

Irony, Political Philosophy, and Historiography: Cai Ze's Anecdote in *Zhanguo ce* Revisited

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Abstract This study explores a single anecdote from the *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策), named »Cai Ze was expelled from Zhao«. I analyze its philosophical, historical, and literary content and argue that the anecdote was in all likelihood composed during the Han dynasty. It presents highly original views on the nature of the sage's political achievements, and on the relations between the quest for fame and the dictum to preserve one's body. Moreover, the anecdote can be read as an ironic take on the common *Zhanguo ce* trope of an omniscient successful persuader. My study calls for a deeper engagement with *Zhanguo ce* as a source for the Warring States-period history, literature, and thought.

Keywords body, irony, historiography · Qin 秦 (221–207 BC), reputation, sages · Warring States 戰國 (453–221 BC), *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策

Ours is an exciting age in studies of early Chinese thought in the West. The explosive increase in the number of unearthed manuscripts provides scholars with many new sources for intellectual history of pre-imperial (pre-221 BC) and early imperial China. Parallel to this, many transmitted texts that had been neglected for generations by Western scholars have recently been accorded translations cum studies.¹ The expanding scope of texts with which we operate allows for a much

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¹ There is no slightest possibility to summarize the impact of paleographic revolution on studies of early Chinese thought. For examples of recent publications of previously ignored texts, see,

more nuanced understanding of intellectual trends in the Warring States period than was possible a few decades ago.

This said, some major sources still attract very limited scholarly attention. Of these, the ongoing neglect of the *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策) is most regrettable. After all, this is one of the largest texts that deals with the Warring States period (*Zhanguo* 戰國, 453–221 BC), an immensely rich repository of contemporaneous rhetoric, political thought, diplomatic history, and literary patterns. This richness, though, remains largely unexplored. Aside from several pioneering studies by James Crump (published in the 1960s and republished in the 1990s), and an almost contemporaneous solid monograph by Kim V. Vasil'ev (1968), the text merited in the West just a few short articles that focused on its rhetorical patterns.² Its richness in terms of intellectual history and the problems it poses to studies of early Chinese historiography have been barely tapped.

The reasons for scholarly reluctance to deal with *Zhanguo ce* are not difficult to find. First, the text lacks an identifiable authorship. It was compiled by the Han 漢 (206/202 BC–220 AD) librarian, Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BC) from no fewer than six texts discovered by him in the imperial library. Each of these component texts in turn was in all likelihood itself a compilation of disparate anecdotes produced

e.g., *Shizi: China's First Syncretist*, tr. by Paul Fischer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); *The Shenzi Fragments: A Philosophical Analysis and Translation*, tr. by Eirik Lang Harris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan*, tr. by Olivia Milburn (Leiden: Brill, 2016) and another edition, translated by Yoav Ariel (Beijing: Renmin University Press, 2018).

- 2 *Intrigues: Studies of the Chan-kuo T'sè*, tr. by James I. Crump, Jr. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964; revised edition published in 1996); *Legends of the Warring States: Persuasions, Romances, and Stories from the Chan-kuo T'sè*, tr. by James I. Crump, Jr. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Kim V. Vasil'ev, *Планы Сражающихся Царств (Исследования и переводы)* [*Stratagems of the Warring States: Studies and Translations*] (Moscow: Nauka, 1968). For articles, see Paul R. Goldin, »Rhetoric and Machination in Stratagems of the Warring States«, in Paul R. Goldin, *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 76–89; Romain Graziani, »Rhetoric That Kills, Rhetoric That Heals«, *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 34 (2012): 41–77.

by different authors, at different circumstances, and with different goals in mind. Second, the dates and the historical veracity of the *Zhanguo ce* anecdotes remain very uncertain. Some of these may have been composed soon after the events they depict and may contain reliable historical information, while others (probably the majority) are pure fiction.³ Third, the text is disciplinarily confusing: standing at the nexus of history, philosophy, and literature, it belongs to none *sensu stricto*. All these understandably discourage scholars from in-depth engagement with the *Stratagems*.

Another, less visible reason that hinders interest in *Zhanguo ce* can be called a traditional one, namely dislike of its amoral, and at times immoral message. Liu Xiang himself noticed that despite the brilliance of the protagonists' stratagems, these cannot be used for »ruling the state and for educational transformation« (不可以臨國教化).⁴ This negative view of the text's intellectual content remained visible throughout the imperial millennia, and is still observable nowadays. *Zhanguo ce* indeed focuses on machinations and intrigues and, in Paul R. Goldin's words, »espouses a world view antithetical to orthodox Confucianism«. ⁵ Yet paraphrasing Goldin, therein lies the book's value—not only for »ancient readers«, but for all those eager to understand important undercurrents in the world of thought of the Warring States. The *Zhanguo ce* protagonists' brazen concern with immediate gain, their deceitfulness, their unadorned quest for glory and riches—all provide a valuable corrective to a somewhat idealized picture of the men-of-service (*shi* 士) that we encounter in the vast majority of the Masters' (*zi* 子) writings from that age. Moreover, the very heterogeneity of *Zhanguo ce* and the absence of identifiable unified ideological agenda behind its anecdotes makes it a richer repository of intellectual trends of the Warring States period than any other contemporaneous text.

3 The best study of the nature and composition of *Zhanguo ce*, of which am aware, is He Jin 何晉, *Zhanguo ce' yanjiu* 《戰國策》研究 [Studies of the *Stratagems of the Warring States*] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001).

4 Liu Xiang's preface to his compilation of *Zhanguo ce* is cited from He Jianzhang 何建章, *Zhanguo ce zhusi* 戰國策注釋 [Annotated *Stratagems of the Warring States*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), 1357.

5 See Goldin, »Rhetoric and Machination«, 89.

In what follows I want to demonstrate the *Zhanguo ce*'s value for students of pre-imperial intellectual history through an in-depth analysis of one of its anecdotes, the story of the travelling persuader Cai Ze 蔡澤, an otherwise insignificant political personality, who allegedly unseated and replaced the all-powerful prime minister of Qin 秦, Fan Sui 范雎 (d. 255 BC).⁶ This unusually lengthy anecdote of around 1800 characters provides manifold insights about rhetoric, political thought, and historiography. Some of its ideas are quite peculiar and may give us precious clues about the intellectual atmosphere at the time of its composition, which, I shall argue, should be the early Han dynasty.

1 Background: Cai Ze and Fan Sui

Both Fan Sui and his replacer, Cai Ze, belong to the famous »guest ministers« (*ke qing* 客卿) of Qin. They and their ilk were travelling persuaders who benefitted from Qin's openness to foreign talents, climbed to the top of the political ladder there, and contributed to the strengthening of that state.⁷ Fan Sui was arguably the most eminent of these, second only to Shang Yang 商鞅 (d. 338 BC) in his achievements.⁸ A *Zhanguo ce* anecdote, incorporated in Fan Sui's biography in

6 Fan Sui's name is written either 雎 or 睪; consequently there is confusion about its pronunciation: Sui or Ju? In transcribing the name as Sui 雎, I follow the tentative conclusion of the most detailed study of that issue, Bai Guohong 白國紅, »Guanyu Fan Sui zhi ming de kaocha yu sisuo« 關於范雎之名的考察與思索 [My Study and My Views about Fan Sui's Name], *Jiangxi shehui kexue* 江西社會科學 11 (2015), 114–120.

7 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 [On the Warring States-period Qin chancellors], *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究 60 (2011), 1–29; Huang Liuzhu 黃留珠, *Qin Han lishi wenhua lungao* 秦漢歷史文化論稿 [Preliminary Discussion of History and Culture under Qin and Han] (Xi'an: San Qin chubanshe, 2002), 41–50.

