

2.1 THE WARRING STATES PERIOD (453-221)

Introduction

The Warring States period resembles the Spring and Autumn period in many ways. The multi-state structure of the Chinese cultural sphere continued as before, and most of the major states of the earlier period continued to play key roles. Warfare, as the name of the period implies, continued to be endemic, and the historical chronicles continue to read as a bewildering list of armed conflicts and shifting alliances. In fact, however, the Warring States period was one of dramatic social and political changes.

Perhaps the most basic of these changes concerned the ways in which wars were fought. During the Spring and Autumn years, battles were conducted by small groups of chariot-driven patricians. Managing a two-wheeled vehicle over the often uncharted terrain of a battlefield while wielding bow and arrow or sword to deadly effect required years of training, and the number of men who were qualified to lead armies in this way was very limited. Each chariot was accompanied by a group of infantrymen, by rule seventy-two, but usually far fewer, probably closer to ten. Thus a large army in the field, with over a thousand chariots, might consist in total of ten or twenty thousand soldiers. With the population of the major states numbering several millions at this time, such a force could be raised with relative ease by the lords of such states.

During the Warring States period, the situation was very different. One reason why the armies of Wu and Yue had been so effective during the period 506-476 was that they did not employ chariot warfare. The uneven country of the south, split by rivers everywhere, made chariot warfare impractical, and Wu and Yue chose instead to raise massive armies of infantry. Infantry armies moved as rapidly as traditional ones – after all, the infantrymen that accompanied chariots limited the mobility of the whole – and they could be used much more flexibly than armies tied to chariot riding patricians. Horseback command, rather than chariot command, also gave patrician officers more freedom of movement.

The northern states learned the lessons of the period of Wu-Yue hegemony. The chariot was largely discarded, and instead of concentrating on the size and training of their elite officer corps, patrician lords cultivated huge armies of peasant infantrymen. During the Warring States years, the overall population of China grew rapidly, spurred by great strides in agricultural technology – the raw material for massive armies was there. Traditional state structures were not conducive to the raising of such numbers of men, however. To achieve the military ends that became increasingly vital to the survival of the state, the patrician lords and their advisors engineered fundamental changes in the structure of the state itself. Three of these changes stand out: 1) the altered relationship between the peasant and the lord; 2) revisions in political administration

that increased centralized control to the disadvantage of the patrician class; 3) a sharp rise in social mobility occasioned by the need for true expertise in the management of large armies and growing, centralized states.

Most profoundly changed was the relationship between the lord and the peasantry. The altered military situation now made farmers doubly valuable to their lords: they represented not only his main source of income, but the heart of his war machine as well. Systems of taxation in state after state were reformulated so that the peasant's payment to his lord no longer took the form of field labor, but was a direct payment in cash or in crops, resources that could sustain the lord's household or be converted to funds necessary to raise and provision armies. In the course of this transition, the peasantry for the first time were viewed as, in some sense, possessing the lands upon which they paid tax. In some states they were even licensed to buy and sell land, the truest test of ownership in the modern sense.

The altered relationship between ruler and people is also reflected in the restructuring of administration which occurred in many states. The degree of change varied widely from state to state: among the major states, Chu was probably least touched by them, while Qin was unquestionably the most fundamentally transformed. The nature of the changes also differed among states, but there was a common thread. In virtually all cases, state administration was restructured so that lands and cities were divided into centrally designated units and control over these units was directly determined by the ruler and his close advisors, rather than becoming the hereditary prerogatives of patrician clans. Thus the peasants and city-dwelling commoners fell increasingly under the control of the ruler's court, and the regional patrician clans more and more found themselves excluded from access to real power. The increased control that the lord exercised aided him in the task of maintaining the state's readiness in war and coherence in diplomatic policy.

Finally, the fast growing need for skilled men able to administer the vastly more complex military and political demands of the Warring States period created a lively demand for men of intellectual talent. Whereas the most prized skills of the Spring and Autumn period had been the charioteering skills and ritualized etiquette of the patrician born – abilities that could be drilled into any young man – the Warring States prized the ability to devise clever and original strategies of war, or of economic and diplomatic policy. Raw intelligence and learning which was often derived through study of books or with an expert teacher were now the qualities most prized; whatever their virtues of bravery, bearing, and clan loyalty, the patrician class held no monopoly on intelligence, and, in time, little advantage with regard to learning as well. Consequently, the Warring States was a time of sharply increasing social mobility. Positions of power gradually shifted into the hands of men of wit, many of whom were of low birth or sons of very junior branches of the *shi* class.

Along with changes in agricultural technology and commerce, these factors made the Warring States both the bloodiest and most dynamic era of Chinese history.

As in our section of the Spring and Autumn era, we will divide our survey of the Warring States era into a number of periods. However, the chaotic political situation of the Warring States era does not lend itself readily to simple periodization, and in this section, the latter two of our four periods overlap substantially – they are distinguished less by their dates than by the themes we will draw from them. Likewise, largely because there exists no Warring States literary equivalent to the Zuo commentary to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the period is not as rich in extended narrative accounts. For this reason, there are fewer of these here, and they are confined to the latter part of the narrative.

These are the section divisions of the narratives that follow:

Period I: Structures of Social Mobility 453-380

Period II: Reforms in Qin 360-338

Period III: The Horizontal and Vertical Alliances 320-256

Period IV: The Great Ministerial Lords of the Third Century 300-230

Epilogue: The Final Conquest of the Qin

PERIOD I Structures of Social Mobility, 453-380

Confucius and the *shi* class

The division of Jin in 453, in which a ruling house sanctioned by Zhou tradition was displaced by three upstart patrician clans who sliced the old state into smaller ones over which they ruled, was part of a larger process in which the prerogatives of the old patrician class began to decay. While it is possible to view this as the end of the Zhou aristocracy, it is probably more accurate to say instead that the boundary between the older clans of high birth and the common people became more porous. It is during this period that the word “*shi*,” denoting a trained warrior possessing the learning and etiquette of the nobility, came to be applied to a class of people, and the characteristics of the members of the *shi* class came to be viewed as a function of training rather than birth (though of course, birth still largely determined who was likely to receive training). Being a *shi* thus became a goal rather than a mere fact.

