

6

Between Merit and Pedigree

Evolution of the Concept of “Elevating the Worthy” in Pre-imperial China

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Western admirers of Chinese civilization – from the French intellectuals of the age of Enlightenment, to the doyen of modern Sinology, John K. Fairbank (1907–91), to countless current scholars – remain fascinated with China’s perceived ideology and practice of meritocracy.¹ Doubtlessly, these admirers have the point. The idea of “elevating the worthy” (*shang xian* 尚賢) became one of the cornerstones of China’s political ideology ever since the Warring States period (Zhanguo 戰國, 453–221 B.C.E.); through much of the imperial period most of the males were technically legible for promotion into the government apparatus; and Chinese history provides not a few examples of persons from a relatively humble background who made their way to the top of the political ladder. In all these aspects, Chinese civilization differs markedly from aristocratic cultures elsewhere, such as medieval Europe, in which the pedigree normally played the decisive role in determining one’s future.

This background makes it tempting to proclaim meritocracy to be an essential feature of Chinese civilization, such as, supposedly, the family-oriented ethics, ritual-based social hierarchy and the monarchic political system. Yet a closer look at Chinese history would disclose not only that meritocratic ideas and practices did not develop before the Warring States period, but also that their introduction was accompanied by multiple tensions. These tensions, for example, between the principle of “elevating the worthy” and the ongoing importance of family and of pedigree; between meritocratic government and the hereditary monarchy; and, most significantly, among conflicting views of “worth” (*xian* 賢) and “merits” (*gong* 功) stand at the focus of my chapter. In what follows, through highlighting ideological debates over these issues during the Warring States period, the formative age of Chinese

political tradition, and through contextualizing these debates in contemporaneous political practices, I hope to demonstrate the essentially contradictory nature of “elevating the worthy” discourse. Namely, behind the strongly pronounced support of social mobility and of granting an opportunity for every skilled male to enter the government service, we find a subtle yet discernible desire of the members of educated elite to monopolize power in their hands. This desire – and the ensuing tension between “worthiness” and “merit” – may explain some of the complexities and contradictions that accompanied implementation of meritocratic ideas under the imperial rule; and it may also be of some relevance for implementing the principles of meritocracy in our age.

I. BACKGROUND: THE END OF THE ARISTOCRATIC AGE

I start my discussion not with the Western Zhou age (西周, 1046–771 B.C.E.), during which, according to some of its eminent researchers, seeds of meritocracy were sown,² but rather with the demonstrably aristocratic Springs-and-Autumns period (Chunqiu 春秋, 770–453 B.C.E.). My choice is not incidental: whereas the evidence for the Western Zhou period appointment practices and ideological trends is too scant to allow definitive conclusions, for the Springs-and-Autumns period, in contrast, we have abundant data that allows meaningful discussion. The *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, our major source for the history of that period, provides valuable information about political, administrative, social, and, arguably, ideological life of major polities of that age; this information, supplemented whenever relevant with paleographic evidence, serves my discussion here.³ From the very beginning, it may be useful to summarize: the available evidence shows beyond doubt that the Springs-and-Autumns period was decidedly *not* meritocratic.

The Springs-and-Autumns period was the golden age of hereditary aristocracy. Politically, members of this stratum occupied all positions of importance in each of the major states; and the system of hereditary offices, which had fully developed by the early sixth century B.C.E., effectively precluded outsiders from entering the top echelon of power-holders. Economically, aristocratic lineages relied on hereditary allotments, the size of which was at times comparable with the possessions of the ruling lineage itself. Socially, the elevated position of the aristocrats was reinforced by the elaborate ritual system, the major goal of which was to maintain hierarchy within the nobility and to preserve the

nobles' superiority over other social strata. Finally, the aristocrats also dominated the realm of ideology: if members of lower strata were ideologically active, then our sources did not preserve their voices. Through much of the period under discussion, the power of nobility appeared to be unassailable.⁴

The aristocratic monopoly on positions of power in the state hierarchy was not built in to the political system of the Springs-and-Autumns period from its inception. At the beginning of that age, regional lords (*zhuhou* 諸侯) were still able to maintain certain control over appointments,⁵ and although normally a new ruler was granting top positions to his closest kin, occasionally a member of the low nobility (i.e., a *shi* 士, discussed subsequently), could be elevated to the position of a ruler's aide.⁶ Yet gradually, as ministerial (*qing* 卿) lineages consolidated their power in major states, they succeeded to effectively monopolize high positions in the state administration, either turning major offices into their hereditary possession or, alternatively, rotating these offices among a few most powerful lineages.⁷ Only exceptionally, in cases of major internal turmoil and subsequent overhaul of the state apparatus, could a *shi* ascend the administrative ladder to a position of substantial power.⁸ In contrast, should the ruler try to appoint his favorites from among the *shi* to a top position at the expense of the aristocrats, this could lead to a violent response from ministerial lineages.⁹

In the pedigree-based order, individual abilities of an appointee were not neglected, but they played a subordinate role in determining his future. This rationale can be seen from the following summary of the rules of designating a heir-apparent:

When a heir-apparent dies, his younger brother from the same mother is appointed; if there is none, then the eldest [of other brothers] is appointed. If their age is equal, then the worthy is chosen. If the candidates are equally appropriate, then divination by making cracks is performed – this is the way of the ancients.¹⁰

天子死，有母弟則立之，無則立長。年鈞擇賢，義鈞則卜，古之道也。

The worthiness of the candidate had to be taken into consideration – but its importance was miniscule when compared with his birthright.¹¹ This view, *mutatis mutandis*, dominated the approach toward office holding in general. Statesmen of the Springs-and-Autumns period, whose

voices we hear from the *Zuo zhuan*, hailed at times their colleagues who appointed the “good” people, but only insofar as these “good” were members of hereditary aristocracy: “goodness” was secondary to pedigree.¹² Hence, rulers who were able to preserve well the interests of their kin and of old ministerial families were hailed,¹³ whereas those who appointed outsiders were criticized.¹⁴ One of the most brilliant sixth century B.C.E. thinkers, Yan Ying (晏嬰, c. 580–510), clarified that the proper social order is the one in which members of the lower nobility, the *shi*, would not “overflow” the high-ranking nobles.¹⁵ Political power – just as social and cultural power – was supposed to remain forever in the hands of the latter.

This said, during the period under discussion, we may discern certain institutional and intellectual factors that contributed to the eventual demise of the pedigree-based political order and its replacement with the meritocratic system. Most significantly, the system of hereditary officeholding never gained ideological legitimacy: it was neither sanctified by canonical texts or historical practices of the early Western Zhou period nor was it justified in terms of political efficiency and good order. To the contrary, it was obvious for most observers that the system severely malfunctioned. First, by effectively depriving the rulers of the right to appoint their ministers, it contributed to the grave weakening of the regional lords’ authority, thereby exacerbating domestic crises that plagued most of the polities of the Springs-and-Autumns period.¹⁶ Second, the accumulating political experience made it clear that hereditary appointments often brought into government inept and intemperate men whose misbehavior could ruin their lineage and even their state.¹⁷ This understanding might have prevented the aristocratic statesmen, whose voices we hear from the *Zuo zhuan* from proposing full institutionalization of the system of hereditary officeholding. Although these statesmen, who were the major beneficiaries of this system, did not advocate its overhaul, they also did not attempt to legitimate it. Thus, the hereditary appointment system which stood at the core of the pedigree-based social order remained singularly lacking political vitality and was eventually easily dismantled in the wake of political reforms of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.

The second major factor that weakened the aristocratic order was gradual reconceptualization of the nature of the elite status. Rather than justifying their elevated positions in terms of pure pedigree, aristocrats of the Springs-and-Autumns period increasingly tended to emphasize abilities and morality as the true foundation of their power. This

change is evident from the reinterpretation of the term “superior man” (*junzi*, 君子), the single most important elite designation during the aristocratic age. Initially, this term was clearly related to one’s belonging to hereditary aristocracy,¹⁸ but gradually it became imbued with ethical content. While the pedigree connotation of the term remained clear (hence, in the *Zuo zhuan* this designation is never applied to a *shi*), *junzi* was gradually reinterpreted as pertaining to one’s qualities rather than pure pedigree. Only the noble who was impeccably moral and intelligent deserved his elevated position; otherwise, he could be designated “a petty man” (*xiao ren* 小人), thereby indicating his unworthiness of the noble status. In the age of frequent downfall of powerful ministerial lineages, this emphasis on personal inadequacy of those who were supposed to be “superior men” provided contemporary aristocrats with convenient explanations of the ever-accelerating downward mobility of the members of their stratum.¹⁹

This shift away from one’s lineage and one’s pedigree to one’s individual qualities as a major determinant of one’s status is visible in the late Springs-and-Autumns period, both from textual and paleographic sources.²⁰ Yet this “ethicization” of the “superior men’s” self-image had unexpected consequences for the nobles. In the short term it might have been designed to provide further legitimation for the aristocrats’ dominant position, but in the final account, it paved the way for the upward mobility of the *shi* stratum. As we shall see later in the chapter, the rising *shi* began emulating the behavior of superior men, thereby laying claim to their eligibility to *junzi* status. The aristocrats remained powerless in the face of this challenge. Ironically, those who imbued the term *junzi* with ethical meaning were unable to find ideological justifications to repel the *shi* attack on their hereditary privileges. Thus, by downplaying the importance of the pedigree in obtaining high political status, aristocrats of the Springs-and-Autumns period contributed to the dismantling of the very social order that had ensured their elevated position. The new age belonged to the new men.

II. THE RISE OF THE *SHI*: BACKGROUND

From the fifth to fourth century B.C.E., the political system of the would-be Chinese world underwent tremendous change. Loose aristocratic polities of the Springs-and-Autumns period were replaced with centralized territorial states of the Warring States era; the expanded bureaucracy attained novel agro-managerial and military functions and

penetrated the society down to its bottom, and the system of hereditary officeholding and hereditary allotments was largely replaced by flexible appointments that were increasingly determined by the appointee's individual qualities and his merit. Of manifold developments of that age, the one that is of particular importance for the current discussion is the change in the elite composition, namely, the demise of hereditary aristocracy and its absorption into the new elite group, based on the *shi* stratum. The rise of the *shi*, in turn, was accompanied by major ideological changes, among which the introduction of the idea of meritocracy figures prominently.

Originally, *shi* were the lowest stratum of hereditary aristocracy, which comprised primarily minor siblings of the nobles; as such, they made their living largely as retainers and stewards of the noble lineages and only under truly exceptional circumstances they could gain national prominence.²¹ Yet by the fifth century B.C.E., as the high nobility was decimated in bloody internecine feuds, some of the regional lords found it expedient to appoint more subservient and less threatening *shi* to fill in the gap in the ranks of high officials. Other *shi* benefited from the ascendancy of the heads of powerful ministerial lineages – namely, the Zhao 趙, Wei 魏, and Han 韓 lineages in the state of Jin 晉 and the Tian 田 lineage in the state of Qi 齊. Heads of these lineages were among the first to experiment with centralized rule in their allotments, granting positions to their retainers not on the basis of the pedigree but rather due to one's abilities; and when these allotments turned into fully independent polities, the practice of employing the *shi* rather than the high-ranking nobles continued, allowing members of the *shi* stratum to rise to the top of the political pyramid. Concomitantly, the expansion of the government apparatus in the wake of administrative and military reforms of the Warring States period created new employment opportunities for the *shi*.²² While details of these processes (as generally details of the fifth century B.C.E. history) are not clear due to dearth of reliable sources, the general trend of the rise of the *shi* during that century is undeniable.²³ By the middle to late Warring States period, the term *shi* becomes a common appellation of the elite members.