8 Fan Sui's exploits are summarized in his biography in *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記), chapter 79, which is overwhelmingly based on *Zhanguo ce*—related anecdotes. He figures prominently in many other chapters of the *Shiji* and in additional *Zhanguo ce* anecdotes, as well as in such texts as

Records of the Historian (*Shiji* 史記)⁹ credits him with devising the policy of “allying with the distant and attacking the near,” which allowed Qin to translate its military superiority into steady territorial expansion.¹⁰ Later, he assisted King Zhaoxiang in consolidating the king’s authority at the expense of the Queen Dowager.¹¹ For his contribution to Qin, Fan Sui was enfeoffed at Ying 應 (a location near current Lushan 魯山, Henan), and hence is known as the Marquis of Ying 應侯. From 266 to 255 BC, he was the most powerful personality at the court of Qin. It was during his tenure that Qin delivered a mortal blow to Zhao 趙 in 260 BC, destroying the Zhao army at Changping 長平. However, Fan Sui’s rivalry with Qin’s eminent military commander, Bai Qi 白起 (d. 257 BC, see more below), caused not only Bai’s downfall but also subsequent disaster to Qin and to Fan Sui personally. Fan Sui’s appointees failed miserably in fighting Zhao: one defected in 257 BC; another, Wang Ji 王稽, was accused of plotting to defect in 255 BC. In the aftermath of Wang Ji’s arrest, Fan Sui faced imminent demise, because, according to Qin laws, he was personally responsible for the failure of those whom he had recommended. This moment is the starting point of the *Zhanguo ce* anecdote.

Very little is known of Cai Ze. The lion’s share of his biography in *Records of the Historian* (where it is attached to that of Fan Sui) comprises the single *Zhanguo*

Xunzi 荀子 and *Han Feizi* 韓非子. For Shang Yang’s career and his contribution to Qin, see Yuri Pines, *The Book of Lord Shang: Apologetics of State Power in Early China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 7–24.

- 9 It should be reminded here that *Zhanguo ce* was composed almost a century after *Records of the Historian*, hence, when I speak of incorporation of a *Zhanguo ce* anecdote there, I mean incorporation of an anecdote from one of the component texts of the would-be *Zhanguo ce*. This heuristically convenient way of treating *Zhanguo ce* as a source text of Sima Qian was employed already by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) in *Hanshu* 漢書 62: 2737. See more in Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tensions and Conflicts in Writing of Sima Qian* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 100–101.
- 10 The importance of this policy is summarized by Mark E. Lewis, »Warring States: Political History«, in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, ed. By Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 587–650, esp. see pp. 638–639.
- 11 *Zhanguo ce* 5.9: 170–172 and 5.10: 181 («Qin ce» 秦策 3); *Shiji* 79: 2408–2412; translated in Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin Dynasty* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1993), 131–158 on pp. 138–142.

ce anecdote analyzed below.¹² Cai was a travelling persuader from Yan 燕, but we know nothing of his achievements before his bold plan to replace Fan Sui. Nor was his subsequent career very impressive, as we shall see in the final section of this essay. Cai's lack of remarkable political exploits is an important backdrop for understanding the subtleties of the *Zhanguo ce* anecdote.

The anecdote on which my discussion below focuses (the official title of which is “Cai Ze was expelled from Zhao” 蔡澤見逐於趙) is a very engaging piece of literature.¹³ It is different from most *Zhanguo ce* pieces in that it presents a verbal duel between two equally gifted persuaders. This allows posing conflicting interpretations of a common set of historical examples and in-depth deliberations on the nature of individual success and failure, which is rarely seen in *Zhanguo ce*.¹⁴ Furthermore, as I shall try to demonstrate, the anecdote contains covert irony, which undermines the appeal of precisely the kind of rhetoric that permeates *Zhanguo ce* in general.

The story starts with Cai Ze's dire straits: he was expelled from Zhao, and travelled through Han 韓 and Wei 魏, where even his cooking pot was stolen. This is a common trope in the tales of travelling persuaders, who routinely encounter hardship and humiliation before they are able to realize their goals.¹⁵ Undeterred by his miserable conditions, Cai, having heard of Fan Sui's troubles, heads to Qin,

12 A single additional piece of information about Cai Ze in *Records of the Historian* is his meeting with a physiognomist who predicted Cai considerable longevity.

13 For a brief analysis of its value, see Luan Qiaoyun 樂巧雲, «Cong Cai Ze shui Fan Sui gong cheng shen tui» kan Zhanguo ceshi chenggong de yuanyin« 從《蔡澤說范雎功成身退》看戰國策士成功的原因 [Analyzing the Reasons for Success of the Warring States-period Strategists on the Basis of the “Cai Ze Urges Fan Sui to Retreat Once Success is Accomplished”], *Guiyang xueyuan xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 貴陽學院學報 (社會科學版) 1 (2007): 98–100.

14 Graziani, «Rhetoric», 57–58 notices the absence of deliberative modes of arguments in *Zhanguo ce* in general.

15 The paradigmatic story of this genre is that of Su Qin's 蘇秦 (d. 284 BC) sojourn in Qin before he opts to form an anti-Qin alliance (*Zhanguo ce* 3.2: 74–76 [»Qin ce 1«]), analyzed in Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 142–144.

hoping to replace Fan. In order to do so, Cai Ze needs an audience with King Zhaoxiang 秦昭襄王 (r. 306–251 BC), which is not easily obtained. To meet the king, one is expected to possess fine reputation as a skillful scholar, and, of course, to have a recommender who would introduce the aspiring servant to the king in the first place. Cai solves both problems in a very peculiar way:

使人宣言以感怒應侯曰：「燕客蔡澤，天下駿雄弘辯之士也。彼一見秦王，秦王必相之而奪君位。」應侯聞之，使人召蔡澤。蔡澤入，則揖應侯，應侯固不快，及見之，又倨。應侯因讓之曰：「子常宣言代我相秦，豈有此乎？」對曰：「然。」應侯曰：「請聞其說。」

Cai Ze] dispatched somebody to incite the anger of the Marquis of Ying, saying: »A guest from Yan, Cai Ze, is the most outstanding and eloquent man-of-service under Heaven. The moment he gets an audience with the King of Qin, the King of Qin will appoint him minister and deprive you of your position.«

Having heard this, the Marquis of Ying sent someone to summon Cai Ze. When Cai Ze entered, he bowed curtly to the Marquis of Ying. The Marquis of Ying was even more uneasy about this. As they started the audience, [Cai] still behaved arrogantly. The Marquis therefore berated him saying: »You are spreading the word that you are going to replace me as Qin's chief minister. Is this true?«

Cai Ze replied: »Yes«.

The Marquis of Ying said: »Please explain yourself.«¹⁶

The *Zhanguo ce* is often considered a textbook of political rhetoric, but the starting lines of the Cai Ze anecdote seem more like a textbook for publicity campaigns. Cai Ze faces a formidable task: how to get a recommender who would introduce him to King Zhaoxiang? The only option is to use the service of Fan Sui, the very person whom he wants to unseat. But then, how to cause Fan Sui to pay attention to him? Cai opts for negative publicity. He presents himself as an excessively arrogant job-seeker. The goal is to goad Fan Sui into action: to irritate him and cause him to summon Cai. Fan Sui ostensibly falls into the trap, but does he really? From the subsequent exchange, it seems that Fan Sui is less worried about Cai

16 *Zhanguo ce* 5.18: 203. Hereafter all the references to Cai Ze anecdote are to He Jianzhang's edition (pp. 203–205) without additional notes. My translation utilizes, with certain modifications, Burton Watson's translation of the parallel passages from the *Records of the Grand Historian* (Watson, *Records*, 149–156). Cf. Crump's translation (*Legends*, 31–36).

Ze's ability to unseat him, but simply welcomes a nice verbal competition with another eloquent persuader.

