CHAPTER THREE

Early Economic, Diplomatic, and Military Thought in China

CHAPTER 3.2

War and Peace: Eastern Zhou Military and Diplomatic Thought[1]

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INTRODUCTION

The shift from the Spring and Autumn (*Chunqiu* 春秋, 770–453 BCE) to the Warring States (*Zhanguo* 戰國, 453–221 BCE) periods was accompanied by one of the deepest changes in China's long history prior to the twentieth century. Everything seems to have changed—from the modes of production, exchange, and extraction of resources, to social and political structures, the kinship system, religious beliefs, modes of artistic expression, and, of course, the realm of ideology. Amid a few points of (relative) continuity, that of ongoing political fragmentation remains the most notable. Ever since the collapse of the Western Zhou 西周 (*c.* 1046–771 BCE), the Zhou realm remained divided between manifold polities. Although the number of these polities gradually decreased due to the ongoing annexation by stronger neighbors—from well over a hundred in the eighth century to less than ten by the mid-third century BCE—the nature of their interaction remained the same: it fluctuated between wars and alliances. How these two were conceptualized throughout the period under discussion is the topic of the current chapter.

Before we start the discussion, it should be clarified that some of the differences between views of war and diplomacy during the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States period may be exaggerated because of the very different nature of our sources. The lion's share of the information about the former period comes from *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (the *Zuo Tradition* or *Zuo Commentary on the Springs-and-Autumns Annals*). This is primarily a historical text which contains very detailed depiction of some of the major military campaigns (e.g., *Zuozhuan*, Xi 28.3), diplomatic encounters (e.g., Xiang 27.4), and even minor skirmishes (e.g., Zhao 26.4). The text does not focus on theoretical discussions about warfare or diplomacy, though. It addresses these (and many other) topics primarily through the speeches attributed to contemporaneous statesmen. The question of these speeches' reliability for reconstructing the world of thought of the Spring and Autumn period is highly controversial (cf. Schaberg 2001; Pines 2002; Li 2007). My working assumption here is that the bulk of *Zuozhuan* narratives (and, arguably, most of its speeches) come from the text's primary sources, namely local histories prepared by court historians of the competing polities; as such they reflect the intellectual milieu of the

aristocratic age (Pines, forthcoming A). This said, there is little doubt that some of the *Zuozhuan* speeches were redacted or outright invented by the text's compilers, transmitters, and editors; resultantly, they reflect much later ideological perspective.

For the Warring States period, our sources differ dramatically. We have abundant works of competing thinkers, including those who focused exclusively on military affairs. By contrast, we have only a few depictions of military campaigns, and none is as detailed as those we encounter in *Zuozhuan*. As for diplomats, most of our knowledge about them comes from the collection of speeches attributed primarily to "roving persuaders" (*youshui* 游説). These servants of several masters crisscrossed the Zhou world facilitating interstate alliances, the most notable of which were the Vertical Alliance directed against the powerful state of Qin 秦 and the Horizontal one, in which one or a few polities allied with Qin against the rest. Most of the persuaders' speeches are assembled in the *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhanguoce* 戰國策)—a heterogeneous collection which comprises among other things teaching materials for the future diplomats, viz. model speeches that could have been pronounced under certain circumstances (Schaberg, forthcoming). The thick fog of exemplary persuasions obscures much of the realities of contemporaneous diplomatic practices. Notably, in contrast to warfare, diplomacy never became a field of separate theoretical explorations, aside from a few astute observations scattered in the philosophers' works.

WARS IN THE ARISTOCRATIC AGE

The military landscape of the Spring and Autumn period was dominated by warring chariots. The art of chariot fighting demanded considerable training and was primarily the prerogative of the nobles, for whom war was an essential occupation. Wars were normally decided in a single pitched battle during which the chariots of both sides rushed against each other, requiring extraordinary skill and courage of the combatants. The battle itself had to be fought on an open terrain, which required preliminary agreement of both sides on the day and place of engagement. This added to military encounters an aura of "sport," a noble contest among equals (e.g., *Zuozhuan*, Xi 28.3g; Kierman 1974).

