

Biases and Their Sources: Qin History in the *Shiji**

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The *Shiji* 史記 continues to attract unprecedented scholarly interest in China and in the West. Western languages' studies and translations of this book roughly equal those dedicated to all other traditional Chinese historical texts altogether. This ongoing interest reflects both the outstanding role of the *Shiji* as the fountainhead of the Chinese official historiography and its unrivaled position as a literary masterpiece. But the *Shiji* is more than that. It is also the most detailed, and frequently the only extant source for the events of the formative period of the Chinese empire. Especially, for the period spanning two-and-a-half centuries since the end of the *Zuo* 左傳 narrative and to the establishment of the Han dynasty (漢, 206 BCE-220 CE), the *Shiji* is the only extant narrative history, which crucially shaped our perception of political, social and institutional processes that contributed toward the emergence of the Chinese empire, as well as of the political context for the activities of the Zhanguo (戰國, 453–221 BCE)¹ thinkers. Hence the question of the reliability of the *Shiji* narrative is one of the pivotal issues in the study of early Chinese history in general.

It is with regard to the issue of the *Shiji* reliability and of the intellectual integrity of its major author, Sima Qian (司馬遷, c. 145–90), that the most crucial revolution is taking place nowadays. The traditional critics of the *Shiji* usually emphasized its commitment to the “true recording” (*shilu* 實錄) at the expense of ideological purity, and many twentieth-century scholars echoed them, hailing Sima Qian's willingness to reproduce true events from disparate sources.² Consequently, although traditional and modern scholars alike criticized the author's biases and pointed at certain inaccuracies in the text, the *Shiji* remained the most authoritative source for the pre-Han (and early Han) history. This situation began changing, however, in the last generation, as more scholars began searching for Sima Qian's hidden agendas, either personal, or ideological. This pre-occupation with the historian's putative

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1 Hereafter all the dates are Before Common Era unless indicated otherwise.

2 See, for instance, Yang Xiong's (揚雄, 53 BCE-18 CE) views in his *Fayan* 法言, annotated by Han Jing 韓敬 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992), 10.30 (“Chong Li” 重黎), 279; cf. Ban Gu (班固, 32–92 CE), *Hanshu* 漢書, annot. by Yan Shigu 顏師古 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1997), 62.2738; Wang Chong (王充, c. 27–97 CE), *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, comp. by Huang Hui 黃暉 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1995), “Chao qi” 超奇 13.607–608. For modern approvals of Sima Qian's reliability, see e.g., Burton Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Grand Historian of China* (New York: Columbia University, 1958), 85–86, Mikhail V. Kriukov, “Syma Tsian' i ego Istoricheskie Zapiski,” in Syma Tsian' [Sima Qian], *Istoricheskie Zapiski [Shiji]*, ed. and trans. by R.V. Viatkin (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), 49–64. The Chinese studies that adopt this approach are too many to be surveyed here; for just one recent example, see e.g., Zhang Guiping 張桂萍, “*Shiji* yu Zhongguo shixue de shilu chuantong” 《史記》與中國史學的實錄傳統, *Xuexi yu tansuo* 1 (2004), 118–124.

agendas brought about increasing skepticism regarding the reliability of the *Shiji*, going even so far as to accusations that Sima Qian created “a literary universe that doubled and replaced the real world of events”, rather than made “true records” of the past.³

Is this skepticism justified? Can we determine the degree to which Sima Qian’s “mirror” was “cloudy” (to paraphrase Stephen Durrant)? Can we still trust the *Shiji* when discussing China’s pre-imperial age? While many scholars in answering these questions concentrated on Sima Qian’s putative agenda(s), I prefer to treat the matter differently: namely, to compare the *Shiji* narrative with the independent data, which recently became available due to remarkable archeological discoveries. Such a comparison would allow us to avoid both the problem of the often futile search for Sima Qian’s elusive agenda(s), and the problem of circularity when certain agendas are presupposed and then the narrative is searched for the possible confirmation of these agendas. Employing the new data opens therefore new possibilities for the *Shiji* researchers.

My attempt to trace the biases in the *Shiji* will focus on its presentation of one of the most ideologically sensitive issues in pre-imperial history, namely the history of the state of Qin 秦 and its place within the Warring States system. The exceptional importance of Qin history for the Han thinkers and statesmen is widely recognized. Being the only precedent of the imperial rule, Qin became the ultimate “mirror” for the Han rulers, so that conflicting approaches toward policy making were usually shaped in the form of criticism of the Qin, or, conversely, support for its politics. Moreover, the very legitimacy of the Han rule was ultimately based on Qin’s legacy: Han inherited many of Qin’s practices and institutions, ruled from the former Qin heartland, and partly owed its initial legitimacy to the success of the dynastic founder, Liu Bang (劉邦, d. 195), to secure Qin’s surrender. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the attitude to Qin was a true political and ideological litmus test for a Han thinker or historian.⁴

Most previous studies of Sima Qian’s attitudes toward Qin focused predictably on one of the most literary and intellectually sophisticated chapters of the *Shiji*, namely the “Basic Annals of the First Emperor of Qin”.⁵ I prefer instead to focus on the much drier and yet

3 See Mark E. Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: SUNY, 1999), 316. For different analyses of the historian’s ideological or personal agendas, see, aside from Lewis, such major works as Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: SUNY, 1995); Grant Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo: Sima Qian’s Conquest of History* (New York: Columbia University, 1999); Michael Nylan, “Sima Qian: A True Historian?,” *Early China* 23–24 (1998–99), 203–246; Li Wai-yee, “The Idea of Authority in the Shih-chi (Records of the Historian),” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54.2 (1994), 345–405.

4 See e.g., Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch’in Shib-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000), 155–163. Kern’s statement that “we time and again have to accept the *Shiji* version of history simply because of lack of alternatives” (*ibid.*, 157), and his insightful use of the epigraphic data to reconstruct cultural and ideological dimensions of the pre-imperial and imperial state of Qin, served as a source of inspiration for the present study.

5 These had been discussed, for instance, by Stephen W. Durrant, in his “Ssu-ma Ch’ien’s Portrayal of the First Ch’in Emperor,” in *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China*, ed. Frederick P. Brandauer and Chun-chieh Huang (Seattle and London: University of Washington, 1994), 28–50; Michael J. Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2001), 188–191; Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions*, 155–163.

much longer and more informative “Basic Annals of Qin” and the adjacent information contained in several other chapters of the *Shiji*. While admittedly literarily inferior and ideologically less sensitive than “The First Emperor’s Annals”, the discussion of early Qin history is historiographically more intriguing. First, unlike most discussions of Chunqiu (春秋, 722–453) and Zhanguo history in the *Shiji*, which rely heavily on the *Zuoqzhan*, *Guoyu* 國語 and Zhanguo collections of anecdotes, Sima Qian’s discussion of Qin history is largely based on the long lost Qin sources and presents plenty of otherwise unobtainable information.⁶ Second, Qin benefited more than any other pre-imperial state (with a possible exception of Chu 楚) from a series of extraordinarily impressive archeological findings. These, in particular rich epigraphic sources, supply illuminating information about the life of different social strata and cover an extraordinarily broad range of topics: local and national administration, legal issues, statutes, popular and elite religion, political declarations, international relations, historiography and many others. As I shall show below, the newly obtained sources provide us with information which sharply differs from what is presented in the *Shiji*. After highlighting these differences, I shall try to explain the reasons for the ostensible misrepresentation of the history of Qin in the *Shiji* and explore whether or not the “new sources’ revolution” undermines the credibility of the *Shiji* and its value for the scholars of ancient Chinese history.

1 Explaining Qin’s Success: The *Shiji* Version

Sima Qian summarized his views of the Qin history in the preface to the “Annual Tables of the Six States”:

太史公讀秦記，至犬戎敗幽王，周東徙洛邑，秦襄公始封為諸侯，作西時用事上帝，僭端見矣。禮曰：「天子祭天地，諸侯祭其域內名山大川。」今秦雜戎翟之俗，先暴戾，後仁義，位在藩臣而躡於郊祀，君子懼焉。⁷

While reading the *Qin Records* [in my capacity as a] Grand Historian, when I came to the time of the Quanrong defeating King You [of Zhou, 周幽王, r. 781–771], Zhou moving eastwards to Luoyi, Lord Xiang of Qin [秦襄公, r. 777–766] being first enfeoffed as an overlord (*qhubou* 諸侯) and establishing a Western Altar to sacrifice to the Supreme God, I have seen the beginning of the transgression. The *Rites* say: “The Son of Heaven sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, the overlords sacrifice to famous mountains and great rivers within their domain.”⁸ Now, Qin’s customs were mixed with those of Rong and Di, it advanced violence and cruelty and downgraded benevolence and righteousness; being in a vassal position, it carried out suburban sacrifices [appropriate to the Zhou king]: the superior men were overawed by this.

6 For the discussion of Sima Qian’s sources for Qin history, see e.g., Yoshimoto Michimasa 吉本道雅, “Shin shi kenkyū josetsu” 秦史研究序説, *Shirin* 78.3 (1995), 34–67; cf. Fujita Katsuhisa 藤田勝久, *Shiki Sengoku shiryō no kenkyū* 史記戰國史料の研究 (Tōkyō: Tōkyō University, 1997), 227–278.

7 Sima Qian 司馬遷 et al., *Shiji* 史記, annotated by Zhang Shoujie 張守節, Sima Zhen 司馬貞 and Pei Yin 裴駟 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1997) 15.685.

8 Cf. Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji jijie* 禮記集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996), “Quli, xia” 曲禮下 6.151–152.

Having clarified his basic attitude toward Qin as an unscrupulous usurper, Sima Qian then depicts initial achievements of Qin during the reign of lords Wen (文公, r. 765–716) and Mu (穆公, r. 659–621), and continues with the depiction of the overall moral and political degeneration of the Zhanguo age, which set the scene for the further advancement of Qin:

秦始小國僻遠，諸夏賓之，比於戎翟，至獻公之後常雄諸侯。論秦之德義，不如魯衛之暴戾者，量秦之兵不如三晉之彊也，然卒并天下，非必險固便形執利也，蓋若天所助焉。⁹

Qin originally was a small and remote state, all the Xia shunned it, treating it as Rong and Di ["barbarians"]; [only] after the age of Lord Xian [獻公, 384–362] it became a constant hero among the overlords. When we discuss virtue and righteousness of Qin, it does not match even the violence and cruelty of Lu 魯 and Wei 衛,¹⁰ when we measure its armies, they are not as strong as those of the three Jin 晉 states (i.e. Wei 魏, Han 韓 and Zhao 趙), but at the end [Qin] annexed All under Heaven. It is not necessarily due to the advantages of its mountain barriers and benefits of its geographic situation. Truly, [Qin] was aided by Heaven.

