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FRIENDS OR FOES: CHANGING CONCEPTS OF RULER-MINISTER RELATIONS AND THE NOTION OF LOYALTY IN PRE-IMPERIAL CHINA

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**FRIENDS OR FOES**  
**CHANGING CONCEPTS OF RULER-MINISTER RELATIONS**  
**AND THE NOTION OF LOYALTY IN PRE-IMPERIAL CHINA\***

YURI PINES

Now the reason why a ruler builds lofty inner walls and outer walls, looks carefully to the barring of doors and gates, is [to prepare against] the coming of invaders and bandits. But one who murders the ruler and takes his state does not necessarily climb over difficult walls and batter in barred doors and gates. [He may be one of the ministers] who by limiting what the ruler sees and restricting what the ruler hears, seizes his government and monopolizes his commands, possesses his people and takes his state.

Shen Buhai 申不害<sup>1</sup>

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Loyalty (*zhong* 忠) is widely recognized as one of the pivotal ethical norms in Chinese political culture. Ever since the Chunqiu 春秋 (722–453 B.C.E.) – Zhangguo 戰國 (453–221) periods,<sup>2</sup> political and philosophical texts argued that without "loyal ministers" (*zhong chen* 忠臣) the state would perish, and urged officials and ministers to preserve *zhong* even at the expense of their lives. The

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<sup>1</sup> 今人君所以高為城郭而謹門閭之閉者，為寇戎盜賊之至也。今弑君而取國者，非必逾城郭之險而犯門閭之閉也。蔽君之明，塞君之聽，奪君之政而專其令，有其民而取其國矣。  
(Modified translation of Herrlee G. Creel, *Shen Pu-hai: A Chinese Political Philosopher of the Fourth Century B.C.* [Chicago – London 1974], p. 344).

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter all the dates are before Common Era, unless indicated otherwise.

pseudo-Han dynasty “Canon of Loyalty” (*Zhong jing* 忠經) states: “Among whatever is covered by Heaven, supported by Earth and followed by men, nothing is greater than loyalty.”<sup>3</sup> This may be a rhetorical exaggeration, but the sentiment certainly represents a widely shared conviction of traditional Chinese statesmen and thinkers.

This exaltation of loyalty cannot obscure major problems concerning actual implementation of this virtue in political life. Throughout Chinese history, thinkers and statesmen disagreed to whom loyalty is due: to an immediate master, a supreme ruler, a ruling family, the people in general, or, perhaps, to *Dao* 道, i.e., the principles of good rule? Especially in the ages of turmoil and dynastic decline, conflicting loyalties instigated immensely tense personal dramas. These dramas have not remained unnoticed: several excellent studies discuss the complicated nature of loyalty during ages of rebellion and dynastic change.<sup>4</sup> These studies, however, usually concentrate on the last millennium of imperial history. Much less attention has been devoted to the origins of the concept of loyalty and its evolution during the pre-imperial period, the formative age of Chinese political thought. Occidental Sinology has rarely focused on ethical aspects of ruler-minister relations in pre-imperial thought.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 天之所覆，地之所載，人之所履，莫大乎忠 (*Zhong jing*, repr. *Congshu jicheng* 叢書集成 [Beijing], vol. 893, p. 1). Although the *Zhong jing* is traditionally attributed to Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166 C.E.), it was compiled in all likelihood in the Song dynasty.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Wang Gung-wu, “Feng Tao: An Essay on Confucian Loyalty,” in: Arthur F. Wright – Denis Twitchett (eds.), *Confucian Personalities* (Stanford, Calif. 1962), pp. 123–145; James T.C. Liu, “Yüeh Fei (1103–1141) and China’s Heritage of Loyalty,” in: *Journal of Asian Studies* 31 (1972) 2, pp. 291–297; Naomi Standen, “Frontier Crossing from North China to Liao, c. 900–1005” (Ph.D. diss., University of Durham, 1994), pp. 260–277; David A. Graff, “The Meritorious Cannibal: Chang Hsün’s Defense of Sui-yang and the Exaltation of Loyalty at the Age of Rebellion,” in: *Asia Major* (Third Series) 8 (1995) 1, pp. 1–17; Richard L. Davis, *Wind Against the Mountain. The Crisis of Politics and Culture in Thirteenth-Century China* (Cambridge, Mass. 1996). For a somewhat different perspective, see Laurence A. Schneider, *A Madman of Ch’u. The Chinese Myth of Loyalty and Dissent* (Berkeley 1980).

<sup>5</sup> The issue of ruler-minister relations and the notion of loyalty in pre-imperial China have been extensively discussed by Chinese and Japanese scholars. See, for instance, a series of studies by Suzuki Yoshikazu 鈴木喜一, “Shunjū jidai no kunshin ronri” 春秋時代の君臣倫理, in: *Nihon Chūgoku gakkai hō* 日本中國學會報 34 (1982), pp. 1–16; “Sengoku jidai no kunshin ronri – juka o shu toshite” 戰國時代の君臣倫理—儒家を主として, in: *Nihon Chūgoku gakkai hō* 35 (1983), pp. 84–98; “Sengoku jidai no kunshin kankei – hōka, yūkyō, jūōka no baai” 戰國時代の君臣關係—法家、游俠、從橫家の場合, in: *Tōhōgaku* 東方學 68 (1984), pp. 1–15; see also Ning Ke 寧可 – Jiang Fuya 蔣福亞, “Zhongguo lishi shang de huang quan he zhongjun guan-nian” 中國歷史上的皇權和忠君觀念, in: *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 2 (1994), pp. 79–95; Liu Bao-cai 劉寶才, “Chunqiu shidai lunli sixiang jianlun” 春秋時代倫理思想簡論, in: *Xibei daxue xuebao* 西北大學學報 1 (1988), pp. 9–15; Liu Zehua 劉澤華, *Zhongguo chuantong zhengzhi siwei* 中國傳統政治思維 (Changchun 1991), pp. 252–283; Ge Quan 葛荃, *Zheng de zhi* 政德志 (Shanghai 1998), pp. 193–221; Wang Zijin 王子今, *Zhong guannian yanjiu* 《忠》觀念研究 (Jilin 1999). Among Western scholars the most important discussion is that by Mark Edward Lewis in *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany 1999), pp. 63–73. Although Lewis does

Fortunately, recent archeological discoveries may spur renewed interest in early Chinese political ethics. In 1993, Chinese archeologists excavated a tomb at the site of Guodian 郭店, in Hubei province. The tomb, identified as that of a mid-Zhanguo high-ranking official from the state of Chu 楚, yielded a cache of texts written on 730 bamboo slips. Most of these philosophical, ethical, and political texts were previously unknown; others, like three portions of the *Laozi* 老子, differ significantly from the received version. This epochal discovery has led to heated academic discussions, which will surely continue for years to come. Understandably, most discussants concentrated on those texts which seem to be of pivotal importance in pre-imperial discourse, such as the *Laozi* and several “Confucian” manuscripts. Less attention was given to those bundles of bamboo slips that contain miscellaneous statements and sayings, the so-called *Collected Sayings* (*Yu cong* 語叢).<sup>6</sup> Some of these sayings, however, are highly interesting. Particularly, the radical pro-ministerial assessments of ruler-minister relations expressed in the *Yu cong* are unparalleled in received pre-Qin texts. They are not only indicative of the *Weltanschauung* of the tomb’s occupant, but may also help us to better understand the intellectual atmosphere among members of the *shi* 士 stratum in the last centuries prior to imperial unification.

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not deal directly with the question of ministerial loyalty, his discussion contains plenty on insightful remarks on Zhanguo scholars’ attitudes to the state and to political authority. Another relevant discussion is by Charles Wing-Hoi Chan, “Confucius and Political Loyalism: The Dilemma,” *Monumenta Serica* 44 (1996), pp. 25-99. It worth reminding that in contrast to Western scholars, Chinese intellectuals’ preoccupation with the issue of loyalty derives not only from pure academic interest, but is of high contemporary relevance (see, for instance, Liu Binyan’s *A Higher Kind of Loyalty. A Memoir by China’s Foremost Journalist*, trans. by Zhu Hong [New York 1990]).

<sup>6</sup> It is virtually impossible to survey here all the studies, which deal with the Guodian manuscripts. Many important articles were collected in the 20th and the 21st issues of the *Zhongguo zhixue* 中國哲學 under the respective titles *Guodian Chujian yanjiu* 郭店楚簡研究 and *Guodian jian yu ruxue yanjiu* 郭店簡與儒學研究 (Shenyang 1999 and 2000); other convenient collections are *The Guodian Laozi. Proceedings of the International Conference, Dartmouth College May 1998*, edited by Sarah Allan and Crispin Williams (Berkeley, Calif. 2000), *Kakuten Sokan shisō shiteki kenkyū* 郭店楚簡思想史的研究 (Tōkyō 1999–2000, vols. 1-3) and *Wuhan daxue Zhongguo wenhua yanjiuyuan* 武漢大學中國文化研究院, *Guodian Chujian guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 郭店楚簡國際學術研討會論文集 (Wuhan 2000, hereafter *Guoji hui*). The ideological importance of the *Yu cong* slips was noticed by Pang Pu 龐朴 in his “Chu du Guodian Chujian” 初讀郭店楚簡, in: *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 4 (1998), pp. 7-8, and Ding Sixin 丁四新, *Guodian Chumu zhujian sixiang yanjiu* 郭店楚墓竹簡思想研究 (Beijing 2000; hereafter *Guodian sixiang*), pp. 214-241; it was also mentioned in passim by Robin Yates (*The Guodian Laozi*, p. 179). Most discussions of the *Yu cong*, except that by Ding Sixin, concentrated on the *Yu cong* 4 slips, which significantly differ in their content and nature from the rest of the *Yu cong* “chapters” (see articles in *Guoji hui*, pp. 389-405).

The *Yu cong* statements and other relevant passages from the Guodian texts serve in this paper as starting point for discussing the pre-imperial evolution of the notion of loyalty. I shall try to analyze conflicting views of loyalty in the broad context of changes in ruler-minister relations throughout the five centuries prior to imperial unification of 221. My assumption is that the different ways in which loyalty was conceptualized by successive generations of thinkers reflect a changing standing of ministers *versus* the rulers. Chunqiu ministers and their Zhanguo successors pursued contradictory goals of both maintaining their eminent status and preserving the paramount position of a ruler as the single source of political authority. This conflict between private and public goals of members of the ministerial stratum imbued the pre-imperial discourse of loyalty, of ruler-minister relations, and of the ministers' obligation toward the ruler with immense tension. The drama of loyalty and its conflicts has been re-enacted throughout the imperial period, continuing well into modern times. Its roots, I suggest, should be sought in the complex legacy of the pre-imperial period.

### 1.

#### **“When you dislike [the ruler], you may leave him”: The Guodian *credo***

From the first publication of the Guodian slips many scholars have discussed the dating of the tomb and the possible identity of its occupant. While no consensus was reached, the mainstream view identifies the occupant as a high-ranking *shi* or a low-ranking noble (*dafu* 大夫) from the late fourth century B.C.E.<sup>7</sup> The unprecedented amount of philosophical and political writings buried in the tomb leads one to assume the occupant's deep involvement in the intellectual controversies of his time. How then did this Chu intellectual view ruler-minister relations?

Even a brief glimpse at the Guodian slips suggests that the tomb occupant was preoccupied with the issue of loyalty and proper norms of ruler-minister intercourse. The term *zhong* is mentioned in nearly all of the Guodian texts,<sup>8</sup> while

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<sup>7</sup> For the discussions about the identity of the tomb occupant, see Hubei sheng Jingmenshi bowuguan 湖北省荊門市博物館, “Jingmen Guodian yi hao Chu mu” 荊門郭店一號楚墓, in: *Wenwu* 文物 7 (1997), pp. 35-48; Cui Renyi 崔仁義, *Chujian Laozi yanjiu* 楚簡老子研究 (Beijing 1998), pp. 12-16. Li Xueqin 李學勤 was apparently the first to assert that the tomb occupant might have been a tutor of the heir-apparent of the state of Chu (see his “Xian Qin rujia zhuzuo de zhongda faxian” 先秦儒家著作的重大發現 [repr. *Guodian Chujian*, pp. 13-17]); this view was initially adopted by many other scholars (see, for instance, Luo Yunhuan 羅運環, “Lun Guodian yi hao Chu mu suo chu qi erbei wen ji muzhu he zhujian de niandai” 論郭店一號楚墓所出漆耳杯文及墓主和竹簡的年代, in: *Kaogu* 考古 1 [2000], pp. 68-71). More attenuated studies, however, called this assumption into question, pointing at several inaccuracies in Li Xueqin's interpretations (see, for instance, Zhou Jianzhong 周建忠, “Jingmen Guodian yi hao Chu mu muzhu kaolun – jian lun Qu Yuan shengping yanjiu” 荊門郭店一號楚墓墓主考論—兼論屈原生平研究, in: *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 5 [2000], pp. 12-23).

<sup>8</sup> Hereafter I discuss only the so-called “Confucian” Guodian texts, i.e., all the texts except the *Laozi* and the adjacent text “Tai yi sheng shui” 大一生水.

two of them, named by the editorial team *Lu Mugong wen Zisi* 魯穆公問子思 and *Zhongxin zhi Dao* 忠信之道, are dedicated exclusively to ministerial virtues. The latter text's statement that "loyalty is the essence of benevolence," is indicative of the pivotal position of *zhong* in Guodian materials.<sup>9</sup>

We may assume, therefore, that the issue of ministerial loyalty was highly important to the occupant of the Guodian tomb. But how did he view this virtue? A possible answer to this question may be found in the scattered sayings, named by the editorial team *Yu cong*. These sayings do not seem to be extracts from a lost text; rather they resemble personal notes jotted down while reading other texts, or perhaps they are raw material for a future compilation.<sup>10</sup> The succinct aphorisms of the *Yu cong* lack the philosophical depth of other texts, but in certain cases reveal with unusual frankness what may be considered as the tomb occupant's *Weltanschauung*. The *Yu cong* contain several surprising remarks on ruler-minister relations. First, they unequivocally state that ruler-minister relations are secondary to family ties:

Father is both a relative and is revered. Elder and younger brother are [connected] by the way of relatives. Friends (*you*), and ruler and ministers are not relatives. Although revered they are not relatives.<sup>11</sup>

The statement favoring familial ties over political obligations is not novel in pre-imperial Confucian thought; it was implied already by Confucius 孔子 (551–479), and echoed by Mencius 孟子 (ca. 379–304).<sup>12</sup> These thinkers, however, usually preferred to emphasize the similarity rather than distinction between familial and

<sup>9</sup> 忠，仁之實也 (Jingmenshi Bowuguan 荊門市博物館, *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 [Beijing 1998], "Zhongxin zhi Dao" 忠信之道, p. 163, hereafter *Guodian*. Here and elsewhere, I use modern forms of the characters, following the suggestions of the editors of the *Guodian*. For more about the Guodian texts' views of ministerial ethics, see Li Cunshan 李存山, "Du Chujian *Zhongxin zhi Dao* ji qita" 讀楚簡《忠信之道》及其他 in: *Guodian Chujian*, pp. 263–277; Luo Yunhuan, 羅運環, "Guodian Chujian youguan junchen lunshu de yanjiu: jian lun *Yu cong* si de wenti" 郭店楚簡有關君臣論述的研究：兼論《語叢四》的問題 in: *Guoji hui*, pp. 398–401.

<sup>10</sup> *Yu cong* texts are discussed by Pang Pu 龐朴, "Yu cong yishuo" 語叢臆說, in: *Guodian Chujian*, pp. 327–330, and Ding Sixin 丁四新, in: *Guodian sixiang*, pp. 214–241. These texts are written on the shortest strips of 15–17.4 mm, which, according to Cui Renyi, suggests their relatively low value for the owner (*Chujian Laozi*, pp. 16–18). Yet, Robin Yates opined that these short slips may contain philosophically most important sayings (*The Guodian Laozi*, p. 179), and his views are supported by Ding Sixin (*Guodian sixiang*, pp. 215–218). Li Xueqin alternatively suggested that *Yu cong* may be merely teaching materials (*The Guodian Laozi*, p. 124).