Parallel to the political ascendancy of the *shi*, no less remarkable was their attainment of ideological leadership. By the middle Warring States period, leading *shi* intellectuals (the Masters, *zi* 子) – and by extension the *shi* stratum as a whole – succeeded in establishing their position as “possessors of the Way (Dao 道)” – that is, intellectual and moral leaders of the society. Although some aspects of this process

are still unclear, its basic parameters can be outlined with sufficient clarity.²⁴ In marked distinction from the Springs-and-Autumns period, when the courts were the only known loci of intellectual authority, by the Warring States period, this authority shifted to the members of the *shi* stratum, who owed it not to their exalted position (which they frequently lacked) but to their ideological expertise, namely, their putative access to the Way. To be sure, the nature of the Way, and the nature of the required ideological expertise, remained bitterly contested throughout that period and beyond; but it seems that there was consensus that the proper definition would come from among the ranks of the *shi*. Inexplicably, hereditary aristocrats made no traceable attempt to preserve their ideological authority, and while our sources are clearly biased in favor of the *shi*, there is no doubt that overall the picture they present is correct: the *shi* came to dominate the intellectual and not just political life of the two to three centuries before the imperial unification of 221 B.C.E.

These simultaneous and mutually reinforcing processes of the rise of the *shi* to the forefront of political and ideological life have fuelled the new pro-*shi* discourse evident in both ethical and administrative thought of the Warring States period. It is on this background that proliferation of meritocratic ideas should be understood. Although these ideas were naturally related to the administrative reforms and to the ongoing search for enhanced government efficiency, their rapid spread reflected much broader social and ideological changes during the period under discussion. In particular, it reflected the growing self-confidence of the *shi* as they rose first to the position of the noble's peers and then to the position of the society's undisputed moral and intellectual leaders. In what follows, I show how this distinctive *shi* ethos developed and how a new consensus ensued which had effectively eliminated, or at least substantially reduced, the pedigree as the major criterion for government employment. Yet I also demonstrate that proliferation of meritocratic discourse, with its ubiquitous emphasis on "elevating the worthy," created a series of new social problems, bringing about eventual bifurcation between "worthiness" and "merit" as the major criteria in appointing government officials.

III. "ELEVATING THE WORTHY": THE BEGINNINGS

The rise of the *shi* and the rise of meritocratic discourse are commonly related to two major early thinkers of the age under discussion: Confucius (孔子, 551–479 B.C.E.) and Mozi (墨子, ca. 460–390 B.C.E.). Yet

pace the common perception, Confucius's contribution to the advance of meritocracy is far from direct. Living at the end of the Springs-and-Autumns period, this thinker was reluctant to advocate radical departures from the extant sociopolitical practices, which favored hereditary aristocrats. Hence, although many of Confucius's sayings disclose his high aspirations, and his recommendation to promote "the upright" persons is conducive to the upward mobility of the *shi*, he does not speak explicitly of *shi* as the aristocrats' peers.²⁵ At the very least, the text of the *Lunyu* 論語, the major repository of Confucius's ideas, contains no direct endorsement of the concept of social mobility, which is prominent in later writings of Confucius's followers.²⁶

This political reluctance notwithstanding, the *Lunyu* contribution to the rise of *shi* is undeniable, especially in terms of shaping the self-image of the rising elite. Confucius and his disciples unequivocally endorsed "ethicization" of the concept of *junzi*, which, as we have seen, was evident already in the *Zuo zhuan*. In the *Lunyu*, this term has much less pronounced hereditary connotations, being primarily a designation of benevolent, perspicacious and courageous men; and, in distinction from the *Zuo zhuan*, the *Lunyu* readily applies the term *junzi* to the *shi*. The *Lunyu* is also the first text in which the term *shi* itself becomes an object of inquiry, and it is treated in a way similar to the term *junzi* – primarily as ethical and not hereditary designation. Time and again, Confucius is asked by his disciples, who can be designated *shi*, and the answers strongly resemble his discussions of the "superior men." *Shi* are "people with aspirations" (*zhi* 志), and these aspirations, just as those of the Master himself, are directed at the Way, namely at the ideal of moral and political order. A *shi* is the person who "has a sense of shame" in his conduct and "will not disgrace his ruler's orders when dispatched to the four directions"; or, minimally, he is a person, who is renowned for his filiality and fraternal behavior; or, at least, is a trustworthy and resolute man. *Shi* is "decisive, kind and gentle" with friends and relatives. And, most important, he is a person wholly dedicated to his high mission: "*Shi* who is addicted to leisure is not worthy of being considered *shi*."²⁷

What, then, is the mission of a *shi*? A clue may be supplied from the following dialogue:

Zilu (子路, 542–480 B.C.E.) asked about the superior man.

The Master said: "Rectify yourself to be reverent."

[Zilu] asked: "Is that all?"

[The Master] said: “Rectify yourself to bring peace to others.”

[Zilu] asked: “Is that all?”

[The Master] said: “Rectify yourself to bring peace to the hundred clans. To rectify yourself thereby bringing peace to the hundred clans: even Yao and Shun considered this difficult!”²⁸

子路問君子。子曰：「修己以敬。」曰：「如斯而已乎？」曰：「修己以安人。」曰：「如斯而已乎？」曰：「修己以安百姓。修己以安百姓，堯、舜其猶病諸！」

The ultimate goal of rectification is political: to bring peace to the hundred clans, presumably by restoring a kind of ideal rule akin to that of the paragon rulers, Yao 堯 and Shun 舜. This goal, however, is extraordinarily difficult, almost unattainable: even the ancient paragons would not easily accomplish it. The mission of a *shi*/superior man is therefore a heavy burden. Confucius’s disciples shared the Master’s view: thus, Zizhang (子張, 503–?) defined a *shi* as a person who “sacrifices his life when facing danger, thinks of righteousness when facing [possible] gains,”²⁹ and Zengzi (曾子, 502–435) spoke of the tasks of a *shi* in the following way:

Shi cannot but be strong and resolute, as his task is heavy and his way is long. He considers benevolence as his task – is not it heavy? He stops only after death – is not [his way] long?³⁰

士不可以不弘毅，任重而道遠。仁以為己任，不亦重乎？死而後已，不亦遠乎？

Zengzi’s definition, one of the classical *shi*-related statements in preimperial literature, reflects the strong sense of self-respect by the members of the newly rising stratum, who accepted their mission to improve governance above and public mores below and who considered themselves spiritual leaders of the society. It indicates that although, politically speaking, the *Lunyu* does not treat the *shi* as the nobles’ equals, it does place them at the top of the moral and intellectual pyramid. This elevation is indicative of the coming of a new era of the *shi* dominance in both social and intellectual life.

Whereas the *Lunyu* contributed decisively toward shaping the self-image of intellectually active *shi*, the second major text of the Warring States period, the *Mozi*, added another dimension to the *shi* assertiveness, supplying ideological justifications for their ascendancy. Unlike

the *Lunyu*, the *Mozi* appears free of hesitations or self-restraint insofar as the social standing of the *shi* is concerned. To the contrary, Mozi proudly proclaims that *shi* are indispensable for the state's well-being:

When the state has plenty of worthy and good *shi*, its orderly rule is abundant; when it has few of worthy and good *shi*, its orderly rule is meager; hence the task of the Grandees is to multiply worthies and that is all.³¹

是故國有賢良之士眾，則國家之治厚，賢良之士寡，則國家之治薄。故大人之務，將在於眾賢而已。

In “Elevating the Worthy” (“Shang xian” 尚賢) chapters, from one of which the foregoing passage was cited, Mozi proposed a detailed list of measures aimed at attracting meritorious *shi*: “They must be enriched, honored, respected, and praised: then it will be possible to attain and multiply in the state worthy and good *shi*.”³² These proposals may sound simplistic and even demeaning to the *shi*: surely they differ markedly from Confucius's emphasis on political service as a means of self-realization. Nonetheless, in the peculiar intellectual atmosphere of the Warring States world, which was at times interpreted as a huge “market of talent,” this awareness of economic interests of the *shi* did not undermine Mozi's prestige. Many – probably most – *shi* were primarily interested in government career as a means of improving their economic status, and Mozi was a keen speaker on their behalf.³³

Mozi unequivocally advocated not just employment of worthy *shi* and their enrichment and empowerment; he was also the most radical supporter of social mobility. Thus, after depicting the implementation of “elevating the worthy” policy by the sage kings of antiquity, according to which “neither the officials were perpetually esteemed, nor the people forever base,”³⁴ Mozi specifies its blessed results:

Thus, at that time, even among those ministers who enjoyed rich emoluments and respected position, none was irreverent and reckless, and each behaved accordingly; even among peasants and artisans, each was encouraged to enhance his aspirations. So, *shi* are those who become aides, chancellors and heads of officials. He who attains *shi*, his plans meet with no difficulties, the body is not exhausted, the fame is established and achievements are accomplished; his beauty

is manifest and ugliness will not come into being: it is all thanks to attaining *shi*.³⁵

故當是時，雖在於厚祿尊位之臣，莫不敬懼而施，雖在農與工肆之人，莫不競勸而尚意。故士者所以為輔相承嗣也，故得士則謀不困，體不勞，名立而功成，美章而惡不生，則由得士也。

Mozi is unequivocal: even among the low strata of peasants and artisans, some people may contribute to the state's well-being; accordingly, there should be no limitations at all on social mobility, and one's position should reflect exclusively his worthiness and righteousness. Simultaneously, those who occupy high positions in the present should beware of downward mobility. In Mozi's idealized system, nobody remains secure in his position. Hence, he explains, that ancient sages in promoting the able and the worthy:

... did not align themselves with uncles and brothers, were impartial toward rich and noble and did not cherish the beautiful-looking. They raised and promoted the worthy, enriched and ennobled them, making them officials and leaders; they deposed and degraded the unworthy, depossessed and demoted them, making them laborers and servants.³⁶

..... 不黨父兄，不偏貴富，不嬖顏色。賢者舉而上之，富而貴之，以為官長，不肖者抑而廢之，貧而賤之，以為徒役。

The implications for the nobles are clear enough: they are no longer supposed to be secure at their position in the society where personal abilities alone determine the person's future. What is astonishing is that Mozi's attack on the centuries-old order apparently went unopposed, without traceable attempts to defend the pedigree-based social hierarchy. It is possible that the voices of the opponents of social mobility were simply silenced after the rise of the *shi* became fait accompli, but even if this is the case, the fact that none of these voices is discernible in either received or archeologically discovered texts is remarkable. Thus, even if Mozi's remark that "*shi* and superior men from All under Heaven, wherever they dwell and whenever they talk, all [support] elevating the worthy"³⁷ exaggerates the support for his views, it does reflect a clear change in the intellectual atmosphere from the time of the *Zuo zhuan*. "Elevating the worthy" became the paradigmatic rule of political life, while aristocrats quietly yielded their power and hereditary rights.

IV. THE DISCOURSE OF WORTHINESS AND THE *SHI* PRIDE

In the middle to late Warring States period, meritocratic discourse came to dominate the vast majority of known texts. To show the power of this discourse, I start with a rare example of a thinker who voiced reservations with regard to uninhibited social mobility: one of the leading followers of Confucius, Mengzi (孟子, ca. 380–304 B.C.E.). Mengzi urged the ruler to exercise maximum caution in deciding on promotions and demotions: “When the ruler promotes the able, if he has no choice [but to do so], this means he lets the humble overstep the respected and strangers overstep the kin. Can he but be cautious?”³⁸ The thinker argued that violation of hereditary principles of rule is justifiable only insofar as the move is unanimously supported by “all the courtiers,” “all the nobles,” and “all the dwellers of the capital.” Yet do these reservations with regard to “promoting the worthy” justify identification of Mengzi as “reactionary” defendant of hereditary offices, as proposed by Angus C. Graham?³⁹ I think a closer look at Mengzi’s writings invalidates Graham’s verdict.⁴⁰ Mengzi’s self-identification was squarely with the members of the *shi* stratum; no less than Confucius himself, Mengzi can be identified as the speaker on behalf of the *shi*, and as such he remains decisively meritocratic.