Depiction of military campaigns in *Zuozhuan* abounds with stories of chivalry and mutual respect among the combatants—ranging from polite invitation to the battle (*Zuozhuan*, Xi 15.4c), to exchanging gifts at the battlefield (Xuan 12.2f–g), to avoiding killing a noble foe (Cheng 2.3d), to sparing the enemy in dire straits (Xuan 2.1c; Xuan 12.2h) (see more in Kierman 1974). The text reflects considerable tension between the norms of chivalry and military suitability (Xi 22.8, cf. Xuan 2.1c). This tension is one of many that permeate *Zuozhuan*'s depictions of warfare. Thus, warfare is an epitome of manliness and the acts of bravado are respected, but the text also shows how these very acts may jeopardize military discipline and result in defeat. Similarly, attaining honor on the battlefield is contrasted with the importance of preserving the birthright-based hierarchy (Lewis 2020: 19–33).

In *Zuozhuan* we do not encounter much strategic thinking about war. This perhaps reflects warfare's limited scope through much of the narrative. All too often a campaign ended with attaining "an accord" (*cheng* 成)—that is, securing a covenant and turning a neighboring polity into a nominal ally. Sometimes even this modest goal was too much to aspire for; hence we learn about campaigns which resulted in no more than symbolic humiliation of the enemy—e.g., by seizing grains from its capital's outskirts (*Zuozhuan*,

Yin 3.3 and 4.4), or just laying a five-day siege to the capital's gate (Yin 4.3). Even major campaigns could bring about little gains beyond disgracing the enemy by causing its army to flee or plundering and burning the capital's suburbs (Xiang 18.3–19.1). A major victory could result in further humiliating the enemy by making a covenant with the defeated near their capital gates (Huan 12.3, Wen 15.7, Xuan 15.2, Ai 8.2). Territory seizure or complete annexation of the enemy's polity were rarer than in the subsequent Warring States period. Especially since the second half of the sixth century BCE there was a long lull in annexations—both because of the major powers' attempt to adhere to the norms of the multistate order (see the next section), and because of the difficulty in integrating newly conquered lands. In the absence of well-developed norms of maintaining centralized control, the outlying territories were often granted to local nobles, who could turn them into a hotbed of future rebellion. It was more advantageous then to maintain a local dynasty as one's satellite rather than replace it with one's own appointees (Pines, forthcoming B).

The limited scope of many conflicts does not mean, for sure, that wars were free of devastation and atrocities. We learn of abuse of corpses of the fallen soldiers and of a threat to desecrate the enemy's cemeteries (*Zuozhuan*, Xi 28.3a); of a prolonged siege that caused the defenders to "trade sons and eat them, splitting their bones to feed the cooking fires" (Xuan 15.2), of repeated incursions that made "everyone [be] in sorrow and pain, not knowing where to find protection" (Xiang 8.7). In the latter half of the Spring and Autumn period we encounter longer campaigns involving deep incursions into the enemy's territory. And it is clear—albeit never articulated clearly—that these campaigns (e.g., Wu's 吳 assault on Chu 楚 in 506 BCE; Ding 4.3) involved strategic planning and careful preparations. Unfortunately, *Zuozhuan* does not tell us much about the campaigners' planning.

Zuozhuan contains no more than seeds of military theory, primarily a few maxims such as "To preempt the enemy is to rob him of his will" (Wen 7.4a; Xuan 12.2g; Zhao 21.6a) or "When you know that the difficulties are insurmountable, withdraw" (Xi 28.3c). More interesting are several speeches that explain how victory on the battlefield should be ensured. The speakers often moralize victories: the victors are hailed for superior domestic order (Zhuang 10.1; Cheng 16.5b); for preserving ritual norms (in the military context referring to discipline and clearly pronounced hierarchy; Xi 27.4c and 28.3g; Xuan 12.2b; compare Xi 33.1 when the army's lack of ritual propriety augurs defeat); and for fighting for the just cause: "When troops have justice on their side, they are at the height of their power and morale; when they are in the wrong, they are worn out" (Xi 28.3a). Yet when the text depicts actual battles, the moralizing tone becomes weaker. Victories could be achieved through tactical acumen: from evaluating correctly the opponents' fighting spirit (Zhuang 10.1), to luring an enemy into an ambush (Xi 28.3g), to overawing him by pretending to have more forces than one really possessed (Xiang 18:3c). Furthermore, the text readily acknowledges that battles could be determined by sheer contingency. In 575 BCE, a battle is discontinued because a Chu commander got drunk at night, infuriating his king who ordered retreat instead of resuming the battle (Cheng 16.5k). In 589 BCE, Jin's 晉 victory over Qi 齊 is even more accidental: a driver of the commander's chariot was wounded and could not control horses who "raced forward and could not be stopped, and the army followed his chariot. The Qi troops were completely defeated" (Cheng 2.3c). Countless similar accounts undermine the moralizing message of the text and allow a more nuanced understanding of war than some of the text's compilers and editors would propagate.

