange them in order. Statutes and decrees were prepared, [but] the people became increasingly deceitful; documents and ordinances were piled in disarray, [but] the hundred clans found them insufficient; superiors and inferiors bore mutual grudges, and the people had nobody to rely on. As the words were clarified and items arranged, increasingly more weapons and armor arose; [despite] outstanding and compelling arguments, offenses and wars never stopped; [despite] gorgeous sayings and refined words, the world lacked proper government; tongues were worn off and ears deafened, but no achievements were seen; [rulers] acted according to propriety, bound [alliances] of mutual trust, but All under Heaven lacked close relations.\textsuperscript{43}

Su Qin summarized the woeful inadequacy of diplomatic means to achieve international stability. Despite generations of treaties, agreements and alliances, despite the “gorgeous sayings and refined words” of the envoys, mutual mistrust among the overlords was impossible to overcome; accordingly, “offensives and wars never stopped.” Similarly, incessant efforts at attaining proper government, issuing ordinances and laws, could not pacify the people within each state, and mutual mistrust between superiors and inferiors further aggravated the situation. Definitely, this situation could not continue.

The speech quoted above may not have been pronounced by Su Qin, but may have been prepared by his followers, the masters of alliances (\textit{zonghengjia}), as teaching material for future generations of diplomats.\textsuperscript{44} Whoever the author may have been, the arguments evidently reflected the common belief of Zhanguo statesmen. Diplomacy failed to save the people from incessant bloody conflicts, and the subsequent turmoil, treachery, deceit and bloodshed inflicted unbearable suffering on elites and commoners alike. A solution was badly needed. But of what kind? How to achieve it? These issues dominated late Chunqiu and Zhanguo political thought, resulting in the unanimous quest for political unification of All under Heaven.

\textsuperscript{43} 古者，縱使戰國，言語相讎，天下為一，約從連衡，兵革不銳，文士並競，諸侯亂起，英 城保距，不可勝數。勢難易用，兵多傷盡；音樂繁靡，百姓不足：上下相鬢，民無所聊：明賞章 理，兵甲盈起；弊言蜂起，攻戰不息：策鈐文靜，天下不治；舌弊耳聾，不見成 功：行駟約信， 天下不暝。（\textit{Zhangguo ce, “Qin ce 樂頥 1” 3.1: 74}).

\textsuperscript{44} Not all of the \textit{Zhangguo ce} speeches are of similar verity; some may be based on authentic records of the court speeches, while others, such as Su Qin’s speech presented above, might have been prepared as training material for future diplomats. For more on the historical reliability of \textit{Zhangguo ce} speeches, see James I. Crump, \textit{Intrigues: Studies of the Chan-kuo Ts’e} (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1964), 29-75; K. V. Vasil’ev, \textit{Plany Srazhaiushchikhsia Tsarstv} (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), 33-164.
B. “Stability in Unity”

By the late Chunqiu it became obvious that neither institutional arrangements nor moral norms of international behavior, not even the efforts of powerful hegemons, could preserve a viable multi-state system. The Zhou world order was on the verge of collapse. On the ruins of tiny Chunqiu states new, powerful and territorially integrated political entities had appeared, the so-called seven hero-states (qi xiong 七雄) of the Zhanguo age. Ritual bonds connecting the parts of the Zhou world were weakening; strong peripheral states such as Qin and Chu began emphasizing their unique characteristics and adopted distinct rites; we may even suggest that some kind of distinct identity appeared in different parts of Chinese world. Yet none of the known Zhanguo thinkers endorsed these developments; on the contrary, they did their best to reverse the tide and re-integrate the Zhou world. What were the reasons behind this drive for unity?

Several parallel developments contributed towards tightening the ties between various parts of the Chinese world despite the political disintegration. First, late Chunqiu to early Zhanguo economic developments galvanized inter-regional connections. The

45 These were Qin in the North-West, Qi in the East, Yan 胤 in the North-East, Chu in the South, and three former components of the state of Jin—Wei 韬, Han 韬 and Zhao 韬—in the heartland of the Central Plain. Almost two dozens other states survived the fifth century as the tiny remnants of the Chunqiu world order; all these were annexed throughout the Zhanguo period by the “hero-states.” For the territorial integration of the Zhanguo states, see Mark E. Lewis, “Warring States Political History,” in: The Cambridge History of Ancient China, 593-619.

46 Throughout the Chunqiu period, Qin and Chu were considered states “of a different clan” (yixing 真姓), but definitely belonging to the common Zhou culture; hence, unlike the polities established by the Rong 瑪 and Di 古 tribesmen, they routinely participated in alliances with other Hua 麻 states. In Zhanguo texts, however, we frequently find identification of both peripheral superpowers with the Rong, Di, or Man 瑪 “barbarians” (see, for instance Zhanguo ce, “Wei ce 3” 24.8: 907, for the state of Qin; Yang Bojun 姚伯鍾, Mengzi yizhu 孟子解注 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992], “Teng Wen gong A” 禃文公上 5.4: 123-125, and Gongyang zhuan passim for the state of Chu). This change in identification might have been inspired by conscious attempts of Qin, and particularly Chu, to adopt new rites, apply new definitions for ritual paraphernalia, and other steps aimed to distinguish themselves from the Zhou rules and to establish a distinct identity, for which see Falkenhausen, “The Waning of the Bronze Age,” 525 and his Suspended Music: Chime-Bells in the Culture of Bronze Age China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 318-19.
increasing productivity of agriculture promulgated by the introduction of iron implements, new fertilizers and better irrigation, along with more sophisticated industrial production, led to the growing commercialization of the Zhanguo economy. The rise in commercial activities increased regional interdependence; economic ties across the Chinese world surpassed the boundaries among individual states.\textsuperscript{47} This economic integration and interdependence softened the centrifugal impact of political conflicts.

Second, military developments during this period contributed to the increasing sense of a common fate of the Chinese world. In the early Chunqiu, military conflicts were mostly confined to neighboring states, while long-distance expeditions were infrequent. Within a century, however, the situation changed completely. Deep penetration into enemy lands became common tactics, and states formerly considered remote became active participants in military conflicts throughout the Central Plain and beyond.\textsuperscript{48} In the complicated politics of the late Chunqiu and Zhanguo age, internal political conflicts routinely enticed powerful neighbors—and even relatively distant states—to intervene, seeking political and territorial benefits to themselves.\textsuperscript{49} Under these conditions, no single state could seek stability and prosperity for itself unless the universal order could be ensured.


\textsuperscript{48} The first military encounter of the Qi and Chu forces in 656 was an astonishing experience to the participants. The Chu envoy told Lord Huan: “You live near the Northern Sea, I live near the Southern Sea, even the smells of [sacrificial] horses and oxen do not reach each other; now, unexpectedly you entered my lands—what is the reason?” (Zuo, Xi 4: 289). Chu leaders evidently considered Qi as too remote a state to become a real enemy. A century and a half later, however, the situation completely changed. In 506, the south-eastern state of Wu launched an unprecedented campaign against Chu, penetrating deep into the Chu heartland and invading the Chu capital, Ying.\textsuperscript{48} It was only the military assistance of Chu’s north-western neighbor, Qin, that helped Chu to recover its lands. Thus, for the first time two opposite parts of the Chinese world were linked in the same campaign, inaugurating the age of long-distance expeditions. For Zhanguo warfare, see Yang Kuan, \textit{Zhanguo shi}, 303-316 et passim.

\textsuperscript{49} The examples of such interventions are too numerous to be surveyed here; suffice it to mention that the inter-lineage struggle in the state of Song in 522-520 brought about the troops from the states of Wu, Jin, Cao, Qi, Wei and Chu—almost half of the Chinese world! Understandably, this situation obliterated distinctions between domestic and foreign affairs.
Third, and perhaps most important for our discussion, the migration of statesmen across the Chunqiu and Zhanguo states perpetuated cultural links between these states and thus served as an important integrative force. Already in the Chunqiu period, ministers and members of their lineages who left their native states for various reasons settled in other parts of the about-to-be Chinese world, bringing with them their cultural heritage, thereby strengthening cultural links across China. The phenomenon of peripatetic advisors of the Zhanguo period, who frequently crossed borders in search of better appointment, is well known and does not require detailed discussion. This constant change of allegiance on behalf of the leading statesmen and thinkers prevented or at least weakened the feeling of separatist identity among the elites.