Here Sima Qian introduces four further *topoi* related to Qin. First, despite its imminent desire to usurp the Zhou power, this state actually was a marginal polity, despised by the proud bearers of the Xia 夏 civilization. Second, it was also a semi-barbarian state, alien to the Xia culture. Third, the change in the fate and power of Qin occurred during Lord Xian's reign. Finally, Qin's victories after Lord Xian can be explained neither by its moral qualities nor by military capability, nor even by the beneficent geographic location, as argued by Jia Yi (賈誼, 199–166).¹¹ Rather, Qin's amazing success was a direct result from Heaven's intervention on its behalf.

We shall put aside for the time being Sima Qian's explanations for Qin's success and the possible parallels between Qin and Han, underlined elsewhere in the introduction to the "Annual Tables of the Six States", but will focus first on four major features of Qin history in the historian's eyes. All of the *topoi* outlined above: namely, weird ambitions of the Qin's leaders, the initial remoteness and cultural otherness of this polity, and the change in its fate under the reign of Lord Xian and his descendants, are present elsewhere in the *Shiji*. The only exception is the issue of Qin's inherent intention to usurp the Zhou, which is not explicitly mentioned elsewhere in the text, although it may be implied in the detailed depiction of Qin rulers' extraordinary sacrificial activities surveyed in the "Treatise on Feng and Shan Sacrifices". Perhaps, an apparent contradiction between two of Sima Qian's assertions, namely of Qin's high ambitions and of its pre-fourth century marginality cautioned him against over-emphasizing the former. As for the rest of the historian's estimates, namely, Qin's barbarianism and remoteness, and the radical change after Lord Xian's time, they are repeatedly mentioned in the *Shiji*. The clearest statement appears in the "Basic Annals of Qin" in a historian's remark preceding the discussion of the reforms initiated by Lord Xiao (秦孝公, r. 361–338):

⁹ *Shiji* 15.685.

¹⁰ Cui Shi 崔適 (in his *Shiji tanyuan* 史記探源, collated by Zhang Lie 張烈 [rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua, 2004], 79) proposes an alternative reconstruction of the sentence: "the violence and cruelty of Qin cannot match virtue and righteousness of Lu and Wei," eliminating thereby Sima Qian's irony.

¹¹ For Jia Yi's arguments, see his "On the Faults of Qin" 過秦論 in *Shiji* 6.277 and 48.1962.

周室微，諸侯力政，爭相併。秦僻在雍州，不與中國諸侯之會盟，夷翟遇之。¹²

The house of Zhou declined, the overlords ruled by force, struggling to annex each other. Qin was remote in Yongzhou, it did not participate in the assemblies and alliances with the overlords of the Central States, who treated it like Yi and Di “barbarians”.

This statement is even more radical than those in the preface to the “Annual Tables”. Its most puzzling assertion is that Qin’s location, Yongzhou 雍州, was a remote and semi-barbarous place, at least in the eyes of the leaders of the “Central States”. Could it be that Sima Qian forgot that Yongzhou was the place from which the house of Zhou ruled “All under Heaven” during the age of its glory? And even if this was forgotten, how could the claim of the Yongzhou alleged remoteness be reconciled with the basic fact that this was also the location of the Han capital? Why had Sima Qian, who was born very close to Yongzhou, adopted an extreme “eastern” view, according to which this “province” was considered remote and apparently marginal? Was it again a case of the veiled criticism against the Han ruling house, which had adopted Yongzhou as its power base? We shall return to these questions later; now, let us turn to another of Sima Qian’s harsh statements, namely Qin’s alleged barbarianism.

As we have seen above, the identification of Qin with the Rong, Yi 夷 or Di tribesmen is a recurrent topic in the *Shiji*. Importantly, however, Sima Qian indicates that the success of this state was based on its ability to overcome the inborn barbarianism. Lord Xiao, whose reforms are praised as the turning point in Qin history, had succeeded precisely because he called upon the worthy ministers from abroad (*binke* 賓客) whom he lured with high awards; one of these guest ministers, Shang Yang (商鞅, d. 338), became the architect of reforms, which turned Qin into a super-power. Significantly, among these reforms Sima Qian mentions steps aimed at eliminating “the teachings of Rong and Di” and improving public morality. The civilizing impact of the alien advisors on Qin’s originally coarse customs is mentioned also in the famous memorial directed against the expulsion of the foreigners, submitted by another great foreigner at Qin’s service, Li Si 李斯 (d. 208).¹³ Qin’s “acculturation” is in the *Shiji* intrinsically linked with Qin’s self-strengthening; both occurred in the wake of Lord Xiao’s reforms.

Having ascertained Sima Qian’s basic premises with regard to Qin history, let us check them against independent archeological and epigraphic data. To which extent was Qin influenced by the “customs of Rong and Di”? Was it indeed a peripheral state, at the fringes to the Zhou culture? And how did the reforms of Lords Xian and Xiao influence, if at all, Qin’s cultural identity? Today these questions can be answered independently of the *Shiji*. Several remarkable discoveries during the recent decades have immensely enriched our understanding of Qin’s cultural and political history.¹⁴ By comparing the newly obtained information with Sima Qian’s accounts, we would be able to radically improve our understanding of the reliability of the *Shiji*.

¹² *Shiji* 5.202.

¹³ See respectively *Shiji* 68.2234 and 87.2544.

¹⁴ For an attempt to discuss the impact of some of the recent discoveries on our interpretation of Qin history, see Yuri Pines, “The Question of Interpretation: Qin History in Light of New Epigraphic Sources,” *Early China* 29 (2004), 1–44.

2 “Barbarians” or Zhou Conservatives?

Let us begin with one of the most frequently mentioned assertions of Sima Qian, namely his view of Qin’s erstwhile “barbarian” nature. This view had been frequently cited by historians dealing with Qin history, who found further indications of Qin’s initially alien nature in those parts of the “Basic annals of Qin” which deal with the earliest stages in the history of this state.¹⁵ We shall not deal here with the controversial and perhaps still irresolvable issue of Qin’s earliest origins, but instead focus on its culture as it can be traced from the eighth century, when the state of Qin had moved into the former lands of the Western Zhou royal domain.¹⁶ Was Qin culture at this stage of its history proximate or rather alien to the Zhou?

Before trying to determine the degree of Qin cultural proximity to the Zhou we should choose the core elements of the Zhou culture against which Qin’s cultural belonging can be measured. Here I believe that the adoption of the Zhou ritual norms should constitute the basic watershed between Zhou and non-Zhou polities. Elaborate rites constituted the very foundation of the aristocratic Zhou society; ignorance of ritual regulations was impairing a person’s humanity, be he a commoner or an alien tribesman. The Zhou ritual was then a dividing line between “us” and the “others”, at least throughout the Western Zhou, Chunqiu, and probably also early Zhanguo age.¹⁷

Ritual norms pertained to almost every imaginable sphere of human activities, and in many cases it is impossible to verify whether or not the ruling elite of the state of Qin followed these norms. In several crucial aspects, however, a systematic comparison is possible. One of the most important aspects of the Zhou ritual culture was a set of uniform mortuary practices throughout the Zhou world. Tombs of the Zhou aristocrats display strict adherence to the rules of post-mortem hierarchy, which was reflected in the gradation in the size and the form of the nobles’ tombs, and even more so – in the richness of the assemblages of ritual vessels within the tomb. The hallmark of these rules is the so-called *lie ding* 列鼎 system according to which members of each aristocratic rank were assigned a fixed number of *ding* tripods (and adjacent set of *gui* 簋 tureens) to be used in ancestral sacrifices and in

15 See e.g., Meng Wentong 蒙文通, “Qin wei Rong zu kao” 秦為戎族考 *Yugong* 6.7 (1936), 17–20; Derk Bodde, *China’s First Unifier: A Study of the Ch’in Dynasty as Seen in the Life of Li Ssu* 李斯 280–208 B.C. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ., 1967), 2ff; Liu Yutao 劉雨濤, “Qin yu Huaxia wenhua” 秦與華夏文化, *Kongzi yanjiu* 2 (1988), 61–67; cf. Huang Xiaofen 黃曉芬, “Shin no bosei to sono kigen” 秦の墓制とその起源, *Shirin* 74.6 (1991), 103–144; for the most recent example of this approach, see Liu Chunhua 劉春華, “Cong ‘Shiji’ kan Qin ren de minzu guan” 從《史記》看秦人的民族觀, ed. Qin Shihuang bingmayong bowuguan yanjiu shi 秦始皇兵馬俑博物館研究室, *Qin wenhua luncong* 12 (2005), 393–407.

16 The controversy regarding the earliest origins of the Qin ruling elite is comprehensively summarized by Lothar von Falkenhausen in his “Diversity and Integration along the Western Peripheries of Late Bronze Age China: Archaeological Perspectives on the State of Qin (771–209 BC)” (unpublished ms).

17 For the importance of the Zhou ritual norms prior to the middle Zhanguo period, see Yuri Pines, “Disputers of the *Li*: Breakthroughs in the Concept of Ritual in Preimperial China,” *Asia Major* Third Series, 13.1 (2000), 1–41; for ritual norms being the major dividing line between the “Xia” and the “barbarians”, see Pines, “Beasts or Humans: Pre-Imperial Origins of Sino-Barbarian Dichotomy,” in *Mongols, Turks and Others*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 59–102.

the grave. Implementation of the *lie ding* system can be generally accepted as the single most important sign of the state's belonging to the Zhou cultural sphere.¹⁸

A detailed discussion of Qin mortuary practices as well as of Qin's material remains in general had been done elsewhere, and here I shall confine myself only to a brief summary of the major findings.¹⁹ The most important aspect for the purposes of our discussion is the conformity of Qin mortuary practices with those of the Zhou. Throughout the Chunqiu and the early Zhanguo period, Qin nobles implemented the *lie ding* system with the same vigor as their eastern peers. As elsewhere in the Zhou world, Qin nobles were occasionally transgressing ritual norms, "upgrading" the number of ritual vessels in the tomb, but these subtle transgressions display, if anything, mastery of the subtleties of the Zhou ritual and not "barbarian coarseness". The major peculiarity of the Qin ritual vessel assemblages is that from the middle-Chunqiu period on the increasing number of the grave bronze vessels are replaced by the so-called *mingqi* 明器 ceramic imitations. This, again, is not a manifestation of "barbarianism" but a reflection of the common tendency throughout the Zhou world since the late Chunqiu period. Qin might have even spearheaded the usage of *mingqi* throughout the rest of the Zhou world, which, if correct, would suggest a much more important position of this state within the Zhou *oikoumenē* than suggested by Sima Qian. In any case, the furnishing of Qin graves clearly indicates its belonging to the Zhou cultural sphere.