THE MULTISTATE SYSTEM

The collapse of Western Zhou in 771 BCE was a momentous event. The newly discovered bamboo manuscript *Xinian* 繫年 suggests that the crisis was even graver than depicted in the received texts: "for nine years (749–741 BCE) Zhou was without a king, and the rulers of the states and regional lords then for the first time ceased attending the Zhou court" (*Xinian* 2 cited from Pines 2020: 157; see also Chen and Pines 2018). Although eventually the power of the Zhou Sons of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子) had been restored, the dynasty never regained its erstwhile power. On the ruins of the order led by the Zhou kings, a new multistate system emerged. The major peculiarity of the Spring and Autumn period is that this system was not considered an aberration; rather, the statesmen's efforts were directed at perfecting it and creating viable norms of interstate relations. Restoration of effective Zhou rule, or replacing the Zhou with another unifying dynasty, was not on their agenda.

Interstate relations during the first century of Eastern Zhou were chaotic. Ephemeral alliances rose and fell, often influenced by interpersonal relations among the rulers and their kin rather than any strategic considerations. A semblance of stability in the northeastern part of the Zhou *oikoumenē* was achieved under Lord Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685–643 BCE), the first of the so-called hegemons (*ba* 霸). Lord Huan combined relative military superiority with prestige due to his successful positioning as the protector of the Zhou house. Having solidified his hegemony in the 670s BCE, Lord Huan had furthermore adopted the posture of the interstate order's defender. He refrained from annexing weaker neighbors, and even famously restored two polities that were extinguished by the Di 狄 incursions in 661–660 BCE and another one in 646 BCE. Then he turned his attention southward, trying to stem the expansion of the newly ascending superpower of Chu into the Huai 淮 River valley. Through all these acts, Lord Huan established an appealing model of hegemony based on the combination of power, legitimacy, and adherence to the Zhou ritualized norms of interstate behavior.

The major weakness of Lord Huan—and of the institution of hegemony in general—was that his power remained *sui generis* and was shattered immediately after his death, when the state of Qi entered a period of prolonged fratricidal struggle. Chu was the immediate beneficiary of the collapse of Qi's hegemony; but Chu's expansion was ultimately checked by the newly rising power, Jin. Under the energetic rule of Lord Wen 晉文公 (r. 636–628 BCE)—one of the most picturesque personalities in *Zuozhuan* (Li 2007: 249–75)—Jin succeeded first to position itself as the new protector of the Zhou kings, then to ensure amicable relations with major northern powers, Qin and Qi, and, finally, to inflict a major defeat on Chu in Chengpu 誠樸 in 632 BCE. This victory marked the beginning of Jin's hegemony in the northern part of the Zhou realm. Chu, however preserved its leadership in the south. The age of competing alliances began.

A century of bipolar world (632–541 BCE) was the only age in China's long history during which the multistate system could be considered fully functionable. The alliance leaders—Jin to the north of the Yellow River and Chu to the south of Huai—tried to ensure stability among allies and dependencies. They frequently assembled the allies for solemn covenant ceremonies (*meng* 盟), which served as proxies of interstate treaties. They protected the allies from the rival alliance (or from incursions by non-Sinitic ethnic groups); acted as arbiters in the disputes among the allies; and intervened at times to protect domestic stability in the allied polities. This age witnessed manifold discussion on the nature of hegemony. The hegemons (also called "masters of covenants," *mengzhu*

盟主) were expected to combine power, on the one hand, and non-coercive virtue (*de* 德), on the other. They were expected to adhere to ritual norms of interstate intercourse, to refrain from bullying the allies and from annexing their lands, be fair and maintain trustworthiness (*xin* 信). Under this idealized version of hegemony, a degree of stable multistate order could be maintained (Pines 2002: 125–32).