Thus, despite political disintegration, many factors combined to provide Eastern Zhou statesmen with the sense of belonging to a common economic, military and mostly cultural realm—All under Heaven (\textit{tianxia 天下}). This feeling of commonality is reflected in the increase of the use of the term \textit{tianxia} in the speeches and texts of that age. It had been marginal in pre-sixth century discourse, but since the mid-Chunqiu its usage visibly intensified. Whatever the exact boundaries of All under Heaven

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51 This generalization, however, requires further elucidation. In the state of Chu, for instance, where hereditary aristocracy preserved its leading position throughout the Zhanguo period, the feeling of separatist identity was apparently more pronounced than in the other states. Suffice it to mention the extremely strong anti-Qin feelings, peculiar to the Chu area, as mentioned in the “Basic Annals of Xiang Yu” 廣武本紀, Shi ji 史記 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 7:300. By the late Zhanguo period, Qin also might have increasingly perceived its otherness; hence Qin aristocrats developed a kind of paranoia concerning foreign advisors, and even intended to expel all the foreigners (Shi ji, 87:2541-42).

52 The term \textit{tianxia} appeared first in the Western Zhou period, but its occurrence in Western Zhou texts is few and far between. \textit{Tianxia} is mentioned only twice in the Western Zhou chapters of the \textit{Shu jing} (“Shao gao” 史前郭 in Shisanjing zhushu 十三經注疏 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991] 15:213, and “Gu ming” 國命 18:240) and twice in chapters which cannot be attributed with certainty to the Western Zhou period (“Li zheng” 立正 17:232 and “Lü xing” 呂刑 19:251). In the \textit{Shi jing} the term \textit{tianxia} occurs only once (“Huang yi” 黄帝, Mao 241, Shisanjing 16: 521); it appears twice in its pre-compound form “under the heaven” (\textit{tian zhi
were to Chunqiu and Zhanguo thinkers, it is clear that the focus of their political concern became the entire Zhou world, not a single state.  

The increasing interest in the affairs of *tianxia* had immediate political implications. Chunqiu and Zhanguo statesmen and thinkers came to the conclusion that it was no longer possible to attain social and political stability for their states unless external factors were taken into consideration. In a society which lacked either clear distinctions between the external and the internal realm, or acceptable ways of settling international conflicts, the quest for peace for a single state was meaningless. The multi-state system could bring no stability to the war-torn Zhou world. In these conditions, “disputers of the Dao” gradually reached a consensus: “stability is in unity.” The only alternative to continuous bloodshed and turmoil was the unification of the realm.

Confucius (孔子, 551-479) was probably the first to clearly outline the advantages of the unified rule over All under Heaven. The *Lunyu* cites his saying:

When the Way prevails under Heaven, rites, music and punitive expeditions are issued by the Son of Heaven; when there is no Way under Heaven, rites, music and punitive expeditions are issued by the overlords. If they are issued by the overlords, few [states] will not be lost within ten generations; if they are issued by the nobles (*dafu* 大夫), few will not be lost within five generations; when the retainers hold the destiny of the state, few will not be lost within three generations.

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*xia* 天之下 (“Bei shan” 北山 Mao 205, 13:463 and “Ban” 本 Mao 254, 19:605). To my knowledge, the term *tianxia* does not occur in bronze inscriptions (according to the index to Shirakawa Shizuka’s 白川静 Kinbun tsūshaku 金文題跋 [Kobe: Hakutsuru Bijutsukan, 1960-1984]). Its occurrence in the first half of the Chunqiu period is extremely rare: the *Zuo* records only four references to *tianxia* in the speeches of the eighth and seventh centuries. It appears 18 times, however, in the speeches of the second half of the Chunqiu period.

54 *Tianxia* in Chunqiu-Zhanguo discourse usually referred to the Zhou world united by the common cultural-ritual values. Yet, for some Zhanguo thinkers like Mozi, *tianxia* included non-Chinese tribesmen as well (Wu Yujiang 吴俞江, *Mozi jiaozhu* 莫子校注 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993], “jian ai C” 筌爱下 16: 178-79). Sometimes, conversely, *tianxia* was used in the narrow meaning; in the late Zhanguo it occasionally referred only to the eastern states, excluding Qin (see, for instance, Zhou Zhongling 周锺良 et al, *Han Feizi suoyin* 韩非子索引 [Beijing Zhonghua shuju, 1982], “Chu xian Qin” 褫獻秦 1:729-30). See also a discussion by Ishii Komei 石井來明, *Dongzhou wangchao yanjiu* 東周王朝研究 (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue, 1999), 172-175.
Confucius was not the only Chunqiu thinker who sought a remedy for the ongoing process of political and social disintegration. However, none of his contemporaries, insofar as the Zuozhuan may be trusted, ever suggested to restore the political potency of the Son of Heaven. High-ranking ministers of the Chunqiu states were, predictably, not interested in ceding the de facto sovereignty of their states to Zhou kings. Confucius, whose low position encouraged him to consider the benefits of the realm as a whole rather than of a single state, was, therefore, the first to suggest that only concentration of political power in the hands of a king would stop the ongoing fragmentation and turmoil.\(^55\)

Confucius, thus, favored unitary rule. But how to achieve this goal? Here as elsewhere the solution suggested by Confucius was in accord with his principle to “transmit, and not to create.”\(^56\) Namely, the political potency of the Son of Heaven had to be restored in accord with the Western Zhou ritual norms. This solution, however, could not have been really convincing: the continuous decline of a Zhou order rendered the possibility of the Zhou restoration unrealistic. New generations of thinkers had to search for solutions elsewhere.

The second of the major pre-Qin thinkers, Mozi (墨子, c. 468-390), went one step further towards pursuing the goal of political unity. Mozi, a proponent of the ideal of “universal love,” considered political and social fragmentation a major malady of contemporary society. In the “Elevating Uniformity” (or “Identifying with Superiors,” shang tong 尚同) chapters, Mozi depicted the dire results of disunity:

In antiquity, when the people were just born, it was the time of the lack of punishments and [proper] administration. When we inquire into the speeches [of that period], [we see] that the people had different [concepts of] propriety/righteousness (yi 義). Therefore, one man had one propriety,
two men had two proprieties, ten men had ten proprieties. The more men there were, the more concepts of propriety appeared. Consequently, each man justified his own propriety rejecting thereby others’ propriety, so that human contacts were based on mutual rejection. Thus, within [the family] fathers and sons, elder and younger brothers fell into resentment and hatred, were alienated and were unable to unite in harmony. The hundred clans under Heaven all used water, fire and poisonous drugs to harm each other. Even those who enjoyed extra strength were unable to work for others; surplus commodities rotted, but nobody distributed them among others; good ways were concealed and nobody taught them to others. The disorder in All under Heaven reached the level of birds and beasts.\(^{57}\)

Mozi’s apocalyptic vision of the beast-like world of war of all against all was placed in the unspecified past, but this was only a rhetorical device. The audience of the fifth century BCE easily identified the state of turmoil depicted above with their contemporary conditions. Yet resorting to the widespread device of “using the past to serve the present,” Mozi invented a historical narrative to serve his needs:

It was clear that the disorder under Heaven derived from the absence of the ruler. Therefore, the worthiest and the most able in All under Heaven was selected and established as Son of Heaven. When the Son of Heaven was established, he apprehended that his force was still insufficient; hence, again [he] selected the worthiest and the most able in All under Heaven and placed them in the position of the Three Dukes. After the Son of Heaven and the Three Dukes were established, they apprehended that All under Heaven is vast and huge, and one or two persons cannot clearly know the distinction between the beneficial and the harmful, the true and the false in regard to the people of the distinct lands; thus they divided it into myriad states, and established the overlords and the rulers of the states.\(^{58}\)

Mozi explicated that the only remedy for universal disorder was the establishment of a universal ruler. But, again, how to achieve this goal? Unlike Confucius, Mozi cherished no hopes for a Zhou restoration; and he similarly disliked the idea that the unification would be achieved by force. Unable to resolve the contradiction between insistence on unification and the lack of means to

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57. 莢者，民始生，未有刑政之時，盡其體，人具體，是以一人居一體，二人居二體，十人居十體。其人盡體，其所斷體亦盡體。是以人是其體，以非人之體，故交相非也。是以內者父子兄弟作醯醢，麄共不相和合。天下之百姓，皆以水火毒藥相服，皆有餘力不能以相勞，窮者

58. 夭明乎天下之所以亂者，生於無政矣。是故萬天下之善者，立以為天子。天子立，以其力為民足，又興得天下之聖者，立以為三公。三公立，以其力為大，變亂為土之民，是非法師之適，不可一二而明知，故薄疏其國，立善侯者。 (“Shang tong A” 唐同上 11:109).
achieve it, Mozi preferred to place the emergence of a unitary state in the imaginary past. Mozi did not specify who was supposed to select the worthiest to become the Son of Heaven, but he left no doubt that after the Son of Heaven’s position had been established, rule would be concentrated in his hands. His narrative continues:

[...] After the leaders were established, the Son of Heaven proclaimed to the hundred clans of All under Heaven: “Whenever you hear of good or bad, you must report to your superiors. You must unanimously approve whatever the superiors approve, and you must unanimously disprove whatever the superiors disprove. When the superiors are wrong, you must admonish them, and when there are good men among the inferiors, you must recommend them. One who conforms upward and does not ally with the inferiors is to be rewarded by superiors and praised by inferiors. [...] One who allies with the inferiors and is unable to conform upwards will be punished by the superiors and destroyed by the hundred clans.”