Cai Ze's way of publicizing his existence is cute, but was the story intended to be convincing to the audience? I doubt this. Consider a story of a recent university graduate who seeks to replace the White House Chief of Staff just by spreading rumors that »I am the most qualified for this office, and once the President meets me, I will surely replace you.« Would this bring about an invitation to the Chief of Staff's office? How many of us would believe it? Were early Chinese readers more credulous than we are? Probably not.

I think the story was not intended to be believed. Rather, its aim was not just to entertain readers with a masterly rhetorical duel between two famous persuaders, but possibly also to present an ironic view of the persuaders' genre. Cai Ze's search for recognition is a well-known trope in Warring States literature. Many aspiring men-of-service sought ways to be instantly »recognized« by a powerful leader, without whose endorsement no lucrative appointment would ensue.¹⁷ Cai's employment of negative publicity to attract the recommender's attention stretches the limits of credibility and thereby indirectly ridicules other, more conventional stories of the same lore. I shall return to the ironic subtext of Cai Ze's story at the end of this essay.

2 *Limitless Aspirations*

Having been granted the chance to demonstrate his eloquence, Cai Ze starts with outlining a normative set of aspirations of an ambitious man-of-service. It is against these aspirations that Fan Sui's course of action will be later judged:

蔡澤曰：「吁！何君見之晚也。夫四時之序，成功者去。夫人生手足堅強，耳目聰明聖知，豈非士之所願與？」應侯曰：「然。」蔡澤曰：「質仁秉義，行道施德於天下，天下懷樂敬愛，願以為君王，豈不辯智之期與？」應侯曰：「然。」蔡澤復曰：「富貴顯榮，成理萬物萬物各得其所；生命壽長，終其天年而不夭傷；天下繼

17 For the motif of »recognition« in the early Chinese historical and literary lore, see Eric Henry, »The Motif of Recognition in Early China«, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47,1 (1987), 5–30.

其統，守其業，傳之無窮，名實純粹，澤流千世，稱之而毋絕，與天地終。豈非道之符，而聖人所謂吉祥善事與？」應侯曰：「然。」

Cai Ze said: »Ah, how slow you are to understand! As the four seasons take their round, so the achiever must give ground! To have sturdy limbs, sharp eyes and perceptive ears, and a sagacious mind as long as you live: is this not what a man-of-service desires?«

»Yes«, said the Marquis.

Cai Ze said: »To embody benevolence, cling to duty, implement the Way and spread virtue through All-under-Heaven, be admired, respected, and loved by All-under-Heaven, so that everybody wants to make you a ruler and a monarch: is this not what the eloquent and wise desire?«

»Yes«, said the Marquis.

Cai Ze said again: »Wealth, nobility, renown, glory; to order the myriad things so that each finds its place, longevity of one's full life span, ending the years bequeathed by Heaven without dying early. All-under-Heaven will carry on your rule, preserve your enterprise, and transmit it forever. Your name and actual [achievements] will be of utmost purity. Benefits will reach to thousand generations, so that all endlessly sing praises to you, long-lasting as Heaven and Earth. Is not it the amulet of the Way and virtue, the blessed and good issue for the sages?«

Yes«, said the Marquis.

Cai Ze outlines three levels of desires shared by members of his stratum. The lowest level focuses on the uncontroversial quest for physical and mental health. This level is common to all men-of-service. The second level is that of »eloquent and wise« advisors, whose goal is to influence All-under-Heaven. The third, the level of the sages, is that of transcendental achievements that will outlive the sage himself and will continue indefinitely. These two latter levels are peculiar to Cai Ze's speech and deserve close attention.

Many Warring States texts present the aspirations of a noble man (*junzi* 君子) or a man-of-service as a sequence of ever more expanding influence on the outer world. The *locus classicus* of these sequences is the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), which presents one's meticulous self-cultivation as expanding from one's self toward ordering one's family, governing one's state (*guo* 國), and ultimately clarifying one's brilliant virtue in All-under-Heaven (*tianxia* 天下).¹⁸ The *Analects*

18 *Daxue* 1, cited from *Sisbu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 [The Collected Annotations on the *Four*

(*Lunyu* 論語) speaks of three levels of self-cultivation: at the lowest level, a noble man should be »reverent« (*jing* 敬), a term which is indicative of a relatively low position. At the second level, the noble man »brings peace to others«, implying a higher position in social hierarchy. The upper level is »bringing peace to the hundred clans«, meaning attaining a position of supreme power, on a par with the legendary rulers Yao 堯 and Shun 舜.¹⁹ Mengzi 孟子 (ca. 380–304 BC) provides a slightly different ladder of aspirations. The lowest men-of-service are personal servitors of the ruler, followed by those whose focus is caring for the entire state, then »Heavenly people« (*tianmin* 天民), who aspire to solve the problems of All-under-Heaven, and, finally, the »great man«, who rectifies himself and thereby rectifies all the rest.²⁰ Different texts offer different sequences, but normally unification of All-under-Heaven (or, imposing one's moral influence on All-under-Heaven) is the ultimate goal of an ambitious man's self-realization. A lower level is normally that of an individual state (or another large social unit).²¹

Cai Ze's speech presents a distinct view of the two upper levels. An individual state disappears entirely from the discussion. An »eloquent and wise« man hopes »to embody benevolence, cling to duty, implement the Way and spread virtue through All-under-Heaven, be admired, respected, and loved by All-under-Heaven, so that everybody wants to make him a ruler and a monarch.« Clearly, his focus is All-under-Heaven.

This »universal« rather than local focus may be indicative of the date of the composition of Cai Ze's anecdote. That the goal of unifying All-under-Heaven or

Books Divided into Paragraphs and Sentences], annotated by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 3–4.

19 *Lunyu yizhu* 論語譯注 [The *Analects*, translated and annotated], annotated by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 14.42: 159.

20 *Mengzi yizhu* 孟子譯注, [The *Mencius*, translated and annotated], annotated by Yang Bojun (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 13.19: 308.

21 A somewhat ironic variation of this tripartite division—in which however, the lowest level, that of »a commoner« (*shuren* 庶人) is despicable—appears in the chapter »Shuo jian« 說劍 of *Zhuangzi* 莊子. See discussion by Romain Graziani, »Of Words and Swords: Therapeutic Imagination in Action—A Study of Chapter 30 of the *Zhuangzi*«, *Philosophy East and West* 64,2 (2014), 375–403.

establishing hegemony therein is conspicuously absent from the speech strongly suggests that it was produced during the imperial era, when a minor unit, a »state« (*guo* 國), was no longer important for aspiring men-of-service. Below I shall provide further indicators of the imperial-age composition of the anecdote; here, suffice it to say that Cai Ze's speech implicitly treats the task of unification as having been fulfilled already. Therefore, the »eloquent and wise« hero does not bother with a single state but rather focuses on the subcelestial realm as a whole.

Intriguingly, the topic of one's moral self-realization in All-under-Heaven is linked in Cai Ze's speech with the question of becoming the ruler. The »eloquent and wise« man is not just universally beloved and admired; it is noticed that »everybody wants to make him a ruler and a monarch.« This introduces a subversive motif in the speech. Cai Ze implies that a morally and intellectually impeccable advisor deserves the position of the top leader rather than satisfying himself with the normative expectation of becoming the ruler's aide. That such lofty aspirations were shared by some of the men-of-service of the Warring States period is well known.²² Yet, no text of which I am aware proclaims so unequivocally that the people want to turn the moral paragon into their »ruler and monarch« (*jun wang* 君王). Should such a text had been read by, e.g., Han Fei 韓非 (d. 233 BC), he would surely have judged it as a proof of ultimate subversiveness of the lofty men-of-service.²³ And indeed: how should a ruler treat the minister whom the multitudes want to elevate to the ruler's position?