Alas, the reality was far removed from these expectations. Although both Jin and Chu did in fact moderate their expansionism and tried from time to time to demonstrate fairness to the allies, this did not suffice to ensure the alliances' stability. This stability was threatened by the rivalry among the allies, by domestic struggles within the allied polities, and, most dangerously, by the ongoing competition between the two alliances. Both Jin and Chu sought to secure control over the polities located in between the Huai and the Yellow Rivers, most notably Zheng 鄭 and Song 宋. Under the mounting pressure from both sides, these states (primarily Zheng) had to repeatedly switch sides, notwithstanding solemn alliances oaths. This conduct not just undermined the alliances' stability but also weakened the appeal of the covenant system as a whole (Pines 2000: 119–25).

The prolonged north–south rivalry ended in 546–541 BCE when the leaders of battered intermediate states (primarily Song) initiated two disarmament conferences. The idea was to replace two competing groups with a mega-alliance headed simultaneously by Jin and Chu. In retrospect, this was a naïve expectation. The covenant system itself did not allow dual leadership: the "master of the covenant," the first to smear sacrificial blood on his lips, was a prestigious position that could not be simultaneously occupied by two leaders. The struggle for precedence ensued, causing Jin—which suffered from the aggravating struggle among its major ministerial lineages—to yield de facto leadership to Chu. For a short while, ruthless King Ling of Chu 楚靈王 (r. 540–529 BCE) emerged as the most powerful leader of the Zhou world; but when he was overthrown, Chu had been dramatically weakened. Jin, however, failed to regain its supremacy. The system of alliances disintegrated, burying the only meaningful attempt to preserve the multistate order intact.

From the sixth century BCE onward one can discern increased cynicism in the interstate relations. The leaders blatantly proclaimed that "so long as we fulfil our ambition, what use do we have of good faith" (*Zuozhuan*, Xiang 27.4c) and that "when the enemy's situation is advantageous to us, we advance—what difference does a covenant make?" (Cheng 15.3). As time passes, we observe increasing violation of the norms of ritual intercourse. *Zuozhuan* tells how arrogant leaders of powerful states such as Jin, Chu, and later Wu bullied their nominal allies, demanded bribes, detained foreign leaders, and the like. By the end of that era, what was demanded of a hegemon was not accommodative spirit and display of virtue but rather resoluteness and readiness to eliminate an enemy state, even if the enemy's leader was a morally upright person (*Zuozhuan*, Ai 1.2). More and more statesmen seem to have realized: in their world only might is right (Pines 2002: 107–32).

The disintegration of the system of alliances and the abandonment of the ideal of a moral hegemon marked a watershed shift away from attempts to solidify the multistate order. By the late sixth century the aggravating domestic crisis in most northern states—which were torn apart by feuding ministerial lineages—exacerbated the turmoil. The conflicts among rival ministerial lineages, or between them and the rulers routinely enticed intervention by neighboring and outlying polities, blurring the difference between domestic and foreign affairs. The Zhou world became entangled in the debilitating web of inter- and intrastate struggles, in which no victor could emerge. The erosion of ritual

norms, loss of trust in covenants, and the absence of any force able to regulate the relations between the conflicting polities—all doomed the hopes for a sustainable multistate order. As the Zhou realm was entering the age of the Warring States, a new realization emerged: "Stability is in unity" (*Mengzi* 1.6). Gradually but irreversibly the statesmen's interest shifted from diplomacy to the search for a means to attain unity of All-under-Heaven (Pines 2000).

WARS IN THE AGE OF MASS CONSCRIPTION

The military landscape of the Warring States period differed dramatically from that of the aristocratic Spring and Autumn era. Proliferation of new types of weapons—most notably the crossbow—allowed profound restructuring of the military. A large unit of trained crossbowmen could nullify the advantages of war chariots (Yates with McEwen 1994). Soon enough, large-scale infantry armies took precedence over the chariots-based ones, relegating military nobility to the dustbin of history. Henceforth, the military prowess was determined primarily by the state's ability to mobilize, train, discipline, and motivate peasant conscripts and provide them with adequate weapons and supplies (Lewis 1999).