Through much of his writings, Mengzi proposes a vision of two parallel hierarchies: the political one, headed by hereditary rulers and their close aides, including the rulers’ closest kin,⁴¹ and the moral and intellectual one, headed by upright *shi* like Mengzi himself. *Shi* may come from the bottom of society; hence some of them suffer severe poverty to the point of “eating neither in the morning, nor in the evening, starving to the point of being unable to exit the gate.”⁴² Yet despite these adverse conditions, and despite their utter dependence on the rulers for their sustenance, the *shi* are actually the ruler’s equals: in a most daring and politically dangerous pronouncement, Mengzi claims that in terms of one’s virtue (*de* 德) the ruler actually should “serve” (*shi* 事) his meritorious aide, implying thereby the *shi*’s superiority over the sovereign!⁴³ Moreover, the bifurcation between political and moral and intellectual authority is but a temporary aberration: normally, both should be unified, and the morally upright persons of whatever pedigree should rule the state. In the past, not a few paragon leaders led a humble life, which nonetheless did not prevent them from reaching the peak of power. Thus, the sage Thearch Shun 舜 rose from among the alien

tribesmen; he had to “dwell in the depth of the mountains, . . . having deer and pigs as friends,” and made his living from “toiling at the fields.” Similarly, King Wen of Zhou (文王, d. c. 1047 B.C.E.) also rose from among the aliens, and a series of model ministers of the past started from the very bottom of the society.⁴⁴ Their low starting point notwithstanding, each of these paragons ascended the top of the sociopolitical ladder; and Mengzi evidently expected that such a good fate would befall himself.⁴⁵ In the final account, Mengzi’s aspirations were squarely on the meritocratic rather than aristocratic side!

When we move from Mengzi to another self-proclaimed heir of Confucius, Xunzi (荀子, ca. 310–230 B.C.E.), his meritocratic inclinations become much less equivocal. At first glance Xunzi appears an unlikely candidate to endorse social mobility: his commitment to strict observance of social hierarchy as embedded in the all-important concept of ritual (*li* 禮) might have placed him on par with thinkers of the Springs-and-Autumns period, for whom ritual was the major means of constraining unwelcome advent of the *shi*.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, it is with regard to social mobility that Xunzi’s departure from earlier views of ritual becomes clear. The thinker clarifies:

Although a man is the descendant of kings, lords, *shi* and nobles, if he does not observe the norms of ritual and propriety, he must be relegated to the status of the commoner; although he is a descendant of a commoner, if he accumulates learning of the texts, rectifies his behavior, and is able to observe the norms of ritual and propriety – then he must be elevated to the rank of high ministers, *shi* and nobles.⁴⁷

雖王公士大夫之子孫也，不能屬於禮義，則歸之庶人。雖庶人之子孫也，積文學，正身行，能屬於禮義，則歸之卿相士大夫。

The statement is unequivocal: rather than using ritual as an impediment to social mobility, Xunzi employs ritual behavior as a substitute to pedigree, turning it into the single criterion of appropriate social status. Elsewhere, Xunzi explains why the pedigree cannot serve an adequate determinant of one’s position: it is because every human being – from the most revered paragons to the despicable “petty men” – possesses the same inborn qualities. It is only through learning and self-cultivation that one can transform himself into a “superior man.”⁴⁸ Hence, one’s position should be determined exclusively by one’s learning and one’s conduct, that is, observation of the norms of ritual and propriety, not by one’s birthright. Without a proper behavior, even the son of a king

cannot take his princely position for granted: thus, both downward and upward mobility are normal and normative in an orderly society. Elsewhere Xunzi clarifies:

In the chaotic age . . . ranks and rewards exceed one's virtue . . . worthies are promoted according to their pedigree. . . . If the ancestors were meritorious, the descendants must have distinction; even if they behave like [the paradigmatic tyrants] Jie and Zhou[xin], they must be placed among those who should be respected. . . . [Yet] when one promotes the worthies according to the pedigree, then, even if he hopes to avoid calamity, will he be able to escape it?⁴⁹

亂世則 . . . 爵賞踰德 . . . 以世舉賢 . . . 先祖當賢, 子孫必顯, 行雖如桀、紂, 列從必尊 . . . 以世舉賢, 雖欲無亂, 得乎哉!

Xunzi again is unequivocal: the pedigree-based order is both morally wrong – because it allows scoundrels of Jie and Zhouxin's ilk to remain at the top of the government apparatus – and politically unsustainable. An alternative is clear: a resolutely meritocratic system in which “one's rank will not exceed one's virtue” should replace the decadent aristocratic order. This resoluteness of Xunzi, compared with Mengzi's zigzags, may reflect not just well-known individual differences between the two thinkers but also the impact of the new political realities in which meritocracy not just gained intellectual legitimacy but was also practically implemented (discussed in more detail later in the chapter).

Let us pause to consider broader implications of Mengzi's and Xunzi's approaches. Their differences aside, both thinkers definitely endorse the idea that morally upright “worthy” *shi* should lead the society. But how to determine one's worth? The answers are not clear: oddly enough, the term *xian* (賢, “worthy”) is never properly defined in these or other early texts, and its content is never systematically discussed. Sometimes the content can be deduced from the context: in the *Mozi*, for instance, “worthiness” is often employed as synonymous to “ability” (*neng* 能), which evidently refers to one's administrative skills; this emphasis on one's specific skills is clear from Mozi's comparison of “the worthies” with skillful archers or physicians.⁵⁰ In the *Mengzi*, abilities are mentioned infrequently as an attribute of “worthiness,” but the focus is much stronger on one's morality rather than on specific skills; on one occasion, Mengzi clarifies that one's appointment should be determined primarily by his “goodness” (*shan* 善) rather than knowledge or administrative experience.⁵¹ In many passages of the *Xunzi*, abilities figure as synonymous with worthiness, but elsewhere Xunzi

clarifies that these are not sufficient attributes of a “superior man”: in terms of abilities, there is no real distinction between a superior man and a petty man, and the former excels only in terms of morality and ritually appropriate behavior.⁵² It seems then that insofar as for the followers of Confucius a truly worthy appointee should be a “superior man,” then one’s worth is determined primarily, even if not exclusively, by one’s moral qualities.

Be it morality or skills, the question remained how to “recognize” one’s worth;⁵³ and this was not an idle question in the society in which so many texts advocated “elevating the worthy.” One relatively easy solution to the problem of “recognition” appears in a variety of anecdotes that were incorporated into manifold compendia, such as the *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策) or into Sima Qian’s (司馬遷, c. 145–90 B.C.E.) *Historical Records* (*Shiji* 史記). These anecdotes focus on an ability of a potential employee to impress the ruler (or a high executive) during an interview, in which the job seeker either presents an appropriate policy proposal, or expounds deep philosophical truths, or at times just surprises the potential employer with eloquent argumentation; as a result, he gets the deserved appointment.⁵⁴ The broad circulation of these stories in the transmitted literature suggests that either an interview was indeed the primary means of verifying one’s worth or at least that it was a preferred way for the *shi* who propagated these stories. Yet it was also abundantly clear to many thinkers that speech alone can be misleading and deceptive; hence much of the Masters’ literature expresses mistrust of “glib tongues” and “empty words” and cautions the ruler from being too attentive to eloquent persuaders.⁵⁵

An alternative, more sophisticated means to ascertain the worthiness of a potential employee is suggested in a series of texts scattered through preimperial and early imperial compendia, which teach the ruler (or other employer) how to discern individual qualities of his underlings. In sharp (and possibly conscious) distinction from the anecdotes in which one brilliant speech ensures the person’s employment, these texts, which can be represented by such essays as “Appointments Explained” (“Guan ren jie” 官人解) chapter of the *Surviving Zhou Documents* (*Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書) and the parallel “Appointments of King Wen” (“Wen Wang guan ren” 文王官人) chapter from the *Records of Rites of Dai the Elder* (*Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記) propose a way to diagnose an employee’s character through a series of observances and tests that would explore his sincerity, his will, external expressions of his

feelings, his countenance, his hidden motivations, and the match between his words and deeds.⁵⁶ Significantly, the focus of the observations is overwhelmingly on the candidate's morality; miniscule if any attention is paid to his actual performances. The candidate is expected to be loyal and filial, benevolent and knowledgeable, modest and trustworthy, compliant and virtuous, righteous and observant of rituals. These recommendations closely follow the list of the features of a "superior man" common in the texts of the Confucian lore, and as aptly noticed by Matthias Richter, there is significant similarity between these texts aimed at diagnosing an employee's fitness to office and others, such as the "Zengzi li shi" 曾子立事 chapter of the *Da Dai Liji* aimed at moral self-cultivation of the "superior men."⁵⁷ This means that one's "worth" is determined primarily by one's morality, as implied by Mengzi and Xunzi, among others.

Ostensibly, the "characterological"⁵⁸ texts should have established solid criteria for discerning one's worth; yet the utility of these texts remained limited. The complex process of diagnosing the employee's personality as suggested in these texts was extremely time-consuming; besides, it required of a ruler such an extraordinary insight and psychological sophistication that much of these recommendations remained utterly impractical. In the final account, proponents of moral interpretation of the worthiness did not elaborate – and perhaps could not elaborate – an adequate means of ascertaining one's morality and of making reliable distinctions between a moral person and a hypocrite. In practice this meant that a ruler had to rely primarily on an employee's reputation in ascertaining his worth, and this allowed manifold manipulations by unscrupulous *shi*.

The potential manipulateness of meritocratic discourse of the late Warring States period is fully visible in the last major text from that period, the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋. This text, prepared jointly by thinkers of different ideological affiliations, who gathered on the eve of the imperial unification at the court of the rising power of Qin 秦 under the auspices of the almighty prime minister Lü Buwei (呂不韋, d. 235 B.C.E.), was devised as a careful synthesis of major ideologies of the Warring States era.⁵⁹ Its authors frequently disagree on many political, philosophical, and moral issues, but they have certain common beliefs. Among these, the insistence on elevating the *shi* is so pervasive in the *Lüshi chunqiu* that the entire text may well be read as a promotion campaign by Lü Buwei's "guests." The text abounds with stories of wise rulers who attracted *shi* and benefited enormously from their services and those who failed to do so, bringing disaster on themselves.⁶⁰

It reminds a ruler of the difficulty of discovering truly worthy *shi*: not only should he diagnose their character through a means depicted in “characterological” texts, but he should invest even more time for the search of these rare talents, seeking them “between the four seas, amidst mountain valleys, at lonely and secluded locations – and thus he will be lucky to obtain them.”⁶¹ To illustrate the spirit of the text, a single citation would suffice:

Shi are the men who, when acting in accord with [proper] patterns, do not escape the difficulties; when facing the troubles, forget the profits; they cast aside life to follow righteousness and consider death as returning home. If there are such men, the ruler of a state will not be able to befriend them, the Son of Heaven will not be able to make them servants. At best, stabilization of All under Heaven, or, second to it, stabilization of a single state must come from these men. Hence a ruler who wants to attain great achievements and fame cannot but devote himself to searching for these men. A worthy sovereign works hard looking for [proper] men and rests maintaining affairs.⁶²

士之為人，當理不避其難，臨患忘利，遺生行義，視死如歸。有如此者，國君不得而友，天子不得而臣。大者定天下，其次定一國，必由如此人者也。故人主之欲大立功名者，不可不務求此人也。賢主勞於求人，而佚於治事。

The messages of this passage – namely, effusive praise of the superior morality of the *shi*, of their loftiness which makes a mere ruler of a state unworthy to befriend them, and of their essential contribution to the state’s well-being – recur throughout the entire *Lüshi chunqiu*, indicating thereby the power of the *shi*-centered meritocratic discourse by the end of the Warring States period. The self-confidence of the text’s authors is revealing: it suggests that by the time of the compilation of *Lüshi chunqiu*, the rise of the *shi* was not just a desideratum but rather a *fait accompli*. Hence, in distinction from earlier texts, the *Lüshi chunqiu* employs the term *shi* as an exclusive designation of the elite, while a common designation of the nobles – *dafu* 大夫 – is all but absent from this lengthy compilation. Yet the *shi* are not a closed elite: the text presents them as self-made men who can rise from the utmost poverty, as the following anecdote demonstrates:

Ning Yue was a man from the outskirts of Zhongmou; he was bitter at the labor of tilling and sowing and said to his friend: “How can I escape this bitterness”? His friend replied: “The best is to learn. After learning for thirty years, you will fulfill [your goals].” Ning Yue said:

“I pledge to make it within fifteen years. When others are to rest, I shall not dare to rest; when others are asleep, I shall not dare to sleep.” He learned for fifteen years and became the teacher of Lord Wei of Zhou.⁶³

甯越者，中牟鄙人也。苦耕稼之勞，謂其友曰：『何為可以免此苦也？』其友曰：『莫如學也。學三十歲，則可以達矣。』甯越曰：『請以十五歲。人將休，吾不敢休；人將臥，吾不敢臥。』學十五歲而為周威公之師也。

The anecdote’s most important message is that there are no impenetrable social barriers: a *shi* can come from a poor peasant background, and this by no means should limit his advancement opportunities. Not incidentally, the common self-designation of the *shi* in the *Lüshi chunqiu* is “plain-clothed” (*buyi* 布衣), a term firmly associated with low income.⁶⁴ An immediate impression would be of an entirely open and fair society, but at second glance, questions arose. Was it possible for a peasant to invest fifteen to thirty years in his education? How affordable were learning materials in the pre-paper age when text production might have been exceptionally cumbersome? Is it possible that the anecdote – just like many similar ones scattered throughout the texts of the late Warring States period⁶⁵ – is just part of a misleading effort to present learning as the best and most secure way to improve one’s lot?