<sup>11</sup> 父有親有尊。長弟，親道也。友、君臣，無親也；尊而不親。"Yu cong" 語叢 1, p. 197. I follow Pang Pu's correction of the editors' arrangement of the slips: the proper sequence should be slip 78, followed by slips 80–81 and then slips 77, 82, and 79 ("Chu du Guodian", p. 9).

<sup>12</sup> For Confucius' views, see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Lunyu yizhu* 論語譯注 (Beijing 1991), "Zi Lu" 子路 13.18:139; for Mencius' views, see Yang Bojun, *Mengzi yizhu* 孟子譯注 (Beijing 1992), "Jin xin shang" 盡心上 13.35:317.

political hierarchies, while the Guodian manuscripts do not try to conceal the basic differences between the son's and the minister's obligations. On the contrary, they clearly indicate that a ruler cannot rely on a minister's loyalty to the same extent that a father can trust his son. A text named *Liu de* 六德 (Six virtues) or *Tian chang* 天常 (Heaven's constants) further clarifies:

Benevolence is internal; propriety/righteousness is external; ritual and music are common. Internal positions are father, son, and husband; external positions are ruler, minister, and the wife. To wear three-year mourning clothes and sack-cloth head band, to use walking stick [at the obsequies] – this is done for the father, and also for the ruler. To wear flax mourning clothes and hempen headband is done for brothers, and also for a wife. To bare one's arm and to loosen one's hair is done for kin, and also for friends. Sever [mourning for] the ruler for the sake of the father; never sever father's [mourning] for the ruler's sake. Sever [mourning for] a wife for the sake of brothers; never sever brothers' [mourning] for a wife's sake. Stop [mourning] friends for the sake of kin; never stop [mourning] kin for friends' sake. People have six virtues, but three family [ties] should never be cut.<sup>13</sup>

Authors of the *Liu de* evidently considered blood ties superior to any other kind of human relations: ruler, wife, and friend were external and hence inferior to father, brother, or consanguineous kin. In this context, the mention of mourning rites was aimed to reinforce hierarchy of obligations elsewhere. The phrase *wei fu jue jun* 為父絕君 (“sever [mourning for] the ruler for the sake of the father”) might not only have implied the priority of mourning obligations toward the father over that owed to the ruler, but also legitimized severing relations with the sovereign for the father's sake.<sup>14</sup> This passage seems to reinforce Han Feizi's 韓非子 (d. 233) accusation that Confucius' encouragement of filiality produced “treacherous subjects.”<sup>15</sup> Significantly, both the *Liu de* and *Yu cong* place ruler-

<sup>13</sup> 仁，內也；義，外也；禮樂，共也。內位父、子、夫也；外位君、臣、婦也。疏斬布實 [=經]，丈 [=杖]，為父也，為君亦然。疏衰齊戊 [=牡] 麻實 [=經]，為 [昆?] 弟，為妻亦然。袒字 [=免] 為宗族也，為朋友亦然。為父絕君，不為君絕父；為 [昆?] 弟絕妻，不為妻絕 [昆?] 弟；為宗族 [瑟?] 朋友，不為朋友 [瑟?] 宗族。人有六德，三親不斷 (*Guodian*, “*Liu de*” 六德, p. 188, following the editors' glosses). For a better rearrangement of the relevant slips into a text named *Tian chang* 天常, see Chen Wei 陳偉, “Guanyu Guodian Chujian *Liu de* zhupian bianlian de tiaozheng” 關於郭店楚簡《六德》諸篇編連的調整, in: *Guoji hui*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>14</sup> For a narrow ritual interpretation of this passage, see Peng Lin 彭林, “Zai lun Guodian jian *Liu de* ‘wei fu jue jun’ ji xiangguan wenti” 再論郭店簡《六德》‘為父絕君’及相關問題 (<http://www.bamboosilk.org/Wssf/Penglin4-01.htm>). This interpretation insufficiently addresses the text's complexity, since *Tian chang* (*Liu de*) in general deals with proper modes of political and family relations and not with mourning rituals, and its explicit preference of the parental authority over that of the ruler is highly significant beyond the immediate ritual context. See also Ding Sixin, *Guodian sixiang*, pp. 347ff.

<sup>15</sup> “Judging from this [Confucius' statements], a father's filial son is a ruler's treacherous subject” (以是觀之，夫父之孝子，君之背臣也。Wang Xianshen 王先慎, *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解 [Beijing 1998], “Wu du” 五蠹 49:449).

minister relations in the same category as that of friends. The friends' simile is not incidental: the Guodian authors evidently preferred to emphasize the reciprocal rather than the hierarchic nature of ruler-minister ties. Elsewhere, the *Yu cong* states: "Ruler and minister are [like] friends; [they] select [each other]".<sup>16</sup>

This saying adds another dimension to the trend outlined above of minimizing differences between minister and ruler. What is novel here is not merely the definition of ruler-minister relations as that of friends (*you* 友). This term was applied to ruler-minister relations already in Western Zhou (1046–771) texts,<sup>17</sup> and in the Zhanguo period it was mentioned among others in such an authoritative source as the *Mencius*. Yet, in the *Mencius* and other Zhanguo sources, surveyed below, ruler-minister friendship was usually interpreted as a manifestation of "respecting the worthy" (*zun xian* 尊賢).<sup>18</sup> The *Yu cong* uses this concept for a different purpose: it emphasizes the reciprocal nature of ruler-minister ties. Indeed, if ruler and minister choose one another, then their ties may be severed with fascinating ease. This is, indeed, the recommendation of another *Yu cong* statement, which summarizes the points raised above:

A father is not hated. The ruler is like a father: he is not hated. He is like a flag for the three armies – he [represents] correctness. Yet, he differs from the father: when ruler and minister are unable to stay together, you can sever [these relations]; when you dislike [the ruler], you may leave him; when he acts improperly/un-righteously towards you, you should not accept it.<sup>19</sup>

This saying synthesizes two major ideas expressed in the earlier passages, namely that the minister's obligations to a ruler are inferior to kinship duties, and, second, that the ruler-minister relations resemble those of friends. A minister should be free in his choice whether to serve the ruler or to leave him: whenever he feels that the ruler mistreats him, whenever the ruler's attitude violates the minister's

<sup>16</sup> 君臣，朋友；其擇者也 ("Yu cong 1," slip 87, p. 197). See also "Yu cong 3": "Friendship is the way of ruler and minister" (友，君臣之道也. Slip 6, p. 209).

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 glosses on the "Jia le" 假樂 and "Yi" 抑 odes (Mao 249 and 256, *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 [Beijing 1991], 17.3:541; 18.1:555). In the Western Zhou discourse the term *you* referred primarily if not exclusively to relatives, particularly brothers, and not friends; hence, it implied hierarchy rather than equality (see Zhu Fenghan 朱鳳瀚, *Shang Zhou jiazhu xingtai yanjiu* 商周家族形態研究 [Tianjin 1990], pp. 306-311; Zha Changguo 查昌國, "You yu liang Zhou junchen guanxi de yanbian" 友與兩周君臣關係的演變, in: *Lishi yanjiu* 5 [1998], pp. 94-99; Maria Khayutina "Friendship in Early China," paper presented at the 13th WSW conference [1999]). In the Zhanguo period, however, *you* 友 acquired its current meaning as "friends," persons who share common desires, that is equals (see Zha, "You yu liang Zhou," pp. 99-102). The above citation from the "Liu de" text suggests that by the mid-Zhanguo period friends and relatives were clearly distinguished.

<sup>18</sup> See Mengzi, "Wan Zhang xia" 萬章下, 10.3:237.

<sup>19</sup> 父亡惡，君猶父也，其弗惡也；猶三軍之[旗]也，正也。所以異於父：君臣不相在也，則可已；不悅，可去也；不義而加諸己，弗受也 (*Guodian*, "Yu cong 3," slips 1-5, p. 209). See also a brief discussion of this passage in Ding Sixin, *Guodian sixiang*, p. 233.

notion of propriety (*yi* 義), whenever a minister is not satisfied with his position and “cannot stay together” with the ruler, he may abandon the sovereign. All this amounts to a notion of near equality, or at least a very radically conceived reciprocity in ruler-minister relations.

These views are not entirely unprecedented in pre-imperial discourse, but their bluntness is revealing. Indeed, most of the known Zhanguo thinkers served more than one ruler, and this was not considered illegitimate. In the following discussion we shall see that Confucius and Mencius, among others, justified such changes of ministerial allegiance. Both thinkers, however, placed ethico-political calculations, namely, the ruler’s adherence to *Dao*, as the primary reason for their changing loyalty. The Guodian text is different. With unprecedented candor it places personal relations with a ruler as the primary determinant of a minister’s decisions. If this text reflects the political atmosphere of the mid- to late Zhanguo courts, we may pity the position of contemporary rulers who could not take the allegiance of their aides for granted unless the latter were attached to the ruler by some kind of personal bonds. Is this ministerial freedom of choice commensurate with Zhanguo patterns of loyalty? Should the Guodian texts be considered as extreme, perhaps even marginal manifestation of ministerial self-confidence, or do they represent widely shared views of late Zhanguo statesmen and thinkers? To answer these questions we must first survey the changing views of loyalty and of ruler-minister relations generally throughout the Chunqiu-Zhanguo periods.

## 2.

### Ruler’s Companions and Personal Servants of the Chunqiu Period

The issues of ruler-minister relations in general and of loyalty in particular do not figure prominently in pre-Chunqiu discourse. Although Edward L. Shaughnessy suggested that already some of the earliest chapters of the *Shu jing* 書經, namely, the “Jun Shi” 君奭 and “Shao gao” 召誥, deal with the ruler-minister controversy, this topic does not seem to preoccupy authors of most other Western Zhou texts.<sup>20</sup> None of these texts ever mention, for instance, the term *zhong*; the term is absent also from Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. What are the reasons for this silence? Several Chinese scholars suggested that since in the Western Zhou states most ministers were the ruler’s agnates, their obligations to the sovereign were regulated by norms of family ethics, such as *xiao* 孝 (filiality) and *you* 友 (fraternal relations); hence, there was no need for a separate discussion of ministerial loyalty.<sup>21</sup> While it is difficult to either prove or refute a hypothesis based on

<sup>20</sup> For Shaughnessy’s discussion of these two chapters, see his “The Duke of Zhou’s Retirement in the East and the Beginnings of the Ministerial-Monarch Debate in Chinese Political Philosophy,” in: *Early China* 18 (1993), pp. 41-72. David S. Nivison doubted Shaughnessy’s interpretation (see “An Interpretation of the ‘Shao gao’,” in: *Early China* 20 [1995], pp. 177-193); personally, I find Shaughnessy’s analysis more convincing.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Ning and Jiang, “Huang quan he zhongjun guannian,” p. 79. For the early meaning of *you*, see note 17 above.

*argumentum ex silentio*, the suggestion that political virtues in the Western Zhou period were embedded in family ethics seems convincing. Indeed, in the age when most states were akin to a high-ordered lineage, familial harmony may very well have sufficed to ensure smooth relations between a ruler and his ministers.<sup>22</sup>

This situation changed radically in the Chunqiu period, as the political and to lesser extent the ritual center of gravity shifted from the high-ordered “trunk” lineage (*zong* 宗), characteristic of the Western Zhou age, to rival “branch” lineages (*shi* 氏). Rules of intra-lineage hierarchy could no longer ensure a ruler’s superiority, as independent ministerial lineages began contesting the overlords’ (*zhuhou* 諸侯) power. By the late seventh century these lineages had consolidated their position in most Chunqiu states; their heads succeeded each other in the highest positions at courts, while ever-growing hereditary allotments ensured the lineage’s well being. Relying on their independent power base, arrogant ministers openly defied the ruler’s orders; by the late Chunqiu period most overlords of the Central Plain states retained only ritual supremacy, while political, economical, and military power lay with their courtiers. The rulers who tried to regain their position were often expelled or assassinated by their nominal aides.<sup>23</sup>

These new conditions required a reconceptualization of ruler-minister relations. Old familial values were of little relevance in the world fragmented into rival branch lineages; new rules had to define ministerial obligations towards the ruler. Yet, Chunqiu statesmen, to whom it fell to formulate these new rules, were in a delicate position. On the one hand, the thinkers whose voices we hear from the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, our major repository of Chunqiu history and thought,<sup>24</sup> belonged

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<sup>22</sup> See a detailed discussion about the early Zhou state in Tian Changwu 田昌五 and Zang Zhifei 臧知非, *Zhou Qin shehui jiegou yanjiu* 周秦社會結構研究 (Xi'an 1998), pp. 1-38.

<sup>23</sup> Chunqiu social conditions are discussed in Zhu Fenghan, *Shang Zhou*, pp. 450-594; Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought. Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722-453 B.C.E* (Honolulu 2002), pp. 136-137; 191-192; see also He Huaihong 何懷宏, *Shixi shehui ji qi jieti* 世襲社會及其解体 (Beijing 1996). The ruling houses became puppets of the powerful aristocratic lineages in the Central Plain states of Lu 魯 (since 601), Jin 晉 (since 573), Zheng 鄭 (since 569), Wei 衛 (since 559), and Qi 齊 (since 546). Powerful ministers assassinated the lord of Jin in 607, and another one in 573; of Zheng, in 566; of Qi, in 548; and expelled the lords of Wei, Yan 燕, and Lu in 559, 539, and 517 respectively, to mention only a few cases. The situation was somewhat different in the states of Qin and Chu, for which see Melvin P. Thatcher, “Central Government of the State of Ch'in in the Spring and Autumn Period,” in: *Journal of Oriental Studies* 23 (1985) 1, pp. 29-53; Abe Michiko 安倍道子, “Guanyu Chunqiu shidai de Chu wangquan” 關於春秋時代的楚王權, in: Hubei sheng Chushi yanjiuhui 湖北省楚史研究會, *Chushi yanjiu zhuanji* 楚史研究專輯 (Wuhan 1983), pp. 244-263; Barry B. Blakeley, “King, Clan, and Courtier in Ancient Ch'u,” in: *Asia Major* (Third Series) 5 (1992) 2, pp. 1-39.

<sup>24</sup> For the reliability of the speeches in the *Zuo zhuan* as sources for Chunqiu intellectual history, see Pines, “Intellectual Change in the Chunqiu Period: The Reliability of the Speeches in the *Zuo zhuan* as Sources of Chunqiu Intellectual History,” in: *Early China* 22 (1997), pp. 77-132, and the modified discussion in *id.*, *Foundations*, pp. 14-39. To recapitulate, I argue that most of the speeches were incorporated into the *Zuo zhuan* from its primary sources – narrative histories produced by the Chunqiu scribes. Although some of the speeches were heavily edited or even

with few exceptions to the highest ministerial stratum. Their explicit goal was to restore political stability, which required strengthening the ruler's position. On the other hand, the ministers headed precisely those lineages which contested the ruler's power, and were not interested in ethical or institutional arrangements that would significantly curb their influence. These conflicting aims, public and private, added immense tension to Chunqiu discussions of ministerial obligations.

This tension resulted in a complicated notion of ministerial duties, which combined insistence on obedience and fidelity to the ruler with an understanding that the minister's highest goal was to serve the "altars of soil and grain" (*sheji* 社稷), that is the state or the populace in general.<sup>25</sup> Thus, when a minister could claim that his actions were in accord with what he believed to be the state's interests, he had the right to defy the ruler's orders, and even to act against a ruler. This notion of loyalty to the altars allowed, as we shall see, considerable freedom of action to the ministers – largely at the expense of the rulers.

We should not assume, of course, that Chunqiu statesmen-thinkers openly advocated defiance of the ruler's orders. To the contrary, they often proclaimed their adherence to the principle of trustworthiness/faithfulness (*xin* 信), which meant in the context of ruler-minister relations truthfully and unequivocally obeying the ruler's commands, and "holding no duplicity" (*bu er* 不貳), that is being faithful to the ruler and not conniving with his enemies.<sup>26</sup> The concept of unconditional obedience existed in the Chunqiu period, but it was not the highest priority of self-confident Chunqiu ministers. To retain their freedom of action, the ministers preferred adherence to a more flexible virtue (*zhong* 忠).