New armies changed the nature of warfare. The number of combatants constantly increased, and so did the campaigns' length and destructiveness. Gone were chivalry codes and adherence to ritual norms; massacre of POWs was henceforth legitimate, even if not necessarily welcome. Gone were also acts of individual bravado. The armies prized discipline and coordination among the units. War was no longer a manifestation of manliness, causing some scholars to speak of "the feminization of combat" (Lewis 1990: 111–13; Galvany 2020: 644). Indeed, an anecdote about the legendary strategist Sun Wu 孫武 (the alleged author of *Sunzi's Methods of War* 孫子兵法) tells of how he turned the ruler's concubines into fearsome warriors through imposing draconian discipline (*Shiji* 65: 2161–2; Sawyer 1993: 151–3). The point is clear: in the new era everybody can become a good fighter. Gone is the age of professional soldiers.

The age of mass conscription blurred the difference between combatants and noncombatants. A chapter in the *Book of Lord Shang* (*Shangjunshu* 商君書) discusses how the state should "utilize a ten-thousand-families settlement to repel a ten-thousand-strong army": this can be done through mobilizing not just adult men, but also forming an army of adult women and that of the elderly and the infirm (*Book of Lord Shang* 12 ["Bing shou" 兵守]). In the military chapters of *Mozi* 墨子 we encounter a more sophisticated system of utilizing the entire population in defending the fortress (Yates 1979). Yet this blurring of civilian–military divide meant also that destruction of civilian infrastructure—from dams to granaries—became legitimate. Some texts openly advocate: "in spring encircle their farmlands, in summer eat their provisions, in autumn seize whatever they have reaped, in winter expose their stores" (*Book of Lord Shang* 15.4 ["Lai min" 徠民]; *Yizhoushu* 8:122 ["Da wu jie" 大武解; trans. McNeal 2012: 113]). The damage such strategy inflicted to the general population was of frightening proportions. Add to this expulsion of the restive native population from the newly conquered territory and its replacement with settlers from elsewhere (*Shiji* 5: 210–14)—and the price of warfare becomes clear.

The indignation with ubiquitous wars is palpable throughout most texts of the Warring States-period thinkers. *Mozi* 墨子 condemns perpetrators of aggressive wars as mass murderers (*Mozi* 17: 198 ["Fei gong shang" 非攻上]); *Laozi* 老子 calls weapons "inauspicious utensils detested by creatures" (*Laozi* 31); *Mengzi* 孟子 accuses warmongers of crime for

which even execution would be too lenient a punishment (*Mengzi* 7.14). On the opposite side we encounter provocative adoration of war in the *Book of Lord Shang*: "When a strong state is not engaged in warfare, poison infiltrates its intestines; rites, music, and parasitic affairs are born; [the state] will surely be dismembered" (*Book of Lord Shang* 4.2 ["Qu qiang" 去強]). Heated rhetoric aside, there was broad understanding, first, that war is inevitable, and, second, that its human costs should be reduced. Even the most "warmonger" texts, such as the *Book of Lord Shang*, never go to the extreme of dehumanizing the enemy or glorifying violence as such (Pines 2016a: 107–11). On the contrary, the common bottom line of most texts was to prevent excessive atrocities and end violence once the victory is achieved. As summarized by McNeal (2012: 103), these texts were "concerned with how to incorporate a defeated enemy into one's own administrative and economic system"; hence, looting, killing, and otherwise alienating the defeated populace was unwelcome.