And another, more important question: what were the practical manifestations of Ning Yue’s “worthiness”? Here, the text remains surprisingly silent. We are told that Ning Yue – an important thinker from the early Warring States period⁶⁶ – made his career at the court of Lord Wei of Zhou (周威公, fl. ca. 400 B.C.E.), the leader of a tiny principality established on the lands of the Zhou royal domain. The readers could not have been ignorant of the fact that Ning Yue failed to restore the fortunes of the soon-to-be-extinguished Zhou domain; yet this failure did not undermine Ning’s worthiness in the authors’ eyes. This dissociation of “worthiness” from practical achievements is characteristic of the *Lüshi chunqiu* approach in general. Panegyrics for the abilities of worthy *shi* abound; but the authors carefully avoid definition of what real achievements – if any – prove the worthiness of these men. This understanding further strengthens my observation with regard to potentially self-serving nature of “elevating the worthy” discourse. This also explains why, despite the increasing acceptance of meritocratic employment practices, the discourse of

“elevating the worthy” was coming increasingly under the opponents’ fire.

V. “WORTHINESS” RECONSIDERED

The foregoing discussion, which emphasizes the power of meritocratic discourse during the late Warring States period, may create an impression of a smooth transformation of Chinese society from aristocratic into meritocratic one. This impression is not entirely wrong; indeed, in the next section, we see that on the eve of the imperial unification, an impressive degree of social mobility and openness existed at least in some parts of the would-be Chinese world. And yet, just when the meritocratic practices proliferated, the discourse of “elevating the worthy” came under attack. The reasons for this attack were manifold: some, like Mengzi, might have genuinely feared that widespread implementation of meritocratic principles would cause “strangers to overstep the kin,” undermining thereby family values; others, whose views are exposed below, were dissatisfied with negative political or social consequences of ubiquitous emphasis on “worthiness.” Yet by far the strongest opposition came from among those who opposed the manipulative and self-serving nature of “elevating the worthy” discourse.

Politically, the problem of the meritocratic discourse was its potential threat to the very foundations of the monarch-centered political system. After all, the rulers were the only executives whose position depended exclusively on their pedigree rather than their merit. This understanding engendered immense tension in ruler-minister relations, with many thinkers, such as Mengzi or the *Lüshi chunqiu* authors, beginning to adopt an increasingly haughty stance toward the sovereigns. Especially after the attempts to hasten the arrival of a virtuous sovereign through circumventing the system of the rulers’ hereditary succession failed miserably,⁶⁷ the contradiction between the idea of meritocracy and the monarchic practice became all the more visible. To counterbalance the potentially disruptive impact of this contradiction, some of the eminent political theorists, most notably Shen Dao (慎到, fl. late fourth century B.C.E.), came to reconfirm the priority of one’s political authority over one’s worthiness:

When [the sage emperor] Yao was a commoner, he was not able to command his neighbors, but when he faced southward and became a king, his orders were implemented and restrictions heeded.

Looking from this, [we know] that worthiness does not suffice to subdue unworthiness, but power and position suffice to bend the worthies.⁶⁸

堯為匹夫，不能使其鄰家，至南面而王，則令行禁止，由此觀之，賢不足以服不肖，而勢位足以屈賢矣。

Yao was a paragon of morality, yet his leadership derived not from his individual qualities but exclusively from his position as a sovereign. The nature of political hierarchy is such that morality and worthiness play a secondary, if any, role in determining one's authority; hence, Shen Dao recommends the ruler to focus not on cultivating individual morality but rather on safeguarding his power, the maintenance of which is essential for preserving a functioning political system.⁶⁹

Shen Dao and his ideological associates focused on the potential threat of "elevating the worthy" discourse to the principle of monarchism; others criticized this discourse because of its negative impact on the *shi* and on their relations with the state. Critics were particularly concerned with the notorious difficulty to ascertain one's true worth. Insofar as being "worthy" meant primarily being a moral person, and insofar as it was not at all easy to distinguish a truly moral person from a shameless hypocrite, many thinkers came to consider meritocratic discourse as a self-serving device of despicable careerists. This view is evident in particular in the texts that adopted a critical stance toward the dominant discourse of their age, especially the *Laozi* 老子 and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. The former dismisses the common fascination with promoting the worthy: "Do not elevate the worthy: thereby you will cause the people not to contend."⁷⁰ Zhuangzi echoes the *Laozi*'s reservations: "when the worthies are promoted, the people will oust each other; when the knowledgeable are employed, the people will commit crimes against each other."⁷¹ Zhuangzi furthermore argues that "at the age of perfect virtue, neither the worthies were promoted nor the able employed."⁷²

What are the reasons for this apparent rejection of meritocratic principles? Neither the *Laozi* nor the *Zhuangzi* elaborates, but it is evident that both texts are dissatisfied with the inadequate and misleading definition of "worthiness" rather than with meritocratic practices as such. Hence, the *Laozi* explains that the sage "does not want to be conceived of as a 'worthy',"⁷³ whereas *Zhuangzi* ridicules paragons of worthiness, each of which appears singularly inept.⁷⁴ The *Zhuangzi* warns that proliferation of fake worthies is detrimental to sociopolitical order:

the people “crane their necks and stand on tiptoe, saying ‘Somewhere there is a worthy man!’” – and, bundling up their provisions, follow him, abandoning their families and their rulers.⁷⁵ It is unclear who are the worthies that attract such a zealous following; but it is sure that the authors of the *Zhuangzi* do not consider these people as deserving such a reverence. Both the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* deride the term “worthy” as one of many misleading definitions which are abused and manipulated by brazen *shi*. Clearly, this term cannot serve for ordering the society.

Their negation of “elevating the worthy” discourse notwithstanding, neither the *Laozi* nor the *Zhuangzi* authors proposed any practical alternative to “elevation of the worthy” as an administrative principle. A more pointed opposition came from pragmatic statesmen who are often dubbed “Legalists.”⁷⁶ The *Book of Lord Shang* (*Shang jun shu* 商君書), the major representative text of this putative “school of thought,” clearly distinguishes between the meritocratic principle of rule of which the authors approve, and the notion of “worthiness,” which they reject. Shang Yang (商鞅, d. 338 B.C.E.) and other contributors to “his” book explain that “elevating the worthy” was applicable in the past, in the age which lacked clear political institutions; yet since “the worthy view overcoming one another as the [proper] Way . . . there . . . was turmoil.”⁷⁷ To end this turmoil generated by the competition among the worthies, the sages “took the responsibility,” ordering distinctions between lands, property, men, and women; establishing prohibitions, officials, and, finally, the ruler. “When the ruler was established, elevation of the worthy declined and the esteem of nobility was established.”⁷⁸

Why was the system of “elevating the worthy” doomed? Why did it engender inevitable competition and turmoil? Shang Yang clarifies that the problem lies in the intrinsic impossibility of defining who is truly “worthy”: an impossibility that encourages divisiveness and manipulations:

Elevation of the worthy is what the generation calls “orderly rule”; that is why the orderly rule is in turmoil. What the generation calls a “worthy” is the one who is defined as upright; but those who define him upright are his associates (*dang* 黨). When you hear talking about him, you consider him able; when you ask his associates, they approve it. Hence, one is ennobled before he has any merits; one is punished before he committed a crime.⁷⁹

夫舉賢能，世之所以治也；而治之所以亂。世之所謂賢者，言正也；所以為言正者，黨也。聽其言也，則以為能；問其黨，以為然。故貴之，不待其有功；誅之，不待其有罪也。

This passage exposes with the utmost clarity the intrinsic problem of “elevating the worthy” discourse. “Worthiness” is, in the final account, defined by one’s reputation, yet the reputation itself can be attained through manipulations of one’s partisans. What is the solution then? Should the entire concept of meritocracy be abandoned? Definitely not. Rather, one’s worth should be determined by the impartial Law and not by manipulative definitions and empty talk; only then the real worth will be clarified.⁸⁰ This means, in turn, establishing clear and uncontestable routes of social advancement, as Shang Yang explains elsewhere:

What I call “unifying awards” means that benefits, emoluments, offices and ranks derive exclusively from the military service without any alternative pursuits. Thus, the knowledgeable and the stupid, the noble and the base, the brave and the coward, the worthy and the unworthy: all will fully exert the knowledge from within their breasts, commit all the power of their limbs, and go to die for the sake of their ruler. The powerful and eminent, “the worthy and the good” from All under Heaven, will follow him like the flowing water.⁸¹

所謂壹賞者，利祿官爵，搏出於兵，無有異施也。夫固知愚，貴賤，勇怯，賢不肖，皆盡其胸臆之知，竭其股肱之力，出死而為上用也。天下豪傑賢良從之如流水。

Shang Yang proposes here establishment of objective criteria of promotion instead of the inevitably contestable estimates of individual qualities. What matters is not whether a person is defined as “a worthy and a good” but rather what his real merits are. The definition of “merits” appears to be quite narrow: only attainments on the battlefield are counted for promotion. Later, Han Feizi (韓非子 d. 233 B.C.E.), who generally held Shang Yang in high esteem, ridiculed this suggestion: the state apparatus could not be staffed exclusively by valiant warriors.⁸² Yet Shang Yang’s idea of replacing vagueness of one’s “merit” with clear-cut criteria was much to Han Feizi’s liking, and it was up to him to elaborate further the meritocratic system that should be dissociated from the notion of “worthiness.”