The third and highest level of one's aspiration—the sage's level—is the most interesting. Having attained the supreme (morally, or politically, or both) position in All-under-Heaven on the second level of his self-realization, the sage shifts attention from spatial to temporal dimensions of his impact. What matters for him is that »All-under-Heaven will carry on his rule, preserve his enterprise, and transmit it forever«. I read this as an unmistakable reply to the failure of the Qin 秦 (221–207 BC) dynasty. Recall that having fulfilled the long-cherished goal of unifying All-under-Heaven, the First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇 (r. 246–221/210 BC) adopted the haughty stance of a long-awaited savior. His lavish self-praise recorded in his stele inscriptions focuses primarily on the his achievements

²² See Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 168–172.

²³ For Han Fei's fear of ministerial subversion and of the related discourse, see, e.g., Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 98–102.

theretofore: in particular, unifying the realm, ending incessant warfare and bloodshed, attaining orderly rule and prosperity, ensuring uniformity, clarity of laws, universal compliance, and so forth.²⁴ Yet having attained full spatial control »wherever human traces reach«,²⁵ the Emperor became concerned with the temporal limits of his rule.

We cannot ascertain now whether the First Emperor was truly preoccupied with the search for physical immortality, or it was just Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–90 BC) invention.²⁶ What is beyond doubt, though, is that the First Emperor was concerned with creating a Virgilian *imperium sine fine*, i.e. an empire without either spatial or temporal limits. His desire to conquer the future was expressed soon after unification, when he decided to abolish the tradition of giving posthumous names to the late monarchs, saying that henceforth his posterity would be numbered according to their generation: »the Second Generation [Emperor], the Third Generation [Emperor] and so on for myriad generations, inherited endlessly.«²⁷ This quest for endlessness explains abundance of such terms as »enduring« (長, 5 times) and »forever« (永, 3 times) in his stele inscriptions. Establishing everlasting rule seems to have become the new goal of the First Emperor after »All-under-Heaven« became unified under his control.

As is well known, the First Emperor's hopes were thwarted and his regime disintegrated soon after his demise. This historical experience may have prompted the authors of Cai Ze's speech to rethink the nature of the sage ruler. Throughout the Warring States period, unification of All-under-Heaven was the hallmark of

24 For detailed analysis of Qin inscriptions, see Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shib-buang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000); for my own views, see Yuri Pines, »The Messianic Emperor: A New Look at Qin's Place in China's History«, in *Birth of an Empire: The State of Qin Revisited*, ed. by Yuri Pines et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 258–279.

25 *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1997) 6: 245, citing the Langye 琅邪 inscription.

26 For possible biases in Sima Qian's depiction of the First Emperor, see Hans van Ess, »Emperor Wu of the Han and the First August Emperor of Qin in Sima Qian's *Shiji*«, in *Birth of an Empire*, 239–257.

27 *Shiji* 6: 236.

the sage's achievements; and it is in light of this consensus that the First Emperor became China's first monarch to proclaim himself »sage« (*shengren* 聖人).²⁸ In Cai Ze's speech, a fundamentally different conceptualization of sagacity is proposed. Unification of the realm is no longer deemed difficult to attain; what is really challenging is preserving one's enterprise »to thousand generations, so that all endlessly sing praises to you, long-lasting as Heaven and Earth.« Was it an attempt to redefine the nature of sagacity or of a sage monarch? If so, it was not followed by subsequent thinkers. Yet at the very least, Cai Ze's speech appears to suggest a barely noticed new departure in post-Qin views of sagacity.

3 *Dying for One's Name*

Having exposed the normative desires of all those like Fan Sui and himself, Cai Ze lays a trap for his interlocutor. He asks him: »As for Lord Shang in Qin, Wu Qi in Chu and Grandee Zhong in Yue: can you aspire to end as they did?« (若秦之商君, 楚之吳起, 越之大夫種, 其卒亦可願矣). The trap is obvious. Shang Yang (Lord of Shang) was executed immediately upon the death of his benefactor, Lord Xiao of Qin 秦孝公 (r. 361–338 BC), by the benefactor's son. Wu Qi 吳起, an eminent reformer from the state of Chu, was murdered by his opponents during the funeral of his royal patron, King Dao 楚悼王 (r. ca. 400–381 BC). Grandee Zhong 大夫種 was ordered suicide by the very same King Goujian 越王勾踐 (r. 496–464 BC), whom he had faithfully served. Surely their destiny is unenviable! Yet Fan Sui escapes the trap by explaining that, actually, emulating these three powerful statesmen is his truest desire:

「何為不可? 夫公孫鞅事孝公, 極身毋二, 盡公不還私, 信賞罰以致治, 竭智能, 示請素, 蒙怨咎, 欺舊交, 虜魏公子卬, 卒為秦禽將、破軍, 攘地千里。吳起事悼王, 使私不害公, 讒不蔽忠, 言不取苟合, 行不取苟容, 行義不固 (顧) 毀譽, 必有伯主強國, 不辭禍凶。大夫種事越王, 主離困辱, 悉忠而不解, 主雖亡絕, 盡能而不離, 多功而不矜, 貴富不驕怠。」

28 For the importance of this appropriation of the title »sage« by the First Emperor, see Yuri Pines, »The Messianic Emperor« and Liu Zehua 劉澤華, »Political and Intellectual Authority: The Concept of the »Sage-Monarch« and Its Modern Fate«, in *Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China*, ed. by Yuri Pines, Paul R. Goldin, and Martin Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 273–300.

What is unacceptable about these? When Gongsun Yang (Shang Yang) served Lord Xiao [of Qin], he dedicated himself fully without duplicity. He was fully committed to the common [interests] and never went back to his private [ones]. He made rewards and punishments trustworthy, thereby bringing about orderly rule. He exhausted his wisdom and abilities, laid bare his true feelings, incurred resentment and censure, and deceived his old acquaintance, seizing Prince Ang of Wei.^[29] In the end, for the sake of Qin, he captured [the enemy's] commander and defeated their army, expanding [Qin's] territory by a thousand li.

Wu Qi served King Dao [of Chu], bringing about that private [interests] would not harm the common [ones], slanderers would not conceal the loyal. In his words, he was not seeking whatever is agreeable, nor, in his deeds, whatever is acceptable. When implementing duty, he did not think of praise or blame, and in planning to make his ruler hegemon and strengthen the state, he did not avoid misfortune or evil.

When Grandee Zhong served the King of Yue and his master was troubled and disgraced, he relentlessly committed his entire loyalty. Even if the ruler went into exile and the ruling line was discontinued, he would exert his full abilities and not desert. He had a lot of merit, but did not boast, and when noble and rich he was neither arrogant nor lazy.

Having summarized the achievements of the three paragon ministers, Fan Sui concludes:

若此三子者，義之至，忠之節也。故君子殺身以成名，義之所在，身雖死，無憾悔，何為不可哉？」

As for these three gentlemen: they are the epitome of duty, the touchstone of loyalty.

For a noble man to die in order to attain a name is where duty lies; even if I die, I shall have nothing to regret—why should I avoid it?

Fan Sui's attempt to avoid Cai Ze's rhetorical trap is remarkable. By invoking three eminent ministers who were killed because they did not know when to quit, Cai Ze stands on solid ground. Their fate should demonstrate the correctness of Cai

29 According to the story that became prominent by the late Warring States period, Shang Yang deceived an acquaintance, Prince Ang of Wei, luring him for peaceful negotiations, and taking him prisoner, after which the leaderless Wei army was easily defeated. See *Shiji* 68: 2232–33, and the discussion in Pines, *The Book of Lord Shang*, 21–22.