The most famous theoretician of this new view of the manly ideal was Confucius (551-479), and although he died before the beginning of the Warring States period, his life and ideas also serve as an appropriate starting point for a Warring States narrative.

To review briefly some of the most relevant aspects of Confucius’s career and influence, Confucius was born of parents who were probably members of patrician lineages of very low standing. “When young,” he once remarked, “I was of low station, hence I had to become skilled in many humble arts.” Confucius lived in a patrician state that was undergoing progressive political disintegration. The dukes of Lu had, like those of the much greater state of Jin, lost much of their power to a group of warlord clans. In Lu, these clans were all cadet branches of the ruling Ji lineage (the royal lineage of the house of Zhou, descended, in the case of Lu, from the Duke of Zhou). The warlord clan leaders controlled most of the territory of Lu and their influence at the ducal court was paramount. Their own clan lands were generally controlled by powerful stewards, able retainers in the paid service of these warlords.

The distinctive character of the state of Lu had, in the past, been derived from its association with the Duke of Zhou, whose contributions to the establishment of the Zhou state in the eleventh century had been so great. As his descendants, the dukes of Lu were entitled to employ ritual, music, and sacrificial forms otherwise reserved for the Son of Heaven alone. Lu was seen as preserving the ritual forms and learning of the early Western Zhou, and it possessed a special type of cultural legitimacy. The warlord clans, however, by destroying both the political and the ritual order of the state were destroying this state character.

Confucius, for reasons that seem personal and lost to history, developed a deep affinity for the decaying rituals of the Zhou, and in his mind, he seems to have associated those forms of ceremony and etiquette with the prodigious political success of the Zhou founders. For Confucius, the warlord society of the Spring and Autumn period showed a sharp decline in both the moral values of society and the forms of social, religious, and court behavior. He saw these dimensions as intertwined, and became deeply committed to restoring ethical and political order through restoration of ritual order and personal morality.

However, Confucius's situation was paradoxical. He was an advocate of the old patrician order, but being of low birth, he himself could play no legitimate role in the revival he sought. From this background, Confucius developed a very powerful combination program. He preached a conservative restoration of the patrician society of the Zhou, but he maintained as a radical tenet that personal virtue, rather than birth, was the qualification for membership in the ruling elite. For him, virtue was expressed in terms of ritual skills and humane dedication to social rather than personal advantage. At the same time, Confucius looked to the existing "legitimate" sovereigns, men like the Zhou kings or the dukes of Lu, as the best potential bases for a social revolution. All things being equal, birth still counted. If the men who occupied the thrones of the Zhou patrician rulers could, by means of revived personal virtue (and the aid of morally talented men like Confucius), lead the population as a whole, the new order could be more effectively established.

During his younger life, Confucius attracted a number of political actors in the state of Lu, who came to him to learn more about Zhou ritual forms and his own political views (which he came to claim reflected those of the sages of the past, including the Zhou founders). Two of these men were actually stewards of the leading warlord clans – men of substantial influence. It appears that Confucius plotted with them to arrange an effective disarmament of the warlord strongholds and a restoration of legitimate ducal power. Presumably, Confucius hoped that his assistance to a revived ducal house would induce the dukes to change their policies and behavior along Confucian lines as well.

About 500, Confucius and his disciples put their plan into action. It did not work. The outcome was that Confucius fled into exile and, for the next fifteen years, he wandered with many of his disciples from state to state in eastern China, looking for a ruler who would adopt his policies and employ him as minister. The search was fruitless, and about 485, one of his disciple-stewards in Lu, having made major contributions to his master in war, brokered an arrangement whereby Confucius was allowed to return to Lu and live in retirement as a teacher. Confucius died in Lu in 479.

While Confucius saw himself as a revivalist, the impact of his teachings was entirely radical. It is doubtful whether the intensely ritualized past on which he modeled his ideal future had ever existed in the form he imagined. In fact, Confucius's dual celebration of legitimate rulers and men of moral talent left little role for the hereditary patrician class. Few class members belonged to ruling lineages, and if social and political prestige was to be tied to issues of etiquette and learning rather than birth, what significant advantage did this leave them? Confucius was known to accept as a disciple any man who could afford as little as a (proverbial) bundle of sausages for tuition. While it may be doubtful how many of Confucius's own disciples rose to high rank, his ideas spurred a new growth industry of private teachers who trained all comers for participation in the political and military arenas.

Confucians also seem to have made a radical reconfiguration of the past in their story of the history of Chinese culture. In the Confucian account of China's history, the founding rulers and most perfect sages are the three emperors Yao, Shun, and Yu (known as the founder of the Xia Dynasty). The first two are particularly revered. The mythology connected with Yao and Shun places great emphasis on the fact that they chose not to pass along their thrones to their sons. Instead, acting in a way radically different from the norms of the truly historical periods of the Shang and Zhou, they passed the throne on the basis of merit alone, without any consideration of birth. According to the Confucian story, Shun and Yu were chosen solely as the most worthy men of the land; their fathers are, in fact, generally pictured as evil men of uncertain social background. This mythology seems to reflect an important tendency among Warring States Confucians to attack the very notion of hereditary legitimacy, for rulers as well as for patrician warlords.

In this way, Confucius represents the articulation of an ideology that challenges the exclusivity of the patrician class, and reconceives the very notion of the patrician as a person of high worth, rather than a person of high birth.