Han Feizi’s views of “worthiness” resemble those of Shang Yang. Like his eminent predecessor, he acknowledges the need in worthy aides

to the throne, and like him, he decries the difficulty to verify one's worthiness.⁸³ In the world of mutual trickery and mistrust between the ruler and his aides, the world driven by pure self-interest,⁸⁴ it is imprudent and dangerous to promote "the worthy" just due to their prestige or reputation. Han Feizi clarifies:

The ruler has two worries: when he appoints the worthy, then the ministers will utilize "worthiness" in order to rob [the state] from their ruler; when he makes wanton promotions, then the undertakings will be irreparably damaged. Thus, when a ruler is fond of the worthy, then multiple ministers adorn their actions to satisfy the ruler's expectations; hence, the real situation of the ministers cannot be verified; when the real situation of the ministers cannot be verified, then the ruler cannot distinguish between [the worthy and unworthy] ministers.⁸⁵

人主有二患：任賢，則臣將乘於賢以劫其君；妄舉，則事沮不勝。故人主好賢，則群臣飾行以要君欲，則是群臣之情不效；群臣之情不效，則人主無以異其臣矣。

Han Feizi does not attack here the meritocratic principle as such but rather the ruler's succumbing to meritocratic discourse that can be manipulated by scheming ministers to advance their sinister goals. To avoid being duped, the ruler should promote the able exclusively in accord with strict and uniform rules based not on verifying their morality but rather on assessing their performance: "discuss them according to their tasks, check them according to their performances, assess them according to their merits."⁸⁶ In Chapter 50, "Eminent Doctrines" ("Xian xue" 顯學), Han Feizi cautions the rulers not to be misled by talkative *shi*, whose lofty but nonimplementable doctrines damage the fundamentals of sociopolitical order. Promotions should be based not on one's eloquence, nor on reputation, nor on the immediate impression one makes on the ruler; after all, even such a knowledgeable person as Confucius could not avoid mistakes when making subjective judgments. The solution is elsewhere:

Thus, as for the officials of an enlightened ruler: chief ministers and chancellors must rise from among local officials; valiant generals must rise from among the ranks. One who has merit should be awarded: then ranks and emoluments are bountiful and they are ever more encouraging; one who is promoted and ascends to higher positions, his official responsibilities increase, and he performs his tasks ever more orderly. When ranks and emoluments are great, while official

responsibilities are dealt with in an orderly way, this is the Way of the True Monarch.⁸⁷

故明主之吏，宰相必起於州部，猛將必發於卒伍。夫有功者必賞，則爵祿厚而愈勸；遷官襲級，則官職大而愈治。夫爵祿大而官職治，王之道也。

Like Shang Yang, Han Feizi seeks creating a meritocratic system that would not depend on the vague notion of “worthiness” but will function, instead, according to objective criteria of merit. Rather than focusing on military attainments alone, Han Feizi promotes an idea of double-track advancement: administrative and military officials will be promoted from the lower ranks of the bureaucracy and the army, will be judged according to their performance, and, if successful given ever more important offices. While the system is far from perfect (it does not explain how the people will join the administrative apparatus in the first place), it is much more sophisticated and implementable than anything proposed before. By the end of the Warring States period, a crucial suggestion had been made to rationalize and institutionalize the idea of meritocracy, while dissociating it once and forever from the self-serving “worthy”-oriented discourse of proud *shi*.

VI. QIN AND BEYOND: MERIT VERSUS WORTHINESS

The foregoing discussion indicates that the history of meritocratic thought in China is more complex than is usually assumed. Although there is no doubt that thinkers of the Warring States period had decisively rejected the pedigree-based system of appointment in favor of a flexible system in which individual merits should be the major determinant of one’s position, the nature of these merits remained contestable. Whether identified as referring to one’s skills or one’s morality, or both, “worthiness” remained too difficult to measure, and in the final account it was determined either by one’s eloquence or one’s reputation, being prone, as a result, to continuous manipulations. This situation brought about appearance of counter-discourse promulgated in particular in the writings of the so-called Legalists. The critics rejected the discourse of “worthiness” as self-serving device of the *shi*; instead, they proposed establishing a working meritocratic system in which one’s advancement should be subjected to clear and uniform criteria. It is time to ask now three final questions. First, how do the two trends in meritocratic thought of the Warring States period relate to actual sociopolitical

practices of that age? Second, how did the early tensions between “merit” and “worthiness” transpire during the later imperial history? And third, what can we learn from an early Chinese experience for current debates about meritocratic principles of government?

The answer to the first question is not simple. As mentioned earlier, texts from the Warring States period routinely try to convey an impression that most if not all chief executives of that age were entirely self-made men who often came from the bottom of the society, for example, “a mere *shi* from poor environs, dwelling in a mud cave with mulberry branches and a bending lintel instead of a door.”⁸⁸ Yet as I have argued in the foregoing discussion, these anecdotes should be read *cum grano salis*, as part of the promotion campaign of the “plain-clothed” *shi* rather than an accurate depiction of contemporaneous realities. Actually, we know that proliferation of meritocratic practices notwithstanding, many courts of the Warring States period – most notably in such states as Chu 楚 and to a lesser extent Qi – might have still been dominated by members of the ruling lineage. Yet there were also notable exceptions, among which the state of Qin figures most prominently.

Our current data on preimperial Qin is immeasurably richer than that on other Warring States because of a lucky combination of relatively reliable textual sources and abundant paleographic and material data.⁸⁹ Systematic investigation of this information shows beyond doubt that Qin was a decisively meritocratic regime. First, since the reforms launched under lords Xian (秦獻公, r. 384–362 B.C.E.) and Xiao (秦孝公, r. 361–338 B.C.E.), Qin was routinely employing foreign advisors at the top of the government apparatus at the expense of the ruler’s agnates.⁹⁰ Although some of these “guest ministers” (*ke qing* 客卿) were related to the Qin queens, many others, most notably Shang Yang, were promoted exclusively because of their intellectual abilities, making Qin a particularly attractive destination for traveling persuaders.⁹¹ It seems, then, that the Qin employment patterns did to a certain extent implement “promoting the worthy” ideal, and that members of educated elite from the entire “Chinese” realm of that day could climb to the top of Qin’s sociopolitical ladder.

Qin did promote the worthy *shi*, but what singles it out as an exceptionally meritocratic state is, arguably, the reform of the sociopolitical structure undertaken by Shang Yang and his followers. The reform brought about a new social order, based on twenty (initially less) ranks of merit for which most males were eligible, regardless of pedigree or

economic status. The eight lowest ranks were distributed in exchange for military achievements, particularly decapitation of enemy soldiers, or could be purchased by wealthy individuals; successful rank-holders could be incorporated into the military or civilian administration and thereafter be promoted up the social ladder. Each rank granted its holder economic, social, and legal privileges.⁹² Although Qin remained a highly stratified society and ordinary commoners were normally not able to reach beyond the eighth rank in the hierarchy, the society became incomparably more mobile and “fair” than before. At the very least, insofar as large-scale warfare continued, a significant proportion of men could reasonably expect promotion due to their military performance.⁹³

The new rank system, which eventually incorporated a majority of the male population, effectively transformed the society from one based on pedigree in which the individual’s position was determined primarily by his or her lineage affiliation, into an open one, in which individual merits, especially military merits, determined social position.⁹⁴ The ranks were not fully inheritable; under normal circumstances, a man could designate one heir to his rank, but the heir received one or two ranks lower than his father, and the decrease was sharper for the holders of higher ranks (except for the one or two highest ones).⁹⁵ This system therefore generated a much higher degree of social mobility than had prevailed in the aristocratic age. Predictions of a child’s future that appear in the *Daybooks* (*ri shu* 日書) discovered at Tomb 11, Shuihudi, Yunmeng 雲夢睡虎地 (Hubei), suggest the extraordinarily wide range of possibilities that faced a new born Qin baby: from becoming a high-ranking minister 卿 or a noble 大夫, to becoming an official 吏 or a local bravo 邑傑, or, in the opposite direction, becoming a mere bondservant, a fugitive, or, in the case of females, a slave.⁹⁶ Simultaneously, a strong downward mobility existed as well, as suggested by the regulations regarding unranked descendants of the ruling house.⁹⁷ Most amazingly, even a bondservant could receive a rank of merit in exchange for his military achievements.⁹⁸ Thus, although Qin retained several groups of hereditary occupations (most notably the scribes),⁹⁹ on the overall the degree of social mobility in Qin appears to have exceeded that in other Warring States polities. This in turn may have made Qin an attractive destination for migrants¹⁰⁰ and may have also generated considerable support of the Qin population for its government, despite the notoriously draconian aspects of Qin’s legal system.

Preimperial Qin appears as being able to combine both avenues of advancement: the merit-based promotion that attracted significant proportion of the males and a narrower but still important promotion of the “worthy” – namely, of the educated individuals who could climb the top of Qin’s official ladder due to their intellectual abilities.¹⁰¹ This balanced approach was arguably one of the major strengths of Qin, but it ended soon after the imperial unification. Now, as the need to attract “worthy” advisors from competing polities ended, and the interstate market of talent was replaced with a solid imperial monopoly, the Qin rulers decided to redefine their relations with the educated elite. Through the infamous suppression of “private learning” (the so-called biblioclasm of 213 B.C.E.), the First Emperor of Qin (秦始皇帝, r. 246–221–210 B.C.E.) and his chancellor, Li Si (李斯, d. 208 B.C.E.) tried to create a new situation in which all the intellectual activities will be “nationalized” and members of the educated elite would be fully incorporated into government service.¹⁰² The “worthiness” with its vagueness had no place in the Qin Empire, the founders of which were proud of the clarity of their laws and regulations. Meritocracy should be retained but the concept of “worthiness” had to be abandoned.¹⁰³

The rest of the story is well known. During the lengthy Han dynasty (漢, 206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), the pendulum gradually shifted from “merits” to “worth.” An ever larger percentage of officials became recruited from among men with proper behavioral mode (“filial and incorruptible” 孝廉) and with demonstrable classical education; alternative routes of entrance, such as those in exchange for military merit, became marginal next to nonexistent, especially since the cessation of mass military service.¹⁰⁴ This brought about somewhat unexpected consequences. First, the state-sponsored encouragement of morality (filiality and incorruptibility) brought about behavioral excesses, such as self-destructive funerals and unreasonable wastefulness, as elite members competed among themselves for fine reputation.¹⁰⁵ Second, it allowed gradual closure of elite within a small class of wealthy landowners who perpetuated education and appropriate lifestyle within their families, establishing a web of local relations that was increasingly difficult to penetrate from without.¹⁰⁶

Inattentive to early warnings by Shang Yang and Han Feizi, by the very end of the Han dynasty, its leaders, and eventual founders of the subsequent Cao Wei dynasty (曹魏, 220–265) opted for the system of recommendations based on one’s local reputation as the major avenue of entrance into officialdom. The results were highly

problematic. Well until the Sui dynasty (隋, 581–618), the discourse of “worthiness” served as a de-facto impediment of social mobility, being utilized by aristocratic lineages who manipulated the so-called “local ranks” (*xiang pin* 鄉品) system to prevent outsiders from joining the national elite.¹⁰⁷ This situation eventually backfired, and after the Sui, the central government regained control over promotions, gradually replacing recommendation system, in which one’s reputation was the primary determinant of his worth, with an examination system, which tried to add objective criteria to one’s advancement into officialdom.¹⁰⁸ Although the latter system, as it took shape in the late imperial period, was surely less fair and less conducive to male social mobility than, for example, the Qin system of promotion in exchange for military merits it did allow broader mobility, at least within the proprietary elites, than was possible under the pure recommendations system.¹⁰⁹

VII. EPILOGUE: LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT

In the final account, the replacement of the pedigree-based appointment system with the one that promoted a person because of his qualities or merits appears as one of the major contributions of the Warring States period to the overall strength of China’s imperial enterprise. Yet difficulties accompanying the new practices and in particular differences between promotion according to objective, ideally quantifiable, merits and according to one’s reputation (“worth”) should not be overlooked. What lessons can be learned then from these difficulties – and from the system’s achievements – for our present?

1. *Fairness*

There is no doubt that implementation of meritocratic principles of rule greatly enhanced social mobility during the Warring States period and made high positions accessible to greater segments of population than was ever possible under the aristocratic pedigree-based system. The very notion that learning and self-cultivation may allow even a poor peasant to ascend the social ladder, as epitomized in the anecdote about Ning Yue earlier in the chapter, was surely conducive to social fairness. This said, it should be reminded that “fairness” as such was never considered a goal of “elevating the worthy.” What mattered to the proponents of this policy was enhancement of administrative and military efficiency through full utilization of skilled manpower available to the ruler; the

idea of “equal opportunities” or “equal access” to wealth or power was never proposed by Chinese thinkers. Not only was half of the population (i.e., women) firmly excluded from any considerations of promoting “the able” and “the worthy,” but even the idea that every male should have an equal chance for social or political advancement was never fully articulated. Clearly, an equation of meritocracy with fairness would be a gross simplification.

Moreover, as the foregoing discussion suggests, and as is demonstrated by the experiences of the imperial age, meritocratic system was always prone to elite manipulations. By defining and redefining the nature of “worthiness” and “merit,” ruling elites could preserve their hard-won status in the hands of their social circle, effectively preventing other groups of population from joining the competition for positions at the top of the administrative system. For instance, under the Song dynasty (宋, 960–1279) and thereafter, the exclusion of clerical subbureaucracy from participating in the examinations had severely limited the clerks’ possibilities of social advancement and saved the officials from the competition by those administratively skillful men.¹¹⁰ The possibility that the idea of meritocracy would be manipulated to serve a few selected segments of society should be fully taken into consideration by modern proponents of meritocratic political systems. A possible remedy to this danger is making the system flexible and maintaining several avenues of advancement, as I suggest later in this epilogue (see part 3).