In this passage Mozi discards whatever superficial semblance his ideal state has to the Western Zhou model. Such features as meritocratic appointments, close surveillance of office holders, and most importantly unification of thought and behavior throughout the realm marked Mozi’s radically new approach to the issue of state formation. The loose unity of the Western Zhou could no longer satisfy those thinkers who sought to stabilize All under Heaven. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that two centuries later certain aspects of Mozi’s vision came to influence the founders of the first empire.

Both Confucius and Mozi expressed their dissatisfaction with political fragmentation of the Zhou world; both favored unified rule over the realm. New generations of thinkers developed these ideas, providing, furthermore, philosophical stipulations for the goal of unification. The most interesting, albeit somewhat ne-

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59 Did Mozi envision a kind of election in which all members of society agree on choosing the leader best able to impose stability and act for a mutual benefit, or did he consider omnipotent Heaven as the single Elector? It is likely that the ambiguity was intentional: explicitly propagating popular election of the supreme ruler might have been too radical a departure from the extant rules of hereditary succession to be advocated even by such a bold thinker as Mozi. See also a discussion in Liu Zehua 路陽, Zhongguo chuantong zhengzhi siwei 中國傳統政治思維 (Liaoning: Jilin jiaoyu, 1991), 313-14.

glected contribution in this field was that of the *Laozi* 老子.\(^{61}\) The *Laozi*’s political ideal is commonly identified with its communal utopia of the “tiny state, small population,” proposed in no. 80. A careful reading of the text, however, suggests that the author did not confine his vision to a small state, as argued by A.C. Graham;\(^{62}\) on the contrary, we may assume that he envisioned a unified realm and even provided a metaphysical basis for this goal.

The *Laozi* commonly identifies *Dao* as the One (yi 一 or —); this Oneness refers to the epistemological unity of the universe, to the single progenitor of the “myriad things” and to the single principle of the functioning of the Cosmos and of society. The importance of the principle of Oneness in the *Laozi* is commonly recognized; it was emphasized already by Zhanguo thinkers.\(^{63}\) Particularly important for our discussion are the political implications of this principle, which are not confined to the statement that “Lords and Kings obtained the One to become Rectifiers of All under Heaven.”\(^{64}\) Since the *Laozi* presumed correspondence between political and metaphysical orders, this meant that the unifying principle of Oneness on the cosmic level had to be matched by the political unity below. Accordingly, elevation of the Oneness leads to the elevation of the ruler:

Therefore, the *Dao* is great, Heaven is great, Earth is great, and the King is also great. There are four greats in the state, and the King is one of these.\(^{65}\)

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\(^{61}\) The authorship and dating of the *Laozi* (*Daodejing* 道德經) remain a controversial issue which cannot be dealt with in sufficient detail here; particularly, recently excavated late fourth century BCE Guodian 郭店 slips with portions of the *Laozi* further complicate the problem (see Jingmenshi bowuguan 靖門市博物館, *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚簡竹簡 [Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1998]). Doubtless, *Laozi* (or proto-*Laozi*) existed in the fourth century BCE, although the received text(s) may be the result of the third century BCE editorial efforts.

\(^{62}\) See A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 234.

\(^{63}\) For the identification of “Supreme oneness” (taiyi 太一) as the most important of *Laozi*’s principles, see, for instance, Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* 樊應, “Tianxia” 天下 33. 880; cf. *Han Feizi*, “Yang quan” 陽主, 8.739. For the importance of One or Oneness in the *Laozi*, see nos. 54; 42; 39. The Guodian slips contain a chapter on Supreme oneness as the progenitor of the universe (“Taiyi sheng shui” 太一生水, *Guodian*, 125), which is identified by Cui Renyi 崔仁義 as a part of “Laozi A” text (see his *Chujian Laozi yanjiu* 巨簡老子研究 [Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1998]). This may provide further evidence for the importance of Oneness in the *Laozi*.

\(^{64}\) (following the Mawangdui versions; see Gao Ming 高明, *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu* 吊書老子校注 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996] no. 39).

\(^{65}\) (no. 25). This is in accord
This passage attributes to the ruler an unprecedented metaphysical importance that by far surpasses Shang-Western Zhou religious legitimacy of the monarch.\textsuperscript{66} Elevation of the King to the position of virtual equality with Dao, Heaven, and Earth, the three ultimate unifying forces of the Cosmos, eventually led to the notion of the Single Ruler in All under Heaven. That Laozi indeed envisioned unification of tianxia is suggested by his remarks scattered throughout the text which discuss the proper way to “attain All under Heaven:”

One who wants to seize All under Heaven through action, I see that he would not gain it. All under Heaven is the sacred vessel, it cannot [be attained] by acting. One who acts is defeated, one who holds it loses it.\textsuperscript{67}

And again:

All under Heaven is constantly seized by lacking activities. When one is active, it does not suffice to seize All under Heaven.\textsuperscript{68}

This lack of “activities” (shi 聲) apparently refers to various administrative undertakings and particularly to warfare.\textsuperscript{69} To seize its small neighbors, Laozi suggested, the great power should display submissiveness and humility rather than resort to arms.\textsuperscript{70}

These passages which deal with practical aspects of attaining

with both Mawangdui versions; Guodian version places Dao after Earth (Guodian chumu, 112). Wang Bi uses yu 余 instead of guo 国. Some other editions (Fu Yi’s 伏羲 and Fan Yingyuan’s 伏羲, for instance) substitute King (wang 王) with the less politically loaded Man (ren 人) (see Boshu Laozi, 351-52). However, the context, particularly the mention of the state (guo 国), suggests that the Mawangdui and Wang Bi’s versions are correct.

\textsuperscript{66} For the religious legitimacy of the Shang-Western Zhou monarchs, see Liu Zehua, Zhongguo chuantong zhengzhi siwei, 1-5, and 31-34.

\textsuperscript{67} 賜欲取天下則為之，吾見其不若也。夫天下非勝彼也，亦可為之也。為者敗之，執者失之。（no. 29). I follow Wang Bi’s version (Boshu Laozi, 377).

\textsuperscript{68} 取天下，常以繆事，及其有事，不足以取天下。（no. 48; compare no. 57).

\textsuperscript{69} The Laozi regarded weapons as “inauspicious utensils” (xiongqi 興器) and accordingly proposed restricting warfare to the necessary minimum, satisfying one’s needs without self-glorification, without displaying martial spirit (wu 武), and without rage (nu 恐). See nos. 30, 31, 68, 69.

\textsuperscript{70} “The great state displays humility towards the small state, then it seizes the small state; the small state displays humility towards the great state, then it is seized by the great state. [...] The great state desires nothing more than attaining and nurturing others; the small state desires nothing more than serving others. In order to enable both to fulfill their desires, the great must display humility” 大邦以下小邦，則取小邦，小邦以下大邦，則取於大邦。[...]. 大邦者，不欲篡奪人，小邦者不欲陷於執事。夫欲有其成，大者宜為下。（no. 61). I follow the Mawangdui A version (Boshu Laozi, 123-25).
universal rule strengthen our assumption that *Laozi* considered political unity as a logical outcome of its emphasis on the cosmic Oneness of the *Dao*. This interpretation of the *Laozi* was shared, indeed, by most Zhanguo thinkers.