Although, as mentioned above, *zhong* was a new term in Chunqiu discourse, within few generations it became the pivotal ministerial virtue.<sup>27</sup> In the *Zuo zhuan*,

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invented by the scribes (like Chu Ni's monologue cited below), the evidence suggests that they reflect Chunqiu intellectual milieu and that their content was not significantly distorted by the author/compiler of the *Zuo zhuan*.

<sup>25</sup> For the altars as representatives of the collective entity of the state dwellers, see Masubuchi Tatsuo 増淵龍夫, *Chūgoku kodai no shakai to kokka* 中國古代の社會と國家 (Tōkyō 1963), pp. 139-163.

<sup>26</sup> For demanding the ministers to truthfully carry out the ruler's orders without further considerations, see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing 1981; hereafter the *Zuo*), Xi 5:305; Xi 9:328-329; Xuan 2:658; Xuan 15:759-760; Cheng 17:901; for the demand to serve only one ruler without duplicity, see *Zuo*, Zhuang 14:197-198; Xi 24:414; Cheng 3:814; Cheng 8:840. In some cases, including those discussed below, ministerial obedience was designated not "trustworthiness" (*xin*), but "reverence" (*jing* 敬) or "faithfulness" (*zhen* 貞).

<sup>27</sup> In the early *Zuo*, the meaning of *zhong* differs from the later usage of this term. For instance, in 706, Ji Liang 季梁 from the state of Sui 隨 claimed "What is called the Way, is devotion (*zhong* 忠) to the people and trust towards the deities. Superiors think how to benefit the people – this is devotion" (*Zuo*, Huan 6:111). This is the first occurrence of the term *zhong* in the *Zuo* and in received ancient Chinese texts in general, and it is the only case which refers to the ruler's obligations towards the people. In another early speech we learn that *zhong* might have had reciprocal implications as well (*Zuo*, Zhuang 10:183). Yet, these usages disappeared from

*zhong* refers primarily to two qualities of the minister. First, a loyal minister must consider the long-term interests of the state, and act accordingly; second, he was expected to act selflessly and to prefer state interests to his own.<sup>28</sup> *Zhong* assigned a minister a role of an independent and intelligent political actor, and this inevitably led to a conflict with the concept of unconditional obedience, embedded in *xin*.

Ideally, *zhong* and *xin* should complement each other. The good minister should be obedient as well as intelligent, selfless, not duplicitous, and should act on behalf of the state. Whenever Chunqiu statesmen praised a colleague, they tended to emphasize that he was trustworthy as well as loyal.<sup>29</sup> They introduced the compound *zhongxin* 忠信, implying that both virtues were complementary. Harsh reality, however, challenged this assumption. Intelligent loyalty, namely, a minister's perception of state interests, in certain instances demanded defiance of the ruler's orders contradicting thereby the principle of *xin*. Several stories and anecdotes in the *Zuo zhuan* elucidate the conflict between loyalty and obedience, and they deserve a somewhat more detailed discussion.

In 657, Lord Xian of Jin 晉獻公 (r. 676–651) ordered Shi Wei 士蒍 to fortify the cities of Pu 蒲 and Qu 屈 – the allotments of the princes Chonger 重耳 and Yiwu 夷吾 whose relations with their father were increasingly tense and mistrustful. Shi Wei performed his job carelessly and was reprimanded by the lord. He explained his actions as follows:

I heard that when there is grief without [a reason for] mourning, [real] sorrow is sure to come; fortifying cities without [an external] military threat would allow an [internal] adversary to take them over. Why should I carefully [fortify the future] holdings of bandits and adversaries?<sup>30</sup> When an official neglects orders this is irreverent, but strengthening the holding of an adversary is disloyal. He who loses loyalty and reverence, how can he serve the ruler?<sup>31</sup>

Unable to resolve the contradiction between his perception of the ruler's interests and the ruler's orders, Shi Wei resigned. His carelessness in carrying out the ruler's orders was implicitly praised by the narrator who immediately clarified

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later Chunqiu discourse. The changing meanings of the term *zhong* are discussed by Fu Wuguang 傅武光, "Shi zhong" 釋忠, in: *id.*, *Zhongguo sixiang shi lunwenji* 中國思想史論文集 (Taipei 1990), pp. 1-13. The present article, however, deals with the broadly conceived notion of loyalty, and the discussion will not be confined to the single term *zhong*.

<sup>28</sup> For defining *zhong* as considering long-term interests of the state, see *Zuo*, Min 2:272; Cheng 2:805; Xiang 25:1098; Xiang 28:1152. For unselfishness (*wu si* 無私) as another important feature of the loyal minister, see *Zuo*, Wen 6:553; Cheng 16:894; Zhao 10:1319-1320.

<sup>29</sup> See *Zuo*, Cheng 9:844-845; Zhao 1:1205-1206; Zhao 2:1229; Zhao 12:1336; Zhao 16:1378-1379.

<sup>30</sup> Shi Wei assumed that the sons of Lord Xian would rebel, and their fortified cities would turn into "holdings of bandits and adversaries," i.e., rebels.

<sup>31</sup> 臣聞之：無喪而慼，憂必讎焉；無戎而城，讎必保焉。寇讎之保，又何慎焉？守官廢命，不敬；固讎之保，不忠。失忠與敬，何以事君？(*Zuo*, Xi 5:304).

that Shi Wei's prediction was correct: the newly fortified cities became bases of the princes' insurrection. Thus, Shi Wei's view of loyalty inspired him to defy the ruler's orders.

In 655, Lord Xian's cunning concubine, Li Ji 酈姬, removed the elder scions and established her son, Xiqi 奚齊, as heir-apparent. Most officials objected to this violation of succession norms. On his sickbed, the dying Lord Xian summoned Xiqi's grand tutor, Xun Xi 荀息, and requested him to enthrone Xiqi:

[Xun Xi] kowtowed and answered: "I shall use to the utmost the power of my limbs and add to it loyalty and faithfulness (*zhen* 貞). If [our plan] succeeds, then it is due to your luck; if not, I shall pursue it till my death."

The lord asked: "What do you mean by loyalty and faithfulness?"

[Xun Xi] answered: "Doing whatever I know will benefit the lord's house – this is loyalty; to follow the deceased and serve the living [ruler] without any hesitation – this is faithfulness."<sup>32</sup>

When Li Ke 里克 intended to kill Xiqi he first reported to Xun Xi saying: "Three resentful [groups] will act,<sup>33</sup> Qin and [their supporters in] Jin will assist them. What will you do?"

Xun Xi said: "I will die for [Xiqi]."

Li Ke said: "It is useless."

Xun Shu (Xun Xi) replied: "I gave a promise to the late ruler, and cannot be duplicitous. Can I wish to violate my promise because I pity my life? Although it is useless, how can I avoid it? Yet, others want a good [ruler] just as I do. I want to escape duplicity, but how can I tell others to stop [pursuing their plans]?"<sup>34</sup>

Xun Xi encountered a similar dilemma between loyalty and obedience as Shi Wei. His promise to the former lord demanded acting on behalf of the illegitimate heir; his sense of benefiting the lord's house apparently suggested establishing one of the elder scions. Unable to resolve this contradiction, Xun Xi was paralyzed. After Li Ke murdered Xiqi, Xun Xi tried to establish Xiqi's younger half-brother, Zizhuo 子晫; after Zizhuo was also murdered, Xun Xi committed suicide. The first impression is that Xun Xi kept his promise to the late lord, but a deeper analysis suggests otherwise. Twice he did nothing to prevent Li Ke from fulfilling his plans and he definitely refrained from stopping the plotters. In committing suicide, Xun Xi found the only way out of his dilemma – unable wholeheartedly

<sup>32</sup> I.e., to follow the will of Lord Xian.

<sup>33</sup> Li Ke – a high official of Jin who opposed the establishment of an illegitimate heir. "Three resentful" refers to the followers of the three elder sons of Lord Xian: Shensheng 申生 (who was forced to commit suicide), Chonger, and Yiwu (both in exile at the time of their father's death). All three fell victim to the intrigues of Li Ji – the mother of Xiqi. After Lord Xian's death their followers intended to overthrow Li Ji's son and establish one of the elder scions.

<sup>34</sup> 稽首而對曰：臣竭其股肱之力，加之以忠、貞。其濟，君之靈也；不濟，則以死繼之。公曰：何謂忠、貞？對曰：公家之利，知無不為，忠也；送往事居，耦俱不猜，貞也。及里克將殺奚齊，先告荀息曰：三怨將作，秦、晉輔之，子將何如？荀息曰：將死之。里克曰：無益也。荀叔曰：吾與先君言矣，不可以貳。能欲復言而愛身乎？雖無益也，將焉辟之？且人之欲善，誰不如我？我欲無貳，而能為人己乎？(Zuo, Xi 9:328-329).

to preserve the will of the late Lord Xian, he acted finally in what he believed to be “the interests of the lord’s house.”

Another famous example of the contradiction between *xin* and *zhong* is the anecdote about Chu Ni 鉏麇. In 607, the vicious Lord Ling of Jin 晉靈公 (r. 620–607) dispatched Chu Ni to murder the upright head of government, Zhao Dun 趙盾. When Chu Ni arrived at Zhao’s residence he was impressed by Zhao’s outlook. Embarrassed, Chu Ni uttered:

“He who does not forget respect and reverence is the master of the people. To murder the people’s master is to be disloyal, to disregard the ruler’s order is to be untrustworthy. Being one of these – is it not better to die?” – He dashed his head against a locust tree and died.<sup>35</sup>

These three examples reflect the complicated nature of ministerial ethics. Ideally, trustworthiness and loyalty should complement each other, as reflected in the term *zhongxin*. In fact, however, on some occasions the minister’s concern for the interests of the state contradicted the principle of obedience to the ruler. Such a conflict was not easily resolved; in two of the three cases the unlucky minister/servant committed suicide. Yet, importantly, none of these ministers submitted wholeheartedly to the ruler’s order. The outcomes of their action corresponded to the demands of loyalty and not of faithfulness.

Many other examples suggest that the Chunqiu concepts of the loyal minister differed greatly from the subsequent Zhanguo age. When a minister believed that his actions benefited the altars, he had the right not only to remonstrate, but even to use force against the ruler.<sup>36</sup> The most striking example of such a “loyal minister” is the aforementioned Zhao Dun, who preserved a good name despite his legal responsibility for the assassination of Lord Ling in 607.<sup>37</sup> Thus, even a *de*

<sup>35</sup> 不忘恭敬，民之主也。賊民之主，不忠；弃君之命，不信。有一於此，不如死也。 — 觸槐而死 (*Zuo*, Xuan 2:658).

<sup>36</sup> Remonstrance was of course the most common instance of “loyal disobedience” in Chinese history (see Liu Zehua 劉澤華, *Zhongguo chuantong zhengzhi sixiang fansi* 中國傳統政治思想反思 [Beijing 1987], pp. 154–169; cf. David Schaberg, “Remonstrance in Eastern Zhou Historiography,” *Early China* 22 [1997], pp. 133–179). The Chunqiu instances of “loyal disobedience,” however, frequently exceeded the norms of kind admonition. For instance, Yu Quan 鬻拳 of Chu was considered a paragon of loyalty despite his odd behavior: he threatened King Wen 楚文王 (r. 689–675) with weapons and prevented the king from entering the royal capital to encourage the ruler to conquer more lands (*Zuo*, Zhuang 9:211). Another odd paragon of loyalty is Qing Zheng 慶鄭 of Jin, who in 645 deliberately caused the Jin army defeat at the hands of Qin and effected Lord Hui’s 晉惠公 (r. 650–637) imprisonment; by this means Qing Zheng wanted to persuade Lord Hui to improve his rule. Both the *Zuo zhuan* and the *Guoyu* 國語 leave no doubt that Qing Zheng was continuously revered as a loyal minister (see *Zuo*, Xi 14:348, Xi 15:354–356; Xi 15:367; see also *Guoyu* 國語 [Shanghai 1990], “Jin yu 晉語 3” 9.8:333).

<sup>37</sup> For Zhao Dun’s story, see the *Zuo*, Xuan 2:655–663. Later Jin statesmen lauded his loyalty (see *Zuo*, Cheng 8:839; *Guoyu*, “Jin yu 6” 12.1:411).

*jure* murderer of his ruler could claim loyalty insofar as his actions seemed to correspond to state interests!

What is behind these unique interpretations of loyalty? Perhaps, due to their unusually high status, Chunqiu ministers considered themselves more as a ruler's companions than his subjects. Consequently, they regarded their primary duty to be toward the state and the altars whereas serving the lord was a secondary task. The truly loyal minister need not necessarily be obedient, provided his behavior was unselfish and was aimed at profiting the long-term interests of the state and the ruling house. The conviction that a minister should serve a ruler only insofar as the ruler's actions are beneficent to the state interests permeates Chunqiu thought. This belief is best represented in the following story about a leading Chunqiu thinker, Yan Ying 晏嬰 (Yanzi 晏子) from the state of Qi 齊. In 548, the Qi strongman Cui Zhu 崔杼 assassinated Lord Zhuang 齊莊公 (r. 553–548), massacred the lord's supporters and forbade mourning the deceased ruler. Yan Ying disobeyed Cui Zhu's orders and refused to leave the site of the crime:

Yanzi stood at the gate of the Cui lineage [mansions]. His followers asked: "Are you going to die?"

[Yanzi] said: "Was he only my ruler, the one for whom I should die?"

They asked: "So, will you go into exile?"

[Yanzi] said: "Have I committed any crime that I should flee?"

They asked: "Will you then return [to your house]?"

[Yanzi] said: "The ruler is dead – where shall I return to? To rule the people – does it mean to abuse the people? [The ruler] should preside over the altars of soil and grain. To serve the ruler – does it mean to think of one's emoluments? [The minister] should nourish the altars of soil and grain. Therefore, if the ruler dies for the sake of the altars of soil and grain, then [the minister] should die with him. If he flees for the sake of the altars of soil and grain, then [the minister] should flee with him. But if he dies or flees for personal reasons, then unless one is among his personal favorites, who will dare to be responsible for this?"<sup>38</sup>

Yan Ying clearly distinguished between the ruler as a private person and the ruler as a political institution. The minister ought to serve the ruler only in public matters, but he had no mandated responsibilities toward the ruler as a private person. Moreover, the ruler could not count on the obedience and loyalty of his ministers unless he performed his duties and upheld "the altars of soil and grain."<sup>39</sup> Personal conflicts between the ruler and his entourage were of no relevance to the

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<sup>38</sup> 晏子立於崔氏之門外，其人曰：死乎？曰：獨吾君也乎哉，吾死也？曰：行乎？曰：吾罪也乎哉，吾亡也？曰：歸乎？曰：君死，安歸？君民之，豈以陵民？社稷是主。臣君者，豈為其口實？社稷是養。故君為社稷死，則死之；為社稷亡，則亡之。若為己死，而為己亡，非其私暱，誰敢任之？(Zuo, Xiang 25:1098). Lord Zhuang previously seduced Cui Zhu's wife; hence, Yan Ying claimed that he died "for personal reasons."

<sup>39</sup> In a similar speech in 559, Master Kuang 師曠 of Jin claimed that the task of a good minister is not only to reprimand his ruler, but if necessary to expel him as well, provided the ruler failed to fulfill his obligations towards "the people" (Zuo, Xiang 14:1016-1018; for a detailed analysis of this speech, see Pines, *Foundations*, pp. 139-141).

ministers, whose major task was to “nourish the altars.” Ministers owed their ultimate allegiance to the altars, not personally to the ruler.

Yan Ying’s speech synthesizes Chunqiu views on ruler-minister relations. Hereditary ministers, frequently designated as “masters of the people” (*min zhi zhu* 民之主),<sup>40</sup> felt responsible for the destiny of their state, and treated the rulers as merely *primus inter pares*. Their fidelity to the lord was on condition that he performs his functions properly and ensures state interests. Otherwise, a ruler could not take for granted ministerial support. Loyalty to the altars definitely outweighed fidelity to the sovereign. In actual political conditions of the middle to late Chunqiu period, this concept of loyalty led to the further loss of the overlords’ power, as almost every insubordinate minister could openly defy the ruler’s orders in the name of “the altars.”