Throughout the Chunqiu period, Qin culture was not only decisively Zhou-oriented, but even more conservative in its Zhou inclinations than that of the "Central States". Thus, Qin apparently remained untouched by the late Chunqiu ritual changes in the east which introduced new internal gradation within the ranked aristocracy and new vessel assemblages.²⁰ Further conservatism is observable both from the typology of Qin's bronze vessels and from their shape. The latter is so profoundly influenced by the Western Zhou patterns that Martin Kern even suggests certain "classicist" inclinations among the Qin aristocratic elite; alternatively it is possible that the aesthetic traditions of the Zhou were continued in the Qin due to their inheritance of the Western Zhou royal foundries.²¹ In any case, Qin

18 The uniformity and difference in mortuary practices throughout the Zhou world during the Chunqiu and the early Zhanguo period are comprehensively discussed by Lothar von Falkenhausen in his *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1050–250 BC): The Archeological Evidence* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, 2006); cf. Yin Qun 印群, *Huanghe zhongxiazhou diqu de Dongzhou muzang zhidu* 黄河中下游地区的东周墓葬制度 (Beijing: Shehui kexue, 2001); Falkenhausen, "The Waning of the Bronze Age: Material Culture and Social Developments, 770–481 B.C.," in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, ed. Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), 352–544. See also Falkenhausen, "Social Ranking in Chu Tombs: The Mortuary Background of the Warring States Manuscript Finds," *Monumenta Serica* 51 (2003), 439–526.

19 For discussions of Qin's material culture, see Yuan Zhongyi 袁仲一, "Cong kaogu ziliao kan Qin wenhua de fazhan he zhuyao chengjiu" 从考古资料看秦文化的發展和主要成就, *Qin wenhua luncong* 1 (1993), 28–49; Falkenhausen, "Diversity and Integration," Gideon Shelach and Yuri Pines, "Power, Identity and Ideology: Reflections on the Formation of the State of Qin (770–221 BC)," in *Archeology of Asia*, ed. Miriam Stark (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2005), 202–230.

20 See Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius*, 326–369, especially p. 367.

21 See Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions*, 64n32; cf. Falkenhausen "The Waning of the Bronze Age," 489–493.

bronzes (and their *mingqi* imitations) appear to be conservatively Zhou-oriented and lacking any perceptible “barbarian” features.

Similar conservatism marks Qin’s written language. Hundreds of Qin inscriptions had been excavated throughout the twentieth century, allowing for sufficiently precise reconstruction of the evolution of Qin’s script. Its most remarkable feature is its marked adherence to the Western Zhou shapes, and the minimal degree of change – at least until the middle-Zhanguo period. This situation differs markedly from that of the eastern states where evolution of the script had been much quicker, and the divergence from the Western Zhou legacy much more observable.²²

Finally, insofar as written tradition is concerned, it is worth reminding that the formulaic nature of the inscriptions on Qin ritual vessels from the earliest stages of Qin history generally conforms to the formulae used throughout the Zhou world. The content of some of these inscriptions will be discussed below; here suffice it to mention that their structure is largely similar to that observed by Kern and Falkenhausen for the Zhou inscriptions in general.²³ Such common rules of the ritual bronzes’ inscriptions as self-referential language, frequent employment of the rhymes, the prevalent usage of the tripartite “past-present-future” divisions and so on appear on the Qin bronze vessels, and are echoed as late as in the steles erected by the First Emperor at the top of the mountains in the eastern part of the empire. This explicit traditionalism of Qin’s ritual language and its close proximity to the Zhou patterns had been masterfully discussed by Martin Kern and will not be dealt in greater detail here. To summarize, both Qin’s mortuary practices and written culture display strict adherence to the Zhou legacy and firmly place the elite of this state within the Zhou cultural realm.

The above discussion clearly contradicts Sima Qian’s basic assertions regarding Qin’s supposed “barbarianism”. This state, at least insofar as its ruling elite is concerned, was an inseparable part of the Zhou civilization. The *Shiji* cannot serve as a reliable source for Qin’s cultural identity. The reason for this apparent bias, as that for other biases of Sima Qian, will be discussed below; but first we shall check two other of Sima Qian’s assertions, namely Qin’s alleged remoteness and marginality, and the nature of the change in the state of Qin in the wake of the reforms initiated by Lords Xian and Xiao.

22 Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 noticed that while during the second half of the Zhanguo period Qin script underwent a similar process of changes as that of the eastern states, this new “popular script... never played havoc with the standard-script system”, which itself “was the most faithful in carrying on the written tradition of the Zhou dynasty”. This situation differed markedly from the development in the eastern states, where the advent of “popular” script resulted in significant divergences from the traditional forms (see Qiu, *Chinese Writing*, trans. Gilbert L. Mattos and Jerry Norman [Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China, 2000], 78–89).

23 For the general discussion of the bronze inscriptions, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, “Issues in Western Zhou Studies: A Review Article,” *Early China* 18 (1993), 154; for the Qin case see Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions*.

3 Center or Margin?

The question of Qin's marginality in the eyes of the members of Central States appears to be more difficult to clarify through archeological data than the issue of its cultural belonging. It is easy to dismiss the discussion altogether by claiming that it does not reflect an objective situation but cultural prejudices and that appellations such as "remote" and "marginal" are by definition relative. These justifiable objections notwithstanding, it is useful to remind that in the Zhou world – at least prior to the middle Zhanguo period – a clear cultural and ritual (if not necessarily political) center existed: the Zhou house. Albeit greatly losing its prestige after the disastrous flight to the east in 771, the Zhou had not lost their symbolic significance altogether, as will be demonstrated below. To check the degree of Qin's marginality in the Zhou *oikoumene* means therefore to check its relations with and self-image versus the Zhou house. Luckily, epigraphic evidence provides us here with useful clues regarding both issues.

Above we had already mentioned that Sima Qian's pejorative attitude toward Yongzhou notwithstanding, Qin's inheritance of the old royal domain in 771 was a matter of great importance. Although the ritual center of the universe had shifted eastward together with the Zhou Son of Heaven, the former dynastic center could not lose its significance altogether. At the very least, the presence of the royal tombs, the existence of the terrestrial deities who assisted the Zhou ascendancy and the aura of the former grandeur – all this could not but impress the Qin rulers and their entourage.²⁴ Their extraordinary sacrificial activities, which were denounced by Sima Qian as transgressive, may in fact reflect the new self-confidence of the Qin lords bolstered by the incorporation of the former royal domain into their lands. Actually, the epigraphic evidence seems to support the notion of the Qin rulers' *hubris* much more than the *Shiji* does.

Series of sacrificial vessels belonging to the early Chunqiu Qin rulers had been unearthed since the Song dynasty on, and, with increasing frequency, within the last decades. Some of these vessels contain inscriptions which, albeit being formulated in accord with the Zhou ritual language, differ markedly in their content from the contemporaneous epigraphic evidence from the eastern states. Since the inscriptions had been translated and extensively discussed by Martin Kern, I shall not reproduce their entire content here, but rather focus on one of its aspects: the notion of Qin as a Mandate bearer and the legitimate ruler – if not of the universe, then at least of the significant part of it. Thus, the earliest of the inscriptions, that on the eight "Qin bells" 秦鍾 records the following statement of a Qin ruler (apparently Lord Wu 武公, r. 697–677):

秦公曰：我先祖受天命，賞宅受或（國）[...]
公及王姬曰：余小子，余夙夕虔敬朕祀，以受多福。克明又心，戾穌胤士，咸畜左右。
藹藹允义，冀受明德。以康莫協朕或（國），盜百蠻，具即其服。

24 The sacrality of the Western Zhou homeland is discussed by Maria Khayutina in her "Where was the Western Zhou Capital" (paper presented at the 17th Conference of the Warring States Project, Leiden, September 2003).

The Lord of Qin says: “My foremost ancestor has received the Heavenly Mandate, was rewarded with a residence and received [this] state...”

The lord, together with his kingly wife, says: “I, the little son, from early morning to evening, gravely and respectfully perform my sacrifices to receive manifold blessings. Greatly I clarify my indulgent mind, restrain and harmonize the hereditary officers, completely shield those from left and right. Staunch, staunch faithful and righteous, reverently I receive the shining virtuous power (*de* 德), to consolidate and regulate my state for long, rectify the hundred Man 蠻 tribes and let them all take their duties.”²⁵

This inscription contains several statements unparalleled elsewhere. The most striking of them is doubtlessly the bold claim of Lord Wu that his forefather had received the Heavenly Mandate (*Tian ming* 天命). The notion of the Heavenly Mandate, which figures so prominently in texts and inscriptions of the Western Zhou age, became marginal up to non-extant during the Chunqiu period. By then, the decline of the Zhou power coupled with a lack of legitimate contenders for the universal rule had significantly invalidated the appeal of the Heavenly Mandate theory as the foundation of the political order. Thus, none of the Chunqiu rulers dared claiming to be in the possession of the Mandate as far as universal rule was concerned. In the *Zuo zhuan*, the major source for Chunqiu history, the concept of the Mandate (*ming* 命) appears exclusively in its narrow meaning as individual destiny or, if politics are concerned, as the right to rule an individual state or even to hold an office.²⁶ But what about mentions of the mandate in the Qin bells inscription? While we cannot entirely rule out that the Mandate is confined to the lord’s forefather’s right to rule the state of Qin only, the subsequent mention of the lord’s determination to “rectify the hundred Man tribes and let them all take their duties” leaves us with an impression that his ambitions surpass those appropriate for a mere polity ruler.