Scrutiny of late Zhanguo texts suggests that whereas *Laozi*'s vision of "tiny states" had little impact on Zhanguo thought, its elevation of the King significantly influenced later discourse. The concept of the ruler’s equality with *Dao* had a particularly strong impact on political forms of Daoism, usually identified as the Huang-Lao school. These commonly emphasized the unique position of the ruler, his virtual equality with Heaven and Earth and his function to cherish the lives of all beings. The unique position of the ruler as the generator of the proper order in All under Heaven implied that he had to preside over the unified realm. Shen Dao (慎到, fl. late fourth century) plainly stated:

In ancient times, the Son of Heaven was established and esteemed not in order to benefit the single person. It is said: when All under Heaven lack the single esteemed [person], then there is no way to carry out the principles [of orderly government, *li*], carrying out the principles is done for the sake of All under Heaven.

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71 It is tempting to defy two millennia of commentatory tradition and to reinterpret the famous no. 80 of the *Laozi* in accord with the above analysis. The first phrase, *xiao guo gua min* 小國寡民 is commonly translated as “A tiny state, small population.” If, however, we accept *xiao* and *gua* as verbs in imperative form, a common usage in the *Laozi*, then the text would read “Make states tiny and their population sparse,” which may be a useful recommendation for a future unifier; in that case *guo* must refer to an easily controlled unit of the unified realm. Then the text would be simply another recommendation to the despotic centralizing ruler, and it would be in accord with no. 3, for instance.

72 The *Jing fa* 護法 manuscript unearthed in 1973 in Mawangdui states: “The ruler of men [equals?] Heaven and Earth.” (人主者，天道之[ ]也.) The missing character is in all likelihood *san* 三 [one who stands in trinity with]. See Mawangdui Hanmu boshu zhengli xiaozu 葭王墓漢墓竹書整理小組, *Jing fa* 護法 [Beijing: Wenwu, 1976], “Lun” 倫. p. 27). Similarly, the authors of the *Lüshichunqiu*呂氏春秋 attributed to the Son of Heaven the unique Heaven-like function of cherishing the life of all human beings generated by Heaven (Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, *Lüshichunqiu jiaoyi*呂氏春秋校釋 [Shanghai: Xuelin, 1990], “Ben sheng” 本生 1:20).

Shen Dao’s apprehension that the Son of Heaven is the one who generates universal implementation of the principles of orderly government resembles Laozi’s view of the ruler as Rectifier of All under Heaven. Shen Dao left no doubt that to properly implement his function, the ruler must remain “the single esteemed” in the world. Political unity was therefore, according to Shen Dao, the precondition for implementation of the principles of Dao in social life. Similarly, authors of the mid-third-century BCE compendium, the Lüshì chunqiu 呂氏春秋, echoing the Laozi passage quoted above, explained the need for political unity:

The true king upholds Oneness and becomes the Rectifier of the myriad things. The army needs the general, thereby it is unified. The state needs the ruler, thereby it is unified. All under Heaven needs the Son of Heaven, thereby it is unified. The Son of Heaven upholds oneness, thereby unifying it [the realm]. Oneness means [proper] government; doubleness means chaos.75

Numerous late Zhanguo texts shared the above interpretation of the Laozi, according to which the ruler embodied the Dao, and therefore had to remain the single source of authority, presiding over the unified realm.76 Yet many other thinkers advocated the unification of All under Heaven neither because of historical precedents, nor due to philosophical reasons. These thinkers were moved primarily by the sense of urgent political necessity to put an end to the ever-increasing international turmoil, wars and suffering. These views are best represented by the following dialogue between Mencius (孟子, c. 379-304) and King Xiang of Wei (魏襄王, r. 318-296):

[The king] asked: How to stabilize All under Heaven?
[Mencius] answered: Stability is in unity.
– Who is able to unify it?


75 “王者執一，國為其物正，軍為其將，所以一之也；國為其將，軍以一之也；天下必有天子，所以一之也；天子必執一，所以執之也。一則治。兩則亂” (Lüshì chunqiu, “Zhi yi” 政壹, 17:1132).

76 See, for instance, the Guanzi 荀子: “If there are two Sons of Heaven in All under Heaven, All under Heaven could not be arranged in accord with principles (li 河)” (使天下有天子・天下不可理也). Xie Haofan 謝鴻鵬 and Zhu Yingping 朱英平, Guanzi quanyi 荀子全義 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin, 1996), “Ba yan” 巴彥 23: 357; cf. Allyn W. Rickett, Guanzi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 355-56. For similar views see Jing fa, “Liu fen” 六分, pp. 16-17 (Peerenboom, Law and Morality, 95-96); and Han Feizi, “Yang quan” 楊闕 8:739.
Mencius needed no lengthy explanations to persuade the king of the advantages of political unification; evidently by his time this was already the common goal of political leaders and their advisors alike. The more important issue, therefore, was not whether to unify All under Heaven, but how to do it. Here Mencius, like other thinkers cited above, had no ready solution. A thinker who denounced aggressive warfare as “leading the lands to devour human flesh, the crime that deserves no less than the death penalty,”78 Mencius could not possibly suggest a unification by force. On the contrary, he hoped that unification would be completed by the benevolent unifier, a “true king” (wangzhe 王者) who would attain the heart of the people. Elsewhere Mencius stated that although “It happens that the non-benevolent attains the state, it can never happen that the non-benevolent attains All under Heaven.”79 Benevolence, not force, should unify the realm.

Mencius’ statement that “stability is in unity” was shared by almost all known Zhanguo thinkers, perhaps with the exception of Zhuangzi (莊子, d. 286?). Earlier we surveyed views of those inspired by the Laozi. Followers of Confucius similarly raised the banner of unification, frequently invoking the Master’s authority to emphasize the undisputed legitimacy of this goal. Some, like Mencius, quoted Confucius’ alleged saying: “Heaven does not have two suns, the people do not have two kings.”80 Others, like the authors of the Gongyang zhuan 公羊傳, conceived the quest for

77 開曰：天下非乎定？吾對曰：定於一。孰能一之？對曰：不嗜殺人者能一之。孰能與之？
78 [...] 此所謂率土而食人肉，非不嗜殺死耳。 (Mengzi, “Li Lou A” 立憲上 7.14: 175)
80 天賦二日，君兼二王。 (Mengzi, “Wan Zhang A” 韜常上 9.4: 215). Several chapters of the Liji 禮記 modify this quotation: “There are no two suns in the sky, nor two kings on Earth” (天賦二日，君兼二王) (Sun Xidan 孫希旦, comp., Liji jije 禮記集解 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996], 7:522).
unity as one of the most important aspects of Confucius’ political legacy, as delivered in the *Chun qiu 春秋*.\(^{81}\) Xunzi (荀子, c. 310-218), in turn, considered the ability to “jointly rule All under Heaven” as the major achievement of the Duke of Zhou (周公, d. c. 1037) and of the “Great Ru” 大禹 in general.\(^{82}\) Elsewhere Xunzi identified the true king as the one who “turns the overlords into his servants.” And again:

To preserve the Way and virtue complete, to be the highest and the esteemed, to enhance the principles of refined culture, to unify All under Heaven, to put in order even the smallest things, to cause everyone under Heaven to comply and follow him—this is the task of the Heavenly King. [...] When All under Heaven is not unified, and the overlords are inclined to rebel, then the Heavenly King is not the person that he ought to be.\(^{83}\)

Unification and the ensuing pacification of All under Heaven was, therefore, the real goal of the Heavenly King’s / true king’s rule in the eyes of Confucius’ followers. There is no need to supply further examples of pro-unification sentiments among Zhanguo thinkers; the picture is clear enough. Interestingly, even the language of late Zhanguo discourse reflects the thinkers’ aspirations for a unified realm. Although by the third quarter of the fourth century BCE rulers of most Zhanguo states appropriated the title of king (wang 王), thinkers of different intellectual affiliations rejected this hubris of the rulers. The terms “true king” and “Son of Heaven” in Zhanguo texts refer neither to the current self-proclaimed contemporary kings, nor to the shadowy figure of the Zhou sovereign, but exclusively to the omnipotent rulers of a future unified realm.\(^{84}\) This terminology reflects the

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\(^{81}\) See epigraph. The *Gongyang zhuan* was apparently composed in the mid-Zhanguo, but it was first recorded only during Jing Di’s 景帝 reign in the Han dynasty (156-141 BCE). The *Gongyang* constantly insists that the Son of Heaven must rule over the unified realm; no lands can be external to his rule (Yin 1, *Shisanjing* 1:2199; Xi 24, 12:2259; Cheng 12, 18:2295). Elsewhere the *Gongyang* reiterates: “The desire of the [true] King is to unify All under Heaven” (王有德 一乎天下) (Cheng 15, 18:2297). See also Yanaka, “Sengoku”.