This legacy of ministerial responsibility, self-confidence, and a feeling of being the ruler’s companions had a profound impact on Zhanguo thought, and it might have influenced the authors of the Guodian texts. However, self-confident ministers were not the only players on the Chunqiu political scene. The lower segment of the hereditary aristocracy, the *shi*, developed a different concept of loyalty, a loyalty to the master, and not to the state. This notion of personal loyalty was of similarly profound consequences for Zhanguo political ethics.

In the pyramid-like Chunqiu society, high nobles (*qing dafu* 卿大夫) occupied a dual position. They were ministers with regard to the overlords but also virtually omnipotent rulers of their allotments (*cai yi* 采邑).<sup>41</sup> To rule these allotments the nobles established mini-courts staffed by personal retainers, the so-called “household servants” (*jia chen* 家臣). These retainers were usually, though not necessarily, recruited from the minor siblings of the master’s lineage; most of them belonged to the *shi* stratum. Their positions often were not hereditary but contractual.<sup>42</sup> The retainers did not enjoy hereditary land-holdings, and their

<sup>40</sup> See *Zuo*, Xuan 2:658, and Yang Bojun’s gloss on p. 658.

<sup>41</sup> On the dual position of the high nobles, see Wang Lanzhong 王蘭仲, “Chunqiu shidai qing dafu fengjian lingzhu xingzhi jianlun” 春秋時代卿大夫封建領主性質簡論, in: Nankai daxue lishixi Zhongguo gudaishi jiaoyanshi 南開大學歷史系中國古代史教研室 (ed.), *Zhongguo gudaishi dizhu jieji yanjiu lunji* 中國古代地主階級研究論集 (Tianjin 1984), pp. 104-111; cf. Qian Zongfan 錢宗範, “Xi Zhou Chunqiu shidai de shilu shiguan zhidu ji qi pohuai” 西周春秋時代的世祿世官制度及其破壞, in: *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 中國史研究 3 (1989), pp. 22-26. On the system of allotments, see Lü Wenyu 呂文鬱, “Zhou dai de caiyi zhidu” 周代的采邑制度, in: *Wenxian* 文獻 4 (1990), pp. 74-82.

<sup>42</sup> The appointment of a retainer was confirmed by presenting gifts to the master and recording the retainer’s name on bamboo tablets, concluding thereby a contract. Fu Qian (服虔, fl. late second century C.E.) assumed that contracts were life-long (his gloss on the *Zuo zhuan* is cited in *Shiji suoyin* 史記索隱 [*Shiji* 史記 (Beijing 1997), 67:2191]). However, this was not necessarily the case: for instance, a leading Qi 齊 aristocrat Bao Guo 鮑國 served as retainer of the Shi 施 lineage in the state of Lu 魯 before returning to his position as a *Qi dafu* (*Zuo*, Cheng 17:898-899). It is not clear, furthermore, whether or not contractual relations involved those retainers who were master’s siblings.

prosperity depended entirely on the emoluments granted by their master. Therefore, their dependence on the master was nearly absolute, and so was their allegiance to their lord.<sup>43</sup>

This dependence encouraged retainers to conceive of loyalty in entirely different terms than the ministers. Unlike their masters, who cared for the altars of soil and grain, retainers cared only for the master's person. A *Guoyu* 國語 story illustrates this concept.<sup>44</sup> In 527, Xun Wu 荀吳 of Jin conquered the city of Gu 鼓 ruled by the Di 狄 tribesmen and imprisoned its ruler Yuanzhi 怨支. The *Guoyu* tells:

Sushaxi 夙沙厘, the servant of the Gu ruler, gathered his family and followed [the imprisoned ruler]. The military official wanted to stop him, but [Sushaxi] refused, saying: "I serve the ruler, not the land. Am I called the ruler's servant, or the land's servant? Now the ruler is transferred [to another place], why should I depend on Gu?"

Muzi (Xun Wu) summoned him saying: "Gu has a [new] ruler. If you will wholeheartedly serve the [new] ruler, I shall assure you emolument and rank."

[Sushaxi] answered: "I presented gifts [of initiating my service] to the Di ruler of Gu, not to the Jin ruler of Gu. I heard, that after one presents gifts as a servant, he should not be of two minds. Presenting gifts [at the beginning of service] and [keeping the servants' name] on the bamboo tablets [until] death is an ancient law.<sup>45</sup> [In this case] the ruler has a prominent name, while servants do not rebel [against the master]. How dare I pursue private profits thus causing troubles to the *sikou*<sup>46</sup> and bring further confusion into ancient laws? Will this not cause unexpected [troubles]?"

Muzi sighed and said to his attendants: "How should I devote myself to virtue to gain such a servant!"<sup>47</sup>

The last phrase of Xun Wu may well be a moralizing appendix of the *Guoyu* compilers. In fact, there are no signs that Sushaxi's devotion to his master re-

<sup>43</sup> See Suzuki "Shunjū," pp. 9-11. For more about retainers, see Zhu Fenghan (*Shang Zhou*, pp. 531-540); Zhao Boxiong 趙伯雄, *Zhoudai guojia xingtai yanjiu* 周代國家形態研究 (Changsha 1990), pp. 245-251; Shao Weiguo 邵維國, "Zhoudai jiachen zhi shulun" 周代家臣制述論, in: *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 中國史研究 3 (1999), pp. 39-50.

<sup>44</sup> The *Guoyu* ("Discourses of the States") was apparently compiled during the fourth-third centuries B.C.E., and many of its materials were heavily edited by Zhanguo compilers. Nonetheless, some portions of this treatise, particularly parts of the books of Lu, Jin, and probably Chu, may be representative of Chunqiu thought. For a detailed discussion, see Pines, *Foundations*, pp. 39-45.

<sup>45</sup> See note 41 above and Hu Tu's speech below.

<sup>46</sup> *Sikou* 司寇, an official in charge of capturing criminals.

<sup>47</sup> 鼓子之臣曰夙沙厘, 以其孥行。軍吏執之, 辭曰: 我君是事, 非事土也。名君臣, 豈曰土臣? 今君實遷, 臣何賴於鼓? 穆子召之曰: 鼓有君矣, 爾心事君, 吾定爾綠綬。對曰: 臣委質於狄之鼓, 未委質於晉之鼓也。臣聞之: 委質為臣, 無有二心。委質而策死, 古之法也。君有烈名, 臣無叛質。敢即私利以煩司寇而亂舊法, 其若不虞何? 穆子嘆而謂其左右曰: 吾何德之務而有是臣也? (*Guoyu*, "Jin yu 9" 15.2:485-486).

sulted from Yuanzhi's extraordinary virtue. Personal qualities of the master were not relevant; the servant should simply serve his superior according to the life-long contract. The home state and its altars were of little concern to Sushaxi; his fate was connected only to that of the master. Personal loyalty prevailed over political and moral considerations.

What happened when this personal loyalty came in conflict with state interests? What happened when the retainer's master rebelled against the legitimate ruler of his state? The evidence presented in the *Zuo zhuan* suggests that retainers unequivocally preferred the interests of their masters on whom they were dependent. This may be demonstrated by the story about the followers of Prince Chonger of Jin. In 637, at the beginning of his abrupt rule, Lord Huai of Jin 晉懷公 (d. 636) issued an order that forbade Jin nobles to follow the fugitive Chonger. A leading noble, Hu Tu 狐突, refused to recall his sons Mao 毛 and Yan 偃 from Chonger's service. Lord Huai ordered the arrest of Hu Tu, but the latter continued to defy the ruler's orders:

Sons are able to hold office when a father teaches them loyalty: this is an ancient regulation. When the name is written on the bamboo tablet [to confirm the grant of an office] and official gifts are presented [at the beginning of a retainer's career], to be duplicitous is a crime. Now, my sons for many years are named as Chonger's [retainers]. If I recall them, that means teaching duplicity. If a father teaches sons duplicity, how is it possible to serve the ruler?<sup>48</sup>

Hu Tu did not try to justify his sons' behavior in terms of state interests. Chonger's retainers should have been considered rebels since they plotted against the legitimate rulers of Jin, lords Hui 晉惠公 (r. 650–637) and Huai. However, they owed personal allegiance to the fugitive scion, and these bonds, in the case of the retainers, were more binding than state interests. Thus, a retainer was obliged to follow his master even if the latter rebelled against the legitimate ruler.

Some overlords also recognized the right of a retainer to keep allegiance to a rebellious master, effectively ceding thereby part of their sovereignty to the nobles.<sup>49</sup> In 530, Nan Kuai 南蒯, a retainer of the Ji 季 lineage, intended to overthrow his master and restore the power of Lord Zhao of Lu 魯昭公 (r. 541–510). His plot failed and he fled to Qi. At the banquet, Lord Jing of Qi 齊景公 (r. 547–490) called him a rebel. "I only wanted to strengthen the lord's house," replied

<sup>48</sup> 子之能仕，父教之忠，古之制也。策名、委質，貳乃辟也。今臣之子名在重耳，有年數矣。若又召之，教之貳也。父教子貳，何以事君？(Zuo, Xi 23:402-403).

<sup>49</sup> In 552, Lord Ping of Jin 晉平公 (r. 557–532) pardoned Xin Yu 辛俞, a retainer of the rebellious Luan Ying 欒盈, accepting Xin Yu's claim that his sole ruler was Luan Ying and not the lord of Jin. Not surprisingly, two years later the retainers of the Luan lineage joined Luan Ying's rebellion in Quwo 曲沃 (see *Guoyu*, "Jin yu 8" 14.2:451-452; *Zuo*, Xiang 23:1073-1074).

Nan Kuai. Then a Qi noble, Zi Hanzan 子韓暫, stated: "When a household servant intends to strengthen the lord's house – this is the greatest crime."<sup>50</sup>

Acknowledging that the bonds of personal loyalty between the retainer and his master were of greater importance than allegiance to the overlord is astonishing. This attitude further contributed to the decline of the lord's power. During the late Chunqiu political troubles, retainers unequivocally sided with their masters, not with the overlords.<sup>51</sup> In 517, Zong Li 驂戾, the *sima* 司馬 of the Shusun 叔孫 lineage, who decided to side with the rebellious Ji lineage against the forces of Lord Zhao of Lu, plainly stated: "I am a household servant and dare not interfere in state matters. What is more beneficent for us: existence or elimination of the Ji lineage?"<sup>52</sup>

The ideas of legitimacy and benefit of the altars were of no concern to Zong Li, or to other retainers. They had to do their utmost to benefit their masters, following them in all cases, and refraining from involvement in high matters of the state and overlord. The retainers' fidelity to their masters should be limitless; a master could be right or wrong, but he was the master.<sup>53</sup>

The above discussion suggests that two different concepts of loyalty coexisted in the Chunqiu period: the intelligent and selfless loyalty of the ministers, directed to the state, and the personal fidelity of the retainers, directed to the master. The differences basically corresponded to the social distinctions in the aristocratic society of the Chunqiu age. Understandably, therefore, the erosion of the hereditary social order during the fifth to the fourth centuries B.C.E. brought about a reappraisal of traditional political ethics, and particularly of the concept of loyalty.

<sup>50</sup> 公曰：叛夫！對曰：臣欲張公室也。子韓暫曰：家臣而欲張公室，罪莫大焉！（Zuo, Zhao 14:1364). It is a bitter irony that such a conversation occurred at the court of the lord of Qi. After the death of Lord Jing (490) his heirs were exterminated by powerful ministers, and the state of Qi became since 480 the possession of the Tian lineage. Lord Jing's compliance with the domination of the aristocrats over their retainers at the expense of the ruling family may well have contributed to the bad end of his descendants.

<sup>51</sup> The clearest evidence of this development was the behavior of the retainers of Cui Zhu 崔杼, the strongman of Qi. In 548, as mentioned above, Cui Zhu plotted to assassinate Lord Zhuang. The lord was captured in Cui Zhu's house, where he intended to have illicit relations with Cui's wife. He tried to negotiate his freedom with Cui Zhu's retainers, but they responded: "Your servant, Cui Zhu, is seriously ill, and unable to hear your orders. Here, near the lord's palace, we, the household servants, are patrolling to find an adulterer, and we know of no other order." – The lord tried to climb the wall, but they shot him twice and killed him (Zuo, Xiang 25:1097).

<sup>52</sup> 我家臣也。不敢知國。凡有季氏與無，於我孰利？（Zuo, Zhao 25:1464). The reply of the Shusun elders that "without the Ji lineage, our lineage will cease to exist" determined Zong Li's choice to side with the rebels.

<sup>53</sup> Confucius' disciple, Zi Lu 子路, underlined this principle, explaining his willingness to die for his masters: "I benefited from their emoluments, I must help them in their troubles" (Zuo, Ai 16:1696).

## 3.

**Following *Dao* or Befriending the Ruler: Zhanguo Views of Loyalty**

Profound social changes from the late sixth century B.C.E. on began to undermine the kin-based social order of the Chunqiu period. Hereditary aristocrats, once proud masters of their states, lost their positions at the summit of state hierarchy. Former retainers, the members of the *shi* stratum, replaced their masters at the overlords' courts. By the mid-Zhanguo period, social boundaries formerly separating high-ranking nobles from the lowest segment of the ranked aristocracy all but disappeared. Although many *shi* still served as retainers – the so-called “guests” (*binke* 賓客) – of the powerful magnates, no impassable barriers prevented them from ascending to the top of the government apparatus. A humble, “plain-clothed” (*buyi* 布衣) *shi* making a brilliant career became common in Zhanguo states.<sup>54</sup>

Naturally, these changes generated a reappraisal of the *shi* self-image.<sup>55</sup> The servility of former retainers who dared not think of anything but the master's benefit gave place to the self-confidence of those who considered themselves the true masters of their states, possessors of the True Way – the *Dao*. New patterns of behavior of the *shi* consciously imitated those of their former superiors, the *dafu*. Yet, Zhanguo *shi* did not merely emulate their predecessors' concept of loyalty, but developed and modified it to fit their new condition and the new mode of their relations with the overlords.

Earlier we saw that Chunqiu ministerial loyalty reflected a uniquely high status of Chunqiu aristocrats, whose hereditary ranks encouraged them to conceive of the state as their possession. Zhanguo ministers, however, were in a different position. With few exceptions, they neither enjoyed hereditary positions at court, nor could they even expect life-long tenure. Most Zhanguo statesmen routinely crossed borders in search of better appointments. In the Chunqiu period, the phenomenon of “peripatetic statesmen” was an anomaly, but by early Zhanguo it became a norm. A minister could easily find himself at the court of a rival state serving the adversaries of his former masters. Under these conditions claiming loyalty to the altars was perhaps too hypocritical even for the cynical Zhanguo statesmen.

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<sup>54</sup> These changes are surveyed by Cho-yun Hsu, *Ancient China in Transition. An Analysis of Social Mobility, 722–222 B.C.* (Stanford, Calif. 1965), pp. 35–42; Yang Kuan 楊寬, *Zhanguo shi* 戰國史 (Shanghai 1998), pp. 213–277 *et passim*.

<sup>55</sup> An interesting example of the clash between old and new values appears in the *Lunyu*. Confucius' disciples, Zi Lu and Zi Gong 子貢, criticized the famous Qi statesman, Guan Zhong 管仲 (d. 645) for being unwilling to die for his earlier master, Prince Jiu 公子糾 (d. 686). Confucius in response praised Guan Zhong's political achievements during his long service for the erstwhile adversary, Lord Huan 齊桓公 (r. 685–643). Confucius' answer, thus, represented a new outlook of the *shi*, whose interests were in effect no longer bound to those of their masters (*Lunyu*, “Xian wen” 憲問 14.16–17:151–152).