The remarkable boldness of the Mandate claim is, however, modified in the inscription by another distinct feature: the mention of the presence of the lord’s “kingly spouse”, apparently one of the daughters of the Zhou king. Such mention is unparalleled in any known inscription,²⁷ and it is highly likely that it is not incidental, but that it aimed at qualifying the Mandate claims. It can be interpreted in two ways: either the royal spouse was expected to clarify that Lord Wu’s claims were not aimed at replacing the Zhou house, or, alternatively, her presence was meant to give additional legitimacy to the lord’s position as the heir of the Zhou.²⁸ While I tend to accept the former interpretation as the more plausible one in light

25 Cited with minor modifications from Kern, *Stele Inscriptions*, 85–86. I adopt Kern’s dating of the inscriptions (see *ibid.*, 66–67, n.40).

26 The only mention of the Heavenly Mandate in its Zhou sense of universal rule is made with regard to the rule of the Zhou house itself (Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981] Xuan 3.672, hereafter the *Zuo*). See discussion in Pines, *Foundations*, 59–70.

27 I am grateful to Lothar von Falkenhausen for drawing my attention to the uniqueness of the presence of the donor’s spouse as the co-author of the sacrificial plea inscribed on a donated vessel.

28 It should be mentioned that the founder of the Zhou, King Wen (文王, d. c. 1048), had reportedly married a daughter of the Shang (商, c. 1600–1046) king, Di Yi 帝乙, before divorcing her and eventually rebelling against the Shang. See Edward L. Shaughnessy, “Marriage, Divorce and Revo-

of the amicable ties between the Qin and the Zhou (for which see below), an alternative reading cannot be entirely dismissed. Perhaps the ambiguity is intentional: making explicit claims for the universal rule and the replacement of the Zhou could backfire against the lord.²⁹ However, even in its modified form, the Mandate claim appears to be extraordinarily bold, especially as read against the background of Qin's successful incorporation of the Zhou homeland into its realm.³⁰ In any case, the self-confident tone of the inscription is completely at odds with the assertion that Qin was a "humble" and a "marginal" state.

The notion of the Qin rulers being the bearers of the Mandate appears to be a most prominent common belief of the Qin lords throughout the Chunqiu period. It recurs in three other inscriptions: two of them, on Qin Gong-*gui* 秦公簋 and Qin Gong-*bo* 秦公罇, were made during the reign of Lord Gong (共公, r. 608–604) or of Lord Huan (桓公, r. 603–577); the fourth, that on the chime-stones, is dated to the reign of Lord Jing (景公, r. 576–537). These inscriptions, while resembling that on the Qin Gong bells, further develop the idea of the Mandate and are worth citing. The Qin Gong-*bo* 秦公罇 inscription says:

丕顯朕皇祖，受天命，奄有下國。十又二公不墜在上，嚴恭夤天命，保業厥秦，號事蠻夏。曰：余雖小子穆穆，帥秉明德，睿敷明刑，虔敬朕祀，以受多福。協蘇萬民，虔夙夕，烈烈桓桓，萬姓是敕，咸畜百辟胤士，藹藹文武，鎮靜不廷，柔燮百邦，于秦執事。

The Lord of Qin says: "Greatly radiant is my august ancestor. He received the Heavenly Mandate, broadly possessing the state below. The twelve lords, they do not fall from their high position. Solemn and reverential, in awe of the Heavenly Mandate, they protect and rule our Qin, cautiously caring for the Man and the Xia."

The lord says: "I am the little son: respectfully, respectfully I obey and adhere to the shining virtuous power, brightly spread the clear punishments, gravely and reverentially perform my sacrifices to receive manifold blessings. I regulate and harmonize myriad people, gravely from early morning to evening, valorous, valorous, awesome, awesome – the myriad clans are truly disciplined! I completely shield the hundred nobles and the hereditary officers. Staunch, staunch in my civilizing and martial [power], I calm and silence those who do not come to the court [audience]. I mollify and order the hundred states to have them strictly serve the Qin."³¹

The text, while resembling in many aspects Lord Wu's inscription made almost a century ago, provides also certain new departures. First, the absence of the royal spouse (or of any mention of the Zhou house) is ominous: it suggests that the lord of Qin was by now less in need of bolstering his claims with the help of the external source of legitimacy. Second,

lution: Reading between the lines of the *Book of Changes*," in *Before Confucius: Studies in the Creation of the Chinese Classics* (Albany: SUNY, 1997), 13–30.

- 29 My interpretation of the inscriptions differs thus from the one proposed by Yoshimoto Michimasa in his "Shin shi kenkyū josetsu," p. 55–58. Yoshimoto's suggestion that Qin rulers viewed themselves as "Sons of Heaven", whose Mandate extended to "All under Heaven" not only fails to explain why then throughout the history of Qin its rulers refrained from explicitly adopting the "Son of Heaven" title, but also ignores a basic contradiction between the Qin rulers' self-reference here and elsewhere as mere "lords" (*gong* 公), and the supposed usurpation of the *Tianzi* 天子 title.
- 30 For more about Qin rulers' views of Heaven's mandate, see Zang Zhifei 臧知非, "Qinren de shou ming yishi yu Qinguo de fazhan – Qin Gong-*zhong* mingwen tanwei" 秦人的受命意識與秦國的發展—秦公鐘銘文探微, *Qin wenhua luncong* 8, 243–260.
- 31 Cited with minor modifications from Kern, *Stele Inscriptions*, 73–74.

while the first inscription defined the lord's tasks as "rectifying the hundred Man tribes", a new version claims that the former lords are "cautiously caring for the Man and the Xia [Chinese]", making thereby one step further from the protector of the Zhou king against the aliens toward the potential surrogate of the Son of Heaven. This claim is bolstered again through the unequivocal reference to the current lord's tasks to "mollify and order the hundred states to have them strictly serve the Qin". The voice of the Qin's lords became ever more confident with the pass of time.

The contemporaneous inscription on the Qin Gong-*gui* 秦公簋 is briefer, but its initial part adds several other dimensions to the above mentioned *topoi*:

秦公曰：丕顯朕皇祖，受天命，鼎宅禹蹟，十有二公在帝之坏。嚴恭夤天命，保業厥秦，虢事蠻夏。

The lord of Qin says: "Greatly radiant is my august ancestor! He received Heaven's mandate, secured his residence within the footsteps of Yu 禹. The twelve lords reside in the lofty heights of the Thearch (*Di* 帝). Solemn and reverential in awe of Heaven's mandate, they protected and ruled our Qin, cautiously caring for the Man and the Xia."³²

This passage introduces two new topics into the Qin mandate discourse. First, unlike earlier inscriptions which mentioned the receipt of the mandate in the context of ruling the state of Qin, here the spatial dimension of the Qin ancestral mandate changes to the entire realm "within the footsteps of Yu". Yu, the tamer of the flood and the progenitor of the semi-legendary Xia dynasty, was the universal ruler; securing the residence within his footsteps could well be interpreted as the claim for universal rule. This claim is further bolstered by the reference to the current location of the lord's ancestors "in the lofty heights of the Thearch". This statement unmistakably parallels that made in the Zhou hymns, such as "Wen Wang" 文王, and in some of the Western Zhou inscriptions, which mention the presence of the Zhou progenitors within the realm of Di above.³³

The process of the escalating self-confidence reaches its apex at the fragments of the Qin chime-stones, unearthed from the tomb of Lord Jing. The fragmentary nature of this inscription prevents the complete restoration of its content, but several reconstructed sentences strike the reader with their bold claims. The lord of Qin says, for instance: "broadly I spread over the Man and the Xia, [let them] hurry to serve the Qin and take up [their duties]".³⁴ Later he defines his ancestor(s) as "counterparts of Heaven" (*pei tian* 配天) – another definition which is appropriate exclusively to the Sons of Heaven. And yet, despite the explicit arrogance of these and earlier claims, the lords of Qin at no point cross the Rubicon of rebelling against the Zhou authority. Actually, the fragments of Lord Jing's chime-stones explicitly refer to the visit of the Zhou Son of Heaven to the Qin domain, and the feast

32 Cited with minor modifications from Kern, *Stele Inscriptions*, 79.

33 See *Maosbi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏, ed. by Ruan Yuan 阮元, "Wenwang" 文王 16.503 (Mao 235); *Zongzhou-zhong* 宗周鐘 states "Solemn are the former kings in the vicinity of God" (先王其嚴, 在帝左右. Shirakawa Shizuka 白川靜, *Kinbun tsūshaku* 金文通釋 [Kōbe: Hakutsuru bijutsukan, 1962–1984], Vol. 18, no. 98, p. 270); cf. Hu-gui 鬲鬲 (*Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng* 殷周金文集成 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1984] Vol. 8 no. 4317); in Shu Yi-zhong 叔夷鐘 similar claims are made with regard to the earlier Mandate-bearer, Chengtang 成湯, the founder of the Shang dynasty (Shirakawa, Vol. 38, no. 215, p. 363).

34 奄敷蠻夏，亟事于秦，即服。See Kern, *Stele Inscriptions*, 90.

given in his honor. It seems that Qin had succeeded in maintaining a delicate balance between claims of the Mandate for almost universal rule and its ongoing recognition of the Zhou superiority (for which see below).

Material evidence supports the impression we have from the inscriptions that Qin rulers did not consider themselves marginal players on the Zhou political scene. While Qin capitals, Yongcheng (雍城, capital in 677–383) and Liyang (櫟陽, capital in 383–350), are relatively modest in their size and in the scope of their defensive installations when compared with the capitals of the eastern states,³⁵ Qin rulers' tombs surpass anything known throughout the Zhou world. The badly looted eighth-century tomb of the Qin lord in Dabuzi 大堡子, Li 禮 county, Gansu, contained, according to Li Chaoyuan's assertion, no less than one hundred bronze ritual vessels, a number which by far exceeds that assigned by sumptuary rules to the overlords.³⁶ But this tomb in turn is completely dwarfed by the M1 tomb from Nanzhuhui 南指揮, a necropolis at Fengxiang 鳳翔 county, Shaanxi, identified as that of Lord Jing (the alleged author of the chime-stones inscription mentioned above). As in the other tombs of similar shape, in Nanzhuhui the two sloping tomb passages leading to the bottom of the tomb are from the east and the west. The eastern passage is 156m long and the western 85m. The burial chamber itself is 60m long (from east to west), 40m wide and 24m high. The grave was looted in antiquity so that its ritual set of bronze vessels and other precious grave goods were not found. However, findings such as the inscribed fragments of chime-stones, 166 human victims each placed in his own coffin, as well as the huge wooden beams used to construct the burial chamber and evidence for a wooden structure which was built above ground, all suggest an extraordinarily rich burial, which, as Falkenhausen estimates "surpasses anything seen elsewhere in the Spring and Autumn period and may well constitute an infraction, in spirit if not in letter, of the sumptuary privileges due to the rulers of a polity".³⁷ Qin rulers' tombs, as well as inscriptions on Qin ritual vessels, clearly contradict Sima Qian's assertion of Qin's humble status.