\(^{82}\) See Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), “Ru xiao” 靈孝 8:114-116. Later in the same chapter Xunzi plainly states that when the “Great Ru” succeeds, he “unifies All under Heaven” ( 趙姬一天下); see 8: 138.

\(^{83}\) 其道統，載諸高，黃文理，一天下，稱帝者，使天下莫不顧比翼，天王之事也。… 天下不一，能伐除之，周天王非其人也。 (*Xunzi*, “Wang zhi” 王制 9:171).

\(^{84}\) This analysis of the usage of the terms tianxia and tianzi in late Zhanguo discourse was suggested by H.G. Creel in *Shen Pu-hai* (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1974), 59-60, 200; cf. Ishii, *Dong Zhou*, 159-167. “Kings” of the
thinkers’ conviction that the current state of fragmentation of All under Heaven was an anomaly that should be overcome after unification; only then would a true king reign.

Most interestingly, even those statesmen and thinkers whose personal interests should have discouraged them from advocating unification, namely the representatives of the “school of alliances,” nevertheless shared a belief in the need for unity. Although these skillful diplomats personally benefited from the Zhanguo international disorder and might have suspected that future unification would invalidate their skills, they dared not advocate legitimacy of the multi-state order. Whenever Su Qin urged powerful kings “to preserve the overlords’ states,” he did it invariably because this course of action might have in the short term benefited a specific ruler, not because the preservation of the ruined states was considered either normative or desirable. Su Qin himself, or the anonymous authors of his speeches, realized that the international order was doomed. Hence, during his alleged meeting with King Hui of Qin (秦惠王, r. 337-311), mentioned above, Su Qin vividly depicted the demise of the multi-state system and consequently suggested “to annex the overlords’ [states], to swallow the world, to declare yourself emperor and to bring about orderly rule.” The need for unity was apparent to everyone.

The discussion to this point shows that the quest for unity was almost unanimously endorsed by Zhanguo thinkers. Nonetheless, our analysis of Confucius, Mozi, the Laozi and Mencius reveals that while these philosophers sought “stability in unity,” they had few if any practical suggestions regarding the ways to achieve their common goal. Indeed, the sweeping opposition of these thinkers to aggressive warfare discouraged them from advocating unification through military means. The alternatives, however, were hardly convincing: emulation of the past, suggested by Confucius, non-action, advocated by the Laozi, or the ruler’s benevolence, preached by Mencius, might have been morally laudable but not entirely adequate means to put an end to the fragmentation of All under Heaven. Other thinkers mentioned above

Zhanguo states dared not proclaim themselves Sons of Heaven; the only exception was the attempt by the notorious King Min of Qi (齊閔王, r. 300-283), but his claims were rejected even by the weakest of his neighbors, Lu and Zou (Zhanguo ce, “Zhao ce 趙策 3,” 20.13: 737).

86 正觀書·吞天下·戰國百治· (Zhanguo ce, “Qin ce 1,” 3.1: 74).
were similarly disinclined to advocate unification “all within the seas” by military means.\textsuperscript{87}

The thinkers’ opposition to military unification derived not only from moral considerations but also from the objective conditions of their time. Prior to the mid-fourth century BCE, the level of military and administrative development evidently precluded the successful conquest of the entire realm. The huge cost of protracted campaigns convinced many, including military specialists, that these undertakings were highly unprofitable. Furthermore, prior to the mid-Zhanguo period most Chinese states were underpopulated; accordingly they lacked sufficient human resources to conquer the entire realm. For these reasons, and not only for moral considerations, Mencius ridiculed the aspirations of King Xuan of Qi (齊宣王, r. 319-301) to attain the world by military means, comparing these to “looking for fish by climbing a tree.”\textsuperscript{88}

By the late fourth century, however, the situation changed. Technological, economic, administrative and military changes

\textsuperscript{87} Xunzi, for instance, in a passage curiously reminiscent of that of Mencius, cited above, argued that the “great Ru” “would do nothing to attain All under Heaven if this requires acting unrighteously or killing an innocent person. The righteousness of such a ruler would be trusted by men, penetrate the land within the four seas, and then All under Heaven would respond to it like an echo” (行一不義，殺一無罪而得天下，不為也。此若義行乎人矣，經於四海，則天下靡之如響）(Xun-zi, “Ru xiao” 8:120-121; for a more sophisticated approach, see “Wang zhi” 9:158). The most radical opposition to military unification was, perhaps, that of the late fourth-early third century BCE thinkers Song Xing and Yin Wen from the state of Qi. The Zhuangzi tells: “By ‘To be insulted is not disgraceful’ they helped the people not to quarrel, by ‘Forbid aggression, disband troops’ they helped the age to avoid war. With these [doctrines] they moved across the world, preaching to the rulers and educating the ruled, and although the world did not accept [their views] they stubbornly squawked without taking a rest” (見侮不辱，故兵之門，禁攻無過，故世之政，以此周天下，上國下國，蒼天下不改，雖告而不舍者也) (Zhuangzi, “Tianxia” 33:870-871, modifying Graham, Disputers of the Tao, 96).

\textsuperscript{88} See Mengzi, “Liang Hui Wang A” 1.7: 16. For the problems of protracted warfare see Li Ling 李零, Wu Sunzi fawei 吳孫子兵賦 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996), “Zuo zhan” 作戰, 2:37. For the lack of human resources in early Zhanguo states, see Mozi, “Fei gong” 非攻 and “Jie yong” 戒用 chapters. Inadequate resources and lack of proper administrative means to rule the recently acquired territories undermined early attempts to unify the realm by military means; Zhanguo thinkers were perfectly aware of the miserable end of King Ling of Chu, as well as that of over-ambitious Wu and Yue leaders. Prior to the late Zhanguo, military unification might have been inconceivable even to military specialists.
enabled powerful rulers to allocate more resources to military needs. Huge armies, allegedly comprising hundreds of thousands of soldiers, were able to operate in enemy territory for years. Many Zhanguo statesmen were aware of the changing circumstances. For them military unification of the realm was no longer an idle dream.\(^89\)

Those who reacted to the changing circumstances and suggested practical ways of achieving universal pacification were political realists, namely, the Legalists (fajia 法家). These, to paraphrase Marx, realized that their task was not to explain the need for unity, but to suggest practical ways for achieving it.\(^90\) Shang Yang (商鞅, d. 338) ridiculed those thinkers who advised the rulers to emulate the patterns of the sage kings of antiquity and achieve unification by primarily non-military means:

King Wu 简王 seized those who confronted him, and appreciated those who complied; he fought for All under Heaven but elevated yielding; he seized [the world] by force, but held it by propriety/righteousness (yi 义). Nowadays, strong states engage in conquests and annexations, while the weak are devoted to forceful defense. Upwards, they do not reach the times of Yu 舜 and Xia 商, downwards they do not embrace [the way of] Tang 唐 and Wu. [The ways] of Tang and Wu are blocked; hence none of the states of ten thousand chariots are not engaged in war, while none of the states of one thousand chariots are not engaged in defense. These ways are blocked for a long time, but contemporary rulers are unable to dismiss them; hence, the three dynasties lack the fourth one.\(^91\)

Shang Yang realized that in the current age of total war states-

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\(^89\) For military changes in the late Zhanguo period, particularly the increasing duration and scale of conflicts, see Yang Kuan, Zhanguo shi, 303-16; Hsu, Ancient China, 62-71; Lewis, “Warring States,” 625-29. Although many scholars assume that the size of the late Zhanguo armies may be inflated by later historians, the data presented throughout pre-Qin sources does indicate a steady growth in the numbers of soldiers involved in military conflicts; numbers appear both consistent and not incredible (see Li Ling, Sunzi guben yanjiu 孫子古本研究 [Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1995], 215). See also an illuminating discussion on the population growth and the resultant military changes in Zhanguo ce, “Zhao ce 3” 20.1: 709.

\(^90\) “Philosophers were only explaining the world in various ways, but the task is to change it” (K. Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” [1845], rpt. in K. Marx and Friedrich Engels, Izbrannye Proizvedeniia [Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Politicheskoj Literatury, 1985], Vol. 1, p. 3; italics in original)

\(^91\) ( Jiang Lihong, Shang jun shu zhuizhi 商軍史詁指 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996], “Kai sai” 起始, 7: 54-55).
men cannot follow the ways of antiquity; yielding and benevolence were of no relevance to those eager to establish the fourth dynasty. Instead, Shang Yang recommended acting resolutely at home and abroad. Warfare, in particular, was an indispensable means of acquiring true kingship. Shang Yang plainly stated that “he, whose army performs whatever the enemy dares not perform, is strong; he, who undertakes whatever enterprise the enemy is ashamed to do, benefits.” The moral aspects of such undertakings were of little relevance; Shang Yang visibly despised the anti-militaristic sentiments shared by his predecessors and contemporaries. War was not only justified, it was the crucial means to obtain the ultimate goal of pacification.