Usurpation in Qi

We have already seen the fate of one of the four great Spring and Autumn powers, Jin. Of the two late-arising powers, Wu and Yue, the former had been extinguished in 476, while the latter slipped from significance after the death of King Goujian in 465. Thus, apart from the three new states formed when Jin was divided, three of the Spring and Autumn great powers survived: Qi, Chu, and Qin (the state of Yan, north of Qi, although rarely in a class with its greatest contemporaries, is generally counted as a seventh powerful state competing for dominance). During the fifth century, the one of these that underwent the greatest change was Qi.

Now that Jin was gone, Qi was the major state with the greatest claim to legitimacy in the Zhou cultural sphere. Qin and Chu were relative newcomers to China. Their ruling houses had emerged only late in the Western Zhou or during the first decades of the Spring and Autumn period. Qi, however, had been founded as the patrimonial estate of the Grand Duke Wang, the general-in-chief of King Wu during the conquest of the Shang. Although the Grand Duke was not a member of the Zhou royal lineage, his clan of Jiang was honored through his accomplishments and its prestige had been renewed by the greatness of Duke Huan during the seventh century.

By the fifth century, however, the quality and power of the Jiang house had declined in Qi, and a situation had emerged similar to those in Jin and Lu, where great families rather than the duke's clan held the balance of power. In the case of Qi, however, the outcome of the struggle for power was different, and of a distinct benefit to the state.

During the hegemony of Duke Huan, he had sheltered at court a princely refugee from a neighboring state. This man's descendants settled permanently in Qi, and the prestige of their lineage, together with an apparent family tendency towards ambition, soon brought their lineage, the Tian clan, into competition with other great patrician clans native to Qi.

As in other states, over the centuries the power of the great clans came to overawe the dukes in Qi, and it may have appeared as if Qi would follow the path of the three clans of Jin, who had carved new states from a great power. But in the case of Qi, successive generations of talented men from the Tian family proved increasingly indispensable to the rulers of Qi. By the middle of the fifth century, the Tians dominated the state to such a degree that they planned the usurpation of both power and title. Launching successful attacks on their greatest competitors, the Tian clan managed first to achieve a full monopoly of political control as ministers to the duke, then to divide the territory of Qi, taking half for their direct control and leaving half to their puppet ruler, then transporting the ruler himself to an obscure seaside town (391). Finally in 386, after the last legitimate ruler of Qi died without a son in his lonely outpost, the leader of the Tians obtained recognition from the Zhou king as the hereditary ruler of Qi, succeeding to the rights of the Grand Duke Wang.

Upsetting as this process may have been to those remaining loyal to the Zhou system of hereditary privilege, the accession of a vigorous new clan to the leadership of Qi prevented that state from either disintegrating or being overwhelmed by growing military threats from other powers. The shift of the ducal mandate of a great power to an ambitious émigré lineage exemplified the flexibility which had come to the notion of hereditary privilege. It is no accident that thereafter in the state of Qi, the dukes followed a policy of actively courting talented men to

come to Qi from other states, rewarding them with high office if their abilities met the needs of the ruler.

The court of Marquis Wen of Wei

The new rulers of Qi were not the first to seek out friends from afar when in need of talented men at court. The innovators of this tradition, which became a hallmark of Warring States politics, seem to have been the rulers of Wei, one of the three new states created out of the lands of Jin. Wei, along with Han and Zhao, the two other Jin states, was eager to gain some leverage over the multi-state community within which it had suddenly emerged. Initially, none of the three was a match for the established powers. Wei's political initiative represented a response to its particular precarious position.

Only seven years after the partition of Jin, a young and ambitious ruler came to the throne in Wei. This man, Marquis Wen, was anxious to establish the security of his state. Not long after his installation, the marquis issued a public pronouncement to the effect that he would provide audiences and the opportunity for high position to any man of talent who would journey from his home state to Wei. While the state of Qin had for years relied on men from other states to fill high office, and we have seen the example of Wu Zixu's role in Wu as a sixth century case of a visiting minister exercising great influence, nevertheless this was the first instance of so broad an invitation being issued as a matter of state policy. Wei could not provide quality manpower at court, so the ruler was entering the import market.

The court of Marquis Wen of Wei became renowned for its illustrious company of brilliant men. Even one of Confucius's own disciples, the aging Zixia, traveled to Wei in response to the duke's call and became the court tutor, the highest regular post that a Confucian is known to have attained after Confucius's death.

While Zixia may have lent the greatest culture to the Wei court, others offered it skills of more immediate use. In particular, a number of men who became famous as military strategists congregated at court and aided Wei to prepare for the great power role that had once been played by Jin. Indeed, by the early years of the fourth century, they had done their work so successfully that the young state of Wei was for several decades the most powerful state in China.

Political predation and its consequences

The fifth century was an era during which the growth of armies and military technology began to be felt. During the first century of the Warring States era, the new scale of battles made it

impossible for the smaller central states to compete. Consequently, the war aims of the larger states began to change. Whereas during the Spring and Autumn period the usual motives of a campaign had been the formation of security alliances, the great states now became outright predators, seeking to occupy and annex the territories of neighboring states.

The results were quickly apparent. Venerable states such as Lu, which fell under the power of Qi, retained only a nominal existence, while one after another, border states between Qin and Wei, Qi and Chu, and Chu and Qin fell prey to the great new armies, whose soldiers now numbered in the hundreds of thousands.

In consuming their near neighbors, these great states were also eliminating the buffer regions that insulated them against one another. The expansion of their territories increased their shared borders, thus bringing gradually closer the inevitability of a military conflict engaging armies so massive that the casualties of a single campaign could number close to a half million men.

PERIOD II: Reforms in Qin, 360-338

If we rely on the historical texts that have been left to us to determine the greatest turning point of Classical Chinese political history, it would be the ministry of Shang Yang in the state of Qin. While it is undoubtedly true that the histories exaggerate his achievements, it is still likely that the reality was extraordinary. Shang Yang was a political thinker who reflected his times, and it may be that even without his personal efforts, the same general outcome of the chaotic years of the Warring States era would have been brought about in time – another Shang Yang would have eventually arisen. But Shang Yang's career is no less remarkable for that.