The discrepancy between the *Shiji* views of Qin and the self-image of this state's leaders is striking. It is even more puzzling when we consider that Sima Qian had correctly apprehended that extraordinary sacrificial activities of the Qin rulers reflected their "usurpatory" ambitions. Why then neither him, nor his predecessor who had drawn the first sketch of the Qin history, Jia Yi, had ever mentioned the haughty claims of the early Qin rulers that they possess the mandate?³⁸ We shall return to this question later; but first let us go back to Sima Qian's thesis of Qin's original marginality. We have seen that this thesis is not valid insofar as Qin's rulers' self-image is concerned. But may it reflect a pejorative view of Qin current among its eastern neighbors? After all it was due to their objections that Qin "did not par-

35 See Shelach and Pines, "Power, Identity and Ideology," 207–208.

36 See Li Chaoyuan 李朝遠, "Shanghai Bowuguan xinhuo Qingong qi yanjiu" 上海博物館新獲秦公器研究, *Shanghai Bowuguan jikan* 7 (1996), 32.

37 See Falkenhausen, "The Waning of the Bronze Age," 486; cf. Teng Mingyu 滕銘予, *Qin wenhua: cong fengguo dao diquo de kaoguxue guancha* 秦文化：從封國到帝國的考古學觀察 (Beijing: Xueyuan, 2002), 57.

38 This silence is remarkable, especially in light of several references in the *Shiji* to what appears to be the *hubris* of the early Qin rulers, especially in the "Treatise on Feng and Shan sacrifices" (*Shiji* 28); see also Dorothee Schaab-Hanke, "Der Herrscher und sein Richter: zur Bedeutung von *biao* 表 und *li* 裹 in Kapitel 28 des *Shiji*," *Oriens Extremus* 43 (2002), 128.

participate in the assemblies and alliances with the overlords of the Central States”. Is it possible then that Sima Qian’s anti-Qin bias merely reflects the views of the eastern statesmen?

At the first glance this assertion appears plausible. All extant historical and philosophical texts which deal with or were compiled during the Chunqiu and early Zhanguo period (i.e. before the changes in Qin’s fortune under the rule of lords Xian and Xiao) were written in the eastern part of the Zhou world, and none of them displays interest in Qin’s affairs. In the *Zuo zhuan* and the *Guoyu* Qin is discussed, if any, only at the margins of the accounts about Jin or Chu 楚 affairs. Qin’s diplomacy remains therefore largely invisible in both texts; and this may be the reason for Sima Qian’s feeling that Qin was shunned by its neighbors. But is this “Shandong” perspective correct?

To answer this question we should have a closer look at Qin’s relation with the Zhou ruling house. Militarily insignificant as they were, the Zhou Sons of Heavens remained the ritual leaders of “All under Heaven” well into the Zhanguo age, and their relations with the Qin ruling house may be indicative of the Qin position vis-à-vis its eastern neighbors. What can be learned from the *Shiji* and other sources about Zhou-Qin relations?

The *Shiji* version of these relations is reflected in the frequently-cited prediction by the Great Scribe Dan 太史儋 of Zhou, made in 374: “Originally, Zhou and Qin were united, and then separated; after being separated for five hundred years they will reunite, and seventeen years after this unification the hegemon-king will appear [in Qin].”³⁹ This prediction is cited no less than four times in different chapters of the *Shiji*, indicating its exceptional importance in Sima Qian’s eyes. Putting aside for the time being the precise meaning of the prediction and the calculation of the years, we may observe that it basically reflects the *Shiji* version of Zhou-Qin relations: Qin is depicted as a loyal ally of the Zhou from the very beginning of the Qin polity into the eighth century; the alliance is then briefly revived under Lord Mu of Qin (r. 659–621), but after Lord Mu’s death for almost 250 years the *Shiji* does not record a single instance of Zhou-Qin contacts, until the new era of Qin-Zhou rapprochement began in the aftermath of Grand Scribe Dan’s visit. This picture serves perfectly Sima Qian’s assertion of Qin’s initial remoteness, but can it be confirmed by independent sources?

Paleographic evidence can significantly modify and supplement the *Shiji* narrative. As the above cited inscription on the eight Qin bells indicates, Qin rulers were connected to the Zhou through marital ties, apparently using this to bolster their prestige. Even more interesting is the evidence of continuing intimacy between both houses after the death of Lord Mu and before Lord Xian’s ascendancy. The above mentioned inscription on chime-stone fragments dating from the reign of Lord Jing (r. 576–537) mentions the feast made by the lord of Qin in honor of the Zhou Son of Heaven. Similarly, an inscription on Qin stone

39 始周與秦國合而別，別五百載復合，合十七歲而霸王者出焉。(《Shiji》4.159; for different versions of this prediction, see idem, 5.201; 28.1364–65; 63.2142). Another piece of evidence for continuation of Qin-Zhou amicable ties throughout the Chunqiu period is the Huaihou 懷后 chime-stones inscription. This inscription, fragments of which survived only in Song collections of rubbings, was recently discussed by Li Xueqin 李學勤, who approved its authenticity and identified the author as the spouse of one of the Chunqiu period Qin lords. The inscription mentions grant of a token of approval to the lord of Qin (or to his spouse) by the Zhou queen, adding thereby another dimension to our perspective of Qin-Zhou relations. See Li Xueqin, “Qin Huaihou qing yanjiu” 秦懷后磬研究, *Wenwu* 1 (2001), 53–55.

drums mentions the royal visit to the Qin lands, which occurred either in the sixth or the fifth century.⁴⁰ The importance of these royal visits, about which the received texts are silent, is immense. From the early Chunqiu period on, weakening Zhou kings ceased “touring” (巡 巡) other states, and did not leave their domain, except under duress.⁴¹ Visits to Qin manifest, therefore, the exceptional trust of the Sons of Heaven toward the state that occupied the cradle of the Zhou dynasty. We do not know whether such visits were routine or not, but even if these were isolated cases, they indicate that the Zhou-Qin alliance in the early fourth century did not come all of a sudden, but was a logical continuation of amicable relations between the two states. Moreover, they indicate that in the eyes of the Zhou house Qin preserved its unique importance, and that the assertion of Qin’s supposed “marginality” cannot be supported.

To make justice to Sima Qian, it should be noticed that his presentation of Qin’s marginal role in the inter-state politics prior to Lord Xian’s ascendancy is not entirely groundless. During most of the fifth century, Qin was in the state of severe internal turmoil, which, as Sima Qian had noticed elsewhere, resulted in military setbacks and in shrinking of Qin’s eastern territories.⁴² The correctness of this assessment is corroborated by the text of the *Mozǐ* 墨子, which discusses military superpowers of the fifth century, but makes no references to Qin.⁴³ It is perhaps against this background of Qin’s military decline that the author of the *Zuozhuan* made his erroneous prediction according to which “Qin will never again march eastwards”.⁴⁴ In the early fourth century the estimate that Qin is but a minor international player was therefore understandable. What is puzzling, however, is why Sima Qian projected this temporary decline backwards to the entire early period of Qin history ignoring (or being unaware of) the evidence to the contrary. Was it a deliberate attempt at downgrading the importance of Qin, or should the sources of this obvious misrepresentation be sought elsewhere? In the last part of our discussion we shall return to this question.

4 Acculturation or Estrangement? Qin after Shang Yang

Having ascertained that two of Sima Qian’s suppositions about Qin, namely its barbarianism and its marginality, are at odds with the picture obtained from epigraphic and material sources, while his assertion of Qin rulers’ high ambitions is correct, but insufficiently substantiated, we shall turn now to the last of the historian’s major assertions about Qin: the breakthrough effected by the reforms associated with Lord Xian and Lord Xiao (or, more precisely, with Shang Yang). Here the correctness of Sima Qian’s account should be pre-

40 For the discussion of this epigraphic evidence, see Wang Hui 王輝 and Cheng Xuehua 程學華, *Qin wenzi jizheng* 秦文字集證 (Taipei: Yinwen, 1999), 89–90 and 133–35; for the dating of the chime-stones and the drums’ inscriptions, see Wang and Cheng, 81–143; for a detailed discussion of Qin stone drums, see Gilbert L. Mattos, *The Stone Drums of Ch’in* (Nettetal: Steyer Verlag, 1988); Mattos tentatively dates the drums’ inscription to the sixth to fifth century (see the discussion on pp. 325–363).

41 The *Zuozhuan* records a single routine foreign visit of the Zhou king, to the state of Guo 虢 in 673 (see *Zuo*, Zhuang 21.217–218).

42 See *Shiji* 5.200.

43 See Wu Yujiang 吳毓江, *Mozǐ jiaozhu* 墨子校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1994), 18.203–204 (“Fei gong, zhong” 非攻中).

44 See *Zuo*, Wen 6.549.

sumably beyond doubt: while certain details of his narrative may be flawed, nobody would question the very basic fact of Qin's overall social, political and military change in the wake of reforms, and the resultant triumph of Qin over its powerful rivals. The question to be asked, however, is what were the cultural consequences of the reforms in Sima Qian's eyes? Did they bring about Qin's integration with the rest of the Zhou world, or, conversely, encouraged its estrangement?