To whom then should a Zhanguo minister owe his loyalty? What entity would allow him to defy the ruler's orders, while preserving a semblance of loyalty? In an age of shifting allegiances, this defiance was no longer possible in the name of the altars. As in many other instances, it was the spiritual leader of the Zhanguo *shi*, Confucius, who suggested an alternative, by proposing the following definition for a "great minister":

What is called "a great minister" is one who serves the ruler according to *Dao*, and when it is impossible, stops [serving him].<sup>56</sup>

Confucius found a new focus of loyalty for the *shi*, that is *Dao* 道, the Way, namely, the normative ideal of behavior. Elsewhere he reiterated that a person ought not accept riches and high position when not in accord with *Dao*, and he frequently criticized his disciples whose desire to achieve high-ranking positions often led to compromises with the moral and ethical values advocated by the Master.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Confucius evidently set a personal example to his disciples by resigning whenever service to a ruler contradicted his principles. He succinctly explained: "A bird can choose the tree, is it possible that a tree chooses the bird?"<sup>58</sup>

Confucius' followers eagerly adopted the Master's interpretation of loyalty as devotion to *Dao*. This interpretation preserved the minister's feeling that he is not a ruler's tool, but an intelligent and responsible political actor. Concomitantly, the declared adherence to *Dao* could conveniently justify crossing borders in search of a better appointment, since benefiting the altars was no longer the primary criterion of ministerial loyalty. Mencius, perhaps the most articulate spokesman of the mid-Zhanguo *shi*, suggested the following gradation of loyalties:

Some are the ruler's servants. They feel pleased with serving a certain ruler. Some are ministers of the altars of soil and grain. They feel pleased with bringing peace to the altars. Some are Heaven's subjects. They practice only whatever can be implemented in All under Heaven. There is a Great Man. He rectifies himself and things are rectified.<sup>59</sup>

Mencius distinguished between four kinds of politically involved *shi*, according to their focus of interests/loyalty. He placed personal fidelity to the ruler in the lowest rank, followed by loyalty to the altars. Those whose aspirations were to pacify All under Heaven ranked higher, and the highest position was that of the Great

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<sup>56</sup> 所謂大臣者：以道事君，不可則止 (*Lunyu*, "Xian jin" 先進 11.24:117).

<sup>57</sup> "Riches and nobility is what everybody wants, but if you cannot obtain them in accord with *Dao*, you should not dwell in them" (富與貴，是人之所欲也；不以其道得之，不處也。 *Lunyu*, "Li ren" 里仁 4.5:36). For Confucius' criticism of his career-seeking disciples, Zhong You 仲由 (542–480) and Ran Qiu 冉求 (b. 522), see *Lunyu*, "Xian jin" 11.17:115; "Ji shi" 季氏 16.1:172.

<sup>58</sup> 鳥則擇木，木豈能擇鳥？ (*Zuo*, Ai 11:1667). See also Chan, "Confucius," pp. 49–70.

<sup>59</sup> 有事君人者，事是君，則為容悅者也。有安社稷臣者，以安社稷為悅者也。有天民者，達可行於天下而後行之者也。有大人者，正己而物正者也 (*Mengzi*, "Jin xin shang" 13.19:308).

Man, who rectified others by rectifying himself. The ministers of the Chunqiu period, loyal servants of the altars, were placed just above personal retainers, and at a significant distance from the Great Man.<sup>60</sup>

We cannot discuss here at length the Mencian concept of the Great Man. For the purposes of the present discussion what is most important is that Mencius evidently viewed those ministers who preserved loyalty to the ruler and the state as not sufficiently highly aspiring *shi*. True loyalty should be only to one's moral and ethical principles, to *Dao*.<sup>61</sup> On another occasion Mencius clarified that whether a minister remained loyal to a single ruler or not, did not matter much, as long as he followed the path of benevolence (*ren* 仁).<sup>62</sup> Elsewhere Mencius emphatically explained who deserved the name of the Great Man:

He dwells in the broadest place under Heaven, he occupies the correct place under Heaven, he goes along the Great Way of All under Heaven. When he fulfills his will, he proceeds together with the people; when he cannot fulfill his will, he follows his Way alone. Riches and honors cannot entice him; poverty and humility cannot move him; awe and military power cannot bend him. This is called the Great Man.<sup>63</sup>

This Great Man, confident in his Way, is, of course, the model minister in Mencius' eyes. Understandably, this Great Minister should serve the ruler only if this service conforms to the minister's moral *credo*. Mencius did not conceal his deep contempt for those who benefited the ruler when the latter did not follow the Way of benevolence.<sup>64</sup> A true minister had the right not only to reprimand his lord, as many did long before Confucius and Mencius, but also to leave him, whenever the service violated the minister's principles.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Mencius was consistent in his order of priorities. Elsewhere he stated that "the people" (*min* 民) were the most precious in the state (and, accordingly, the ultimate source of concern/loyalty), followed by the altars and the ruler (*Mengzi*, "Jin xin xia" 盡心下 14.14:328).

<sup>61</sup> Of course, many Zhanguo thinkers conceived of *Dao* as the universally applicable True Way rather than personal criteria of moral behavior. Yet as the precise meaning of *Dao* was continuously contested, politically following *Dao* amounted to following personal principles of proper conduct.

<sup>62</sup> See *Mengzi*, "Gaozi xia" 告子下 12.6:284. Among benevolent ministers, Mencius mentioned Yi Yin 伊尹, who "five times approached Tang [湯, the founder of the Shang 商 (ca. 1570–1046) dynasty], five times approached Jie [桀, the vicious last ruler of the Xia dynasty, and Tang's victim]." Thus, even serving mortal adversaries was legitimate insofar as this could be justified by adherence to moral principles.

<sup>63</sup> 居天下之廣居，立天下之正位，行天下之大道；得志，與民由之，不得志，獨行其道；富貴不能淫，貧賤不能移，威武不能屈 — 此之謂大丈夫 (*Mengzi*, "Teng Wen Gong xia" 滕文公下 6.2:140–141).

<sup>64</sup> See *Mengzi*, "Gaozi xia" 12.9:293.

<sup>65</sup> In extreme cases Mencius approved even of the minister's right to overthrow the unrighteous ruler (*Mengzi*, "Liang Hui Wang xia" 梁惠王下 2.8:42). This radical case of legitimate insubordination, however, deserves separate discussion.

Mencius clearly stated that the Great Man should be loyal to *Dao* alone. This view, which further developed the ideas of Confucius, was quite popular among many *shi* of the Zhanguo era. Not only Confucius and Mencius declared their resolute unwillingness to compromise moral principles for the sake of appointments; similar views evidently prevailed among adherents of other intellectual currents as well. Whereas Mozi 墨子 (ca. 460–390) never openly advocated defying the ruler's orders in the name of *Dao*, this *topos* is present in accounts of his life circulated by his disciples.<sup>66</sup> Daoist recluses, whose understanding of *Dao* differed from that of Confucius and Mencius, shared, nevertheless, their belief in *Dao* as the primary focus of personal loyalty. Many Zhanguo *shi* highly esteemed the alleged paragons of pure morality, Bo Yi 伯夷 and Shu Qi 叔齊, who abandoned even the righteous King Wu of Zhou 周武王 when the king's behavior contradicted their moral principles. The anonymous tradition, later cited by Xunzi 荀子, (ca. 310–218), “follow *Dao*, do not follow the ruler,” might have expressed the wide-shared belief of Zhanguo *shi*.<sup>67</sup>

A concept of “following *Dao*, not the ruler” was morally laudable, and it enhanced the *shi* self-esteem. Nevertheless, its practical implications in Zhanguo political life remained limited. It might have been applicable to a person of the moral stature of Confucius or Mozi, but how could it be applied to an average *shi*? *Dao* was after all an elusive concept, disputed by dozens of contending “schools,” and it could not serve as a guideline of the elite's behavior. Thus, career-oriented members of the ruling stratum often conceived of the actions of their high-minded colleagues as not very prudent. Mozi plainly admitted that righteous resignation from the office could be regarded as a manifestation of insanity (*kuang* 狂).<sup>68</sup>

Understandably, therefore, prevalent Zhanguo views of loyalty stressed personal fidelity to the ruler rather than following the *Dao*. This notion of personal loyalty was generically linked to the earlier retainers' legacy, but it differed significantly from Chunqiu antecedents. Chunqiu master-retainer relations, while possessing certain reciprocal (contractual) features were, nevertheless, markedly

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<sup>66</sup> See Wu Yujiang 吳毓江 (annot.), *Mozi jiaozhu* 墨子校注 (Beijing 1994), “Geng Zhu” 耕柱 46:659; “Lu Wen” 魯問 49:737-739; “Gongshu” 公輸 50:764-765. I adopt Wu Yujiang's opinion, according to which the so-called “second group” of the *Mozi*'s chapters (chapters 8 to 37) generally represents Mozi's authentic views, while the “fourth group” (chapters 46 to 50) was prepared by his disciples after the master's death (see his “Mozi gepian zhenwei kao” 墨子各篇真偽考 in: *Mozi*, pp. 1025-1055).

<sup>67</sup> For Bo Yi and Shu Qi as paragons of morality, see Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋 (Shanghai 1990), “Cheng lian” 誠廉 12.4:633-634; for the conflicting views of their behavior, see Vitaly Rubin, “A Chinese Don Quixote: Changing Attitudes to Po-i's Image,” in: Irene Eber (ed.), *Confucianism: The Dynamics of Tradition* (New York – London 1986), pp. 155-184, 203-211. For Xunzi's citation, see Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing 1992), “Chen Dao” 臣道 13:250, and the discussion below.

<sup>68</sup> See *Mozi*, “Geng Zhu” 46:659.

hierarchical in nature. More often than not, a retainer was supposed to engage in life-long service to his master, and his fidelity was expected to be nearly absolute. By the late Chunqiu, however, these life-long bonds of retainers to their masters were gone, giving place to more flexible patron-client ties. Contracts could no longer ensure the retainers' attachment to their masters, and some nobles had to resort to the religiously significant ceremony of alliance (*meng* 盟) to preserve the fidelity of their servants.<sup>69</sup> These means, however, apparently failed as well. Most Zhanguo stories about retainers (*binke*) emphasize the ease with which they abandoned their masters and shifted allegiance to another powerful figure.<sup>70</sup> This flexibility brought about a profound reappraisal of the nature of personal bonds.

The new vision of personal loyalty emphasized reciprocity rather than hierarchy between a ruler/master and his ministers/retainers.<sup>71</sup> To ensure continuous fidelity, a ruler had to take into consideration his ministers' dignity and beware of insulting them. Zhanguo *shi*, inspired by the meteoric rise of their stratum, developed an extraordinarily high sense of self-esteem, which encouraged many contemporary ministers to view themselves as equal – if not superior – to their rulers.

At the least, *shi* pride required polite treatment by superiors. Confucius reportedly explained to Lord Ding 魯定公 (r. 509–495) the law of ruler-minister relations: “A ruler should employ a minister according to ritual (*li* 禮); the minister should serve the ruler loyally (*zhong* 忠).”<sup>72</sup> *Li* in this phrase refers primarily to the polite treatment of the minister.<sup>73</sup> Confucius implied that ministerial loyalty is not unconditional, but is traded in exchange for the ruler's respect.

Confucius' view apparently reflected the prevalent mood of members of his stratum. The preoccupation with polite treatment of *shi* by their superiors became

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<sup>69</sup> An example of such *meng* between a master and his retainers are the early fifth-century B.C.E. Houma 侯馬 alliances (see Zhu Fenghan's discussion in *Shang Zhou*, p. 539; for more about the Houma alliances, see Susan R. Weld, “The Covenant Texts at Houma and Wenxian,” in: Edward L. Shaughnessy (ed.), *New Sources of Early Chinese History: An Introduction to Reading Inscriptions and Manuscripts* [Berkeley 1997], pp. 125-160). The increasing importance of *meng* in Zhanguo society is discussed in Mark E. Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Ancient China* (Albany 1990), pp. 48-50.

<sup>70</sup> Many anecdotes about Zhanguo *binke* were conveniently collected by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–90 B.C.E.) in several biographies of Zhanguo personalities (*Shiji*, 75-78:2351-2399).

<sup>71</sup> The ensuing reconceptualization of personal loyalty applied both to *binke* and to their more successful colleagues who ascended to the top of the government apparatus and became high-ranking ministers. For the ease with which *binke* could become high ministers, see Masubuchi, *Chūgoku kodai no shakai*, pp. 207-211 *et passim*.

<sup>72</sup> 君使臣以禮，臣事君以忠 (*Lunyu*, “Ba yi” 八佾 3.19:30).

<sup>73</sup> This interpretation is suggested, for instance, by Mencius (*Mengzi*, “Gongsun Chou xia” 公孫丑下 4.2:88-89; “Wan Zhang xia” 10.7:247-248); cf. similar invocations of *li* in the *Lüshi chunqiu* (“Xia xian” 15.3:878; “Jin ting” 謹聽 13.5:704; “Jiao zi” 驕恣 20.7:1404).

one of the major *topoi* in the Zhanguo *shi* ethos. Mencius refused to meet rulers if they summoned him disrespectfully. Elsewhere he stated:

When the ruler regards his ministers as his limbs, they regard him as their heart and belly; when the ruler regards his ministers as dogs or horses, they regard him as one of the common folk, when the ruler regards his ministers as the ground or the grass, they regard him as an enemy.<sup>74</sup>

This unequivocal statement leaves no doubt that ruler-minister relations are based on *quid pro quo*: a ruler should expect no more than the same attitude he displayed toward his ministers. Thus, to ensure ministerial loyalty, the ruler should treat his subordinates with the utmost respect. Numerous anecdotes scattered throughout late Zhanguo texts repeatedly tell of powerful leaders who treated *shi* as their equals, if not superiors, in order to obtain the latter's fidelity. The message of these anecdotes is succinctly summarized in a saying attributed to a famous assassin-retainer, Yu Rang 豫讓, who spared no efforts to avenge his late master, Zhi Bo 知伯 (d. 453). When asked why he did not profess a similar loyalty toward his previous masters, the Fan 范 and the Zhonghang 中行 lineages, Yu Rang reportedly answered:

When I served the Fan and the Zhonghang lineages, they treated me as a commoner, and I repaid them as a commoner. Zhi Bo treated me as the *shi* of the state, and I repaid him as the *shi* of the state.<sup>75</sup>

Yu Rang made it clear that the servant's loyalty was not an obvious obligation towards his master, but rather a bonus given in exchange for respectful and polite treatment. Only he who recognized the worth of his retainers/ministers could expect devotion in return, or as Yu Rang stated elsewhere: "A *shi* dies for the sake of the one who profoundly understands him."<sup>76</sup> This emphasis on profound understanding (*zhi ji* 知己, lit., "to understand the other as you understand yourself") is indicative of the increasing demand for reciprocity in ruler-minister relations.<sup>77</sup> Mere respect was not enough; the *shi* expected a sort of spiritual affinity from their masters. This expectation may explain the appearance of the notion of ruler-minister friendship, which became strongly pronounced in late Zhanguo texts.

In the Zhanguo discourse friendship acquired its modern meaning as "sharing common desires," namely, spiritual affinity among equals. Recently, Zha Chang-

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<sup>74</sup> 君之視臣如手足，則臣視君如腹心；君之視臣如犬馬，則臣視君如國人；君之視臣如土芥，則臣視君如寇讎 (Mengzi, "Li Lou xia" 離婁下 8.3:186).

<sup>75</sup> 臣事范、中行氏，范、中行氏以眾人遇臣，臣故眾人報之；知伯以國士遇臣，臣故國士報之 (He Jianzhang 何建章, *Zhanguo ce zhushi* 戰國策注釋 [Beijing 1991], "Zhao ce 趙策 1" 18.4:618).

<sup>76</sup> 士為知己者死 (*Zhanguo ce*, "Zhao ce 1" 18.4:617).