Ze's point about the need for timely retreat. This idea—epitomized in *Laozi's* 老子 dictum »once the merits are accomplished one should retreat: this is Heaven's Way« (功遂身退，天之道)—enjoyed broad popularity among the Warring States-period thinkers.³⁰ It is intrinsically linked to the concept of preserving one's physical well-being (one's body, *shen* 身), to which Cai Ze referred in the beginning of his speech. In particular, *Laozi*—as well as a few related texts, most notably *Zhuangzi* 莊子—vehemently criticize sacrificing one's body in pursue of career and of one's »name« (*ming* 名).³¹ Fan Sui, who was surely well aware of these sentiments, decided to defy them in the most straightforward way. Attaining a »name« is the utmost duty (or righteousness, *yi* 義) of a noble man. In a bold departure from the *Laozi*-related insistence on the priority of the body, Fan Sui is unequivocal: one's name is more important than one's life. Fan proudly concludes: »even if I die, I shall have nothing to regret«.

The idea that one's »name« possesses certain transcendental qualities which may compensate one for losing one's life is attested in several texts from the Warring States period. For instance, the *Book of Lord Shang* (*Shangjunshu* 商君書) notices:

民之性，饑而求食，勞而求佚，苦則索樂，辱則求榮，此民之情也。民之求利，失禮之法；求名，失性之常。奚以論其然也？今夫盜賊上犯君上之所禁，下失臣子之禮，故名辱而身危，猶不止者，利也。其上世之士，衣不煖膚，食不滿腸，苦其志意，勞其四肢，傷其五臟，而益裕廣耳，非性之常，而為之者，名也。故曰名利之所湊，則民道之。

The nature of the people is to seek food when they are hungry, to seek respite when they work hard, to seek joy when they are embittered, to seek glory when they are humiliated: this is the people's disposition. In seeking benefit, the people lose the

30 See *Laozi* 9 cited from *Bosbu Laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校注 [Silk Manuscript of *Laozi*, collated and annotated], annotated by Gao Ming 高明 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 261. For the trope of timely retreat in pre-imperial and early imperial texts, see Zheng Wangeng and Huang Deyuan, »Tracing the Source of the Idea of Time in *Yizhuan*«, *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 5,1 (2010), 51–67, on pp. 55–61. Cai Ze statement »As the four seasons take their round, so the achiever must give ground« may be an allusion to *Laozi*.

31 See *Laozi* 44 cited from *Bosbu Laozi*, 39–40; *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* 莊子今注今譯 [*Zhuangzi* with Modern Glosses and Modern Translation], annotated by Chen Guying 陳鼓應 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994) 8: 239 (»Pianmu« 駢拇).

standard of ritual.^[32] in seeking a name (=reputation), they lose the constancy of their nature. ^[33] How can I demonstrate this? Now, criminals violate the prohibitions of rulers and superiors above, and lose the ritual of subjects and sons below; hence their name is dishonored and their body endangered, but they still do not stop: this is because of benefit. In the generations of old, there were men-of-service (shi) who did not have enough clothing to warm their skin, nor enough food to fill their bellies. They exerted their four limbs and injured their five internal organs, but behaved ever more broad-heartedly: this is not the constancy of their nature, yet they did it for the sake of a [good] name. Hence it is said: wherever name and benefit meet, the people will go in this direction.³⁴

In the *Book of Lord Shang*, the quest for a name (which in the above passage refers primarily to reputation, but elsewhere in the text is associated with social status) is considered one of the prime movers of human action. So powerful is the quest for a »name« that some people are willing to sacrifice their health and even their lives to attain a fine reputation. The authors of the *Book of Lord Shang* neither reject this quest nor try to alter it. Instead, they make it one of the cornerstones of the proposed policy of »social engineering«. To direct the people to socially and politically desirable behavior—primarily agriculture and warfare—the ruler should ensure that economic and social privileges will be granted exclusively to hardworking tillers and meritorious soldiers. The latter would brave death if they are sure that their “name” (referring here to the inheritable social status and the accompanying benefits) will be bequeathed to their descendants. The very idea that the quest for a name outlives one’s concern with physical survival becomes the crux of social policies associated with Shang Yang.³⁵

The idea that a good name may transcend one’s physical demise was shared by many other thinkers. Xunzi, for instance, considers *ming* as one of the primary

32 The combination *li zhi fa* 禮之法 (»standard of ritual) is peculiar to the *Book of Lord Shang*; it implies here the essential norms of proper behavior embedded in the broader concept of ritual.

33 The »constancy of one’s nature« (*xing zhi chang* 性之常) refers here to the fear of death.

34 Pines, *The Book of Lord Shang* 6.4: 160.

35 See detailed discussion in Yuri Pines, »Social Engineering in Early China: The Ideology of the *Shangjunshu* (*Book of Lord Shang*) Revisited«, *Oriens Extremus* 55 (2016), 1–37.

assets of his hero, the Great Ru (大儒). The attainment of a good name compensates the Great Ru for his failure to realize his political aspirations:

通則一天下，窮則獨立貴名，天不能死，地不能埋，桀、跖之世不能汙，非大儒莫之能立。

When he [the Great Ru] succeeds, he unifies All-under-Heaven; when he fails, he alone establishes his noble name. Heaven cannot kill it; Earth cannot bury it; the age of [tyrant] Jie and [Robber] Zhi cannot tarnish it: only the Great Ru can establish it like this.³⁶

Here the »name« (i.e., good reputation) is posed as the supreme asset of the Great Ru, the possession of which is recompense for the lack of attainments in his real life. This name reaches cosmic dimensions: neither Heaven, nor Earth, nor human evildoers can tarnish it. Possessing a »noble name« is depicted as coequal with the supreme political achievement of unifying All-under-Heaven. This quest for a »noble name« recurs in the texts associated with distinct intellectual currents.³⁷ In *Xunzi* in particular, the insistence on the transcendent qualities of one's name become most explicit. Elsewhere, the text notices that the noble man can be compensated for his worldly failures by the mere realization that »His body may die, but his name will be ever radiant«.³⁸ This insistence resembles Fan Sui's ideas, although it should be immediately noticed that Xunzi's views of what constitutes loyalty and duty differ dramatically from those expressed in Fan Sui's speech.³⁹

The idea, outlined in the *Book of Lord Shang*, *Xunzi*, and elsewhere, according to which attaining a fine name may, in certain circumstances, be more important

36 *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 [*Xunzi* with Collected Commentaries], annotated by Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842-1917) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), IV.8: 117-118 (»Ru xiao« 儒效).

37 See more in Yuri Pines, »To die for the Sanctity of the Name: Name (*ming* 名) as prime-mover of political action in early China«, in *Keywords in Traditional Chinese Literature and Thought*, ed. by Li Wai-ye and Yuri Pines (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, forthcoming).

38 身死而名彌白。 *Xunzi jijie* II.4: 61 (»Rong ru« 榮辱). For a similar view of transcendent qualities of a noble man's name, see *Liji jijie* 禮記集解 [The *Records of the Rites* with collected commentaries], compiled by Sun Xidan 孫希旦 (1736-1784) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995) LII.33: 1330 (»Ziyi« 緇衣).

39 For Xunzi's views of loyalty in comparison to ideas of his contemporaries, see Yuri Pines, »Friends or Foes: Changing Concepts of Ruler-Minister Relations and the Notion of Loyalty in Pre-Imperial China«, *Monumenta Serica* 50 (2002), 35-74, esp. pp. 68-71.

than physical survival is reiterated in several *Zhanguo ce* anecdotes. It is most notable in the stories of assassin-retainers (*cike* 刺客). These stories—which, as I have argued elsewhere, played an important role in shaping ministerial ethics of the Warring States period—reflect fascination with one’s name. The quest for a lasting reputation that would outlive one’s mortal body serves as the major prime-mover for the assassins’ readiness to sacrifice themselves.⁴⁰ However, in all these stories, the priority of one’s name over bodily well-being is implied, but never stated explicitly. It is in this regard that Fan Sui’s views are truly exceptional.