Despite his blatantly stated militarism, Shang Yang realized that warfare alone was insufficient to ensure the ultimate success of unification. It had to be accompanied with a series of political, economical, and mostly administrative undertakings which had to ensure that the newly acquired lands would be firmly integrated into the expanding state. Surely, administrative reforms aimed to enhance centralized control over the newly acquired territories began long before Shang Yang and continued for generations to follow. Shang Yang, however, was the one who suggested a systematic series of measures aimed to turn the state into an apparatus of expansion with the ultimate aim of universal rule. He ominously designated his system as the One (yi)—the single way of proper rule, particularly unifying agriculture and warfare. Agriculture would supply material resources sufficient to wage protracted wars; warfare would supply new lands that would in turn enrich the state and enable it to launch further military campaigns. By combining these the ruler would attain universal rule. Shang Yang’s summarized his message as follows:

“Quqiang” (4:27).

Shang Yang did not deny the desirability of moral goals as such, but argued that these could be dialectically achieved only by immoral means; peace and tranquillity would be then an outcome of war and violence (see Shang jun shu, “Huace” 18:107-113 et saepe).

“In ancient times those who were able to rule All under Heaven had first to rule their people; those who were able to overcome the strong enemy had first to overcome their people” (Shang jun shu, “Huace” 18:107).

For early administrative reforms aimed to curb the forces of disintegration within a single state, see Zhao Boxiong, Zhoudai guojia xingtai yanjiu (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu, 1990); Pines, Aspects, 314-323.
Therefore, my theory causes the people who seek profit to get it nowhere but from tilling; and those who want to avoid disasters to escape in no way but through warfare. Within the boundaries, there is not one among the people who is not devoted to tilling and warfare; thus they attain whatever pleases them. Hence, although lands are few, grain is plenty; although the people are few, the army is strong. He who is able to implement these two within the boundaries has completed the way of the hegemon and the king.  

The undeniable achievements of Shang Yang’s reforms and the practical advantages of his theory of statecraft increased the appeal of his ideas in the next generations. Even critics of his approach, such as Xunzi, could not deny the practical advantages of Shang Yang’s doctrine. Shang Yang’s views were further modified by later Legalist thinkers, particularly Han Feizi (韩非子, d. 233) and Li Si (李斯, d. 208). It was their efforts, coupled with successes at the battlefield, which facilitated Qin unification in 221 BCE. Yet military prowess, important as it was, cannot sufficiently explain Qin’s success. Paraphrasing Lu Jia (陸賈, d. 178 BCE), we may say that it was possible to unify All under Heaven from horseback, but it was impossible to preserve the unity from horseback. Other factors which contributed to the successful unification will be discussed in what follows.

C. Epilogue: Qin Unification and Beyond: Da yitong in Imperial Political Culture

In 256, the state of Qin annexed the Zhou royal domain, eliminating thereby the last symbol of the Zhou political system. This coup de grâce exacerbated the statesmen’s fear of continuous disorder. Henceforth nobody could claim the position of Son of Heaven; no legitimate, even if symbolic, focus of authority remained. The authors of the Lüshi chunqiu bitterly lamented this...
situation, stating: “Our age is extremely foul; nothing more can be added to the suffering of the ‘black-headed’ [the commoners].” 99 Elsewhere they explained the reasons for their frustration:

Nowadays, the house of Zhou is already destroyed, [the line of] the Sons of Heaven is already severed. There is no turmoil greater than the absence of the Son of Heaven; without the Son of Heaven, the strong overcome the weak, the many lord it over the few, they incessantly use arms to harm each other.100

However, the lamentations were premature. Just a generation after the formal demise of Zhou rule, Qin rulers finally succeeded to implement Shang Yang’s dream of establishing “the fourth dynasty.” After a series of brief successful campaigns, Qin forces put an end to all the six rival powers. The imperial era in Chinese history began.

The success of unification was amazing. Despite the long cherished hatred towards Qin, frequently designated by Zhanguo statesmen as “land of wolves and jackals,” no significant attempt was made to reestablish the vanquished states either during the Qin campaigns of 230-221, or later, during the First Emperor’s reign (221-210); no serious resistance movement tried to regain independence. Why did the leaders of the Warring States allow their kingdoms to be swallowed up with such ease?101 A partial answer is, of course, the series of successful political and administrative measures undertaken by the First Emperor and his chief aide, Li Si, to solidify their unprecedented achievement.102 These

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99 當今之世，黃葛矣，翳翳之君，不可與謀矣 (Lūshī chunqiu, “Zhen luan” 擎亂, 7: 393).
101 For Zhanguo hatred of Qin, see Zhanguo ce (“Xi Zhou ce” 西周記 2.3: 49; “Chu ce 1” 14.17: 508; “Zhao ce 3” 20.10: 726; “Wei ce 3” 24.10: 907). Although one might have expected a prolonged struggle against the Qin conquest, aside from two ill-prepared attempts to restore the extinguished states of Zhao and Chu in 228 and 224 respectively, and a rebellion in the former Han 鬱 lands in 226, the unification was remarkably smooth. It was only during the self-destructive rule of Hu Hai (昭侯, the notorious Second Emperor (二世皇帝, r. 210-207), that major uprisings began.
102 These measures included symbolic steps, such as unification of measures, weights, currency and the script, or establishment of new rites aimed to unify the realm in a common ritual framework; and practical steps to prevent resurrection of the old order, such as collecting and melting down weapons, and transferring the 120,000 “rich and powerful” families from the recently conquered states to the imperial capital of Xianyang (咸陽). See Shiji 6: 235-263; Derk Bodde, “The
measures, however, although they doubtless contributed towards consolidation of the empire, do not entirely explain the rapid and undeniable success of the unification in the short term.

To answer our question we may cite one of the staunch critics of Qin, the Han statesman Jia Yi (賈誦 199-166 BCE), who wrote:

Qin appropriated all within the seas, annexed the overlords' [states]; its ruler faced south and called himself emperor; thus he nourished all within the four seas, and the gentlemen of All under Heaven docilely bowed before his wind. Why did this happen?

I would reply that recently the world had for a long time been without [a true] king. The Zhou house had sunk into insignificance, the Five Hegemons had passed from the scene, and no commands were obeyed under Heaven. Hence, the overlords in governing relied on strength alone, the strong impinging on the weak, the many lording it over the few; arms and armor were never set aside, and the people grew exhausted and impoverished. Now, after Qin faced south and ruled All under Heaven, this meant that there was a Son of Heaven above. The masses hoped that they would obtain peace and security and there was nobody who did not whole-heartedly look up in reverence. This was the moment to preserve authority and stabilize achievements, the foundations of lasting peace.103

An astute thinker, Jia Yi realized that popular support of the long-awaited unification was the crucial factor in Qin's final success. After the long period of turmoil and wars, the people obtained peace and security; hence they willingly accepted Qin's domination. The Qin rulers, particularly the First Emperor, were aware of these feelings and manipulated them to legitimize their rule. The issue of peace and tranquillity for the "black-headed" people of All under Heaven was the pivot of Qin's propaganda and of the emperor's self-glorification, as exemplified by the texts of the stone tablets that he erected in the newly conquered regions of his realm. The emperor reminded everybody that he

State and Empire of Ch'in," in: Cambridge History of China Vol. 1, 52-72; Li Ling, "Qin Han lì zhōng de zongjīào: guànyù ‘Shìjī fēngshānshù’ de ‘Hàn shù jiàosìzhī’ de kaoguxue sikao" (秦漢禮儀中的宗教——關於《史記·封禪書》和《漢書·郊祀志》的考古思考), paper presented at the University of California, Berkeley, February 1997.

103 竺可煙內, 《論語》·《尚書》名言的社會價值, 《社會科學研究》, 1993年3期, 《王安石和〈王安石傳〉》; 《王安石傳》, 《王安石傳》, 1993年4期, 《社會科學研究》, 1993年4期.
“brought peace to All under Heaven,”\textsuperscript{104} so that “black-headed people are at peace, never needing to take up arms;”\textsuperscript{105} that “he wiped out the powerful and unruly, rescuing the black-headed people, bringing stability to the four corners of the empire,”\textsuperscript{106} and that by “uniting All under Heaven, he put an end to harm and disaster, and then forever put aside arms.”\textsuperscript{107} This propaganda referred directly to the principle of “stability in unity” and we may plausibly assume that it enjoyed a positive response from the majority of the populace.