The answer seems to be obvious: the entire narrative of the *Shiji* emphasizes the increase of cultural ties between Qin and its eastern neighbors throughout the last century-and-a-half of Qin history. Above we saw that Lord Xiao and his advisors are praised for their efforts to "acculturate" Qin and that this concept of "acculturation" is implicitly present also in Li Si's memorial submitted at the very end of the pre-imperial period. The vast presence of foreign advisors at the Qin's court in the aftermath of the reforms, and their extraordinary contribution to Qin's successes is emphasized in a series of biographies of Qin statesmen gathered in the *Shiji*. This supposed "acculturation" of Qin seems to moderate the negative impact of its increasing harshness, cruelty and cynicism in the treatment of its eastern rivals.

This picture of integrative cultural dynamics is, however, too simplistic when considered against material and epigraphic evidence. For instance, a look at Qin burials since the fourth century discloses radical departure from the previous Zhou-oriented ritual practices. Almost complete disappearance of ritual bronze assemblages, replaced by a large amount of "utilitarian" bronzes, as well as rapid introduction of the previously unknown "catacomb burials" instead of the traditional "pit burials" mark a sharp departure from the old Zhou ritual practices, old Zhou beliefs, and, more generally, from the Zhou aristocratic society.⁴⁵ The abolition of the traditional aristocratic ranks and the introduction of the alternative rank system under Shang Yang are thus clearly reflected in the archeological record. But while these reforms are usually discussed in the context of Qin's socio-political changes, we should ask now how the abandonment of Zhou ritual culture influenced Qin's cultural identity and its image in the eyes of the rest of the Zhou world.

At the first glance, the answer to the latter question seems to completely contradict the *Shiji*: rather than establishing the bridges with its eastern neighbors, Qin became estranged from them in the wake of the reforms. Although developments such as the demise of the aristocratic society, novel views of the afterlife and the resultant change in burial patterns were common to all Zhou states,⁴⁶ the rapidness and thoroughness of Qin's reforms were unprecedented and had a shocking effect on Qin's relations with the rest of the Zhou realm. Both textual and epigraphic evidence reflect the increasing separation and enmity between the people of Qin and their neighbors. Many texts compiled after 300 abound with philippics against Qin's cruelty, barbarianism and "impaired humaneness"; Qin is either identified with the Yi 夷 "barbarians", or claimed to have "common customs with the Rong 戎 and Di 狄; a state with a tiger's and wolf's heart; greedy, profit-seeking and untrustworthy, which knows nothing of ritual, propriety and virtuous behavior", or it is plainly designated "the

45 See Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Mortuary Behavior in Pre-imperial Qin: A Religious Interpretation," in *Religion and Chinese Society*. Vol. 1: Ancient and Medieval China, ed. John Lagerwey (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2004), 109–172; Shelach and Pines, "Power, Identity and Ideology."

46 See Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society*, 293–325.

mortal enemy of All under Heaven”.⁴⁷ These views are absent from earlier texts, and it may be plausibly assumed that they reflect a new attitude toward the western super-power, which emerged both as a reaction to its aggressiveness, and as a result of a sense of cultural alienation triggered by Qin’s partial abandonment of the Zhou legacy.

The process of estrangement was not mono-directional; many members of Qin elite as well as the commoners apparently shared the feeling of otherness with regard to the Central States. Whether we speak of Qin conscripts deployed at the old Chu lands, who considered the locals as “bandits”, or of Qin statesmen who contemplated the idea of fighting and subduing “All under Heaven”, we have a strong feeling of Qin’s increasing alienation from the rest of the Zhou world.⁴⁸ The separation was not only mental: at the ground it was marked by long protective walls, a powerful symbol of the state’s separation from the “aliens”; and it also had legal implications. Qin statutes unearthed in Tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi 睡虎地 show clear demarcation between Qin and its neighbors – either the Rong 戎 or the Xia 夏 – all of whom are treated as distinct others with specific legal rights and duties.⁴⁹ The infamous suggestion by members of the Qin ruling lineage to expel all foreign advisors, made at the very end of the Zhanguo period, is the clearest manifestation of the atmosphere of mistrust toward foreigners, characteristic of certain “native” members of the Qin ruling elite.⁵⁰

The above examples suggest that once again Sima Qian has partly misrepresented the cultural dynamics of Qin. What he conceived of as a movement by the Qin leaders toward the Zhou appears to be the movement in an opposite direction. Yet it would be wrong to accept the estrangement picture as the only reality of the late Zhanguo period; the actual situation was much more complex. Qin rulers had never opted for complete separation from their neighbors. To the contrary, their desire to facilitate conquest and incorporation of the neighbors’ lands and populace dictated a converse policy of preserving cultural bridges with the Central States. This may explain continuity in many aspects of Qin’s original Zhou-oriented culture. Such continuity is evident in Qin’s written culture, as exemplified in preservation of the Zhou-related formulaic language well into the age of imperial unification; also state rituals and some of the religious policies remained unmistakably derivative from the Zhou legacy. Falkenhausen further identifies ongoing religious ties between the people of Qin and those of other states despite significant changes in religious beliefs during the Warring States period.⁵¹ Finally, the constant influx of foreign advisors into the service

47 See, respectively, *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 春秋公羊傳注疏, annotated by He Xiu 何休 and Xu Yan 徐彥, *Sbisanjing zhushu*, 22.2319; He Jianzhang 何建章, *Zhanguo ce zhushi* 戰國策注釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1991), 24.8.907 (“Wei ce” 魏策 3) and 14.17.508 (“Chu ce” 楚策 1); see also a detailed discussion in Pines, “The Question of Interpretation,” 30–34.

48 For the first, see *Yunmeng Shuibudi Qinmu bianxie zu* 雲夢睡虎地秦墓編寫組, *Yunmeng Shuibudi Qinmu* 雲夢睡虎地秦墓 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1981), 25–26; see also the translation of the letters by Edward L. Shaughnessy, “Military Histories of Early China: A Review Article,” *Early China* 21 (1996), 181; for the latter, see Wang Xianshen 王先慎, *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1998), 1.2–3 (“Chu xian Qin” 初見秦) and the discussion in Pines, “Changing Views of *tianxia* in Pre-imperial Discourse,” *Oriens Extremus* 43.1/2 (2002), 110–112.

49 See *Shuibudi Qinmu zhujian* 睡虎地秦墓竹簡, ed. Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 睡虎地秦墓竹簡整理小組 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2001), 135, slip 176 and slips 177–178 and the detailed discussion in Pines, “The Question of Interpretation,” 23–27.

50 *Shiji* 87.2541–46.

51 See Falkenhausen, “Mortuary Behavior in Pre-imperial Qin.”

of Qin kings remained a powerful source of Qin's ongoing cultural integration into the Zhou sphere, *pave* the above mentioned futile attempt to expel "the aliens". Since all these aspects of cultural continuity and of ongoing ties between Qin and its neighbors had been extensively discussed elsewhere,⁵² I shall concentrate here on the less explored issue, which brings us back to the *Shiji* narrative – namely Qin's ongoing ties with the Zhou royal house.

The centuries-long decline of the Zhou military and economic prowess and the hapless condition of its kings often misleads modern readers to consider the royal authority as non-extant during the Warring States period; references to the Zhou power in the *Shiji* are either neglected or considered a result of Sima Qian's post-factum manipulation.⁵³ In particular, scholars generally seem disinterested in Sima Qian's account of Qin's ties with the Zhou house. However, as I shall try to show, here Sima Qian was not embellishing the story, but rather, if any, insufficiently aware of the importance of the Qin-Zhou alliance.

The *Shiji* account suggests that soon after Grand Scribe Dan's visit to Qin, the relations between Zhou and Qin flourished for almost half a century. The Zhou kings recognized Qin's successes by granting its rulers tokens of royal approval, and perhaps even cherished hopes that the powerful Qin would bolster their declining prestige. The last recorded account of the Qin-Zhou alliance is given for 334, when King Xian of Zhou 周顯王 (r. 368–321) granted sacrificial meat to Lord Huiwen of Qin 秦惠文王 (r. 337–311). He hoped thereby to counterbalance a ritual offensive by the rulers of Wei 魏 and Qi 齊 who had usurped the royal title earlier the same year. These hopes were futile, however; in 325, Lord Huiwen also proclaimed himself king, apparently putting an end thereby to the amicable relations with the Zhou house. For the next seventy years the *Shiji* records intermittent wars and alliances between Qin and the two tiny Zhou principalities (the so-called Western and Eastern Zhou into which the royal domain had been divided), but nothing is known about Qin contacts with the Zhou kings until the annexation of Zhou lands after the death of King Nan 周王赧 (r. 314–256).

Epigraphic evidence not only supports Sima Qian's account (King Xian's grant of sacrificial meat to Lord Huiwen is mentioned in the so-called "Clay document" [*Wa shu* 瓦書]),⁵⁴ but even expands it to the period beyond that covered in the *Shiji* and contextualizes Qin-Zhou ties within the ritual framework. The recently published jade tablets inscribed with a prayer of a Qin king to Mountain Hua 華山 are perhaps among the most significant Qin-related discoveries of the recent years. Not only the prayer itself is built in accord with the Zhou ritual norms and employs traditional sacrificial formulae throughout, but it also contains direct reference to the tragic consequences of the demise of the Zhou house:

周世既沒，典法鮮亡。惴惴小子，欲事天地、四極、三光，山川、神祇、五禮、先祖，而不得厥方。犧豕既美，玉帛既精，余毓子厥惑，西東若蒼。

The house of Zhou has now vanished, the standards and regulations [of sacrifices] have been scattered and lost. Fearful small child, I would like to serve Heaven and Earth, the four apices and the three luminaries, spirits and deities of mountains and rivers, five objects of sacrifice, former ancestors—but cannot obtain the [proper] way [of conducting the sacrifice]. My sacrificial pigs are

52 See e.g., Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions*; Falkenhausen, "Mortuary Behavior in Pre-imperial Qin."

53 See e.g., Lewis, *Writing and Authority*, 354.

54 See Yuan Zhongyi 袁仲一, "Du Qin Huiwen wang sinian washu" 讀秦惠文王四年瓦書, *Qin wenhua luncong* 1 (1993), 275–85.

made beautiful, jade and silk are purified, but, a toddler that I am, I am wavering and am dull regarding [proper sacrifices] to the west and to the east.⁵⁵

Since I had extensively discussed the inscription, its dating, authorship and content elsewhere,⁵⁶ I shall focus here on the single passage cited above. Here one of the late Zhanguo Qin rulers laments the demise of the Zhou house which created ritual void and thereby endangered the entire cultic system. This sentiment is striking. It shows that until the very end of the Zhou existence, if not beyond, the ritual supremacy of the Zhou kings had not been questioned. Even the state of Qin, which is frequently (although probably erroneously)⁵⁷ credited with the destruction of the line of the Sons of Heaven, remained faithful to the notion of the Zhou kings' unique ritual potency. This explains why neither Qin nor any of the Warring States rulers dared usurp the highest ritual position, that of *Tianzi* 天子.⁵⁸ This may also explain why the Zhou house survived for centuries after its political and military authority had evaporated.