<sup>77</sup> For more on the importance of "understanding" *shi*, see *Lüshi chunqiu*, "Zhi shi" 知士 9.3:490-491; "Bu qin" 不侵 12.5:640; *Zhanguo ce*, "Chu ce 楚策 4" 17.11:589-590; *Shiji* 77:2378-2381.

guo asserted that the concept of ruler-minister friendship may be present implicitly already in the *Lunyu*.<sup>78</sup> By the mid-Zhanguo, this notion became prominent in numerous texts. Mencius, for instance, lauded Yao 堯, who befriended Shun 舜: “when superiors revere inferiors, this means ‘respecting the worthy’.”<sup>79</sup> The Guodian texts discussed above best represent this trend. Some rulers too evidently recognized the need to befriend and to respect *shi*.<sup>80</sup>

Imposition of friendship, the norm of relations among equals, on the supposedly hierarchical ruler-minister ties epitomizes the assertive attitude of Zhanguo *shi*. Yet, some proud ministers were no longer satisfied even with this presumed equality with the rulers. In the atmosphere of escalating self-confidence of the *shi*, a more radical view of ruler-minister relations emerged. Radical *shi* argued that the worthy members of their stratum should be treated not as the ruler’s friends, but as his teachers, that is *de facto* superiors. A passage from the *Mencius* states:

Lord Mu went several times to visit Zi Si, asking him: “In antiquity, how did [the rulers] of the one-thousand-chariot [i.e., small] state manage to befriend *shi*?” Zi Si did not like that, and answered: “Men of antiquity had a saying: ‘talk of service,’ did they say: ‘talk of friendship’?” As Zi Si did not like [the lord’s question], why did he not answer: “Judging by position, you are the ruler, and I am the minister – how dare I befriend a ruler? Judging by virtue (*de* 德), you serve me – how can you befriend me?”<sup>81</sup>

Thus, for “worthy *shi*” befriending the ruler was humiliating; nothing short of the position of the ruler’s teacher could satisfy them. Zi Si and his follower, Mencius, believed that the ruler should *serve* (*shi* 事) the worthy minister, thus reversing the ostensible hierarchy. Leaving aside the dangerous political implications of the assertion that the minister’s virtue outweighed that of the ruler, we should ask what kind of loyalty could be expected of the minister in such a case? Can we ever speak of the master’s loyalty towards his disciples?

The notion of a *shi* being a ruler’s superior became quite popular in late Zhanguo discourse. The manifesto of the Zhanguo *shi*, the late-third-century B.C.E. compendium, *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, lauds outstanding *shi*: “a ruler cannot ob-

<sup>78</sup> Zha pointed out that the *Lunyu* discusses in almost identical terms *shi* obligations towards the ruler and the friend, which apparently implies that Confucius envisioned both systems of relations as basically the same (Zha, “You yu Liang Zhou,” pp. 102-104).

<sup>79</sup> 用上敬下，謂之尊賢 (*Mengzi*, “Wan Zhang xia” 10.3:237).

<sup>80</sup> Lord Mu of Lu 魯穆公 (r. 409–377) reportedly asked Confucius’ grandson, Zi Si 子思 (483–402) how to befriend *shi* of All under Heaven (*Mengzi*, “Wan Zhang xia” 10.7:248), while Lord Wen of Wei 魏文侯 (r. 445–396) was hailed in later generations for his alleged willingness to befriend and to respect worthy *shi* (*Lüshi chunqiu*, “Ju nan” 舉難 19.8:1320).

<sup>81</sup> 繆公亟見於子思，曰：「古千乘之國以友士，何如？」子思不悅，曰：「古之人有言曰：「事之云乎」，豈曰友之云乎？」子思之不悅也，豈不曰：「以位，則子，君也，我，臣也，何敢與君友也？以德，則子事我者也，奚可以與我友？」」 (*Mengzi*, “Wan Zhang xia” 10.7:248).

tain them as friends, the Son of Heaven cannot obtain them as ministers.”<sup>82</sup> The *Lüshi chunqiu* repeatedly emphasizes the importance of *shi* to the destiny of the state, claiming that the political standing of “plain-clothed” *shi* may surpass that of the rulers. Rulers should never behave arrogantly towards *shi*, but must tolerate the haughty behavior of their advisors; they should always remember that *shi* are their teachers, and not mere servants.<sup>83</sup> The late Zhanguo *Jing fa* 經法 manuscript, excavated in 1973 in Mawangdui 馬王堆, Hunan, further elaborates these arguments:

The Emperor’s minister is named minister, but in fact he is a teacher. The king’s minister is named minister, but in fact he is a friend. The hegemon’s minister is named minister, but in fact [he is a guest. The imperiled ruler’s] minister is named minister, but in fact he is a servant. The due-to-perish ruler’s minister is named minister, but in fact he is a slave.<sup>84</sup>

The above passage implies that the ruler’s destiny depends primarily on the mode of his relations with his ministers. The more the ruler respects his aides, the more he can rely on their gratitude and selfless service. Otherwise, a *shi* can follow the advice of the Guodian authors: “when ruler and minister are unable to stay together, you can sever [these relations]; when you dislike [the ruler], you may leave him.”

The above sayings represent the view of radically minded *shi*, but their impact was not limited to the *shi* stratum. Some rulers also adopted the views of their aides that *shi* are the most precious state treasure. A striking evidence for this compliance with the *shi* ideal is again supplied by archeological discovery. A tomb of King Cuo of Zhongshan 中山, excavated in 1974–1978, yielded among others a *ding* 鼎 caldron with a long inscription of 462 characters.<sup>85</sup> The inscription commemorates a successful military expedition carried out by the Zhongshan minister named Zhou 周 against the state of Yan 燕 in 316 or 315. In the inscrip-

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<sup>82</sup> 國君不得而友，天子不得而臣 (*Lüshi chunqiu*, “Shi jie” 士節 12.2:622-623). A more extreme passage claims that as for the great *shi* “Five emperors could not obtain them as friends, three kings could not obtain them as teachers; only when they cast aside their emperors’ and kings’ airs could they approach and be able to obtain [these *shi*]” (五帝弗得而友，三王弗得而師，去其帝王之色，則近可得之。“Xia xian” 下賢 15.3:879). For similar views, see also Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji jijie* 禮記集解 (Beijing 1996), “Ru xing” 儒行 57:1407.

<sup>83</sup> See *Lüshi chunqiu*, “Zun shi” 尊師 4.3:204-206; “Jie li” 介立 12.3 627-628; “Bu qin” 不侵 12.5:640-641; “Xia xian” 下賢 15.3:878-880; “Shun shuo” 順說 15.5:905-906; “Jiao zi” 驕恣 20.7:1404-1405.

<sup>84</sup> 帝者臣，名臣，其實師也。王者臣，名臣，其實友也。霸者臣，名臣，其實[賓也。危者]臣，名臣，其實庸也。亡者臣，名臣，其實虜也 (Mawangdui Hanmu boshu zhengli xiaozu 馬王堆漢墓帛書整理小組, *Jing fa* 經法 [Beijing 1976], “Cheng” 稱, pp. 89-90). For a similar argument, see *Zhanguo ce*, “Yan ce 燕策 1” 29.12:1110-1111.

<sup>85</sup> The state of Zhongshan was established by the White Di 白狄 tribesmen in northern Hebei and Shanxi. The following discussion is based on Gilbert L. Mattos, “Eastern Zhou Bronze Inscriptions,” in: Shaughnessy (ed.), *New Sources*, pp. 104-111.

tion the king hails Zhou's achievements; below we shall cite the most interesting portion of the royal declaration:

Heaven sent down a gracious mandate to my state, [therefore we] have this loyal servant, Zhou, [who] is able to be acquiescent and obedient, [so that] nothing does not accord with humaneness. Reverently compliant with Heaven's virtue, he thereby assists me, the Lonely Man, on the left and the right. He made me understand the responsibility of the altars of soil and grain, and the proprieties of servant and master. From dawn to dusk he does not slacken in leading and guiding me, the Lonely Man.<sup>86</sup>

The king spared no superlatives in depicting Zhou, and even stated that Zhou's assistance was tantamount to his receipt of Heaven's mandate (*tian ming* 天命). He seemingly adopted the view that a righteous minister should be the ruler's teacher; hence, he emphasized that Zhou "led and guided" him. What else can better illustrate the ruler's compliance with the above-mentioned *Jing fa* idea that "the Emperor's minister is named minister, but in fact he is a teacher"? Noteworthy, the king's effusive panegyric of Zhou was not aimed only to propagate the king's "respect to the worthy," but was placed in a royal tomb, apparently as a report to the ancestors.<sup>87</sup> It may well reflect, therefore, the king's genuine belief in the overall importance of his aide to the state's prosperity. Even Mencius could not have possibly demanded more!

Perhaps the most radical manifestation of the atmosphere of diminishing distinctions between rulers and ministers is an abdication legend, which gained popularity in the Zhanguo age. The story of the sage emperor Yao yielding the throne to his worthy minister, Shun, later paralleled by a story of Shun's abdication in favor of his worthy aide, Yu 禹, is well known and does not require detailed discussion here. What is noteworthy is that abdication legend does not merely promulgate the principle of "elevating the worthy" as noticed by many scholars, but, more precisely, advocates elevating a worthy minister. Indeed, if a minister can be a ruler's friend or a teacher, why could not he become a ruler's heir?<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> I slightly modify Constance Cook's translation as it appears in Mattos, "Eastern Zhou", pp. 106-107. My major modification is changing past to the present tense, as there is no reason to suggest that Zhou's positive qualities ended with the king's maturity as assumed by Cook and Mattos.

<sup>87</sup> For the function of the bronze inscriptions as the means of communicating with the ancestors and their being a media to express the donor's *Weltanschauung*, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Issues in Western Zhou Studies: A Review Article," in: *Early China* 18 (1993), pp. 145-171.

<sup>88</sup> The abdication legend and its contradicting versions are extensively discussed by Sarah Allan in *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China* (San Francisco 1981); see also Angus C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao. Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, Ill. 1989), pp. 292-299. This legend apparently did not exist prior to the Zhanguo period (the only reference to Yao's abdication in the *Zuo zhuan* [Wen 18:633-643] is definitely a later interpolation [see Pines, *Foundations*, pp. 234-238]). Its implications were not limited to philosophical discourse: at least in one case the imprudent ruler, King Kuai 瞽 of Yan, was enticed in 318 to

The above examples, as well as other Zhanguo manifestations of near equality between rulers and ministers,<sup>89</sup> suggest that far from being a marginal manifestation of ministerial self-confidence, the Guodian texts are rather a tip of the iceberg, and may well be representative of the widespread mood of the late Zhanguo period. In this intellectual atmosphere ministerial loyalty was conditioned by the ruler's respectful treatment of his aides, and the minister's obedience to the sovereign's commands could not be taken for granted. Understandably, ministers might have liked this situation. But what was its impact on social and political stability? What were the implications of the *shi* self-confidence on ruler-minister relations? These issues will be discussed below.

#### 4.

#### From Friends to Foes – The Late Zhanguo Reappraisal of Loyalty

Until now I have discussed the concept of loyalty from the *shi* viewpoint. Self-confident Zhanguo ministers viewed the rulers as their equals and owed them a loyalty due to friends, not to superiors. This sense of equality may be puzzling. While Chunqiu ministers really shared the ruler's power due to their hereditary position at court and kinship ties with the overlord, this was not the case with their Zhanguo heirs. By the mid-fourth-century B.C.E. most rulers of Zhanguo states had successfully regained their power, eliminating dangerous aristocratic lineages, diminishing hereditary service and hereditary landholding and imposing close surveillance on government apparatus. Many Zhanguo overlords were direct descendants of the former ministerial lineages of the Chunqiu period, and they were determined to prevent a new usurpation by curbing ministerial power.<sup>90</sup> What may explain then the self-confidence of Zhanguo ministers?

A possible answer to this question may be the unique freedom of action of Zhanguo ministers. Zhanguo *shi* lived in a world of transparent boundaries. Their

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abdicate in favor of his "worthy minister," Zi Zhi 子之, with grave consequences for the state of Yan. Political sensitivity of the abdication issue justifies Graham's assertion that extant textual references to it may be merely a tip of the iceberg (*Disputers*, p. 293).

<sup>89</sup> An important indication of the extraordinary high position of Zhanguo ministers *versus* the rulers are ritual regulations of that age which, unlike in the imperial period, demanded explicitly respectful treatment of the ministers by the ruler. See an excellent discussion by Du Jiaji 杜家驥, "Zhongguo gudai junchen zhi li yanbian kaolun" 中國古代君臣之禮演變考論, in: Zhang Guogang 張國剛 (ed.), *Zhongguo shehui lishi pinglun* 中國社會歷史評論 1 (Tianjin 1999), pp. 255-269.

<sup>90</sup> Four out of seven Zhanguo superpowers (Qi, Zhao 趙, Wei 魏, and Han 韓) were established by descendants of the ministerial houses, which effectively eliminated the power of their former rulers. In the Zhanguo period, a similar usurpation occurred in the state of Song 宋, and almost happened in Yan 燕. To prevent recurrence of these events, Zhanguo overlords did their best to concentrate power in their hands. See a detailed discussion by Mark E. Lewis, "Warring States: Political History," in: Michael Loewe – Edward L. Shaughnessy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Ancient China. From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.* (Cambridge 1999), pp. 597-603; Yang Kuan, *Zhanguo shi*, pp. 213-277.

lives are comparable to that of qualified personnel in a market economy: shifting from one company to another in search of better conditions is neither contemptible nor disgraceful.<sup>91</sup> A high minister who felt his position declining and that his advice was no longer heeded could easily cross the border and serve a new master. Unlike Chunqiu hereditary office-holders, the Zhanguo *shi* viewed their loyalty as directed personally to the overlord, and not to the altars. Hence, the altars' destiny mattered little if the minister's ties with his ruler deteriorated. Eventually, most Zhanguo ministers conceived a notion that one can owe loyalty to the altars and not personally to the ruler as characteristic of the bygone Chunqiu age, inapplicable to the modern situation.<sup>92</sup> A conflict with the ruler severed then all obligations to the polity.

This freedom of action bolstered the *shi* standing versus the rulers, but also added increasing tension to ruler-minister ties. Shifting allegiances of leading ministers generated an atmosphere of mistrust between the ruler and his aides. A moral justification for shifting loyalties could rarely conceal the private motives of the turncoats. It was all too clear that most *shi* sought primarily wealth and power, rather than *Dao*. To illustrate this point we may briefly discuss a *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 anecdote about a famous diplomat, Su Qin 蘇秦 (d. 284), which may be representative of the late Zhanguo intellectual atmosphere.

At the beginning of his career, Su Qin reportedly arrived at the state of Qin, where he attempted to persuade King Hui 秦惠王 (r. 337–311) to adopt a more assertive military policy with the ultimate aim “to annex the overlords’ [states], to swallow the world, to declare you emperor, and to bring about orderly rule.” As the king rejected the advice, and refused to employ Su Qin, the latter returned home to be treated with open contempt by his parents, wife, and sister-in-law. Su Qin pledged to avenge this humiliation, for which Qin was responsible. Hence, he moved to the state of Zhao 趙, where he became an architect of the anti-Qin (“vertical,” *zong* 縱) alliance.

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<sup>91</sup> Han Feizi, arguably the most astute of Zhanguo political analysts, summarized this situation: “A minister brings to the rulers’ market [his ability] to exhaust his force to the point of death; a ruler brings to the ministers’ market [his ability] to bestow ranks and emoluments. Ruler-minister relations are based not on the intimacy of father and child, but on calculation [of benefits].” (臣盡死力以與君市；君垂爵祿以與臣市；君臣之際，非父子之親也，計數之所出也。 *Han Feizi*, “Nan yi” 難一 36:352).

<sup>92</sup> This understanding is most explicit in one of the *Zhanguo ce* anecdotes. King Wei of Chu 楚威王 (r. 339–329) asked his minister, Zi Hua 子華, to tell him about paragon ministers of his state who preferred the interests of the altars to their own. Zi Hua told several anecdotes about these model ministers, all of whom lived in the Chunqiu period, but was embarrassed when the king remarked: “All these are men of antiquity; are men of our days able to behave so?” (“*Chu ce* 1” 14.20:523–525). Significantly, almost all the paragons of loyalty to the altars in Zhanguo texts are Chunqiu ministers (see, for instance, Allyn W. Rickett [transl.], *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China. A Study*. Vol. I [Princeton, N.J. 1985], p. 290; *Liji jijie*, “Tan Gong xia” 檀弓下 11:279).