2. *Morality and Efficiency*

The desire for public servants who will be both efficient and morally impeccable is as old as Chinese bureaucracy itself; but so is the understanding that such an ideal is rarely attainable. A controversy about the proper set of priorities continued for millennia, mostly in a subtle form but at times quite openly. Thus, on the one side of the spectrum we find blatant recommendation of Shang Yang to “employ scoundrels to rule the good people,” meaning that the officials’ morality means nothing in comparison with strict fulfillment of their tasks in accordance with the law.¹¹¹ On the opposite side, we find an immensely more authoritative statement by Sima Guang (司馬光, 1019–86), arguably the most brilliant political analyst in the imperial history. Sima opined that the “superior man” is the one “whose morality exceeds his skills” and that if one cannot find enough superior men, it is better to employ the stupid

ones who lack either morality or skills, rather than employing skillful but immoral individuals.¹¹² The practice, as usual, fluctuated between these two poles: usually, enlistment into bureaucracy was determined primarily by one's perceived morality, whereas advancement within the bureaucratic apparatus was normally subordinated to one's performance, in accordance with Han Feizi's suggestions. But how did this combination influence Chinese political system?

The answer is complex and may be disappointing from the point of view of supporters of the moral government in the present. The idea of promoting persons according to their moral behavior, such as "filiality and incorruptibility," could of course encourage filial piety and modesty, but more often than not it encouraged public displays of "morality" (e.g., through lavish burials) but not necessarily true moral behavior. Even when moralizing discourse came to dominate overwhelmingly the officials' selection, as it was, for instance, during the Ming dynasty (明, 1368–1644), the result was not enhancement of morality and incorruptibility but rather increasing awareness of the gap between the public *yang* and the private *yin*, which brought about one of the most corrupt regimes in China's long history.¹¹³ Using meritocratic principles to promote public morality was not entirely meaningless, but the results clearly fell much behind the expectations of the adherents of Confucius.

The Chinese meritocratic system could achieve much more impressive results in terms of efficiency. When measurable criteria were employed to determine one's career, they could be utilized to direct behavior of officials and of aspiring officials toward the desirable goals. For instance, the Qin idea of "per capita" grants of minor ranks of merit had clearly strengthened the Qin's army; whereas later, when mastering the Classics became the major way of entering the officialdom, it greatly encouraged classical learning. Yet even more impressive results could be achieved when clearly definable criteria of "merit" were applied within the officialdom, determining one's bureaucratic advancement. Through redefinition of the officials' "merits," the system could be directed at a variety of goals, ranging from massive land reclamation and afforestation to more prosaic enhancement of tax revenues. Yet although the results could be quite remarkable, they often came at a huge price of ruthlessly oppressing the peasants to attain one's bureaucratic goals.¹¹⁴ Similarly in current China, imposing quantifiable goals on the officials (e.g., enhancing the GDP or promoting birth control)

can produce remarkable results, at times, again, at a heavy human or environmental price.

The observation that the meritocratic system can be highly efficient but is not necessarily conducive to increased morality of either officials or the public in general is highly relevant for the current quest for implementing meritocracy in China or elsewhere. Thus, that meritocratic principles rule the officials' promotion in China today is undeniable and that this brings out impressive results in selected fields of development is self-evident. Yet whereas meritocratic system can at times be used to induce state-sponsored ideology or to promote certain modes of public behavior, it cannot be effective in creating a moral society. Solutions to China's current quest for spiritual civilization should be searched for elsewhere.

3. *Flexibility*

Meritocracy was one of the great inventions of Chinese statesmen of the Warring States period. It provided rulers of China for millennia to come with the pool of highly efficient public servants who maintained one of the largest and most complex empires in human history – and the most durable of all. Yet as it is well known, the system at times severely malfunctioned, causing great turmoil and undergoing lengthy periods of bitter domestic or external struggle until a new efficient regime could be established.¹¹⁵ It seems that the principle of meritocracy as such could not ensure the dynasty's survivability. This may be related to a natural process of the system's degradation and ossification, as ruling elites tried to manipulate it in their favor, closing access to outsiders and utilizing the meritocratic façade to preserve their vested interests. Conversely, as my brief discussion of preimperial and imperial Qin had shown, Qin's success was in part related to its ability to maintain multiple avenues of social and political advancement, although the loss of this diversity might have hastened Qin's collapse.¹¹⁶

I think this is an important lesson for proponents and architects of modern meritocracies. Insofar as manifold routes of individual advancement are maintained, the system may be expected to be fairer, more dynamic, and more adaptable overall to changes than a too perfectly organized one, which would always be prone to move toward ossification. Thus, it may be argued that insofar as the Communist Party of China (CPC) is able to attract both soldiers and students, migrant

workers, and millionaires, it – and the CPC-led government apparatus – will remain an effective political organization and maintain its ruling momentum. To ensure further success, the Party should constantly seek expansion to other, currently marginalized social groups, attracting their ambitious representatives and co-opting them into the ruling apparatus. Lessons from China’s past and their adaptation to ever-changing present may then provide the Party with significant vitality, and these lessons may be of use for other supporters of meritocratic government worldwide.

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NOTES

1. For the French intellectuals’ fascination with China as “a country where merit permitted one to attain to the highest dignitaries of the states, a country where each person was classed in the social hierarchy according to his merit,” see Herlee G. Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 22–3. For Fairbank’s views, see, e.g., John K. Fairbank and Edwin O. Reischauer, *China: Transition and Transformation: Revised Edition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), p. 69.
2. For supposedly meritocratic aspects in the appointment practices of the Western Zhou period, see Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft*, pp. 400–3; Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China: Governing the Western Zhou* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 190–234. Edward L. Shaughnessy furthermore identifies already in the earliest chapters of the *Venerated Documents* (*Shang shu* 尚書) seeds of future debates over relative importance of merit vs. pedigree. See Shaughnessy, “Western Zhou History,” in Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 315–17.
3. For various views of the dating and reliability of the *Zuo zhuan*, especially of its ideologically loaded sections, see David C. Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

University Asia Center, 2001); Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722–453 B.C.E.* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002); Li Wai-ye, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Harvard East Asian Monographs; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007). Scholarly differences aside, it is clear that in terms of purely historical information, such as the composition of the ruling elites in major contemporaneous polities, the *Zuo zhuan* is a highly reliable source. As I shall demonstrate in this chapter, insofar as the speeches in the *Zuo zhuan* are reflective of distinctively aristocratic mindset of the protagonists, it is highly unlikely that they were fabricated during the Warring States period, when social values differed considerably from those of the aristocratic age.

4. For the comprehensive discussion of the aristocratic society of the Springs-and-Autumns period, see Zhu Fenghan 朱鳳瀚, *Shang Zhou jiazhu xingtai yanjiu* 商周家族形態研究 (Tianjin: Guji chubanshe, 1990), pp. 450–593; for the ritual system and its social impact see Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1050–250 B.C.): The Archeological Evidence* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, 2006), pp. 29–73; Yuri Pines, “Disputers of the *Li*: Breakthroughs in the Concept of Ritual in Preimperial China,” *Asia Major* Third Series, vol. 13, no. 1 (2000), 1–41; for ideological power of the aristocrats, see Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*.
5. See Hsu Cho-yun, *Ancient China in Transition: An Analysis of Social Mobility, 722–222 B.C.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), pp. 26–31.
6. A rare but important example of promotion from outside the ranks of aristocracy is Cao Gui 曹劌, whose strategic talents allowed him to become an aide of Lord Zhuang of Lu (魯莊公, r. 693–662 B.C.E.); see *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* 春秋左傳注, annotated by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981, hereafter *Zuo*), Zhuang 10: 182; later texts depict him alternatively as a retainer-assassin in Lord Zhuang's service (*Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 春秋公羊傳注疏, annotated by He Xiu 何休 and Xu Yan 徐彥, rpt. in Ruan Yuan 阮元, comp., *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏. [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991, vol. 2: 2189–2355, hereafter *Gongyang zhuan*], 7:2233, Zhuang 13) or as a military strategist and political advisor (see the newly unearthed *Cao Mo zhi zhen* 曹沫之陣, transcribed and annotated by Li Ling 李零, in Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed., *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書, vol. 4 [2004], pp. 239–85).
7. See 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, *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 中國史研究, no. 3 (1989), pp. 20–30; Zhu Fenghan, *Shang Zhou jiazhu xingtai yanjiu*, pp. 575–93.
8. For instance, when Lord Wen of Jin 晉文公 (r. 636–628 B.C.E.) had seized power in his state after a prolonged period of domestic turmoil, he elevated his supporters, allowing those to rise from the ranks of low nobility to the top of the political ladder.
9. Thus, when Lord Li of Jin 晉厲公 (r. 580–573 B.C.E.) attempted to neutralize powerful aristocrats by appointing his favorites to top government positions, he

- was assassinated and posthumously humiliated by heads of major ministerial lineages. Notably, his murderers were not punished.
10. *Zuo*, Xiang 31: 1185.
 11. For stories in the *Zuo zhuan* in which a heir's worthiness could have an impact on his appointment, see, e.g., *Zuo*, Yin 3: 29; Wen 6: 550; Xuan 4: 679; Zhao 26: 1474; Zhao 26: 1478.
 12. This is most evident from the stories about Zichan (子產, d. 522 B.C.E.), who was lauded for making appropriate appointments in his state of Zheng 鄭; yet all these appointments were invariably from the members of high-ranking lineages, the interests of which Zichan faithfully safeguarded. For further details, see Yuri Pines, "Aspects of Intellectual Developments in China in the Chunqiu Period (722–453 B.C.)," Ph.D. dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1998), pp. 325–9.
 13. *Zuo*, Xuan 12: 724.
 14. *Zuo*, Zhao 11: 1328; Zhao 20: 1417.
 15. *Zuo*, Zhao 26: 1480.
 16. See Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, pp. 136–63.
 17. See, e.g., *Zuo*, Zhao 10: 1319–20.
 18. It is tempting to translate the term *junzi* 君子 according to its components as "the ruler's sons" (e.g., Hsu, *Ancient China in Transition*, pp. 158–9), but in all likelihood, this popular translation is misleading, and *zi* should be read not as a "son" but as honorific suffix. The meaning will then be "a lordlike person" (actually, in some of the earliest appearances of the term *junzi*, e.g., in the *Shi jing* 詩經 odes, it refers to the ruler). In any case, the pedigree connotations of the term *junzi* are indisputable.
 19. See Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, pp. 165–71.
 20. Thus, as pointed by Gilbert L. Mattos ("Eastern Zhou Bronze Inscriptions," in Edward L. Shaughnessy, ed., *New Sources of Early Chinese History: An Introduction to Reading Inscriptions and Manuscripts* [Berkeley: Society for Study of Early China, 1997], pp. 86–7), bronze inscriptions of the Springs-and-Autumns period turn away from the ancestors and focus on the individual attainments of the donor. For similar analysis of the inscriptional evidence, see Pines *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, pp. 171–5.
 21. See notes 6 and 8 for these exceptional cases.
 22. See details in Hsu, *Ancient China in Transition*, pp. 92–105; Zhao Boxiong 趙伯雄, *Zhoudai guojia xingtai yanjiu* 周代國家形態研究 (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu, 1990), pp. 237–51. For the expansion of the administrative apparatus of the Warring States, see Mark E. Lewis, "Warring States: Political History," in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, pp. 587–650.
 23. Archeological evidence lends further support to the picture of the rise of *shi* insofar as there are demonstrable changes in the nature of elite and sub-elite tombs. For details see Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Social Ranking in Chu Tombs: The Mortuary Background of the Warring States Manuscript Finds," *Monumenta Serica* vol. 51 (2003), pp. 439–526; *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius*, pp. 370–99; Yin Qun 印群, *Huanghe zhongxiayou diqu de Dong Zhou muzang zhidu* 黃河中下游地區的東周墓葬制度 (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001); see also discussion of these data in Yuri Pines,

- Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), pp. 116–9.
24. For different analyses concerning the emergence of independent intellectual authority of the *shi* thinkers, see Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Shi yu Zhongguo wenhua* 士與中國文化 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), pp. 26–33; Mark E. Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1999), pp. 53–97; Liu Zehua 劉澤華, *Xian Qin shi ren yu shehui* 先秦士人與社會, rev. ed. (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2004), pp. 22–39 and 113–19; Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, pp. 123–31.
 25. For promoting “the upright” and “the gifted,” see *Lunyu yizhu* 論語譯注, annotated by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), “Wei zheng” 為政 2.19:19; “Zilu” 子路 13.2: 133. The *Lunyu*, however, directs the *shi* not necessarily at serving the regional lords (*zhuhou* 諸侯) but rather at serving unspecified “rulers” (*jun* 君), a term that could refer also to powerful nobles. The nobles are specifically mentioned in the text as the *shi* superiors, whom the *shi* are supposed to serve (e.g., *Lunyu*, “Wei Ling Gong” 衛靈公 15.10: 163; “Zi han” 子罕 9.16: 93). As such, the *Lunyu* perpetuates rather than undermines the situation in which *shi* were inferior to high-ranking nobles.
 26. The dating of the *Lunyu* and its relevance to Confucius’s authentic thought are hotly disputed (see e.g., Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, “Dao yan” 導言, in *Lunyu yizhu* pp. 1–37; John Makeham, “The Formation of *Lunyu* as a Book,” *Monumenta Serica* vol. 44, (1996), pp. 1–24; Bruce E. Brooks, and A. Taeko Brooks, *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Successors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); David C. Schaberg, “Confucius as Body and Text: On the Generation of Knowledge in Warring States and Han Anecdotal Literature,” Paper presented at the Princeton conference “Text and Ritual in Early China,” 2000 (unpublished). I concur with Paul R. Goldin (“Confucius and His Disciples in the *Analects*: Or, Why the Traditional Chronology is Right,” Paper presented at Princeton University, 2011) who views the *Lunyu* as an earlier text than those of Confucius-related lore of the Warring States period. It may be significant that Confucius’ followers from the Warring States period might have decided to “update” the Master’s views with regard to social mobility, turning him into a staunch supporter of the principle of “elevating the worthy.” This tendency is most clear in the newly discovered text *Ji Gengzi [Kangzi] wen yu Kongzi* 季庚(康)子問於孔子 from the Shanghai Museum collection, where “elevating the worthy” becomes Confucius’s single most important policy recommendation (see *Ji Gengzi [Kangzi] wen yu Kongzi* 季庚(康)子問於孔子. Transcribed and annotated by Pu Maozuo 濮茅左, in *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu*, vol. 5 [2006], pp. 193–235).
 27. For these citations, see respectively, *Lunyu*, “Li ren” 里仁 4.9: 37; “Yan Yuan” 顏淵 12.20: 130; “Zilu” 13.20: 140; 13.28: 143; “Xian wen” 憲問 14.2: 145.
 28. *Lunyu*, “Xian wen” 14.42: 159.
 29. *Shi* also thinks of reverence when at sacrifice and of mourning when at the funeral (子張曰:「士見危致命, 見得思義, 祭思敬, 喪思哀, 其可已矣。」) *Lunyu*, “Zizhang” 子張 19.1: 199).
 30. *Lunyu*, “Tai Bo” 泰伯 8.7: 80.

31. *Mozi jiaozhu* 墨子校注, compiled and annotated by Wu Yujiang 吳毓江 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), “Shang xian 尚賢 shang” II.8:66.
32. 亦必且富之貴之, 敬之譽之, 然后國之良士, 亦將可得而眾也。 *Mozi*, “Shang xian shang” II.8: 66.
33. Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, pp. 136–45.
34. 故官無常貴, 而民無終賤。 *Mozi*, “Shang xian shang” II.8: 67.
35. *Mozi*, “Shang xian shang” II.8: 67–8.
36. *Mozi*, “Shang xian zhong” II.9: 74.
37. 而今天下之士君子, 居處言語皆尚賢。 *Mozi*, “Shang xian xia” II.10: 96.
38. 國君進賢如不得已, 將使卑踰尊, 疏踰戚, 可不慎與? *Mengzi yizhu* 孟子譯注, annotated by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), “Liang Hui Wang 梁惠王 xia” 2.7: 41.
39. Angus C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1989), p. 115.
40. Cf. Wang Xianghui 王向輝, “Xian Qin Rujia shangxian guannian de fazhan qianxi” 先秦儒家尚賢觀念的發展淺析, *Shangluo xueyuan xuebao* 商洛學院學報, no. 1 (2008), pp. 59–60.
41. *Mengzi* identifies the ruler’s relatives as an exceptionally powerful stratum of courtiers (*Mengzi*, “Wan Zhang 萬章 xia” 10.9: 251–2).
42. 朝不食, 夕不食, 飢餓不能出門戶。 *Mengzi*, “Gaozi 告子 xia” 12.14: 298.
43. *Mengzi*, “Wan Zhang xia” 10.7: 248; cf. “Gongsun Chou 公孫丑 xia” 4.2: 89; see more of *Mengzi*’s haughty attitude toward the rulers in Yuri Pines, “From Teachers to Subjects: Ministers Speaking to the Rulers from Yan Ying 晏嬰 to Li Si 李斯,” in Gareth Olberding, ed., *Facing the Monarch: Modes of Advice in the Early Chinese Court* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 2013), pp. 69–99.
44. See *Mengzi*, “Li Lou 離婁 xia” 8.1: 134; “Gaozi 告子 xia” 12.15: 298; “Jin xin 盡心 shang” 13.16: 307.
45. *Mengzi*, “Gongsun Chou xia” 4.13: 109.
46. For *Xunzi*’s ideology, see Paul R. Goldin, *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999); Sato, Masayuki, *The Confucian Quest for Order: The Origin and Formation of the Political Thought of Xun Zi* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); for the concept of *li* in the *Xunzi* in comparison to earlier texts, see Pines “Disputers of the *Li*.”
47. *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, compiled by Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), “Wang zhi” 王制 V.9: 148–9.
48. *Xunzi* “Rong ru” 榮辱 II.4: 61.
49. *Xunzi*, “Junzi” 君子 XVII.24: 452.
50. See, e.g., *Mozi*, “Shang xian shang” II.8: 67.
51. *Mengzi*, “Gaozi xia” 12.13: 296. See also *Mengzi*, “Li Lou 離婁 shang” 7.7:153, where worthiness is paralleled to virtue (*de*) and both are implied to be related to one’s benevolence (*ren* 仁). For *Mengzi*’s combination of worth and abilities, see *Mengzi*, “Gongsun Chou 公孫丑 shang” 3.4–3.5: 68–70.
52. *Xunzi*, “Bu gou” 不苟 II.3: 40; “Rong ru” II.4: 62.
53. For the topic of “recognizing” one’s worth, see Eric Henry, “The Motif of Recognition in Early China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 47 (1987), pp. 5–30.

54. See, e.g., the *Shiji* biographies of several Qin 秦 leading statesmen, such as Shang Yang (商鞅, d. 338 B.C.E.), Fan Sui (范雎, d. c. 250 B.C.E.) and Cai Ze (蔡澤, d. c. 230 B.C.E.). An exaggerative nature of these anecdotes is clear from some of them, such as a story of an otherwise unknown Yan Chu (顏觸), who had first irritated King Xuan of Qi (齊宣王, r. 319–301 B.C.E.) during an audience and then made a single point: the king should respect outstanding *shi* and that is all; this boldness and eloquence duly prompted the king to offer Yan Chu a position of the ruler's teacher (*Zhanguo ce zhushi* 戰國策注釋, annotated by He Jianzhang 何建章 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991], “Qi ce 齊策 4” 11.5: 395–6; see also Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, pp. 131–2).
55. See Albert Galvany, “Sly Mouths and Silver Tongues: The dynamics of psychological persuasion in ancient China,” *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 34 (2012), pp. 15–40.
56. See *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書, annotated by Zhang Wenyu 張聞玉 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2000), “Guan ren jie” 官人解 VII.58: 251–63; *Da Dai liji jiegua* 大戴禮記解詁, annotated by Wang Pinzhen 王聘珍 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), “Wen Wang guan ren” 文王官人 X.72: 187–98. The dating of these texts is difficult to assess, but they were likely produced between the late Warring States and the early Han period. Both texts and their numerous parallels are insightfully analyzed by Matthias Richter, *Guan ren: Texte der altchinesischen Literatur zur Charakterkunde und Beamtenrekrutierung* (Welten Ostasiens 3; Bern: Peter Lang, 2005).
57. See Matthias Richter, “From *shi* 士 Status Anxiety to Ru 儒 Ethics,” paper presented at the conference “Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China,” Jerusalem, May 2012.
58. Definition borrowed from Richter, “From *shi* 士 Status Anxiety to Ru 儒 Ethics.”
59. See Scott Cook, “The *Lüshi chunqiu* and the Resolution of Philosophical Dissonance,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 62 (2002), pp. 307–45.
60. See *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋, compiled and annotated by Chen Qiyu 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Xuelin, 1990), “Ai shi” 愛士 8.5: 458–60; “Zhi shi” 知士 9.3: 490–1; “Shi jie” 士節 12.2: 622–4 *et saepe*. One of the chapters (“Jie li” 介立 12.3: 627) plainly proclaims that the only reason for which Lord Wen of Jin (晉文公, r. 636–628 B.C.E.) failed to become a True Monarch (i.e., failed to unify “All-under-Heaven”) is his maltreatment of the devoted aide, Jie Zitui 介子推.
61. *Lüshi chunqiu*, “Jin ting” 謹聽 13.5: 705; for a “characterological” chapter in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, see *ibid.*, “Lun ren” 論人 3.4: 159–60; see also Song Liheng 宋立恒, “Lun *Lüshi chunqiu* yi shu de ‘yong xian’ sixiang ji chansheng de shidai beijing” 論《呂氏春秋》一書的“用賢”思想及產生的時代背景, *Nei Menggu minzu daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 內蒙古民族大學學報(社會科學版) no. 4 (2004), pp. 42–4.
62. *Lüshi chunqiu*, “Shi jie” 士節 12.2: 622–3.
63. *Lüshi chunqiu*, “Bo zhi” 博志 24.5: 1618.
64. See Yuri Pines, “Lexical changes in Zhanguo texts,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* vol. 122, no. 4 (2002): 691–705, on pp. 701–2.