What Shang Yang did in Qin was to crystallize the early tendencies that had arisen to create centralized states whose governments were managed both by the officers of a central court and by district officers whose appointments were made without reference to birth. Shang Yang also recognized that the benefits of such a system to the central government would only accrue if there were fashioned sophisticated systems of social control that would have the same effects as micro-management by the ducal court, without requiring great additional manpower and expense. In Qin, the law code and its enforcement became just such a tool of social control.

Although to later Confucians Shang Yang represented the epitome of political immorality, Shang Yang was actually a legitimist in the same sense as Confucius: he relied on the legitimacy of the Zhou-appointed ducal house, but otherwise sanctioned only criteria of merit rather than birth. His reforms had the predictable effect of drastically reducing the power of the patrician class; however, before this ultimate outcome was determined, the enmity of the patricians in Qin brought Shang Yang down.

The Career of Shang Yang

Background

Shang Yang was born in Wey about 390 to a patrician family descended from the Wey ruling house (he is also known as Wei Yang, or Prince Yang of Wey). Wey, which had been a significant political force among the Central States centuries earlier, had lost nearly all of its interstate influence by the fourth century. Nevertheless, as a young man, Shang Yang seemed on the way to a brilliant career in Wey. He became a clan retainer of the prime minister of Wey, who was greatly impressed with his abilities.

It is said that when the prime minister fell ill, the duke of Wey visited him to consult on a successor, should one be needed. The prime minister startled the duke by naming Shang Yang, who,

in the duke's eyes was still an obscure youth. The duke not only ignored the recommendation, he ridiculed it. Consequently, Shang Yang came to the conclusion that his fortune would best be sought outside his home state.

Shang Yang travels to Qin

In 362 the prime minister of Wey, having recovered his health, was captured in battle by the armies of Qin, and the following year a new ruler took the throne in Qin, Duke Xiao. Duke Xiao was intent on recapturing territories and influence that had slipped from Qin in recent centuries, and like other ambitious rulers of the time, he issued a proclamation inviting men of talent throughout China to travel to his court. With his future in Wey seeming bleak, Shang Yang responded to Duke Xiao's call.

It seems to have taken Shang Yang some time to persuade the duke of his usefulness to Qin. Many of the reforms that he ultimately engineered were apparently proposals that he announced soon after his arrival in order to attract the duke's attention and stand out from the crowd of learned men flocking to Qin in hopes of wealth and prestige. When the duke at length began to probe Shang Yang's ideas in greater depth, traditionalists at his court voiced strenuous objections to the radical nature of his proposals. But Shang Yang kept his self-possession and continued to speak eloquently for his ideas. He was, after all, not only a brilliant man, but a cultivated patrician who had seen service as a key aide to a prime minister in Wey. In the end, the duke decided to adopt Shang Yang's ideas and put him in charge of their implementation as prime minister of Qin. As the established power holders in Qin were adamantly opposed to this outsider's programs, we may assume that the administrative staff that Shang Yang used to manage his reforms probably included many men not previously of high standing. Their loyalty towards Shang Yang would have been unusually strong, as their own careers were most likely dependent on his success.

Thus because Shang Yang was denied a chance to join the political establishment of his small native state, he became instead the unusually independent head of government in one of the greatest states in China.

The Qin reform program

Shang Yang was in power in Qin for about twenty years and during that time he made Qin into a completely new type of state. That state was characterized by centralized administration, new systems of taxation, government management of the economy, standardization of weights and measures (a major undertaking in those times), armament of a greatly enlarged army, and, what later writers most stressed, the implementation of a brutally draconian set of laws.

To achieve centralized control of the state, Shang Yang divided the lands of Qin into counties, administrative units determined by the duke's court rather than by tradition. The management of these counties was entrusted not to local power holders, but to magistrates whose

talents were valued by the court and who were answerable to the duke and the prime minister for their actions. These were men who could be fired without repercussions – they did not represent powerful clans, only themselves, and there was no hereditary right associated with their offices. Their sole political loyalty was thus to the men who appointed them, and in this way, Shang Yang created the first true state-wide bureaucracy in China.

The patrician clans still retained rights to incomes from the lands that earlier dukes had bestowed upon them, and the aristocracy was by no means eliminated. In fact, Shang Yang himself received a patrimonial estate from Duke Xiao (it was the city region of Shang, which is why he is usually called Shang Yang, or sometimes Lord Shang). But the power of the patrician clans to influence the operations of both state and local government was sharply reduced.

The changes that Shang Yang effected in Qin were more than administrative, they were social as well. All families were registered, and groups of five or ten families living in a single village, neighborhood, or lane were designated as a “mutual responsibility” unit. Each member of the unit was a guarantor to the government for the behavior of the entire group. Thus if one member of the group broke the law, all members received punishment.

And the punishments were severe. Heavy punishments were decreed for crimes that might be considered relatively minor, and any who sheltered law breakers were sentenced to be cut in two. Rewards were similarly great, and good conduct could actually earn promotion to patrician status in a newly crafted system of sixteen social grades (another thorn in the side of the established patricians in Qin, who were equally dismayed to learn that law breaking could strip them of their ancient status under the new system). In practice, the punishments made a far greater impact on cultural memory than the rewards.

A second wave of reforms attacked the family structure of Qin still further. In order to discourage the formation of large family compounds that might become points of independent social influence, government policies encouraged the independence of the nuclear family unit. Fathers, married sons, and brothers were forbidden to occupy a single household once of a certain age. Families with two unmarried adult sons faced a double tax assessment. As families, the basic economic units of the state, were reconfigured in this way, the boundaries of fields were completely redrawn so as to reflect new realities.