The anti-Qin rebellion of 209-207 and the ensuing civil war provided those who might have dreamt of the reestablishment of the pre-imperial order with convincing arguments in favor of continuing unification. A powerful rebel leader, Xiang Yu (蕭頌, d. 202), decided to reestablish the multi-state order, with grave consequences for himself and for everybody. Initially, Xiang Yu favored the idea of a loosely unified empire, ruled by the puppet Yi Di (義帝, d. 206), but he soon changed his mind. After assassinating Yi Di in 206, Xiang Yu attempted to govern All under Heaven from the position of “hegemon-king” (霸王). However, the vacuum of legitimate power eventually led to chaos, and the war of all against all devastated most of the Chinese world. Under these conditions, the need for unification became apparent to all. The major reason for the ultimate success of Xiang Yu’s rival, Liu Bang (劉邦, d. 195), was his skill in establishing himself as the only candidate able to restore unity and to bring an end to turmoil and war. The banner of unity raised by Liu Bang enabled him to attain massive support of outstanding advisors and generals. After ascending the throne, Liu Bang preserved major aspects of the Qin imperial structure intact, testifying thereby to the continuous popularity of the Great Unity ideal.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{104} See the Liangfu 禮父 inscription (219): Shiji 6.243; Watson, Records, 46.

\textsuperscript{105} 興造安寧・不用兵革. The Langye 琅邪 inscription (219): Shiji 6.245; Watson, Records, 48.

\textsuperscript{106} 六起統一・制置有致・周定四極. The Zhifu 政府 inscription (218): Shiji 6.249; Watson, Records, 51.

\textsuperscript{107} 統合天下・興造統一・永保成務. The Zhifu inscription: Shiji 6.250; Watson, Records, 51.

\textsuperscript{108} Although in the course of his struggle Liu Bang had to make concessions to his generals and granted them a semi-independent status of “kings”/“princes” (王), he never envisioned resurrecting the Zhou order. Shortly after the Han victory, independent kings were replaced by members of the Liu clan, but even this compromise derived primarily from the weakness of the central gov-
Henceforth, only a unified empire was considered a legitimate form of rule, while frequent periods of disunion were conceived of as an anomaly.

A detailed discussion on the impact of the Great Unity ideal on imperial political culture is beyond the scope of the present essay; it is not my intention here to discuss such well known topics as the importance of unification for dynastic legitimization, or the imprint of the Da yitong paradigm on imperial historiography.\(^{109}\) It seems appropriate, however, to raise the issue of the Da yitong’s impact on the general pattern of Chinese history.

Recently, numerous studies have questioned the focus of traditional historiography on unified China and concentrated on the heretofore largely neglected history of those dynasties which failed to unify all under Heaven, but, nevertheless, significantly contributed to economic, cultural and administrative developments in the regions under their control.\(^{110}\) These studies, coupled with a better understanding of the immense diversity of regional developments in Chinese history, allow us to modify the previous, somewhat monochromatic picture of China’s past. Some scholars, however, took these developments to the extreme, coming, as E. Schafer did, to a radical conclusion that the concept of China “which was sometimes divided, sometimes reunified” is “a non-

\(^{109}\) For the traditional thinkers’ emphasis on yitong as a precondition to zhengtong (正統, correct, i.e. legitimate rule), see for instance the views of Ouyang Xiù (歐陽修, 1007-1072) in Zhengtong lun 正統論 (Wenzhong ji 文忠集, 16, rpt. Siku quanshu 四庫全書 [Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1991], Vol. 1102, 129-135), and Sima Guang’s (司馬光, 1019-1086) discussion in Zizhi tongjian 資治通鑑 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju), 69:2187; see also Yuri Pines, “Name or Substance: Between zhengtong 正統 and yitong 一統,” History: Theory and Criticism (forthcoming). For the historiographical bias in favor of unity, see, for instance, Duara, “Provincial Narratives.”

\(^{110}\) See, for instance, Yang Weili 杨伟立, Qian Shu Hou Shu shi 前蜀後蜀史 (Chengdu: Sichuan sheng shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1986); Rafe de Crespigny, Generals of the South: The Foundation and Early History of the Three Kingdoms State of Wu (Canberra: Australian National University, 1990); Ren Shuang 任爽, Nan Tang shi 南唐史 (Changchun: Dongbei shifan daxue, 1995); Terry F. Kleeman, The Great Perfection: Religion and Ethnicity in a Chinese Millennial Kingdom (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), to mention only a few.
It seems that, eagerly deconstructing traditional narratives, these scholars obliterate certain important characteristics of Chinese political culture, and, therefore, neglect those factors which facilitated reunification after recurring periods of disunion.

Perhaps, contrary to the above mentioned studies, we should recall a question asked by Mark Elvin a quarter of a century ago: not why the unified empire occasionally disintegrated, but why, given the undeniable geographic, economic, linguistic and religious differences between its parts, unity was routinely restored in more or less the same boundaries as that established by the First Emperor. Can we attribute this only to the common written language and common elite culture, or to the myth of unity in the past? If so, why did similar processes of resurrection of the divided empire never occur in either medieval Europe or the Arab world which shared (and in the Arab case still share) similar common traits which characterize “Chinastan”? We must pay more attention to the impact of the *da yitong* paradigm on the pattern of Chinese history.

To do so we shall briefly trace the common pattern of division of the empire. The division itself, even if facilitated by foreign conquests, can be treated as the extreme manifestation of the phenomenon of regionalism, deeply embedded in Chinese history. Even in the most tightly unified empire, regional elites and/or local potentates pursued their economic and political interests, which were frequently at odds with the interests of the imperial government. They sought to pay fewer taxes, and hoped to monopolize as many local official positions as possible—and often succeeded in doing so. In periods of relative weakness of the

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111 See Schafer, “The *Yeh chung chi*,” 148. The tendency to view China’s unity as ephemeral became particularly pronounced among scholars of modern China, especially after the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. and the Tian’anmen incident (see, for instance, Gerald Segal, “China Changes Stage: Regionalism and Foreign Policy,” *ADELPHI*, 287 [March 1994]).

112 See Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973), 17-22 et passim. Elvin mainly dealt with the question of why the Chinese empire did not disintegrate like its western counterparts. My emphasis is different: why, after the periods of disunion, was unity restored? In this article I discuss the concept of *da yitong* roughly within the boundaries of the first empire, the Qin. The question of the territorial limits of *tianxia* in imperial thought and political practice is too complicated to be addressed in detail here, and will deserve a separate discussion.
imperial court, local potentates could gain military power as well, and then openly defy the orders of the central authorities. Nevertheless, this ever-present tension between regions and the center did not usually result in attempts to seek full-scale political independence. It was only in periods of complete breakdown of the imperial government and the void of a legitimate source of authority that regional leaders would finally secede, declaring themselves kings or emperors, adopting distinct reign names (nianhao 年號) and establishing separate courts.