65. The erstwhile poverty of the eminent leaders is a persistent topos in many anecdotes from the Warring States period, and the reliability of these anecdotes is almost invariably doubtful. Suffice it to give one example: the story of an eminent diplomat, Su Qin (蘇秦, d. 284 B.C.E.), as narrated in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策. Su Qin is hailed as a self-made man who initially “dwelled in a mud cave with mulberry branches and a bending lintel instead of a door”; it is through intensive learning that he gained his illustrious career. Yet we are also told in the same anecdote that even before his success, Su Qin was already able to spend a hundred catties of gold and possessed a sable fur coat, which suggests his belonging to proprietary classes (*Zhanguo ce*, “Qin ce 秦策 1” 3.2: 74–6). Clearly, the stories of Su Qin, Ning Yue, and other self-made men should be taken *cum grano salis*.
66. Ning Yue’s book in one *pian* (*Ning Yuezi* 甯越子) is recorded in the bibliographical section of the *Han shu* 漢書, but it was lost before the Sui dynasty (隋, 581–618 C.E.). Recently, portions of the *Ning Yuezi* were discovered in the middle Warring States period Tomb M36 from Shibancun 石板村 village, Cili 慈利 county, Hunan. For the preliminary publication of the discovery, see Zhang Chunlong 張春龍, “Cili Chu jian gaishu” 慈利楚簡概述, in *Xin chu jianbo yanjiu* 新出簡帛研究, eds. Sarah Allan (Ailan 艾蘭) and Xing Wen 邢文 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2004), pp. 4–11.
67. For this failure, see Yuri Pines, “Disputers of Abdication: Zhanguo Egalitarianism and the Sovereign’s Power,” *T’oung Pao*, vol. 91 (2005), pp. 243–300; idem, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, pp. 54–81.
68. *The Shen-tzu Fragments*, compiled by P. M. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), “Wei de” 威德, pp. 235–6.
69. See more in *Shen-tzu*, “De li” 德立, 264–265, and discussion in Pines *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, pp. 47–8; for similar views of priority of the monarch’s power over his qualities, see *Shang jun shu zhuizhi* 商君書錐指, annotated by Jiang Lihong 蔣禮鴻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), “Kai sai” 開塞 II.7: 52; *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu* 韓非子新校, compiled by Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2009), “Nan shi” 難勢 XVII.40: 939–46.
70. 不尚賢，使民不爭。 *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校注, compiled and annotated by Gao Ming 高明 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 3: 235. This saying is not attested to in the proto-*Laozi* fragments from Tomb 1, Guodian 郭店 (Hubei); hence, it may belong to a later layer of the *Laozi*.
71. 舉賢則民相軋，任知則民相盜。 *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* 莊子今注今譯, Annotated by Chen Guying 陳鼓應, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), “Gengsang Chu” 庚桑楚 23: 592.
72. 至德之世，不尚賢，不使能。 *Zhuangzi*, “Tian di” 天地, 12: 327.
73. 是以聖人 . . . 其不欲見賢。 *Boshu Laozi*, 77: 206.
74. *Zhuangzi*, “Dao Zhi” 盜跖 29: 779.
75. 今遂至使民延頸舉踵曰「某所有賢者」，贏糧而趣之，則內棄其親而外去其主之事，足跡接乎諸侯之境，車軌結乎千里之外。則是上好知之過也。 *Zhuangzi*, “Qu qie” 胠篋 10: 262.
76. For problems around the much-abused term “Legalism,” see Paul R. Goldin, “Persistent Misconceptions about Chinese ‘Legalism,’” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 38 (2011), pp. 64–80.
77. 賢者以相出為道 . . . 則有亂。 *Shang jun shu*, “Kai sai” II.7: 52.

78. 既立君，則上賢廢，而貴貴立矣。 *Shang jun shu*, II.7: 53.
79. *Shang jun shu*, “Shen fa” 慎法 V.25: 136–137.
80. *Shang jun shu*, “Xiu quan” 修權 III.14: 83.
81. *Shang jun shu*, “Shang xing” 賞刑 IV.17: 96–7.
82. *Han Feizi*, “Ding fa” 定法 XVII.43: 963.
83. See Yuan Lihua 袁禮華, “Zhong xian bu shang xian, yong xian qie fang xian: Han Fei xiannengguan chutan” 重賢不尚賢 用賢且防賢 – 韓非賢能觀初探, *Nanchang daxue xuebao (renwen shehui kexueban)* 南昌大學學報(人文社會科學版), vol. 1 (2005), pp. 59–63; Jiang Zhongyue 蔣重跃, “Cong ciyu de butong neihan kan Zhongguo gudai de zhengzhi biange – shixi Han Feizi de zhong, xian, ren” 从詞語的不同內涵看中國古代的政治變革——試析《韓非子》的忠、賢、仁, *Hebei xuekan* 河北學刊, vol. 5 (2010), pp. 63–6.
84. See Paul R. Goldin, “Han Fei’s Doctrine of Self-Interest,” in idem, *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), pp. 58–65.
85. *Han Feizi*, “Er bing” 二柄 II.7: 116.
86. 論之於任，試之於事，課之於功。 *Han Feizi*, “Nan san” XIV.38: 908.
87. *Han Feizi*, “Xian xue” 顯學 XX.50: 1137.
88. This is how Su Qin is depicted in a *Zhanguo ce* anecdote (“Qin ce 1” 3.2: 75). See note 65 above.
89. Yuri Pines with Lothar von Falkenhausen, Gideon Shelach and Robin D.S. Yates, “General Introduction: Qin History Revisited,” in: Yuri Pines, Lothar von Falkenhausen, Gideon Shelach and Robin D.S. Yates, eds., *Birth of an Empire: The State of Qin Revisited* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).
90. It is worth reminding here that meritocracy in the Warring States period was commonly understood as “universal”: that is, the ruler should attract the best talents from “all-under-Heaven” and not just from his state. For an interesting proposal by Yan Xuetong (閻學通, 1952–) to resurrect this principle in current China, see Daniel Bell’s introduction to Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, Daniel A. Bell and Sun Zhe, eds., Edmund Ryden, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 14.
91. For the guest ministers at the court of Qin, see Moriya Kazuki 森谷一樹, “Senkoku Shin no sōhō ni tsuite” 戰國秦の相邦について, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究, vol. 60 (2001), pp. 1–29; Huang Liuzhu 黃留珠, *Qin Han lishi wenhua lungao* 秦漢歷史文化論稿 (Xi’an: San Qin chubanshe, 2002), pp. 41–50. Qin’s efforts to attract travelling persuaders peaked under the leadership of chief minister, Lü Buwei, who assembled scholars from the eastern states to compile the *Lüshi chunqiu*.
92. For manifold aspects of the Qin social structure and of its impact on the early Han practices, see Michael Loewe, “The Orders of Aristocratic Rank of Han China,” *T’oung Pao*, vol. 48 (1960), pp. 97–174; Gao Min 高敏, “Qin de cijue zhidu shitan” 秦的賜爵制度試探, in idem, *Qin Han shi lunji* 秦漢史論集 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou shuhuashe, 1982), pp. 1–32; Michael Loewe, “Social Distinctions, Groups and Privileges,” in *China’s Early Empires: A Reappraisal*, Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 296–307.

93. Two recently published Qin population registers discovered at the site of Liye 里耶, Hunan, indicate that the majority of households were headed by ranked individuals, approximately one-quarter of whom were identified as “nobles” 大夫, i.e., holders of rank five and higher; Chen Wei 陳偉, ed., *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi (di yi juan)* 里耶秦簡牘校釋 (第一卷) (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2012), slips 8–19; 8–1236+8–1791, pp. 32–33 and 297; Robin D. S. Yates, “Bureaucratic Organization of the Qin County of Qianling 遷陵 in the Light of the Newly Published *Liye Qin jian (yi)* and *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi (diyi juan)*” paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Sinology, Institute for History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 20–22 June, 2012. This high proportion of ranked individuals may reflect particularly high possibilities of individual advancement in the wake of wars of unification, but in any case it is indicative of the availability of low and medium-level ranks of merit to most Qin males. Females, of course, were excluded from this system of promotion, making it fundamentally unfair from the modern point of view; it is worth noticing, however, that women could inherit the husband’s rank and some of its privileges.
94. See Robin D. S. Yates, “Social Status in the Ch’in: Evidence from the Yün-meng Legal Documents. Part One: Commoners,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 47 (1987), pp. 197–236; Teng Mingyu, “From Vassal State to Empire: An Archaeological Examination of Qin Culture,” Susanna Lam, trans., in Pines et al., eds., *Birth of an Empire*.
95. See details in the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year (Ernian lüling 二年律令)* text, unearthed at the early Han Tomb 247, Zhangjiashan, Jiangling 江陵張家山 (Hubei); see *Zhangjiashan Hanmu zhujian (er si qi hao mu)* 張家山漢墓竹簡 (二四七號墓), published by Zhangjiashan Hanmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 張家山漢墓竹簡整理小組 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2001), “Fulü” 傅律, slips 259–62, p. 182.
96. See Wu Xiaoqiang 吳小強, ed., *Qin jian Ri shu jishi* 秦簡日書集釋 (Changsha: Yuelu, 2000); Robin D.S. Yates “Slavery in Early China: A Socio-cultural Perspective,” *Journal of East Asian Archaeology*, vol. 3, nos. 1–2 (2002), 283–331, on p. 310.
97. A. F. P. Hulswé, *Remnants of Ch’in Law: An Annotated Translation of the Ch’in Legal and Administrative Rules of the 3rd Century b.c. Discovered in Yün-meng Prefecture, Hu-pei Province, in 1975* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), D164, p. 174.
98. Hulswé *Remnants of Ch’in Law*, A91, p. 83; Yates, “Slavery in Early China,” p. 313.
99. See Robin D.S. Yates, “Introduction: The Empire of the Scribes,” in Pines et al., eds., *Birth of an Empire*.
100. For archeological confirmation of the influx of immigrants into Qin, see Teng, “From Vassal State to Empire.”
101. For these examples, see, for example, careers of Shang Yang, Fan Sui, and Cai Ze (see note 54).
102. This interpretation of the biblioclasm is based on Pines *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, pp. 180–3; for other views, see, e.g., Jens Østergard Petersen, “Which Books Did the First Emperor of Ch’in Burn? On the Meaning of *Pai Chia* in

- Early Chinese Sources,” *Monumenta Serica*, vol. 43 (1995), pp. 1–52; Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000), pp. 183–96.
103. It may not be incidental that the term “worthiness” is conspicuously absent from the Qin stele inscriptions (for which, see Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions*).
 104. For the latter, see Mark E. Lewis, “The Han Abolition of Universal Military Service,” in Hans Van de Ven, ed., *Warfare in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 33–76.
 105. See Michael Nylan, “Confucian Piety and Individualism in Han China,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 116 (1996), pp. 1–27.
 106. See Patricia B. Ebrey, “Toward a Better Understanding of the Later Han Upper Class,” in Albert E. Dien, ed., *State and Society in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 49–72.
 107. See Dennis Graffin, “Reinventing China: Pseudobureaucracy in the Early Southern Dynasties,” in Dien, ed., *State and Society in Early Medieval China*, pp. 145–55.
 108. For the functioning of the renewed examination system under the Tang (唐, 618–907) dynasty, see Penelope A. Herbert, *Examine the Honest, Appraise the Able: Contemporary Assessments of Civil Service Selection in Early Tang China* (Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University Press, 1998). Herbert shows how the tension between one’s “worth” (literary talents) and “merits” (administrative skills) transpired as a tension between those examinations aimed at determining one’s theoretical legibility to an office and those aimed at fixing one’s real appointment.
 109. See Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) and his chapter for this volume (Ch. 7).
 110. See William T. Rowe, *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 339–44; Bradley W. Reed, *Talons and Teeth: County Clerks and Runners in the Qing Dynasty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
 111. *Shang jun shu*, “Qu qiang” 去疆 I.4: 29–30; for the analysis of this statement and its role in the *Book of Lord Shang*, see Yuri Pines, “Alienating rhetoric in the *Book of Lord Shang* and its moderation,” *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* vol. 34: (2012), pp. 79–110.
 112. *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒, by Sima Guang 司馬光, annotated by Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 1: 14–15. Sima Guang’s statement should be understood in the context of his lasting polemics against Wang Anshi (王安石, 1021–86), in particular against Wang’s readiness to employ highly efficient but morally questionable individuals in financial institutions. For the polemics, see Peter K. Bol, “Government, Society and State: On the Political Visions of Ssu-ma Kuang and Wang An-shih,” in Robert R. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer, eds., *Ordering the World: Approaches to State and Society in Sung Dynasty China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 128–92; for Wang’s employment practices, see Paul J. Smith, “State Power and Economic Activism during the New Policies, 1068–1085: The Tea and

- Horse Trade and the ‘Green Sprouts’ Loan Policy,” in *Ordering the World*, pp. 76–127.
113. See Huang, Ray. *1587: A Year of No Significance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).
 114. A huge success of land reclamation and afforestation campaigns under the Ming founder, Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋, r. 1368–98) came in part due to the subjugation of officials’ promotion to their successful attainment of these goals. See Natalia P. Svistunova, *Agrarnaia Politika Dinastii Min, XIV vek* (Moscow: Nauka, 1996); cf. Edward L. Dreyer, *Early Ming China: A Political History, 1355–1435* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), pp. 122–31. For an attempt to utilize the administrative system for increasing tax revenues and for its human price, see, e.g., Smith, “State Power and Economic Activism”; Huang, 1587, pp. 60–7.
 115. See Pines, *The Everlasting Empire: Traditional Chinese Political Culture and Its Enduring Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).
 116. See also Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, pp. 214–18.