Su Qin made a brilliant career in the state of Zhao, achieving the highest position and acquiring fabulous riches. His parents, wife, and sister-in-law treated him thereafter with utmost respect and awe. The anecdote's authors laud him: "Su Qin was after all merely a *shi* from poor environs, dwelling in a mud cave with mulberries instead of doors. Yet, leaning on the dashboard and holding the reins, he traveled across the world, spoke to kings and overlords and confounded their aides, and nobody in the world was a match for him." The anecdote ends with Su Qin's exclamation: "Alas! When one is poor and humble, parents do not treat him as a son; when one is rich and noble, relatives are afraid of him. When a man lives in this world, how can he ignore the power of his rank and the affluence of his wealth?"<sup>93</sup>

The historical veracity of this anecdote need not concern us here. What is important is the moral lesson its authors convey. For Su Qin, the content of the proposed policy mattered very little: hence, throughout most of his life he struggled against the state which he wanted to benefit at the dawn of his career. Su Qin concerned himself with nothing but personal welfare. He sought from the overlords neither *Dao* nor friendship, but power and riches, and his only objective was benefit. Whereas Mencius railed against profit-seeking,<sup>94</sup> the *Zhanguo ce* authors hail Su Qin and envy his success. By no stretch of the imagination can we discern in the story a hint of criticism. Su Qin, rather than Mencius, was the model for *Zhanguo shi*. Behind the façade of talks about ruler-minister friendship and about "respecting the worthy," we find the ugly cynicism of the late *Zhanguo* age: loyalty was given primarily if not exclusively in exchange for personal benefits.

This understanding sheds a different light on the lofty ideals of the *Zhanguo shi* surveyed in the previous section. While a minister could claim ideological or personal reasons for his resignation from the office, the ruler usually suspected that his aide was merely seeking a better career at the rival court. Only few *shi* would prefer the life of a recluse, after their resignation.<sup>95</sup> Most would normally shift their allegiance to a different ruler. An overlord, then, had to consider the possibility that his closest aides may one day be acting against the interests of the state which they previously served. To make things worse, some shrewd ministers succeeded in serving simultaneously two or more masters, thereby undermin-

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<sup>93</sup> *Zhanguo ce*, "Qin ce 秦策 1" 3.2:74-76.

<sup>94</sup> See Mengzi, "Liang Hui Wang shang" 1.1:1-2; "Gaozi xia" 12.4:280.

<sup>95</sup> For the recluses of the *Zhanguo* age, see Aat Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves. The Development of the Chinese Eremitical Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty* (Hong Kong 1990), pp. 19-73. This option, however, was not particularly attractive for most *shi*, who conceived of their political career as both a respectable way to make a living, and as the best way of self-fulfillment. Mencius, for instance, stated that a *shi* losing his position was like an overlord losing his state; a *shi* sought an office after crossing the boundaries just like a farmer had to till the soil wherever he was; remaining without an appointment for three months was a reason to offer a *shi* condolences (Mengzi, "Teng Wen Gong xia" 6.3:142).

ing the very rationale of ruler-minister relations.<sup>96</sup> Such people, like their paragon, Su Qin, were admired by many *shi* of their age.

The world dominated by Su Qin and his like was not an ideal place for ruler-minister friendship and spiritual affinity. On the contrary, mutual distrust was the rule. Zhanguo texts repeatedly tell about unfortunate ministers who failed to prove their fidelity to the masters, and encountered suspicion and slander.<sup>97</sup> Other stories tell about naïve rulers who relied on treacherous aides, endangering their states or their position. Indeed, in a world of deceit where noble sayings and high principles often disguised mean personal motives, the trusted aide of today could become the deceitful subject of tomorrow.<sup>98</sup> Amicable relations in the higher echelons were an exception, not a rule.

The atmosphere of mutual mistrust invalidated the appeal of ruler-minister friendship. Zhanguo rulers needed neither companions, nor friends, nor teachers, but rather obedient servants. Certain members of the *shi* stratum responded to this need of the overlords, and supplied them with intellectual and practical means to restrain ministerial power and subdue ministerial pride. These thinkers, usually identified as the so-called Legalists (*fajia* 法家),<sup>99</sup> dismissed their colleagues' pleas for ruler-minister friendship as either unrealistic, or deceitful. Legalists ridiculed the ethical approach to institutional problems, characteristic of Confucius and Mencius, and paid little attention to ministerial loyalty. Instead, they urged the ruler to apply appropriate techniques (*shu* 數, or *shu* 術, "methods") to control his aides. Practical aspects of their recommendations have been examined elsewhere and will not be dealt with here.<sup>100</sup> For the purpose of our discussion

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<sup>96</sup> For details about these "servants of several masters," see Lewis, "Warring States," pp. 632-634.

<sup>97</sup> Legends about tragic heroes, outstanding ministers whose loyalty was not recognized by their superiors, and who were resultantly victimized, became wide-spread among Zhanguo *shi*. Among these heroes we may mention Wu Zixu 伍子胥 (d. 484), a minister at the court of Wu 吳; a military strategist, Wu Qi 吳起 (d. 381); and the semi-legendary poet, Qu Yuan 屈原. Sima Qian, whose personal tragedy made him particularly receptive to their stories, collected anecdotes related to these persons in chapters 65, 66 and 84 of the *Shiji*; see also David Johnson, "Epic and History in Early China: The Matter of Wu Tzu-hsü," in: *Journal of Asian Studies*, 40 (1981) 2, pp. 255-271; Schneider, *A Madman of Chu*.

<sup>98</sup> The memory of recent usurpations (see note 90) increased a ruler's suspicions against his powerful aides, whose positions therefore were particularly perilous (see, for instance, *Zhanguo ce*, "Qin ce 3" 5.18:203-206). The deterioration of ruler-minister relations is elucidated in another *Zhanguo ce* anecdote, which tells that only a bad and unpopular minister could be considered loyal, as he would never usurp the ruler's power ("Dong Zhou ce" 東周策 1.11:17).

<sup>99</sup> Designating Zhanguo thinkers as members of a certain "school" may be both misleading and over-simplifying the complex picture of Zhanguo thought, and I use it only as a scholarly convention. Pace Herrlee G. Creel (*Shen Pu-hai*, pp. 135-162) I define "Legalists" broadly, referring to all thinkers who sought to enhance the ruler's authority at the expense of *shi* interests.

<sup>100</sup> See, for instance, Creel, *Shen Pu-hai*; Lev S. Perelomov, *Kniga Pravitelia Oblasti Shan (Shang jun shu)* (Moscow 1993), pp. 59-136; Yang Kuan, *Zhanguo shi*, pp. 188-212.

more important is the Legalists' reevaluation of the rationale of ruler-minister relations.

Thinkers like Shang Yang 商鞅 (d. 338), Shen Buhai 申不害 (d. 337), and to lesser extent Shen Dao 慎到 (fl. late fourth century) repeatedly stated that a minister, driven by his personal interest, must always be suspected as a potential traitor or a usurper. Shang Yang warned the ruler that many of his ministers might secretly connive with the foreign powers.<sup>101</sup> Shen Buhai, alternatively, focused his attention on the possibility of usurpation from within.<sup>102</sup> Their views were effectively synthesized by the last of the great pre-imperial thinkers, Han Feizi, who viewed every minister as a potential enemy of the ruler. Han Feizi ridiculed the hypocritical criticisms of a famous late Chunqiu treacherous retainer, Confucius' contemporary and antagonist, Yang Hu 陽虎:

Some people say: in a household of one thousand [*jin*] of gold, sons lack fraternal feelings because they are too anxious about benefit. Lord Huan [of Qi, r. 685–643] was the supreme of the five hegemonies, but in struggling for his state he murdered an elder brother – this is because the benefit was high. Between ruler and minister, there is no intimacy of relatives. If robbery and murder attain the rule of a one-thousand-chariot state and the pleasure of a huge benefit, which of the multitude of ministers would differ from Yang Hu?

An affair is completed by subtle and skillful [action]; it is defeated by clumsy and foolish [action]. If the multitudes of ministers still have not risen to make troubles, this is because they are still not prepared. ... The loyalty or deceitfulness of the ministers depend on the ruler's behavior. When the ruler is clear-sighted and stern, the ministers are loyal; when the ruler is cowardly and benighted, the ministers are deceitful.<sup>103</sup>

Han Feizi leaves no doubt: a minister is potentially a mortal enemy of the ruler. A sovereign should not rely on ministerial loyalty, nor should he condemn ministerial deceitfulness, since when the highest prize – state power – is at stake, moral rules play no role. Every minister is a potential traitor, each harbors Yang Hu's heart; and it is only stern surveillance by the ruler that prevents his ministers from carrying out their treacherous plans. Han Feizi inverted the idea of ruler-minister friendship: the court, he argued, harbors not friends but bitter foes of the ruler.

<sup>101</sup> Shang Yang warned: "The 'heroes' diligently study *Shi* and *Shu* and then follow the foreign powers" (豪杰務學詩書，隲從外勢。Jiang Lihong 蔣禮鴻, *Shang jun shu zhuzhi* 商君書錐指 [Beijing 1996], "Nong zhan" 農戰 3:22; cf. "Suan di" 算地 6:45-47).

<sup>102</sup> See epigraph. For Shen Dao's views, see Shenzi 慎子, "Zhi zhong" 知忠, in: P.M. Thompson, *The Shen tzu Fragments* (Oxford 1979), pp. 258-263.

<sup>103</sup> 或曰：千金之家，其子不仁，人之急利甚也。桓公，五伯之上也，爭國而殺其兄，其利大也。臣主之間，非兄弟之親也。劫殺之功，制萬乘而享大利，則群臣孰非陽虎也？事以微巧成，以疏拙敗。群臣之未起難也，其備未具也。[...] 臣之忠詐，在君所行也。君明而嚴則群臣忠，君懦而闇則群臣詐 (*Han Feizi*, "Nan si" 難四 49:383).

Does this cynical (or perhaps realistic) appraisal of ruler-minister ties invalidate the concept of loyalty? Not necessarily. Han Feizi after all remained a member of the ministerial stratum; he was aware of his precarious position at court, and wanted to be trusted and employed. Hence, he admitted that loyal ministers might exist, as they had in the past, but he reinterpreted the nature of their loyalty. Among paragons of loyalty, lauded by his contemporaries, Han Feizi hailed those who actually contributed to the state's well-being, and ridiculed those who either sought a ruler's friendship, or served their moral *Dao* at the expense of the ruler. The following passage epitomizes Han Feizi's historical lessons:

Tang (湯, the founder of the Shang dynasty) attained Yi Yin (伊尹), and relying on one hundred *li* (里) of land became Son of Heaven. Lord Huan of Qi attained Guan Zhong (管仲, d. 645) and established himself as the master of the Five Hegemons; he nine times assembled the overlords and unified All under Heaven. Lord Xiao of Qin (秦孝公, r. 361–338) attained Lord Shang (Shang Yang), and thereby expanded his lands and strengthened his armies. Thus, one who has a loyal minister, has no worry of rival states abroad, has no anxiety of calamitous ministers at home; he enjoys lasting peace in All under Heaven and his name is handed down to posterity. This is what is called “a loyal minister.”

After defining a true *zhong*, Han Feizi dismisses paragons of loyalty hailed by his contemporaries:

Now, if we take Yu Rang who was a minister of Zhi Bo, above he failed to convince his master to employ the principles of clear laws, techniques, rules, and methods to avoid the worries of troubles and misfortune; below, he failed to command his multitudes in order to protect [Zhi Bo's] state. Yet, when [Zhao] Xiangzi killed Zhi Bo, Yu Rang branded his face, cut his nose and deformed his appearance in order to kill Xiangzi and avenge Zhi Bo.<sup>104</sup> Although he thereby mutilated and sacrificed himself to attain a name for his master, in reality this was as useless for Zhi Bo as a fringe of autumn hair. This [behavior] is what I discard, but the rulers of our age consider this loyalty and elevate it.

In the past, there were Bo Yi and Shu Qi. King Wu [of Zhou] yielded All under Heaven [to them], but they refused to accept it; both men starved themselves to death at the Shouyang hill.<sup>105</sup> Ministers like these neither fear heavy punishment, nor are they moved by handsome rewards; penalties cannot restrain them, rewards cannot encourage them: these are called useless servants. I [try to] diminish and dismiss them, while the rulers of the age multiply them and seek [their service].<sup>106</sup>

<sup>104</sup> For Yu Rang's story, see *Zhanguo ce*, “Zhao ce 1” 18.4:617–618; see also the above discussion.

<sup>105</sup> See note 67 for further details about Bo Yi and Shu Qi's story. The putative desire of King Wu to yield All under Heaven to righteous brothers is in all likelihood Han Feizi's exaggeration.

<sup>106</sup> 湯得伊尹，以百里之地立為天子；桓公得管仲，立為五霸主，九合諸侯，一匡天下；孝公得商君，地以廣，兵以強。故有忠臣者，外無敵國之患，內無亂臣之憂，長安於天下，而名垂後世，所謂忠臣也。若夫豫讓為智伯臣也，上不能說人主使之明法術、度數之理，以避禍難之患，下不能領御其眾，以安其國；及襄子之殺智伯也，豫讓乃自黔劓，敗其形容，以為智伯報襄子之仇；是雖有殘刑殺身以為人主之名，而實無益於智伯若秋毫之末。

Han Feizi wanted to reconcile the concept of loyalty with state interests. A prudent ruler was not in need of ministers like Bo Yi or Shu Qi who followed their *Dao* disregarding the state; or of those, like Yu Rang, whose fidelity was directed to the ruler's person rather than to the polity. Such notions of loyalty were useless or even harmful to state interests. Han Feizi, therefore, wanted to restore an almost forgotten notion of political rather than personal loyalty.<sup>107</sup> Unlike the case of Chunqiu ministers, however, Han Feizi denied a loyal minister the right to defy the ruler's orders in the name of the altars. Even the greatest ministers of the past were merely the ruler's servants and not companions, and they had no right to disobey. Han Feizi was aware of the possibility (encountered by him personally at the end of his life) that a loyal minister could fall victim to a ruler's mistrust, but these were only inevitable if regrettable lapses of the system. Under no condition was it permissible to disobey the sovereign. Being loyal was laudable, but gave a minister no extra rights.

The Legalists' emphasis on law and subordination could not but impress rulers. Disillusioned with manipulative *shi* who all too frequently used lofty principles to justify their petty personal interests, late Zhanguo overlords were increasingly attentive to the demonstrably effective ideas of Shang Yang, Shen Buhai, and later Han Feizi. Xunzi, a great Confucian scholar and political thinker of the third century B.C.E. did not fail to apprehend the change. In the late fourth century B.C.E., Mencius proudly encountered the rulers from the position of a teacher. Three quarters of a century later, Xunzi had to adopt a markedly defensive stance towards a haughty King Zhao of Qin 秦昭王 (r. 306–250), who blatantly asked him “are Confucians (*ru* 儒) useless to the state?”<sup>108</sup> An astute thinker, Xunzi, sought the way to enhance Confucians' (and other *shi*) value while simultaneously preserving their sense of self-respect.

Xunzi had to reconcile two contradictory trends. First, he had to reconfirm the usefulness of high-minded Confucian *shi* to the rulers, and to absolve them from the suspicion of treachery. Second, to preserve his intellectual prestige among the members of the *shi* stratum, Xunzi had to avoid degrading them to the status of obedient tools of rulers, as Legalists (including Xunzi's disciple, Han Feizi) recommended. Xunzi, arguably the greatest Zhanguo political thinker, managed to achieve a compromise between the ruler's demands and the *shi* self-image. His efforts are presented in the chapter “The Way of Minister” (*Chen Dao* 臣道),

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此吾之所下也，而世主以為忠而高之。古有伯夷、叔齊者，武王讓以天下而弗受，二人餓死首陽之陵；若此臣者，不畏重誅，不利重賞，不可以罰禁也，不可以賞使也。此之謂無益之臣也，吾所少而去也，而世主之所多而求也 (Han Feizi, “Jian jie shi chen” 姦劫弑臣 14:105-106).