The Warring States period was marked by intense debates about military tactics and strategy and about the role of the military and of warfare in the state's and society's life. These topics are most conspicuous in a series of military treatises, the most famous (and, arguably, the most intellectually engaging) of which is *Sunzi* 孫子. Yet aside from specified military treatises (for which see Sawyer 1993), chapters dedicated to military affairs are scattered throughout a great variety of philosophers' texts, such as *Mozi* (Yates 1979), *Guanzi* 管子, the *Book of Lord Shang* (Pines 2016a), *Xunzi* 荀子 (Harris 2019), *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Höckelmann 2010), the *Remainder of Zhou Documents* (*Yizhoushu* 逸周書; McNeal 2012), and so forth. These texts differ much in their emphasis: some focus on technicalities and tactical issues, whereas other are more interested in philosophical and moral questions related to war and peace. The heterogeneity of disputants' views allows us to understand the complexity of military praxis and military ideology in China's preimperial age. The richness of these discussions partly compensates us for the scarcity of detailed depictions of combat akin to what we have observed in *Zuozhuan*.

One of the notable common features of most discussions is the understanding of the war's holistic nature. War is "the great affair of the state, the land of life and death, the way of survival or ruin" (*Sunzi* 1 ["Ji" 計]); its political, social, and particularly economic ramifications are of utmost importance. *Sunzi* in particular pays much attention to the war's cost. "One who does not fully understand the harm of the military, will be unable to fully understand its advantages" (*Sunzi* 2 ["Zuo zhan" 作戰]). The success on the battlefield is predetermined at home. "In general, the root of the [proper] method of war is invariably in [adequate] government" (*Book of Lord Shang* 10.1 ["Zhan fa" 戰法]). Possessing sufficient resources and preparing equipment for war is essential for its success (*Book of Lord Shang* 11.1 ["Li ben" 立本]). The chapter "Seven methods" ("Qi fa" 七法) of *Guanzi* elaborates:

> The art of conducting warfare consists in amassing material resources, examining [the skill of] artisans, manufacturing weapons, and selecting officers, issuing administrative instructions, training, acquiring a broad knowledge of the realm, and an understanding of strategy—all to an unrivaled degree.
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> —*Guanzi* 6: 116; Rickett 1985: 132

Ensuring the army's adequate supplies aside, one of the toughest tasks facing the military leaders was motivating the conscripts. How to do it properly was a focus of intense debates. *Mengzi*, for instance, insists that the government's morality is the only thing that matters: "If Your Majesty practices benevolent (*ren* 仁) government towards the people . . . you can cause them, armed with nothing but staves to attach the armies of Qin and

Chu with their hard armor and sharp weapons" (*Mengzi* 1.5). By contrast, the *Book of Lord Shang* considers the soldiers' motivation as purely the matter of addressing their self-interest. Through the combination of rewards and punishments, most notably by granting ranks of merit and the adjacent socioeconomic benefits exclusively or overwhelmingly to meritorious fighters (Pines 2016a and 2016b), the ruler would cause the people to "look at war as a hungry wolf looks at meat" (*Book of Lord Shang* 18.2 ["Hua ce" 畫策) and "sing and chant only about war" (17.3 ["Shangxing" 賞刑]). Xunzi admits that rewards and punishments can motivate the soldiers, but insists nonetheless that these are inferior to the deeper motivation caused by the ruler's adherence to ritual and propriety (*Xunzi* 15: 285; Hutton 2014: 159 ["Yi bing" 議兵]). And *Sunzi* offers a pure military solution: putting the soldiers in the "terrain of death" where only those who fight will survive is the best to cause them do their utmost (*Sunzi* 11 ["Jiu di" 九地]).

Another hotly debated topic was the role of the commander. It was agreed by all that the general should not dash valiantly toward the enemy, as was common in the aristocratic age, but be a professional able to calculate the campaign's costs, ensure adequate supplies, preserve discipline, analyze the ever-changing conditions at the battlefield, and so forth (Lewis 1990: 97–135). But these demands meant that armies be ruled by brilliant individuals. How these individuals should be related to the ruler? Most authors of military texts insisted on the general's operational autonomy. This autonomy derived from the need to allow the commander making fateful decisions immediately, without consulting the far-away capital. *Sunzi* in particular warns the ruler that intervention into military affairs will entangle the army and confuse the officers (*Sunzi* 3 ["Mou gong" 謀攻]; Sawyer 1993: 162). Yet, however logical, this demand to preserve the commander's autonomy runs against the dominant trend of the Warring States period toward centralization of power in the ruler's hands (Lewis 1990: 121–35). A general far afield could utilize his authority to serve his selfish needs (e.g., by conniving with foreign powers), or, worse, to challenge the ruler at home. Countless anecdotes scattered through the *Stratagems of the Warring States*, *Han Feizi* 韓非子, and the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) tell either of faithful commanders who were mistrusted at home, or, alternatively, of generals who preferred their selfish interests to those of their state. The tension between the power of the monarch and the power of a military commander was never adequately solved.