The new confirmation of the lasting ritual superiority of the Zhou kings sheds a new light on Sima Qian's narrative. Rather than accusing him of post-factum invention of the Zhou superiority, one may rather censure his insufficient emphasis on the ritual reasons for Zhou's longevity. The same can be said of his depiction of the Qin-Zhou ties. While meticulously recording instances of Zhou envoys' visits to Qin after Lord Xian, and of Qin rulers' attempts to bolster the prestige of the Zhou,⁵⁹ Sima Qian paid no attention to the underlining notion of ritual (and *mutatis mutandis* political) legitimacy embedded in these ties, and omitted them from his summary of Qin's road to power. Probably, his post-factum perspective was shaped by the changing views of Zhou in the imperial Qin. Then, after the First Emperor had ascended the throne of the universal ruler, the ritual void left after the demise of the Zhou was filled in, and there was no longer need either to lament the bygone Zhou house or to evoke its legitimacy. Thus, if any, Sima Qian can be criticized not for retroactively creating the Zhou symbolic supremacy, but on the contrary, for paying insufficient attention to this aspect of the Warring States' political life.

55 For various reconstructions of the original text, see Li Ling 李零, "Qin Yin dao bing yuban de yanjiu" 秦駟禱病玉版的研究 in *Zhongguo fangshu xukao* 中國方術續考 (Beijing: Dongfang, 2001), 451–74; Li Jiahao 李家浩, "Qin Yin yuban mingwen yanjiu;" 秦駟玉版銘文研究, Li Xueqin 李學勤, "Qin yudu suoyin" 秦玉牘索隱, *Gugong bonnyuan yuankan* 2 (2000), 41–45; Wang Hui 王輝, "Qin Zengsun Yin gao Hua Da shan mingshen wen kaoshi" 秦曾孫駟告華大山明神文考釋, *Kaogu xuebao* 2 (2001), 143–57; for the translation and the detailed discussion of the text, see Pines, "The Question of Interpretation," 4–12.

56 See Pines, "The Question of Interpretation," 4–12.

57 As I had argued elsewhere ("The Question of Interpretation," 19–23) the two Zhou principalities which were annexed by Qin in 256 and 249 respectively were not, in a strict sense, royal domains, since they were ruled by the independent lords, members of minor branches of the Zhou family. It is possible that Qin annexed both principalities only after the Zhou royal line vanished due to internal reasons. In this case such an annexation would not be treated as the destruction of the Sons of Heaven line. This interpretation would explain the surprising silence with which the rival overlords accepted the demise of the Zhou house.

58 See Ishii Kōmei 石井宏明, *Dongzhou wangchao yanjiu* 東周王朝研究 (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue, 1999), 127–179. The only exception was the attempt by the notorious King Min of Qi 齊閔王 (r. 300–283) to usurp the title of Son of Heaven, but his claims were rejected even by the weakest of his neighbors, Lu 魯 and Zou 鄒; see *Zhanguo ce*, 20.13.737 ("Zhao ce" 趙策 3).

59 See e.g., *Shiji* 4.160.

5 Tracing the Sources of Sima Qian's Biases

Our discussion heretofore questioned significant portions of Sima Qian's narrative. According to the *Shiji*, Qin, a semi-barbarous and marginal state, cherished weird ambitions from the earliest years of its independent existence but was unable to realize them, especially after the series of setbacks which began in the later years of Lord Mu and spanned almost two-and-a-half centuries. Then, under lords Xian and Xiao, series of reforms set in motion profound changes in all walks of life, resulting both in the strengthening of Qin and in its partial acculturation into the Zhou realm. The hallmark of these reforms was employment of worthy advisors, most of whom came from eastern states, and who were largely responsible for Qin's ultimate triumph. Putative Heaven's support notwithstanding, Qin's success was the result of its flexible policies during the century-and-a-half prior to the imperial unification; and it was through the leadership failure – we may add, echoing Jia Yi – that the series of Qin's brilliant successes came to an abrupt end under the self-destructing rule of the Second Emperor.

The problem of this interpretation, which became the foundation of many of the Qin-related studies well into our days, is its obvious failure to accommodate most of the newly obtained data of Qin's cultural and political history. As the discussion above had shown, Qin was neither a marginal nor a "barbarian" state; and its success owed much to the constant alliance with the Zhou house, the homeland of which Qin inherited. Even at those points where Sima Qian correctly apprehends major trends in Qin history, his narrative remains far from flawless: thus he is apparently unaware of the early Qin rulers' haughty self-identification as the bearers of the Heavenly Mandate; his discussion of Qin-Zhou relations ignores the earlier stages of the alliance between the two states and pays insufficient attention to the importance of this alliance for facilitating Qin's successes; and while he correctly identifies major ruptures in Qin history after Lord Xian, he is wrong with regard to the cultural implication of Qin's reforms on the ensuing estrangement between Qin and the Central States.

The *Shiji*, our major and often the only source of Qin history, appears therefore to be significantly flawed, and it should be treated with utmost caution. But what are the reasons for these biases and misrepresentations in the *Shiji*? The first and almost immediate answer would point at Sima Qian's possible agendas as the major reason behind his tendentious presentation of Qin history. Thus, it may be argued that his emphasis on Qin's erstwhile coarseness and "barbarianism" can be a disguised criticism of the Han dynasty, which, very much like Sima Qian's Qin, was founded by an uneducated and "semi-barbarous" peasant, whose ascendancy also could be attributed either to Heaven's support or to more earthly ability to "change with the times", which Sima Qian identifies elsewhere as characteristic of the Qin rulers.⁶⁰ Qin's initial arrogance also reminds one of similarly high ambitions of the young Liu Bang.⁶¹ If these parallels are correct, then Sima Qian's insistence on Qin's eventual acculturation may disguise his optimistic outlook regarding the Han dynasty, which, despite preserving harsh and aggressive ways of the Qin, was by Sima Qian's days much

60 *Shiji* 15.686–687.

61 See *Shiji* 8.344.

more acculturated from the Traditionalist point of view than during Liu Bang's days.⁶² Such interpretation would be in accord with Michael Nylan's observation that "the painstaking reaffirmation of the sacred origins, predestined greatness and the enduring order of the Central States' (Zhongguo 中國) culture" is one of the major messages of the *Shiji*.⁶³

Plausible as it is, the "hidden agenda" explanation of the *Shiji* flaws remains problematic. It presupposes the author's manipulation of his sources, such as embellishment, editing out or even outright invention of the narrative to fix the author's goals. The problem is, however, that if this assumption is valid we should admit that Sima Qian was an extraordinarily clumsy manipulator. Why, for instance, did he ignore the Qin ruler's claims to possess the Mandate? After all, this point would serve him nicely whenever the issue of Qin's incipient usurpation activities was discussed. Similarly, if his goal was to prove Qin's original marginality, why did he include in the "Basic Annals of Qin" a lengthy account about meritorious services of Qin's progenitors to the rulers of the "Three Dynasties"? And if the author wanted to emphasize Qin's "barbarianism", why then did he include in the accounts of Lord Mu several anecdotes (of which see later) in which Qin appears as the member – and even representative – of the Central States vis-à-vis the Rong? Questions such as these can easily be multiplied. As in many other cases, the search for a hidden agenda fails to take into account the immense complexity of the *Shiji* narrative.

An alternative explanation for Sima Qian's biases may be that his views presented a common eastern misperception of Qin. Zhanguo and early Han texts, most of which were produced in the eastern parts of the Chinese world, abound with pejorative remarks about Qin's "barbarianism", coarseness and lack of culture.⁶⁴ Sima Qian's views indeed strongly resemble those remarks and may be directly influenced by the prevalent atmosphere of disdain toward Qin; in particular, his remark of Yongzhou's remoteness clearly reflects an eastern perspective. Nonetheless, important as they are in shaping Sima Qian's views, the eastern statesmen's anti-Qin philippics could not decisively influence the Qin-related narrative in the *Shiji*. As Sima Qian himself states, his major source for the Qin history were the so-called *Qin records* (*Qin ji* 秦記), which, expectedly, could not contain eastern biases.⁶⁵ The source of Sima Qian's misrepresentations should therefore be sought elsewhere – perhaps in Qin's materials themselves.

The nature of Qin's sources which were available to Sima Qian had been assessed by several scholars, and will not be discussed in great detail here.⁶⁶ For our discussion suffice it to state that significant portions of the "Basic Annals of Qin" derive from Qin's original records. Is it possible to trace biases of the *Shiji* to these very records? To answer this question let us briefly consider first the structure of the "Basic Annals of Qin". The "Annals" can be easily divided into three major parts. The first largely comprises legendary materials

62 I borrow the term "Traditionalist" instead of the much disputed term "Confucian"/*Ru* 儒 from David Schaberg.

63 See Nylan, "Sima Qian," 209.

64 See above, n. 47; for an example of pejorative attitude toward Qin among Sima Qian's contemporaries, see e.g. Liu Wendian 劉文典, *Huainan Honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1997), 21.711 ("Yao lue" 要略).

65 For references to *Qin records*, see e.g., *Shiji* 15.685–687; cf. *Shiji* 6.255.

66 See e.g., Jin Dejian 金德建, *Sima Qian suo jian shu kao* 司馬遷所見書考 (Shanghai: Renmin, 1963), 415–423; Yoshimoto, "Shin shi kenkyū josetsu;" cf. Fujita, *Shiki Sengoku shiryō*, 227–278.

concerning Qin rulers' meritorious ancestors, and we should not consider it here. The second, which spans four centuries from the enfeoffment of Lord Xiang and until the rule of Lord Xian, mostly presents a laconic account of major events in the state of Qin, except for the detailed narrative of Lord Mu's reign; the last part of the "Basic Annals", beginning with lords Xian and Xiao, is the most detailed, and perhaps the most reliable Zhanguo portion of the *Shiji* in general. For the matter of our discussion the most interesting is the second part, namely an account of the history of Qin from the eighth to the early fourth century. As we have seen, *Shiji* major flaws with regard to Qin history concern this period: it is for this age that Sima Qian makes his erroneous claims with regard to Qin's marginality and "barbarianism", and its relations with the Zhou house. Can we discern in this part of the narrative the reasons for the historian's misperception?