Despite these pressures on social arrangements, which worked to the disadvantage of the less influential strata of society, Shang Yang’s reforms initially benefited the peasant class at the expense of the patricians. The sharp limitations on the prerogatives of the patricians were complemented by the explicit designation of all farming families as independent units owing taxes directly to the Qin state. Over the portions of Qin where patrician claims were not clearly established, this act essentially gave farmers ownership responsibilities over their lands, and spelled the end of any expansion of patrician control over the peasant class, apart from control exercised directly from court.

However, this system seems not to have benefited the peasant class in the long run. Shang Yang's laws also established the legality of the private purchase of land. Land was thus transformed into a marketable commodity of great value, substantially increasing the volatility of commerce in Qin. Under these circumstances, a process of land speculation appears to have occurred in which those with liquid assets, principally members of the merchant class, bought out poor peasants and accumulated substantial holdings of land. Although Qin had strong bars against members of the merchant class being awarded patrician rank, it does appear that economically the merchant class was the chief beneficiary of Shang Yang's reforms.

In time, it was widely acknowledged that Shang Yang had created a state that worked. The population was orderly, the harvests were huge, the markets were flourishing, and soldiers fought bravely. When Shang Yang exhibited the fairness of the laws by punishing high ranking courtiers as severely as commoners, he won grudging admiration. But when people began to praise his laws, he took further action. Desirous of suppressing the notion that independent evaluation of the duke's legitimate government was permissible, regardless of the nature of the judgment, he had those who praised his reforms banished along with his opponents and passed a law forbidding any discussion of the laws whatever.

Shang Yang claimed that the sole values relevant to a state were its wealth and its military success. Since his political outlook was framed entirely from the perspective of the personal interests of the legitimate ruler, no other values were of importance. It was irrelevant whether the people of the state were content or not: whichever was more conducive to enlarging the duke's treasuries and strengthening his armies was the one more desirable. Shang Yang's state was an absolute tyranny, but like many well managed tyrannies, it purchased the toleration of the population by delivering to them the fruits of order: wealth and security.

The fall of Shang Yang

Had Shang Yang been able to stay in office another decade or two, it is conceivable that he would have died with utmost honor in his adopted state. But in 338, Duke Xiao died, and his son and heir was no friend of Shang Yang. He bore a deep resentment against the prime minister, who had taken severe action against some of the prince's closest patrician friends and advisors in the past. Shang Yang's severity in dealing with the patrician class had earned him many enemies. Soon after the new duke assumed his throne, courtiers eager to exploit his suspicions reported that Shang Yang was planning a rebellion to seize the throne.

Shang Yang's partisans at court carried the news of the slander to him, and knowing the new duke's temperament, he determined to flee the capital and escape eastwards to the state of Wei. He set out with a group of retainers, traveling in disguise in the hope that he could flee unobserved before the duke even knew that he had been warned.

When evening fell, Shang Yang and his band stopped at an inn to rest for the night. But the innkeeper would not allow him to stay because he was unwilling to identify himself. “Our prime minister Lord Shang,” said the innkeeper, “has ordered that no one may be granted a place at an inn without proper identification. I dare not disobey his laws!”

Faced with the untimely success of his own policies, Shang Yang and his retainers had no choice but to stagger on towards Wei. When they reached it in exhaustion, however, the border guards detained them and awaited orders from their government. The directive came back: “Shang Yang is an outlaw of Qin. To admit him into our borders would be to invite invasion. Permission is denied.”

In desperation, Shang Yang fled back to his estate, and there he assembled his men in order to raise the rebellion of which he had previously been falsely accused. But his private army was no match against the well trained troops that he had raised for the armies of Qin, and Shang Yang died a victim of his own success.

The new duke, convinced by Shang Yang’s rebellion that he had been correctly informed of his treachery, saw no reason to show restraint in this situation. He had Shang Yang’s corpse dragged to the marketplace and pulled to pieces by four teams of horses, after which he murdered all of Shang Yang’s family. He did not, however, repeal Shang Yang’s reforms, which became the basis of Qin’s steady growth and its march towards the conquest of all the patrician states.

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Interstate power in the fourth century

During the fourth century, the balance of power was delicate enough that it shifted with great frequency. Qin, Qi, and Chu remained the greatest of the states, but the “three Jin” – that is, Han, Wei, and Zhao, the states into which Jin had dissolved – played important roles. In fact, during the middle years of the century, Wei actually held so much power and was so centrally located that it seemed nearly preeminent among the states. By the close of the century, however, Qin was clearly gaining the dominance that would eventually bring it to absolute power.

The reign of a single ruler, King Hui of Wei, illustrates the shifts of influence that characterized the century. King Hui came to the throne of Wei in 370 as a young man. During the previous eighty years, the three states which had been born from Jin had been engaged in feeling out the appropriate shares of influence which each could expect. Han,



which lay principally south of the Yellow River was in a position somewhat too exposed to command influence. It was directly subject to encroachments from Chu to the south and Qi to the east, and its topography made it a difficult area to defend. Zhao in the north was better defended by its peripheral position, but that also hampered it in diplomacy and war. Wei actually stretched from the banks of the Yellow River north of its great bend all the way to the lower reaches of the river, opposite Qi. Its arch formed a bridge from Qin to Qi, separating Han from Zhao.

King Hui's predecessors had made good use of this position. They had made Han effectively subservient to Wei, and repeated military threats against Zhao had forced Zhao to seek aid from Qi. The young King Hui clearly appeared to be the most dynamic political force in China at the time of his accession. By 356, King Hui had coerced not only Han and Zhao, but also a number of key members of the Central States, such as Lu and Song, to join in league with Wei under King Hui's direction. Restoration of the hegemon position seemed a real possibility.

But precisely because the rulers of the states recalled that Jin, by virtue of its geographical position and military traditions, had been able to dominate the politics of China for most of the Spring and Autumn years, none of them was willing to allow Wei to recreate the power of Jin, much less extend it again into the Central States. King Hui found himself repeatedly blocked by the other major powers, which now had the opportunity to undermine the unity of Wei's league by forming agreements with the other Jin states of Han and Zhao. Again and again, the armies of Wei rushed from one end of the state to another, trying first to protect the integrity of its allied forces, and in time trying merely to protect the boundaries of Wei itself.