Another point of contention around the use of the military was the question of morality. The army by its nature favored deception and guile, which caused considerable problems for moralizing thinkers, such as Xunzi, who tried—in vain—to convince the rulers that benevolence is superior to the art of deception (*Xunzi* 15: 265–70; Hutton 2014: 145–7; more in Harris 2019). Thinkers who opposed moralizing discourse, by contrast, delighted in the dubious morality of military affairs; the *Book of Lord Shang* infamously proclaims: "he who in [military] affairs advances whatever the enemy is ashamed of benefits" (4.1 ["Qu qiang"]). *Sunzi* tried to reconcile morality and the art of deception reminding the readers of the exorbitant cost of warfare: if this cost could be cut by, e.g., using spies, this would actually manifest the general's benevolence (*Sunzi* 13 ["Yong jian" 用間]; Sawyer 1993: 184–5). Another solution was proposed by the authors of the *Sima Methods of War* (*Sima fa* 司馬法): they advocated strict separation between the methods employed in the military and those in the civilian sphere: "Thus, virtue and righteousness did not transgress inappropriate realms" (*Sima fa* 2:15 ["Tianzi zhi yi" 天子之義]; Sawyer 1993: 129). Overall, just as the tensions around the commander's autonomy, the contradiction between the "normative" (*zheng* 正) means of maintaining

civilian affairs and the "extraordinary" (*qi* 奇) means demanded of the military had never been resolved (Lewis 1990: 121–35).

THE AUTUMN OF ROVING PERSUADERS

Sima Qian 司馬遷 (*c.* 145–90 BCE) tells that when a future chancellor of Qin, Li Si 李斯 (d. 208 BCE) decided to depart from his teacher, Xunzi, and seek employment in Qin with the would-be First Emperor 秦始皇帝 (r. 246–210 BCE, emp. 221 BCE), he explained: "the king of Qin wants to swallow All-under-Heaven, declare himself Thearch and establish orderly rule. This is the time for a speedy move for plain-clothed [men of service like myself], and the autumn of roving persuaders" (*Shiji* 87: 2539). Many thinkers would probably detest the idea that their aspirations for unity would be realized by none other than the ruthless Qin monarch; but few if any would lament the end of the era of roving persuaders. No other group of statesmen earned such unanimous derision and hatred as this group of professional diplomats.

The rise of "roving persuaders"—whose (mostly imagined) speeches are immortalized in the *Stratagems of the Warring States*—epitomizes the depth of the Warring States-era turmoil. Their unabashed quest for self-interest undermined any attempt to establish viable norms of interstate conduct. Alliances were betrayed at will once the betrayer could benefit from switching sides. If we believe the *Stratagems*, such betrayals were so common that they did not entice much bad feeling even from the victims, who knew that next time would be their turn to turn back to lofty promises. But betrayals were not only by the state leaders. Their ministers were also committed to self-interest at the expense of their employers. Unlike hereditary ministers of the aristocratic age, most ministers of the middle to late Warring States period were free to cross borders in search of better employment. This made them exceptionally prone to connive with foreign powers and turn their high position at one court into a trampoline for even better conditions at another.

Two figures exemplify the roving persuaders' abilities and their lack of scruples—Su Qin 蘇秦 (d. 284 BCE) and Zhang Yi 張儀 (d. 309 BCE). The *Stratagems* pairs them (somewhat anachronistically) as major opponents: Su was the architect of the anti-Qin Vertical Alliance, whereas Zhang tried to bolster the pro-Qin Horizontal Alliance. The *Stratagems* demonstrates time and again how their rhetorical skills caused rulers of different states to switch sides repeatedly. This admiration aside, the *Stratagems* does not conceal Su Qin's and Zhang Yi's blatant selfishness. This is best demonstrated from an anecdote about Su Qin, which was probably designed as an introduction to his career (*Zhanguo ce* 3.2 [Qin 1]).