Fan Sui’s overt defiance of *Laozi*-related imperative of body’s preservation undermines Cai Ze’s cause. But Cai Ze, a clever persuader, finds a new line of argument. Without rejecting the correctness of Fan Sui’s insistence on the priority of one’s fine name, Cai Ze reminds Fan that many eminent ministers of the past attained their fame without sacrificing themselves. »If one can establish one’s loyalty and achieve a name only after dying, then even Weizi was not benevolent enough, Confucius was not sage enough, and Guan Zhong was not great enough.«⁴¹ Having heard this, Fan Sui is willing to reconsider his adamant stance: if he could preserve both the name and the body it is surely preferable to a heroic but meaningless death. Finally, the dialogue moves in the direction designed by Cai Ze.

4 *The Question of Historical Accuracy*

One of the most controversial issues regarding *Zhanguo ce* is that of its value as a source for the history of the Warring States period. On the one hand, *Zhanguo ce*-related anecdotes were the major source for Sima Qian’s reconstruction of the

40 See Pines, »Friends or Foes« and »To die for the Sanctity of the Name«.

41 夫待死之後可以立忠成名，是微子不足仁，孔子不足聖，管仲不足大也。Weizi was the minister of the last Shang tyrant, Zhouxin 紂辛 (d. ca. 1046 BC); he fled the state to avoid persecution. Confucius considered him a paragon of benevolence (*Lunyu* 18.1). Guan Zhong (d. 645 BC) was the architect of hegemony of Lord Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685–643 BC). Weizi, Guan Zhong, and Confucius had established their reputation without suffering persecution.

Warring States-period events.⁴² Not a few biographies in *Records of the Historian* (including those of Fan Sui and Cai Ze) are little more than an assemblage of such anecdotes. On the other hand, ever since Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (1105–1180), scholars have noticed manifold historical inaccuracies in *Zhanguo ce*, relegating it from the realm of history to that of the Masters' (*zi* 子) literature.⁴³ Among Western scholars, the dominant view of *Zhanguo ce* is that its anecdotes are purely or overwhelmingly fictitious and cannot serve as a meaningful source for the history of the Warring States.⁴⁴ Among Chinese colleagues, the opinions diverge:

- 42 See details in Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror*, 99–122. There is a possibility of an opposite borrowing, namely that *Zhanguo ce* (which was, recall, compiled a century after *Records of the Historian*, and later restored under the Song dynasty) borrows from *Records*, although this latter supposition is less convincing for me. See more in Zhao Shengqun 趙勝群, *Lun Shiji yu Zhanguo ce de guanxi lun* 《史記》與《戰國策》關係 [On Relations between *Records of the Historian* and *Stratagems of Warring States*], 南京師大學報 (社會科學版) 1 (1990), 42–48.
- 43 See Chao Gongwu, *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志 [Records of Reading Books from the Jun studio] (e-*Siku quanshu* edition) 3a:25; for debates about *Zhanguo ce* historical value, see He Jin, *Zhanguo ce*, 132–135. Of course the very division of pre-imperial texts into Canons, History and Masters is primarily a matter of librarians' convenience rather than a useful analytical tool. Especially, when didactic anecdotes are concerned, drawing a fine line among the genres is very difficult. See more in David Schaberg, »Chinese History and Philosophy«, *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, vol. I: Beginnings to AD 600*, ed. Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 394–414.
- 44 Henri Maspero (1883–1945) was most unequivocal in his insistence on the fictitious nature of *Zhanguo ce*. See his »Le Roman de Sou Ts'in«, *Études Asiatiques* 2 (1925), 127–141 (the revised version published in *Mélanges Posthumes: Quatre études historiques sur la Chine* [Paris, 1950, electronic edition Chicoutimi, Québec, 2005]). See also Crump, »Intrigues«; Goldin, »Rhetoric«. For a more affirmative view of *Zhanguo ce*'s historical value, see Vasil'ev, *Планы*. Note that at least insofar as Maspero's insistence on Su Qin's fictitious nature is concerned, he was patently wrong: the discovery of *Zhanguo zonghengjia shu* 戰國縱橫家書 [*Letters of the Warring States [period supporters of] the Vertical and Horizontal Alliances*] in Tomb 3, Mawangdui 馬王堆 (1973) has permitted the correction of certain inaccuracies in Sima Qian's reconstruction of Su Qin's story, which caused Maspero's skepticism in the first place. See Tang Lan 唐藍, »Sima Qian suo mei you jianguo de zhengui shiliao: Changsha Mawangdui boshu *Zhanguo zonghengjia shu*« 司馬遷所沒有見過的珍貴史料—長沙馬王堆帛書《戰國縱橫家書》 [Precious Historical Source Unobserved by Sima Qian:

some insist that most of the speeches in *Zhanguo ce* derive from original records made by the court scribes of the competing states, while other remain much more skeptical.⁴⁵ In the case of Cai Ze-Fan Sui dialogue, whatever its original historicity, the evidence presented above and that discussed below all suggest that the protagonists' speeches were fabricated several dozen years after their putative encounter. Yet aside from the historicity of the cited speeches (or the lack thereof), the *Zhanguo ce* anecdotes have another potential value for historians, namely multiple references to recent events that are embedded in the protagonists' speeches. Even if a speech is purely fictitious, it may be assumed that its authors would still construct a historical argument in a convincing way: namely, when they referred to the events of the recent past, they would try to reproduce more or less faithfully what was common knowledge of these events at their time. Given the paucity of historical sources for the Warring States period, these scattered references are truly invaluable, as can be learned from their incorporation into the single most authoritative study of that age, Yang Kuan's *History of the Warring States*.⁴⁶ But can they be fully trusted?

The Silk Manuscript *Letters of the Warring States [period supporters of] the Vertical and Horizontal Alliances* from Changsha, Mawangdui, in *Zhanguo zonghengjia shu* 戰國縱橫家書 [Letters of the Warring States [Period Supporters of] the Vertical and Horizontal Alliances], ed. by Mawangdui Hanmu boshu zhengli xiaozu 馬王堆漢墓帛書整理小組 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1976), 123–153. *Zhanguo zonghengjia shu* occasionally also allows correcting *Zhanguo ce* from mistakes introduced by later transmitters, copyists, and redactors. See, e.g., Yumiko F. Blanford, »Discovery of Lost Eloquence: New Insight from the Mawangdui “Zhanguo zonghengjia shu”«, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114,1 (1994), 77–82.

45 For what appears to me as excessively credulous views, see Zheng Jiewen 鄭傑文, *Zhanguo ce wen xinlun* 戰國策文新論 [New discussion of the *Stratagems of the Warring States*] (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1998); Guo Dan 郭丹, *Zuozhuan Guoce yanjiu* 左傳國策研究 [Study of the *Zuo Tradition* and the *Stratagems of the Warring States*] (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2004). For a more critical assessment, with which I largely concur, see He Jin, *Zhanguo ce*, 132–154.

46 Yang Kuan 楊寬, *Zhanguo shi* 戰國史 [History of the Warring States Period]. Rev. ed. (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1998).

The dialogue between Fan Sui and Cai Ze is full of allusions to historical personages and invocations of their fate aimed at proving or disproving the merit of the proposed course of action. Detailed discussion of each of these multiple references and their historical accuracy would lead us too far astray; hence, in what follows, I shall focus on two examples only, and then refer briefly to two more cases. All the examples are chosen from Cai Ze's lengthy speech in the second part of the anecdote. In that speech, Cai Ze first refers to powerful leaders of the past whose arrogance caused major setbacks or the outright downfall of their states. All these past paragons »rode on their splendor but did not return to the principle of the Way« (皆乘至盛不及(返)道理也). Then Cai Ze moves to engage anew the three case studies addressed in an earlier speech by Fan Sui himself, namely, Shang Yang, Wu Qi, and Grandee Zhong, to whom he also adds the famous Qin general Bai Qi. Cai echoes Fan Sui in hailing these ministers' achievements, but reminds him that each, »when his merits had been accomplished«, was summarily put to death:

夫商君為孝公平權衡、正度量、調輕重，決裂阡陌，教民耕戰。是以兵動而地廣，兵休而國富，故秦無敵於天下，立威諸侯。功已成矣，遂以車裂。

As for Lord Shang: for the sake of Lord Xiao he adjusted scales, corrected measures, coordinated the light and the heavy, and tore down the one-thousand-pace and one-hundred-pace ridges [in the fields]. He instructed the people to engage in tilling and warfare. Therefore, when the troops were put into action, the territory was expanded; when the troops were at rest, the state was prosperous. Hence, Qin had no enemies under Heaven, overawing regional lords. Yet when his merits had been accomplished, he was torn by the chariots.