<sup>107</sup> As the following discussion shows, Han Feizi evidently was influenced by the concept of loyalty promulgated by his teacher, Xunzi.

<sup>108</sup> 儒無益於人之國？(Xunzi, “Ru xiao” 儒效 8:117).

which became a guideline for ministerial ethics of later ages. The major passage in the chapter states:

He who obeys the orders and benefits the ruler, is called compliant; he who obeys the orders and does not benefit the ruler, is called servile; he who contradicts the orders and benefits the ruler is called loyal; he who contradicts the orders and does not benefit the ruler is called an usurper. He who cares not for the ruler's glory or disgrace, cares not for the success or failure of the state, blandishes and flatters the ruler in order to grasp emoluments and nurture ties [with the sovereign] and that is all – is called the state's villain.

After explaining that loyalty demands defiance of the ruler's orders, Xunzi suggests different courses of action for a loyal subject:

When the ruler mistakes in laying his plans or in carrying out his affairs, and one fears that the state will be endangered and the altars suffer a loss, he who is able among grand ministers and the population elders, submits his views to the ruler. If the ruler makes use [of his opinion], he agrees; otherwise, he leaves him – this is called remonstrating. He who is able, submits his views to the ruler; if the ruler makes use [of his opinion], he agrees; otherwise, he dies [for his views] – this is called contesting. He who is able, combines his knowledge, concentrates his force and leads a multitude of ministers and hundreds of officials to jointly urge and subdue the ruler; although the ruler is unhappy, he has no choice but to heed them; thereby [the minister] relieves the state of grave worry, eliminates its great harm, and attains respect to the ruler and peace for the state – this is called being supportive. He who is able to disobey the ruler's command, to steal the ruler's power, to oppose the ruler's undertakings in order to relieve the danger of the state and to eradicate the ruler's disgrace, and his success suffices to bring great benefit to the state – he is called assisting. Thus, remonstrating, contesting, supportive, and assisting ministers are the ministers of the altars of soil and grain, the ruler's treasure. The enlightened ruler respects and treats them generously, while the benighted ruler and the suspicious ruler consider them personal enemies. Hence, he whom the enlightened ruler rewards, the benighted ruler penalizes; he whom the benighted ruler rewards, the enlightened ruler executes.

Xunzi ends his discussion with a brief summary of historical paragons of loyalty from the remote and the recent past:

Yi Yin and Jizi may be called remonstrating; Bi Gan and [Wu] Zixu can be called contesting; Lord Pingyuan of Zhao can be called supporting; Lord Xinling of Wei can be called assisting. The tradition says: "Follow *Dao*, do not follow the ruler" – it is told of these cases.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> 從命而利君謂之順，從命而不利君謂之諂；逆命而利君謂之忠，逆命而不利君謂之篡；不卹君之榮辱，不卹國之臧否，偷合苟容以持祿養交而已耳，謂之國賊。君有過謀過事，將危國家、殞社稷之懼也，大臣、父兄，有能進言於君，用則可，不用則去，謂之諫；有能進言於君，用則可，不用則死，謂之爭；有能比知同力，率群臣百吏而相與彊君擣君，君雖不安，不能不聽，遂以解國之大患，除國之大害，成於尊君安國，謂之輔；有能抗君之命，竊君之重，反君之事，以安國之危，除君之辱，功伐足以成國之大利，謂之拂。故諫、爭、輔、拂之人，社稷之臣也，國君之寶也，明君所尊厚也，而闇主惑君以為己賊

Of these examples the most interesting is the last one, Lord Xinling or Prince Wuji 無忌, a royal sibling from the state of Wei who defied his ruler's orders, stole the royal army and attacked the powerful state of Qin – presumably out of concern for the state of Wei. Xunzi hailed Wuji's defiance of the royal orders as a manifestation of true loyalty, the loyalty to the altars. A true minister in Xunzi's eyes was an "altars' minister" (*sheji zhi chen* 社稷之臣). This concept, which was so prominent in the Chunqiu period, remained marginal in Zhanguo discourse, as Mencius' saying cited earlier suggests. Xunzi revitalized this long neglected concept, and it was probably he who transmitted the notion of loyalty to the altars to Han Feizi.<sup>110</sup>

Unlike his Chunqiu predecessors, Xunzi avoided distinguishing the ruler's interests from that of the altars; to benefit the state was to benefit a ruler and *vice versa*. A virtual identity between the ruler's person and the state, which reflected the greatly enhanced position of late Zhanguo overlords,<sup>111</sup> allowed Xunzi to surpass the bonds of personal loyalty without endangering the ruler. Xunzi advocated institutional, rather than personal loyalty to the sovereign; the ruler had to be served and protected because he was a ruler, the pinnacle of political and social order, and not because of his personal features. This de-personalization of loyalty side-stepped the concept of ruler-minister friendship, so highly praised by Zhanguo *shi*. Personal ties with the sovereign did not matter much any longer; a minister owed him allegiance due to the altars.

The de-personalization and institutionalization of loyalty did not mean that a minister became a ruler's submissive tool. In sharp distinction to the legalists, Xunzi's paragons of loyalty were those who defied the ruler's orders for the sake of state interests. To justify this defiance, Xunzi quoted Confucius' notion of following *Dao* rather than the ruler. In Xunzi's interpretation, however, *Dao* was identical to state's interests, a Way of proper rule, which comprised, but was not

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也。故明君之所賞，闇君之所罰也；闇君之所賞，明君之所殺也。伊尹、箕子可謂諫矣，比干、子胥可謂爭矣，平原君之於趙可謂輔矣，信陵君之於魏可謂拂矣。傳曰：「從道不從君。」此之謂也 (Xunzi, "Chen Dao" 臣道 13:249-250). Jizi 箕子 and Bi Gan 比干 served the vicious last ruler of the Shang, Zhouxin 紂辛 (d. ca. 1046); Jizi remonstrated and being unheeded fled the state; Bi Gan persisted and was executed (see *Shiji*, 3:107-108). For the careers of Wu Zixu, Lord of Pingyuan 平原君, and Lord of Xinling 信陵君, see *Shiji*, 65, 76, 77.

<sup>110</sup> See also note 92 for the rarity of the concept of loyalty to the altars in the Zhanguo age. Xunzi's views of loyalty resemble Chunqiu views of ministerial (but not retainers') loyalty, presented in the *Zuo zhuan*. This is not a single instance of a possible influence of Chunqiu intellectual milieu, as presented in the *Zuo zhuan* on Xunzi's thought. This important issue, however, deserves a separate discussion.

<sup>111</sup> For the enhanced position of the Zhanguo rulers as compared with their Chunqiu predecessors, see Lewis, "Warring States," pp. 597-603. For a comprehensive discussion on elevation of the ruler's position in Zhanguo thought, see Liu Zehua, *Zhongguo chuantong zhengzhi sixiang fansi* and his modified discussion in *Zhongguo de wangquanzhuyi* 中國的王權主義 (Shanghai 2000).

tantamount to personal morality.<sup>112</sup> Thus, loyalty to one's principles, to *Dao*, meant loyalty to the state, which by definition meant loyalty to the ruler. Xunzi succeeded in a few sentences to synthesize previous concepts of loyalty in a way that preserved the minister's dignity, did not endanger political stability, and benefited the ruler personally.

Finally, what was Xunzi's attitude towards changing allegiances? The above passage did not clarify his views: if the remonstrating minister leaves a ruler, does it imply retirement, or moving to another state? Elsewhere, Xunzi subtly expressed his dislike of "serving two rulers,"<sup>113</sup> but generally he remained silent on this issue. In a world where almost every statesman, including Xunzi himself, had to cross the borders to find an appointment, there was no place for advocating loyalty to a single master. This notion remained alien to Zhanguo politics, but it was to be revived shortly after the imperial unification of 221 B.C.E.

### Epilogue

#### From Friends to Wives: The Imperial Notion of Loyalty

A detailed discussion of the changing concepts of loyalty during the two imperial millennia is certainly beyond the scope of the present study.<sup>114</sup> It is interesting, however, to check which of the pre-imperial views of loyalty remained valid after the Qin unification, and which were abandoned. We may then explain why radical pro-ministerial sentiments expressed in the Guodian texts remained virtually unnoticed until the bamboo slips suddenly resurfaced twenty-three centuries after they were buried.

The imperial notion of loyalty, as formed during the Han 漢 dynasty (206 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.), combined the views of pre-imperial thinkers. Imperial ministers, like their Chunqiu predecessors, were supposed selflessly to serve the altars, presuming that the interest of the altars (and of the dynastic ancestral temple) is basically identical to that of the ruler. They were further expected, in accordance with Confucius' dictum, to be critical supporters of the ruler: in the name of *Dao*, that is the highest interests of the political order, the minister could reprimand the ruler, disobey him, and even resign if necessary. This synthesis basically followed Xunzi's theory. Besides, imperial bureaucrats grudgingly recognized the validity of Legalist warnings against treacherous servants, and established an elaborate system of surveillance and control to prevent ministerial treason.

Aside from these aspects, the imperial notion of *zhong* added a dimension of unswerving personal loyalty, akin to that of Chunqiu retainers. This change was

<sup>112</sup> "*Dao* is a principle through which proper rule is arranged" (道也者，治之經理也。 Xunzi, "Zheng ming" 正名 22.423).

<sup>113</sup> See Xunzi, "Quan xue" 勸學 1:9.

<sup>114</sup> See note 4 for discussions on this topic; see particularly Standen, *Frontier Crossing*, pp. 262-277; Ge Quan, *Zheng de zhi*, pp. 193-222.

symbolized by the changing simile of ruler-minister relations: not ties of friendship, but bonds of matrimony. The new vision of loyalty is epitomized by the saying “A loyal minister does not serve two rulers, a faithful wife does not marry a second husband,” which was often used since the early Han.<sup>115</sup> This saying reflects new political conditions after the unification. In the unified empire, shifting allegiances was rarely an option for a dissatisfied minister. The imperial literati’s question was to serve or not to serve, but not whom to serve. The Zhanguo market of talents was closed and replaced by a sound state monopoly, challenged only occasionally at the ages of dynastic turmoil.

The idea of unswerving loyalty to a single master, the major innovation of imperial political ethics, invalidated the Zhanguo emphasis on ruler-minister friendship. Being placed at the apex of the state pyramid, emperors were in need of servants, not friends or self-proclaimed “teachers.” Gradually, by developing and perfecting the system of state examinations, the imperial establishment appropriated the position of a teacher; it was the right of the emperor to instruct literati, while the latter could admonish, but not teach him.<sup>116</sup> As for ruler-minister friendship, this notion also gradually faded away.<sup>117</sup> Traits of the *shi* self-esteem were preserved in such Zhanguo collectanea as *Lüshi chunqiu* and *Zhanguo ce*, and, more importantly, in the *Mencius*. Although the latter’s blatant proministerial rhetoric occasionally infuriated the rulers,<sup>118</sup> the admiration of these passages among the literati preserved the *Mencius*’ position as the core of the

<sup>115</sup> 忠臣不事二君，貞女不更二夫 (The Chinese University of Hong Kong, *The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series*, *Shuo yuan suizi suoyin* 說苑遂字索引 “Li jie” 立節 4.21:30; cf. *Shiji* 82:2457). In the Zhanguo texts the simile of a wife for a minister is extremely rare (see a brief summary in Lisa Ann Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* [Albany 1998], p. 12). This simile is present, according to the dominant interpretation, in some of the *Shi jing* 詩經 odes and in the *Chu ci* 楚辭, but there, unlike in the above saying, it does not directly imply undisputable fidelity of the minister to the ruler (see also the “Wenyan” 文言 commentary on the hexagram “Kun” 坤 in Zhou Zhenfu 周振甫, *Zhouyi yizhu* 周易譯注 [Beijing 1994], p. 16).

<sup>116</sup> This aspect of the state examination system is brilliantly discussed by Benjamin A. Elman, “The Formation of ‘Dao Learning’ as Imperial Ideology During the Early Ming Dynasty,” in: Theodore Huters *et al.* (eds.), *Culture and State in Chinese History. Conventions, Accommodations and Critiques* (Stanford, Calif. 1997), pp. 58-82. The concept of a servant being an emperor’s teacher survived in the position of imperial tutors. However, these tutors, although revered by the emperors, gradually lost their ritual privileges due to the teachers; definitely, their position was that of the servants, not of the masters (see Du Jiaji, “Zhongguo gudai,” p. 262).

<sup>117</sup> Du Jiaji shows how the traits of pre-imperial rituals, which stressed a ruler’s respect to the ministers, gave way during the imperial millennia to increasingly hierarchically oriented rites (see his “Zhongguo gudai”). Independent-minded literati of the late imperial period strongly lamented this degradation of a minister’s position throughout the centuries (see, for instance, Gu Yanwu 顧炎武, “Ren zhu hu renchen zi” 人主呼人臣字, in: *id.*, *Ri zhi lu jishi* 日知錄集釋, ed. by Huang Rucheng 黃如成 [Changsha 1994], 28:827).

<sup>118</sup> For Zhu Yuanzhang’s 朱元璋 (1328–1398) attempt to edit out Mencius’ “subversive” passages, see Elman, “Formation,” pp. 72-74.

Zhanguo legacy, and eventually as an important part of the canonical texts. Does this popularity testify to the latent longing of the educated elite for the bygone age when the gap between rulers and ministers was considerably narrower, an age when loyalty was more reciprocal?

Perhaps such longing really existed. The most popular “textbook” of loyalty and political ethics, “The Romance of the Three Kingdoms” (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義) cites the saying of the exemplary loyal servant, Guan Yu 關羽 (d. 219 C.E.), who explained his unwavering fidelity to Liu Bei 劉備 (d. 223 C.E.): “I and Xuande (玄德, Liu Bei) are friends and brothers, brothers and also ruler and minister.”<sup>119</sup> Indeed, Liu Bei’s ability to treat his advisors as friends, not servants, ensured their loyalty. Yet, the readers of the novel could not fail to realize that such intimacy between the ruler and his ministers was possible only in ages of turmoil, but never in an age of orderly, unified rule.

The centralized and bureaucratized empire was in no need of personalization of political ties. The Guodian strips’ motto: “When you dislike [the ruler], you may leave him,” was inimical to political stability, and endangered the hierarchical order. Such sayings, and with them the concept of ruler-minister friendship, fell into oblivion. The age of imperial unity demanded a different kind of political ethics, leaving the proud *shi* the position of a ruler’s spouses, not friends.

## 忠姦之間：先秦君臣關係與忠君觀念及其演變

YURI PINES 尤銳

新出土的郭店楚簡中有幾篇討論君臣關係及忠君觀念的文章。其中《語叢》篇中所講的「君臣，朋友；其擇者也」；「君臣不相在也，則可已；不悅，可去也」等句表示出戰國士人的自豪意識，以及他們認為自己與國君地位基本上平等 — 相匹的觀念。在本文中我將探討戰國士的自豪意識的歷史背景及其對於「忠」觀念的影響，並討論春秋戰國時期君臣關係的演變。從春秋時代的卿大夫以至到戰國時代的游士，在不同歷史條件之下，當官之人一直保持了自己的較高地位，擺脫了對君主的依附性，因此具有君臣相匹的思潮。這時代的「社稷重於君」、「從道不從君」、「君與臣為朋友」的思維方式都提高了臣子的自由，允許臣違背君的命令，離開國君，甚至「革之」。因

<sup>119</sup> 我與玄德，是朋友而兄弟，兄弟而又君臣也 (Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中, Mao Zonggang 毛宗崗, *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 [Shanghai 1996], 26:331).

這種情況對於國內秩序具有消極的影響，戰國末葉的某些思想家提出了相反的看法，意在提高君主的地位及臣對君的依附性。此後荀子將這些觀念綜合起來，提出了「忠於道，即忠於社稷，即忠於君」的觀念，建立了歷來王朝的君臣之倫理的基礎。而秦漢大一統以後，皇帝的地位越來越高，臣的依附性越來越大，因此「君臣相匹」的觀念漸漸被忘，最終從歷史舞台上消失了。