According to the anecdote, Su Qin started his career by an attempt to convince the king of Qin—almost a century before the First Emperor—"to swallow All-under-Heaven, declare yourself Thearch and establish orderly rule." Su was rejected, however. Frustrated, he vowed to avenge his humiliation. Su asked himself: "Is there a persuader who is unable to make the ruler to part from his gold, jade, silk and brocade, and to receive the honors of high minister and chancellor?" Having trained himself anew in the art of strategy, he found employment with the Qin's rival, the king of Zhao 趙. Soon enough, Su fostered an anti-Qin alliance. To cement the ties among the allies, Su was appointed simultaneously as a minister of six anti-Qin states. The anecdote hails him:

> Su Qin was after all a mere man of service from poor environs, dwelling in a mud cave with mulberry branches and a bending lintel instead of a door. Yet, leaning on the

> dashboard and holding the reins, he traversed All-under-Heaven, spoke to kings and regional lords and confounded their aides; nobody under Heaven was a match for him.
>
> —*Zhanguo ce* 3.2: 75 [Qin 1]

The story presents in a nutshell the roving persuaders' ideal: to maximize personal glory and benefits. Which state to serve, and why, was secondary. The continuous manipulations by these servants of several masters undermined whatever expectations one could cherish of a viable interstate order. Diplomacy was a means of manipulating a rival polity; it was of little if any use for attaining peace and stability. The only real beneficiaries of diplomatic efforts were diplomats themselves. Actually, the failure of diplomacy is outlined, somewhat ironically, in Su Qin's speech to the king of Qin in the above anecdote:

> Despite clear pronouncements and manifested principles, weapons and armor arise ever more; [despite] outstanding and compelling arguments, battles and offensives never stop; [despite] gorgeous sayings and refined words, the world lacks ordered rule. Tongues are worn out and ears deafened, but no achievements are seen; the conduct is righteous and the treaties are trustworthy, but there is no intimacy under Heaven.
>
> —*Zhanguo ce* 3.2: 74

This speech recognizes the futility of diplomatic efforts aimed at stopping battles and offensives. It also explains why none of the Warring States-period thinkers made any notable effort in elaborating principles of peaceful coexistence among rival polities. In the eyes of these thinkers, diplomacy served little else than the personal interests of glib talkers. The futility of diplomacy as a means of securing the state's survival is outlined with utmost clarity in *Han Feizi*. Han Fei 韓非 (d. 233 BCE), a scion of the ruling family of the state of Han 韓, weighs the advantages and disadvantages of the Vertical and Horizontal Alliances, between which his home state constantly fluctuated. The conclusion is unequivocal: in both cases, the small state will be bullied by its allies, and the only beneficiaries from its alliances would be scheming ministers. Thus:

> Although the ruler is humbled, the ministers have become ever more honorable, although the state's territory is partitioned, the private [ministerial] families have become rich. If the undertaking succeeds, they will use their authority to prolong their own political importance; if the undertaking fails, they will withdraw with their wealth and live as privates.
>
> —*Han Feizi* 49: 1115 ["Wu du" 五蠹]; trans. Harbsmeier, forthcoming

Han Fei explains that the only way out of this quagmire is to create a powerful army that will protect the state from external intruders. But he is sober enough to understand that even this would bring only a temporary respite to his home state. In a world that did not allow peaceful coexistence among rival polities, a world in which diplomacy was considered a mean undertaking and the betrayal of alliances was normal, preserving a small state was a pipe dream. The authors of *Lüshi chunqiu*, a compendium composed in the state of Qin on the eve of the imperial unification, summarized: "When All-under-Heaven is in turmoil, no state can be secure" (*Lüshi chunqiu* 13.3:689 ["Qu you" 去尤]; 26.2:1706 ["Wu da" 務大]). *Mengzi*'s dictum, "Stability is in unity" (*Mengzi* 1.6), was shared by all. The quest for political unification became the singularly important unifying thread in the thought of the "Hundred Schools" (Pines 2000). In a unified empire due to

encompass "All-under-Heaven" (*tianxia* 天下), diplomacy would be useless. The fate of roving persuaders was doomed indeed.

NOTES

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