A careful reading of the "Basic Annals of Qin" may provide an answer to this question. The second portion of the "Annals" is oddly structured: unlike earlier and later parts of the chapter which become increasingly detailed as the narrative advances, the second part looks like a pyramid: it is laconic at the beginning and the end of the narrative, but is extraordinarily detailed in the middle part, the reign of Lord Mu, which, in sharp distinction from the rest of the "Annals", contains not only dry accounts of military and domestic activities, but also numerous anecdotes related to the lord's sagacity. This focus on Lord Mu may be easily attributed not only to the remarkable achievements of this ruler, but primarily to his being the single most important Qin ruler for the *Chunqiu* commentaries which narrate in greater detail his exploits.⁶⁷ However, aside from the routine resort to the *Zuo* accounts, while dealing with Lord Mu, Sima Qian incorporated multiple other sources, including Zhanguo anecdotes, and also what appear to be Qin's original accounts which tell of Qin's westward expansion against the Rong and the subsequent grant of royal tokens of approval to Lord Mu.⁶⁸

Interestingly, the narrative of Lord Mu's activities not only differs greatly from the laconic accounts of other lords in the second part of the "Basic Annals of Qin", but also seems to contradict many of Sima Qian's above mentioned assessments of Qin history. The lord's exploits and his active intervention into the affairs of the Central States defy the notion of Qin's marginality; his close ties with the Zhou house are at odds with the simplistic picture of "separation" between Qin and Zhou, as presented by the Grand Scribe Dan,⁶⁹ and even the cultural outlook of the state of Qin under his aegis appears to be unmistakably that of the Central States and not of the "barbarians"; actually, in some of the anecdotes concerning his wise advisor, You Yu 由余, Lord Mu poses himself as a representative of the culture of the

67 Lord Mu is also the first Qin ruler whose activities are mentioned in the *Chunqiu* itself (for the first reference, see *Zuo*, Xi 15.350). Lord Mu is moreover credited with the authorship of the "Qinshi" 秦誓 (Qin Pledge), the last document of the *Shangshu* 尚書 collection.

68 See *Shiji* 5.194–195. These stories are not mentioned either in the *Zuo* (aside from a narrator's note in Wen 3.530), or in other *Chunqiu* commentaries, and it is highly likely that they derive from Qin sources.

69 For instance, the *Shiji* mentions that Lord Mu's decision to release the captive Lord Hui of Jin (晉惠公, r. 650–637) came as a result of the plea by King Xiang of Zhou (周襄王, r. 651–618) (*Shiji* 5.189). This intervention is mentioned neither in the *Zuo* nor in other received text, and it was perhaps introduced from the Qin sources.

Central States.⁷⁰ The inclusion of these accounts in the *Shiji* further undermines the assertion that Sima Qian deliberately manipulated his sources to bolster anti-Qin biases.

Yet while the account of Lord Mu's reign may undermine many of the *Shiji* biases, the accounts of the next two odd centuries appear to strengthen them. The phase of a century-and-a-half after Lord Mu is the least detailed portion of the "Basic Annals of Qin" in general. The *Shiji* retells briefly major Qin-related stories from the *Zuo*zhuan, adding no new information about Qin's military activities or domestic affairs to it; the accounts of the next century, which postdates the *Zuo*zhuan narrative, are slightly more informative but still extremely sketchy. The obvious downgrading of Qin's military exploits, such as its crucial help to the embattled state of Chu in 505 and its partly successful struggle against the major superpower, the state of Jin, serves the narrator to create the pattern of Qin marginality and highlights the change which began during Lords Xian and Xiao's years, when suddenly the narrative becomes much more detailed.

What are the reasons for these fluctuations of the *Shiji* narrative? Why did Sima Qian, who apparently had access to Qin documents, not find anything of significance for the two-and-a-half centuries after Lord Mu's death? Or, is it possible that omissions were made by his anonymous predecessors, the court scribes of the state of Qin? I believe that the evidence tends to support the latter assumption. At least on two major issues only deliberate omissions of the early historians could skew their followers' perspectives. These issues are Qin's alleged marginality and its relations with the Zhou house.

Qin rulers' claims of the possession of the Mandate are perhaps one of the most remarkable features of the early Qin history. Yet none of the Zhanguo or early Han sources had ever mentioned these claims. Such an omission is puzzling in the light of the consistent appearance of the Mandate claims on the ritual vessels from the Qin's ancestral temple: similar formulae appear on the vessels separated by a century-and-a-half. Martin Kern is certainly right with regard to these claims being a part of a certain "master text" preserved in Qin's ancestral temple.⁷¹ It is possible that during the Chunqiu period such bold pronouncements were made for the ancestors' ears only; they were not circulated beyond the limited number of the Qin ruling lineage members and their immediate entourage. But why do any mentions of Qin's mandate disappear from the Zhanguo period Qin discourse? Why were they never mentioned by the First Emperor, who could have used them to bolster his legitimacy? I believe that such silence could not be incidental. It is likely that mentions of Qin's glorious past and of the self-confidence of the early Qin rulers were deliberately eliminated by the persons who had access to the most sacral place in the state of Qin – its ancestral temple.

A similar access should have been demanded of a person who would erase the records of the royal visits to the state of Qin during the sixth and the fifth centuries. But here the anonymous manipulator apparently worked even harder. The above mentioned Grand Scribe Dan's version of the Qin-Zhou relations set the stage for the later (including Sima Qian's) interpretations. But what are the origins of this prediction? The answer can be supplied by help of an unlikely source: the *Shiji* biography of Laozi 老子. There we find the following saying:

70 See *Shiji* 5.192–193.

71 See Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions*, 119–120.

自孔子死之後百二十九年，而史記：周大史儋見秦獻公曰：「始秦與周合，合五百而離，離七十歲而霸王者出焉。」

One hundred twenty nine years after the death of Confucius, the *Scribal Records* (*shiji* 史記) [state]: “The Grand Scribe Dan of the Zhou had an audience with Lord Xian of Qin, saying: ‘Originally, Zhou and Qin were united; after being united for five hundred years they will separate, and seventeen years after this separation the hegemon-king will appear [in Qin].’”⁷²

The wording here differs from other citations of Dan’s prophecy in the *Shiji* and we may assume that a mistake was made in the less precise Laozi’s biography. What is remarkable for us, however, is that Sima Qian identifies here his source for Dan’s prediction, namely the anonymous *Scribal Records*. These records are, in all likelihood, the only well-preserved Zhangguo source that Sima Qian possessed, namely, the records of the state of Qin.⁷³ It seems, therefore, that the account of Dan’s prediction was produced by Qin scribes. Contradictory dates supplied in the prediction prevent us from determining its precise origins, but it is highly plausible that it was manufactured in the court of Qin. If so, somebody at the highest echelons of Qin was interested in altering the notion of traditional Qin-Zhou alliance. Perhaps the same person(s) tried to diminish the glory of the past Qin rulers. What could be the reason for these manipulations?

I believe that the search for the forger should focus on the eras of lords Xian and Xiao. Their reforms, particularly those of Lord Xiao, were the most radical and comprehensive departure from the past ways of Qin, and, expectedly, they triggered widespread opposition. One of the most convenient ways to calm the dissent was to convince the policy makers of the inherent weaknesses of the traditional system and its general inadequacy. Lord Xian’s ascendancy indeed followed a period of internal strives and military setbacks; and it is possible that somebody in his or in Lord Xiao’s entourage simply expanded this period retroactively to the centuries after Lord Mu. Against this imagined background the achievements of Lords Xian and Xiao were ever brighter, and the reforms – ever more justifiable.

That such a view of Qin history was indeed promulgated by Lord Xiao is apparent from his declaration, allegedly pronounced at the beginning of his rule, which is cited in the “Basic Annals”. The speech begins with the praise of Lord Mu, who expanded Qin’s territory eastward and westward, whose achievements were recognized by the Zhou kings, and who thereby “opened the extraordinarily bright way for future accomplishments”. Yet, the lord continued, it was through the malpractices of the later generations that Qin was humiliated by its rivals. The shameful period ended, according to the declaration, only with Lord Xiao’s father, Lord Xian.⁷⁴

It is not difficult to see that the speech summarizes the narrative of Qin’s early history presented in the *Shiji*. While it is possible, of course, that this was indeed how Lord Xiao or his advisors perceived the past of their state, it is also possible that in his declaration the lord was presenting a new, and authoritative, reading of the past. By downgrading the rulers after Lord Mu, Lord Xiao not only glorified his and his father’s achievements, but also indirectly justified the reforms, which changed thereafter the face of Qin.

72 *Shiji* 63.2142.

73 See Jin Dejian, *Sima Qian suo jian shu kao*, 420.

74 See *Shiji* 5.202.

Needless to say, such supposition would forever remain speculative (at least until an earlier version of the *Qin Records* is found). Currently, I think, this is the most plausible explanation of the amazing Qin amnesia regarding the early ambitions of its leaders and regarding their centuries-old ties with the Zhou. It is likely then that Sima Qian's biases resulted from his being misled by his sources, which, coupled with the widespread eastern prejudices against Qin, created in his mind a flawed picture of Qin's past. His resultant account was certainly not correct, but nor is there a justification to accuse Sima Qian of deliberate manipulations.

The case study discussed above suggests that we must be doubly cautious when dealing with the biases of the *Shiji* narrative. It is clear that the *Shiji* is not a Rankean history, but neither is it a purely "literary universe" as suggested by Lewis. Rather than creating a *Chun-qin*-like model account of what should have happened, Sima Qian struggled vehemently with his disparate, contradictory and flawed sources. The result is not always satisfactory for the modern critical historian. Yet rather than ignoring Sima Qian's accounts or blindly following them, we should do our best to integrate them with the newly obtained sources to obtain a better, less biased picture of the pre-imperial age.