The most interesting developments began after the formal division of the empire between local mini-empires, such as occurred in the 220s, 300s and 900s. Scrutiny of the behavior of contending regimes reveals a surprising phenomenon: none of them ever attempted to protect its independence. None tried to develop a separate “national identity”; none abandoned—at least at the level of propaganda—the desire to unify All under Heaven. These goals were actively pursued not only by Chinese regimes, such as Wei 魏, Shu-Han 蜀漢 and, at least symbolically, Wu 吳 in 220-280 CE, but also by most regimes established by the non-Han peoples during the long Nanbeichao period (317-589). Recently, David Honey in an inspiring study outlined the problems of legitimization facing alien rulers of China who sought the compliance of both nomadic followers and Chinese subjects. His study suggests that it was the quest to unify China and reestablish imperial order which answered the aspirations of both groups of followers. Perhaps for these reasons, most energetic nomadic and semi-nomadic rulers of Northern China in the fourth to sixth centuries frequently declared their desire to unify “all within the seas,” and some of them actively pursued this goal, even to the point of self-destruction.\footnote{For D. Honey’s arguments and for the actual policy of “legitimization through unification” adopted by Liu Yuan 梁元 (d. 310), ruler of the Han/Former Zhao (304-329), and Shi Le 石勒 (d. 333), ruler of the Late Zhao (319-351), see Honey’s “Sinification as Statecraft in Conquest Dynasties of China: Two Early Medieval Case Studies”, Journal of Asian History, 30, 2 (1996), 115-151. For the \footnote{For regionalism in Chinese history, see Franz Michael, “Introduction: Regionalism in Nineteenth-Century China,” in: Stanley Spector, Li Hung-chang and the Huai Army: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Chinese Regionalism (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), xxi-xliii. Closely related to regionalism is the phenomenon of regional factionalism when two or more locally based groups contest for the influence at court. This phenomenon, however, did not usually lead to the establishment of separate dynasties, and will not be discussed here.}
This situation in which all contending regimes pursued the common goal of restoring a unified empire—under their aegis, of course—created the zero-sum game which denied legitimacy to all but one regime. Certainly, adherence to the unity paradigm did not necessarily prevent rulers of regional regimes from adopting a flexible policy. For a variety of internal and external reasons, some of these leaders tended to postpone the goal of reunification, concentrating instead on ensuring the stability and prosperity of their state.\footnote{An excellent example of Realpolitik calculations prevailing over ideological obligations is the politics of the Southern Song court. See details in S.N. Goncharov, *Kitaïskaia Sredenvekovaia Diplomatiia: Otnosheniia mezhdu Imperiami Ts' in’ i Sun, 1127-1142* (Moscow: Nauka, 1986), 236-7 et passim. Similar views of the advantages of “protecting the boundaries and tranquilizing the people” (baojing an min 保疆安民) were popular among many southern regimes both during the Nanbeichao and the Five Dynasties period (906-960) (see, for instance, Li Zhiting 李志庭, “Yetan Qian Liu baojing anmin guoce” 響燕前梁保疆安民國策, *Zhongguoshi yanjiu 中國史研究* 4 [1997], 92-3 et passim). R. Davis mentions an interesting, although not necessarily flawless suggestion that south-eastern China’s regimes were particularly predisposed towards pursuing “timid retreatment” (憲安, pian’an) at the expense of an assertive foreign policy (*Wind Against the Mountain* [Cambridge Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1996], 142-43).} They could half-heartedly recognize the legitimacy of rival regimes and even establish diplomatic ties with them.\footnote{See, for instance, Shu-Han’s unenthusiastic recognition of Wu 姜 imperial claims in 229 (de Crespigny, *Generals of the South*, 459-462). For international relations among rival regimes during the Nanbeichao period, see Wang Youmin 王友敏, “Nanbeichao jiaopin liyi kao” 南北朝交聘禮儀考, *Zhongguoshi yanjiu 中國史研究* 3 (1996) 144-154.} Nonetheless, such measures were invariably conceived of as ad-hoc temporary arrangements; no serious attempt to create a viable multi-state order was ever made after the Chunqiu period. Rival leaders were well aware of the inevitability of the forthcoming life-or-death struggle from which only one winner could emerge.

Under these conditions unification became a natural outcome of the period of disunion. The rivals, we may conclude, regarded self-defeating policy of Fu Jian 楊炎, the emperor of the Former Qin 前秦 (r. 357-383), and his declarations in favor of unification, see Fang Xuanling 方玄靜 et al., *Jin shu 晉書* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju), 114:2914; and Michael C. Rogers, *The Chronicle of Fu Chien: A Case of Exemplar History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 161 et passim. For other examples of leaders of Northern dynasties declaring their desire to unify All under Heaven, see Qiu, “Wei Jin Nanbeichao shiqi de ‘da yitong’ sixiang”; Pines, “Name or Substance?”; see also Richard B. Mather’s opinion, in his *Biography of Lü Kuang* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 25.

An excellent example of Realpolitik calculations prevailing over ideological obligations is the politics of the Southern Song court. See details in S.N. Goncharov, *Kitaïskaia Sredenvekovaia Diplomatiia: Otnosheniia mezhdu Imperiami Ts' in’ i Sun, 1127-1142* (Moscow: Nauka, 1986), 236-7 et passim. Similar views of the advantages of “protecting the boundaries and tranquilizing the people” (baojing an min 保疆安民) were popular among many southern regimes both during the Nanbeichao and the Five Dynasties period (906-960) (see, for instance, Li Zhiting 李志庭, “Yetan Qian Liu baojing anmin guoce” 響燕前梁保疆安民國策, *Zhongguoshi yanjiu 中國史研究* 4 [1997], 92-3 et passim). R. Davis mentions an interesting, although not necessarily flawless suggestion that south-eastern China’s regimes were particularly predisposed towards pursuing “timid retreatment” (憲安, pian’an) at the expense of an assertive foreign policy (*Wind Against the Mountain* [Cambridge Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1996], 142-43).
their states as nothing but a spring-board toward future conquest and unification, and made no serious efforts to protect their hard-won independence. After conquest by a more successful state, unless new unifiers displayed extreme cruelty or folly, no resistance movement of any consequence prevented them from reintegrating the rival states into the newly recurring empire. In many cases local elites remained largely indifferent to the outcome of the struggle, which was conceived of as the private matter of the self-proclaimed emperor, rather than the common cause of regional independence. Although former emperors and their close associates were often posthumously revered in the areas of their rule, and some of them were later deified, this popularity never resulted in a resurrection of their cause; those who lost the Mandate lost it forever.\(^{117}\)

The general adherence to the *da yitong* paradigm prevented local differences from becoming politically significant; no leader in the areas of the former Zhou world ever raised the banner of separatism. Unlike in Europe and later in the Arab world, political players on the Chinese scene denied the legitimacy to regional independence; in the long term such independence was conceived of not only as illegitimate, but perhaps also as impossible. What are the reasons of this unique situation? Was it the memory of the formerly unified realm? Historical myth? “Oppressive narrative?” Not necessarily. The discussion above of the origins of the *da yitong* paradigm suggests that the quest for unity was primarily a rational choice of elites and commoners alike.

Many recent studies in China and abroad show that despite centuries-old prejudice against ages of division, these periods contributed greatly to China’s cultural, technological and eco-

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\(^{117}\) De Crespigny summarizes the southern gentry’s attitudes towards the state of Wu as follows: “Sun Quan (孫權, the first Wu emperor, r. 222-252 CE) might have hopes of imperial state, but his subordinates had more limited ambitions, they could expect to maintain some position under any regime, and they had no particular commitment to the fortunes of Wu” (*Generals of the South*, 507). For the deification of local heroes, see for instance Brigitte Baptandier, “The Lady Linshui: How a Woman becomes a Goddess,” in: Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller, eds., *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 105-149. The cults of Liu Bei (劉備 d. 223 CE), and particularly his famous advisor, Zhuge Liang (蔣亮亮 d. 234 CE), still remain extremely popular in Chengdu (成都), the capital of their former empire of Shu-Han. These cults, however, by no stretch of imagination can be identified as renewed independence aspirations of the Fujian or Sichuan populace.
onomic development. These achievements, indeed, are undeniable; at least in terms of intellectual history China benefited from periods of division much more than from periods of unified government. Nevertheless, this long-term perspective of modern historians was not necessarily shared by men at the time of disunion. For them division meant endemic warfare, devastation of the country, large-scale bloodshed, and, finally, the most dreadful of all— _luan_ 嚴, chaos. Suffice it to cite Shen Yue’s (沈約 441-513 CE) description of the grave results of the mid-fifth century CE wars between the states of Northern Wei (北魏, 386-534) and Liu Song (劉宋, 420-479):

The strong were killed, the weak—imprisoned. Of several dozens of thousands of households in the area from the Yangzi and the Huai 淮 to the Qing 淮 and the Ji 江 rivers, even one in a hundred could not flee to the lakes and the marshes. Villages became wasteland, wells were empty; none will return to hear dogs barking and cocks crying.

This gloomy picture was all too common during the periods of disunion. Although astute rulers of some of the regional states, such as the Wu-Yue (吳越, 907-978 CE), succeeded to ensure relative stability and peace for their subjects, this was the exception, not the rule. As China never developed adequate means of peaceful coexistence between contending regimes, and as their conflicts were not confined to border incidents but were wars of mutual extermination, the only way to stop such bloodshed was unification. Not the splendor of local courts, nor technological innovations, nor economic expansion under contending regimes, could reduce the immense suffering of the populace. The saying “stability is in unity” did not require further comment for the people of China in the past, as in the present.

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119 強者為彊梁；弱者為弱燕：自公、侯至於將、subscribe口數千萬，自免逃散者，百不—燕。村 井空寢，無復鳴雞吠犬 (Shen Yue 沈約, _Song shu_ 宋書 [rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1997], 95: 2359). For other instances of devastation as a result of internal warfare, see de Crespigny, _Generals of the South_, 492 et passim.