Finally, in 340, the threat to Wei became so severe that one of its great enemies, Chu, actually had to rush to its aid in order to avoid the destruction of Wei by Qi, which would have upset the balance of power disastrously. From this time, the entire direction of interstate politics begins to change. King Hui, growing old and resigned to the dissolution of his dreams, turned inward and began to cultivate the excellence of his court rather than his armies. He became famous for attracting to Wei outstanding scholars, thus emulating the distinctive glories of his ancestor a century earlier, Marquis Wen, whose court was discussed above.

In 335, King Hui reached an agreement with the ruler of Qi, and at that time the two leaders met and together took the title of "King" (King Hui had previously enjoyed only the relatively modest title of "Marquis"), thus driving another nail into the long closed coffin of the Zhou monarchy. He now looked forward to a peaceful end to his long reign.

But it was at this point that the state of Qin began to flex the muscles that Shang Yang had so recently strengthened. Qin began to put pressure on Wei's western territories, bidding to seize Wei's lands across the Yellow River and so control both banks above the river's elbow. King Hui, too tired to fight, removed his capital from the west of Wei and resettled in the east, signaling his willingness to reach a territorial compromise with Qin. In the end, the prime minister of Qin was granted an estate and installed in the western portion of Wei as a nominal minister of King Hui, but

in fact as a regional viceroy serving the king of Qin (who had copied Wei and Qi and elevated himself to royalty in 325). When King Hui finally died in 319, having reigned for fifty-one years, the state he left was in shambles.

Qin, on the other hand, was expanding rapidly into several voids. It had successfully completed centuries of war against various nomad tribes to the north, which had come to recognize the quantum growth in the power of their traditional Chinese adversary. Moreover Qin had moved into large and potentially fertile regions in the sparsely populated southwest (where modern Sichuan lies in the upper Yangzi valley). By so doing it had begun to exert pressure on Chu.

Chu was occupied elsewhere. The collapse of first Wu and then Yue had opened up opportunities for Chu in the lower reaches of the Yangzi, and this expansion had carried the armies of Chu east and then north into lands that were adjacent to Qi's southern border. In this way the buffer areas between Chu and Qi had disappeared and tensions were rising. When a similar disappearance of buffers developed in the west, Chu was unable to respond. Qin's expansion came at just the right time and in the end Chu had no choice but to cede valuable lands to Qin, creating a major strategic improvement in Qin's overall position.

Thus towards the close of the fourth century, the face of the future was becoming evident in China. The armies of Qin were suddenly encamped across the Yellow River in the north and along the upper Yangzi valley in the south, strategic areas which had never been under the control of any single power before. Rulers were becoming aware that the menace represented by Qin was reaching a scale unprecedented since the beginning of China's multi-state era.

PERIOD III: The Horizontal and Vertical Alliances (320-256)

The last century of the Classical age is among the most dynamic in Chinese history. Long brewing trends of change in government structures, intellectual imagination, and many aspects of economic and material culture all seem to rise to the surface. Because traditional historians viewed the periodization of Chinese history in terms of dynastic eras, they often failed to see just how far the final century of the Zhou order had departed from the norms of the Classical age. *The new Imperial state that was founded by the Qin Dynasty in 221 B.C. is in many ways a culmination of Warring States trends, rather than a sudden new social order imposed on China through conquest.*

By the closing years of the fourth century, virtually all the geographical buffers that softened the power struggle among the major powers had disappeared. Qin, Chu, and Qi dwarfed all other states in terms of territory, influence, and military strength. The rulers of all three had taken the title of King, and it was becoming clear that a final struggle to succeed to the throne of the Zhou rulers had begun. Unlike the Zhou founders, who were said to have conquered the Shang in a single morning, this time the battles for the Mandate were destined to stretch on for many years at the cost of blood beyond measure.

The initial stage of this period is known for a particular type of political contest in which the three powers engaged. As it became apparent that the future would belong to Qin unless the other states could bring their military forces into powerful combinations, some of the rulers and ministers among these states began to engage in the most ambitious alliance building since the age of the hegemons. These alliances, which sought to block the eastward advance of Qin troops by building the barrier of a North-South coalition of states, were known as “Vertical Alliances.”

For centuries, one of the cornerstones of Qin’s political strength was the military advantage it enjoyed by virtue of its geographical position. Not only was it located in the far west, which insulated it from attack by states in the east or southeast, its terrain was a mountain basin, easily guarded at the few strategic mountain passes that would allow military movement in and out of the state. Through these passes, which Qin controlled, Qin armies could issue forth towards the east and south, but an army of invasion would need enormous strength to breach these well defended gateways to Qin.

Now, however, with Qin’s ambitions focused on expansion, its geographical position became a disadvantage. Qin was distant from China’s center of gravity. Its goal to stretch eastward was clearly vulnerable to the counter-strategy envisioned by a north-south defensive coalition: a Vertical Alliance.

But Qin had many cards to play in dealing with those who might join a Vertical Alliance. As the strongest military force in China, it could coerce its near neighbors into obeying its will against their own long-term interests, and it could trade some of its vast territories for the short-term allegiance of rulers who could not see into the future. In this way, traveling ministers

from Qin were able frequently to bully or persuade the governments of other states to join it in an east-west “Horizontal Alliance,” which could parry threats against Qin and provide Qin armies with routes of access towards the east.

The first vertical alliance and its aftermath

The shifting balance of power during this period is far too confused to detail here. One example will suffice to represent the manner in which the alliance system failed to prevent the gradual growth of Qin power.