This is a fairly accurate account of Shang Yang's reforms and of his ideas as reflected in the *Book of Lord Shang*. Unifications of measures, for instance, can be corroborated independently by paleographic materials, and so is the reform of land-holding (replacement of the standard plot size), which is probably what is meant by »tearing down the one-thousand-pace and one-hundred-pace ridges«.47

47 Shang Yang's unification of measures is recorded on Shang Yang-*fang sheng* 商鞅方升, currently in the possession of Shanghai Museum (for details, see Wang Hui 王輝, *Qin chutu wenxian biannian* 秦出土文獻編年 [Chronology of Unearthed Qin Texts] [Taipei: Xinfeng, 1990], 54; Tong Weimin 仝衛敏, *Chutu wenxian yu Shangjunshu zonghe yanjiu* 出土文獻與《商君書》綜合研究 [Synthetic Study of Unearthed Texts and the *Book of Lord Shang*] [Taipei: Hua Mulan chubanshe, 2013], 312n3).

The only questionable phrase is »coordinated the light and the heavy«. If this refers to sophisticated commercial policies (which are usually implied by adjusting »the light and the heavy«), then the text is patently wrong: such policies were never initiated by the historical Shang Yang, nor are they advocated in the book that bears his name.⁴⁸ However, since »coordinating the light and the heavy« may stand for other set of policies, we cannot conclude decisively that the authors of Cai Ze's speech inaccurately depicted Shang Yang's deeds. Let us turn now to Bai Qi's story:

楚地方數千里，持戟百萬。白起率數萬之師，以與楚戰，一戰舉鄢、郢，再戰燒夷陵。南並蜀、漢，又越韓、魏攻強趙，北阬馬服，誅屠四十餘萬之眾，流血成川，沸聲若雷，使秦業帝。自是之後，趙、楚懾服，不敢攻秦者，白起之勢也。身所服者，七十餘城。功已成矣，賜死於杜郵。

The state of Chu measured several thousand li squared, and supported a million lance-bearers. Bai Qi led an army of several tens of thousands, engaging Chu in battle. In one battle he captured Yan and Ying, in another he put Yiling to the torch. In the south, he annexed Shu and Han 漢. He also crossed through Han 韓 and Wei to attack the powerful Zhao. In the north, he buried Lord Mafu and massacred his host of more than 400,000 soldiers. The blood flowed in rivers and cries rose up like thunder. Therewith he caused Qin to perform the task of the thearchs. Thenceforth, Zhao and Chu bowed down in terror and dared not attack Qin: this was the power of Bai Qi. He

The nature of »tearing down the one-thousand-pace and one-hundred-pace ridges« is much debated (see, e.g., Yuan Lin 袁林, *Liang Zhou tudi zhidu xin lun* 兩周土地制度新論 [New Discussion of the Landownership System under the Two Zhou dynasties] (Changchun: Dongbei shifan daxue, 2000), 215–257). Yet major landholding reform under Shang Yang, especially the replacement of a standard plot of five hundred small (one-hundred-pace long) *mu* 畝 with a plot of one hundred large (240-pace long) *mu* is undeniable. The phrase »when the troops were put into action, the territory was expanded; when the troops were at rest, the state was prosperous« appears as an allusion to a repeated trope in the *Book of Lord Shang* (e.g., section 4.11).

48 The lack of sophistication of Shang Yang's commercial policies is discussed in Yuri Pines, »Agriculturalism and Beyond: Economic Thought of the *Book of Lord Shang*«, in *Between Command and Market: Economic Thought and Practice in Early China*, ed. by Elisa Sabattini and Christian Schwermann (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

personally subjugated more than seventy cities. Yet when his merits had been accomplished, he was granted death at Duyou.

Once again, the immediate impression would be that this is an entirely accurate narration of Bai Qi's endless victories. Most of the campaigns depicted above, i.e., the crushing defeat of Chu armies and the conquest of the city of Yan and of Chu's capital, Ying in 278 BC, as well as the defeat of the state of Zhao in 260 BC are well attested in a great variety of sources and the narration above is fairly accurate.⁴⁹ However, what about the phrase »in the south he annexed Shu and Han«? Here, the single most reliable source for the Warring States history—namely, the »Basic Annals of Qin« 秦本紀 in *Records of the Historian*, which are based on original Qin historical records⁵⁰—is unequivocal. The conquests of Shu (Sichuan) occurred in 316 BC, and its territories were pacified again in 306 BC. The acquisition of Hanzhong 漢中 occurred in 307 BC. None of these had anything to do with Bai Qi; actually, Bai Qi's assault on Chu in 278 BC would not have been possible without the full incorporation of these two territories into Qin a full generation earlier.

Why did this mistake happen? I think that the authors of Cai Ze's speech, writing as they did a few generations after Bai Qi's death, were less concerned with factual accuracy in depicting his exploits and wanted to inflate his image as superb general. If the anecdote reflected the real words of Cai Ze and Fan Sui, such an inaccuracy about the exploits of their contemporary would never have occurred. Moreover, the very invocation of Bai Qi's example would have been different in that case. Recall that Fan Sui personally contributed to Bai Qi's downfall, and that this downfall occurred just two years before the putative meeting between Fan Sui and Cai Ze. The speech, however, contains no hints to the immediate relevance of Bai Qi's example. By the time of its composition, Bai Qi had joined a lengthy line of paragons of loyalty who were mistreated by their masters. Any connection between his fate and Fan Sui's machinations was forgotten.

49 See details in Yang Kuan, *Zhanguo shi*, 402–405, 412–416.

50 See details in Yoshimoto Michimasa 吉本道雅, »Shin shi kenkyū josetsu« 秦史研究序説 [Introduction to the Study of Qin history], *Shirin* 史林 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 [Study of the Warring States-Period Historical Sources in the *Records of the Historian*] (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1997), 227–278.

The casual attribution of the conquest of Shu and Hanzhong to Bai Qi reflects a common pattern in other historical references in Cai Ze's speech. For instance, among the exploits of the Chu prominent minister, Wu Qi, Cai Ze mentions that Wu Qi »in the north annexed Chen and Cai« (北並陳、蔡). This is again wrong: Chen and Cai were annexed by the state of Chu back in 478 BC and 447 BC respectively, long before Wu Qi. Or, in the latter part of the speech that talks of Fan Sui's own achievements, he is credited with extending power to Sanchuan (利施三川).⁵¹ Yet Sanchuan commandery (around Luoyang) was acquired by Qin in 249 BC, a few years after Fan Sui's death. Once again we face an anachronism.

These examples of minor but annoying inaccuracies in otherwise fairly reliable accounts should caution us when dealing with *Zhanguo ce* or related invocations of historical events in speeches, memorials, and court exchanges before and after the imperial unification. The authors of these speeches and memorials were normally not inventors of past events; rather, they referred to what was probably common historical knowledge among members of the educated elite of their age. Yet references to the past did not have to be impeccably accurate. Argumentative needs, rhetorical demands, or merely insufficient knowledge of details of the past events could cause manifold mistakes and inaccuracies to creep into an otherwise fairly reliable discussion.⁵² To ignore these discussions altogether in our attempts to restore a reliable picture of the Warring States history is foolhardy. Yet it is equally foolhardy to trust these discussions blindly. One should prepare for the painstaking work of distinguishing—whenever possible—between reliable and unreliable details in *Zhanguo ce* and related anecdotes.