In 321, at the time when Qin was establishing a protectorate region in the western portion of Wei, the king of Qi became concerned at the growth of Qin power. He sent a prominent member of the royal Tian clan, known by his posthumous title of Lord Mengchang, as an emissary to Chu to propose an alliance against Qin. The plan was well received and Lord Mengchang began to act as an intermediary.

Then, in 319, the aged King Hui of Wei died and his successor ordered Qin to vacate its protectorate. Spurred by this, Qi and Chu acted together to launch a joint campaign against Qin on Wei’s behalf and enlist the aid of all the other significant states in the north: Han, Zhao, and Yan. But although the campaign was duly launched in 318, its leadership fragmented when the kings of Chu and Qi could not agree on which was to be regarded as the commander of the campaign. When the other allies indicated that they would follow Chu, Qi ended its active support. Ultimately, the strength of the attack failed to breach the Qin defenses at the Hangu pass, and the war ended in shambles, with Qin not only reestablishing its base in Wei, but even adding lands in Han.

About a decade later, a brief internal crisis in the royal house of Qin led members of the former alliance to attempt to recreate it. But Qin cleverly forestalled this by offering Chu a bribe. In return for reaching an agreement with Qin to form a horizontal axis against this new Vertical Alliance, Qin promised to return to Chu lands it had seized in previous years. When Chu accepted this proposal, Qi reasoned it could no longer pursue the opportunity.

So effective was the Qin ploy, that Qi determined that the only path for it to take was to reach an agreement with Qin that would essentially recognize a three-power balance as the desirable order for China. In 302, Qin, Chu, and Qi made an agreement to this effect, and to seal its part of the treaty, Qi sent Lord Mengchang to Qin, which actually appointed him a minister in the service of Qin.

Unfortunately, very soon thereafter, the entire arrangement fell to pieces. A prince of Chu who was living in Qin as a hostage (a common method states used to enforce good faith when a treaty was in place) killed a Qin patrician and fled. In the political disruption that ensued, Lord Mengchang barely escaped Qin with his life, and soon the entire cycle of abortive alliances was resumed.

While the story of each decade or two differs in its particulars, this example represents the pattern of the Vertical and Horizontal Alliance period. When the Qin encroachment eastwards finally consumed the state of Zhou itself and, in 256, brought an end to the line of kings that had ruled in fact or in name for almost eight centuries, the progress of Qin became less a matter of overcoming types of inter-state resistance, and more a matter of preparing for the final battles of the major states, once the last of the smaller powers had been absorbed into their ever-widening borders.

The ruin of Qi

One particular episode of this penultimate stage of Warring States history deserves special notice because of its rich implications for understanding the stresses in political ideology developing at this time, and because it accounts for the reason why the greatest power of eastern China, the state of Qi, proved unable to withstand the onslaught of Qin, despite the fact that it was a far more natural ally for most of the other states than was either Qin or Chu. The events that follow are reconstructed on the basis of several partial accounts in a variety of sources.

In 319, an ambitious new ruler, King Xuan, came to the throne in Qi. King Xuan was anxious to balance the power of Qin by making Qi a superpower in the east. He actively sought advisors from all over and strengthened the army.

Three years later, an unusual circumstance developed in the large but relatively weak state of Yan, located to the north of Qi. The aging ruler there was convinced to follow the example of the Emperors Yao and Shun and cede his throne to a worthy man. He turned over his state to his prime minister, a man named Zizhi. It seems clear from all accounts that Zizhi was an ambitious man who had risen far by virtue of his wits and that the king's act had followed a long period of persuasion and political pressure. This was, in other words, a bloodless coup d'état. But despite its element of power politics, by cloaking this transfer of power in the most sanctimonious of Confucian rhetoric, Zizhi was able to present himself as a ruler legitimized not only by talent and the circumstances of power, but by virtue and morality as well.

The king of Qi viewed these events as a golden opportunity. Regardless of the rhetoric involved, Zizhi's seizure of the throne was contrary to all the explicit norms of the times, and moreover represented simply the victory of one unlikely political faction in Yan over others. After all, the sons of the former ruler had been deprived of their natural expectations and would surely be seeking for revenge. Civil war in Yan seemed likely and King Xuan decided to fish in troubled waters.

To strengthen his hand, he engineered a political masterstroke. Just at this time, the greatest Confucian of the age, a master named Mencius (Mengzi), of whom we shall read more later, had turned up in the state of Qi announcing that he was in quest of a sage ruler who would employ him

and put into practice Confucian principles of government. The king did what no one had ever done before: he raised a visiting Confucian to a position of high prestige in government, appointing Mencius an advisor of the first rank. Mencius, an old man who had lived his entire life hoping for his moment in the sun, did not have the political acumen to turn the offer down.

Shortly after his appointment, Mencius was approached by another minister who was an intimate of the king's. This man came to Mencius's home on a social visit, and in the course of the conversation, he asked Mencius whether in his opinion, in light of the irregular conduct of the ruler of Yan, that state would be a proper object of a righteous war.

Now, Mencius was a Confucian, and Confucians were not known as warmongers. Nevertheless, Yan represented a sore provocation. Zizhi had shamelessly exploited Confucian myths and Confucian ethics to engineer a power play. Mencius could not but have felt the greatest resentment against him. Moreover, Mencius, who had long hoped to play a significant role in pragmatic politics, had actually developed detailed ways of explaining the proper way in which Heaven's Mandate was supposed to be transferred. He had developed these doctrines both to reassure his potential employers that he was not an opponent of hereditary succession and also to explain why Confucius had not himself received the Mandate, an historical fact that was rather embarrassing to Confucians who wished to claim that the founder of their school had been the greatest sage known to history.

Mencius claimed that the Mandate could be moved only when a ruler was extraordinarily evil, or, in the case of men such as Yao and Shun, only when the ruling king presented his successor to Heaven and Heaven approved. How did Heaven show its approval? Mencius's answer was, "Heaven does not speak, it moves through action and event," and in so doing, "Heaven hears through the ears of the people and sees through the eyes of the people." That is, only when the population at large showed its clear approval could one claim that the Mandate should be transferred. The transfer of the Mandate through cession was not a private matter between a ruler and his chosen successor, it was in the end a matter of popular assent.