51 For reading 利施三川 as »extending power to Sanchuan«, see He Jianzhang's gloss, *Zhanguo ce*, 221n129.

52 Compare the discussions by Paul R. Goldin, »Appeals to History in Early Chinese Philosophy and Rhetoric«, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35,1 (2008), 79–96 and Garret P.S. Olberding, *Dubious Facts: The Evidence of Early Chinese Historiography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

5 Summary: Adoration or Irony?

Cai Ze is successful in his plot. Fan Sui is convinced by Cai's arguments and opts for a timely retreat. He introduces Cai Ze to King Zhaoxiang, recommends Cai as his own replacement and then pleads illness and retires. This is what the authors (and Sima Qian, who faithfully followed their depiction of events) want us to believe. This might have been the case, although the new evidence suggests that actually Fan Sui was probably executed because his protégé allegedly planned to defect.⁵³ Yet for the sake of argument, let us accept the *Zhanguo ce* version as correct. Does the happy end prove Cai Ze's superb sagacity?

The answer is more equivocal than is usually assumed. Let us look at the ending lines of the anecdote, which narrate Cai Ze's subsequent career:

昭王新說蔡澤計畫，遂拜為秦相，東收周室。蔡澤相秦王數月，人或惡之，懼誅，乃謝病歸相印，號為剛成君。居秦十餘年，事昭王、孝文王、莊襄王。卒事始皇帝。為秦使於燕，三年而燕使太子丹入質於秦。

King Zhao[xiang], delighted anew by Cai Ze's schemes, eventually appointed him prime minister. In the east, he appropriated [the territory] of the Zhou house.

After Cai Ze had been prime minister for several months, someone spoke evil of him. Fearful of punishment, Cai Ze pleaded illness and returned the seals of prime minister. His title thenceforth was the Lord of Steadfast Accomplishments. He lived in Qin for over ten years, serving Kings Zhao[xiang], Xiaowen [r. 250 BC], and Zhuangxiang [r. 250–247 BC]. Finally, he served the First Emperor. For the sake of Qin he was

53 Among the texts discovered in 1975 in Tomb 11, Shuihudi 睡虎地 (Hubei), there is a sketchy biographical account of the deceased's family, the *Generational Book* (*Yeshu* 葉書, originally named by the editors *Records of Consecutive Years, Biannianji* 編年記). This text records under the 52nd year of King Zhaoxiang (255 BC): »Wang Ji and Zhang Lu died« 王稽、張祿死 (cited from Chen Wei 陳偉, ed., *Qin jiandu beji* 秦簡牘合集 [Collection of Qin Bamboo Slips and Wooden Boards] (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2016), Vol. 1, p. 11, slip 52). Wang Ji was Fan Sui's protégé who was accused of planning defection and executed; Zhang Lu is Fan Sui's alias. Fan Sui's death is not recorded in received texts, and the new information caused heated debates. The record either implies that Fan Sui was after all executed, or, as argued by those who insist on the reliability of *Zhanguo ce* and *Records of the Historian*, that he was allowed to retire but died soon thereafter. For the complexity of this issue, see Bai Guohong, »Guanyu Fan Sui«, 117–118.

dispatched to Yan. After three years, Yan sent its Crown Prince Dan to be a hostage in Qin.

The laconic narration of Cai Ze's career and its abrupt end contrasts with the extraordinarily detailed depiction of the ploy that brought him to the coveted position of Qin's prime minister.⁵⁴ I shall not quibble with another possible anachronism, namely attributing Qin's successful incorporation of the defunct Zhou royal domain (in 255 BC) to advice from Cai Ze (who assumed his position in Qin in the same year).⁵⁵ Let us accept for a moment that this success can be attributed to Cai's cleverness. But then what else? We know that his tenure as prime-minister was extremely short, and that the next decade of his service was apparently uneventful. The only real achievement of Cai Ze, which is attested to elsewhere in *Zhanguo ce*,⁵⁶ was the sojourn in his homeland, Yan, where he acted as a joint appointee of Qin and Yan to cement mutual ties during their brief anti-Zhao alliance. It was then that Yan sent Crown Prince Dan to Qin as a hostage.

Was this latter enterprise a success? For sure it was perceived as such at the time. But as any reader of the anecdote would know, Dan's sojourn in Qin caused him to resent this powerful state, and eventually led him to plot the assassination of the King of Qin (the future First Emperor). The story of this failed assassination,

54 I shall leave aside an unanswerable question whether or not these ending lines were part of an original anecdote or added by later transmitters.

55 The Zhou domain was divided during the Warring States period between two principalities, both ruled by autonomous lords. The western principality, which also hosted the last Zhou king, Nan 周王赧 (r. 314–255 BC) became defunct after the king's death and was annexed by Qin. See details in Yuri Pines, »The Question of Interpretation: Qin History in Light of New Epigraphic Sources«, *Early China* 29 (2004), 1–44, on pp. 19–22. (The date of the Zhou annexation by Qin is often given as 256 BC, but 255 BC is more accurate. See Yang Kuan 楊寬, *Zhanguo shiliao biannian jizheng* 戰國史料編年輯證 [Collected Evidence for the Chronology from the Historical materials from the Warring States] [Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe 2016], 1116–1117). Cai Ze could not have arrived at Qin before the arrest of Wang Ji, which happened in 255 BC. We cannot know whether the annexation of the Zhou principality preceded or postdated Cai's appointment, but it is unlikely that Cai had enough time to mastermind this annexation.

56 *Zhanguo ce* 7.6: 275 (»Qin ce« 5).

performed by the most famous assassin-retainer, Jing Ke 荆軻 (d. 227 BC), enjoyed immense popularity from the Han dynasty on.⁵⁷ For a perceptive Han reader, Cai Ze's ability to bring Crown Prince Dan to Qin would not look like a great success, to put it mildly.

Why does the anecdote end with such an anti-climax? I believe this is not accidental. Rather, the authors deliberately wanted to juxtapose Cai Ze's verbal eloquence and his meager merits.⁵⁸ The scantiness of Cai's practical achievements sheds additional ironic light on his vanity as expressed in his self-promotional campaign with which the anecdote starts. This framework of Cai Ze's lengthy speeches—namely his brazen self-praise at the beginning of the anecdote and his inability to make any significant contribution to the state of Qin as narrated at the end of the anecdote—undermine the appeal of his eloquence. Behind the ostensible adoration of Cai's argumentativeness, the anecdote's authors remind us of the ultimate hollowness of his glib tongue.⁵⁹ Read from this perspective, the anecdote becomes an ironic take on the common *Zhanguo ce* trope of an omniscient successful persuader.

I do not know whether my interpretation of Cai Ze's anecdote as a subtle subversion of the dominant atmosphere of *Zhanguo ce* is justifiable or not. But at the very least I hope that the above analysis will contribute toward increased interest in the subtleties of the *Stratagems of the Warring States*. A deeper and systematic engagement with this text will benefit all scholars working on the Warring States history, literature, and thought.

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57 See Yuri Pines, »A Hero Terrorist: Adoration of Jing Ke Revisited«, *Asia Major* (Third Series) 21.2 (2008), 1–34.

58 Actually, even Cai's eloquence is indirectly questioned, since he fails to protect himself against an anonymous slanderer. Cai Ze's major achievement is to end his career unharmed, but should this be the primary goal, a reader can ask, why Cai should devote himself to a dangerous career route in the first place?

59 Compare Albert Galvany, »Sly Mouths and Silver Tongues: The Dynamics of Psychological Persuasion in Ancient China«, *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 34 (2012), 15–40.