The seizure of the throne of Yan by Zizhi conformed to none of Mencius's requirements, and to the minister of Qi who was sitting in his home anxious for an answer, Mencius replied, "Oh yes, Yan is indeed worthy of punishment!"

This was all that the minister was waiting for. He had actually been sent by the king to pry just such an answer from Mencius. In short order the troops of Qi marched north to attack Yan and reverse this "Confucian" succession, and they did so, it was proclaimed, with the explicit sanction of the most famous Confucian of the age. In vain that Mencius protested that he had been unaware that he was being asked for his advice in an official capacity. "If I had known what the king meant to do," he said, "I would have told him that though Yan was worthy of being attacked by a righteous state, Qi was not such a state!" He saw clearly that Qi's invasion was not a matter of ethics but of power. Now, of course, it was too late.

King Xuan's invasion could not have gone better. Zizhi was in fact very unpopular in Yan and the troops from Qi, which marched to place the heir apparent on the throne instead, were much welcomed. When the King Xuan boasted to Mencius of his success, Mencius warned him that though the troops were welcome now, that welcome would soon be worn out if they did not quickly return home and Qi withdraw from its meddling in Yen's politics.

But the king's ambition was to establish a puppet state in Yan. The troops stayed, and the new ruler of Yan, King Zhao, discovered that he was not a free actor. He was expected to repay his champion with absolute obedience, and he soon chafed to be rid of Qi's presence. Yan was little more than an occupied territory with the soldiers of Qi patrolling the capital. Although Yan had never been a strong state, it had a proud tradition; the rulers of Yan were the descendants of Duke Shao, a close cousin of the Zhou founder King Wu, the Zhou founder and the Duke of Zhou's principal aide during the years of rebellion. King Zhao felt much ashamed to have become the pawn of another state.

Eventually, confident that Yan was secure, King Xuan of Qi withdrew his armies from Yan. The king of Yan immediately issued a call for wise men to come to his capital, and among those he treated with the greatest courtesies were men known for their abilities in military administration. King Zhao worked tirelessly to build the armies of Yan into a force capable of exacting revenge on Qi, while at the same time, Qi conducted itself with great arrogance in relations with other states, creating a broad coalition of enemies who were most anxious to aid Yan should it move against Qi.

It took many years, but in 284, long after the death of King Xuan of Qi, King Zhao sent the armies of Yan along with allies from almost all the major states south to invade Qi. He was rewarded for his patient devotion to his cause. The troops of Qi were routed and the new king of Qi, King Min, fled south into the small outpost garrison of Ju, where he was soon assassinated. Meanwhile, Yan sacked Linzi, the capital of Qi, burning the palaces and temple shrines and shipping the treasures of the city north to Yan.

Qi was divided into military districts and administered by Yan until 279. In that year at last, the Qi heir returned to the capital behind a vanguard of troops which had been maintained in exile, and in the space of a few days, the armies of Yan were driven out and the entire kingdom of Qi restored. But Qi's power was permanently broken. From that time on, its diplomatic policies were entirely devoted to appeasement. It was no longer a great power, and the vacuum of power in the east that was thus created played a major role in allowing Qin to achieve its ultimate victory.

PERIOD IV: The Great Ministerial Lords of the Third Century

This section will be a picture of Warring States political culture as seen through the biographies of three of the most powerful men of the era. None was himself a ruler, but each played a pivotal role in the final century of the Classical era.

The three men are Lord Mengchang of Qi, whom we met in the previous section, Lord Xinling of Wei, and Lü Buwei of Qin. The tales of these three men certainly accord with the basic facts of their lives, but as you will see, the events within them suggest a great admixture of fiction. Their biographies may be read principally as loose reflections of the events of the times, and more directly as expressions of the way in which the people of the late Classical period imagined the careers of political leaders as lessons in culture, morality, and ingenuity.

All these accounts are largely based on the biographies of these men recorded in Sima Qian's *Shiji*. But in the case of the biography of the Lord Mengchang, the tale of Feng Xuan is translated directly from the *Zhanguo ce* (*Intrigues of the Warring States*) (this section appears in Roman rather than Italic type). The biographies of Lord Mengchang and Lord Xinling are more extensive than the portions summarized here, but the events selected are meant to convey the essential features that characterized the stature of each man in traditional histories of the period.

The Story of Lord Mengchang

Lord Mengchang was the title by which Tian Wen of Qi was known. He was a member of the royal Tian family which had seized the throne of Qi in the early fourth century. His uncle ruled from 319 to 301 as King Xuan.

Lord Mengchang played a major role in the political life of Qi during the reign of his uncle, but he is chiefly remembered as the lord of an enormous crowd of retainers. Lord Mengchang delighted in being surrounded by men of talent as diverse as possible, and he took pride in the generosity that he displayed in supporting them. When he was in power in Qi and residing in the capital of Linzi, his retainers would stay in his great ministerial compound. At other times they lived with him in Xue, a large district which had been granted to him as an hereditary estate.

Lord Mengchang's great stable of retainers made him a leading warlord power of Qi, but he was no ordinary warlord. He was famous for his courteous treatment of retainers, which rarely reflected his exalted rank or class standing, and he was assiduous in providing for the relatives of the hundreds – some texts say thousands – of men in his service. Moreover, Lord Mengchang had a penchant for taking in men who had so little to offer in the way of military or literary skills that they had no hope of receiving patronage from more traditional strongmen. At times, the men he accepted into his service were so outlandishly undistinguished that it damaged his reputation and made his other retainers feel resentful. For example, he accepted into his compound two men who,

at their initial audience with him pretended to no skills other than the ability to make animal sounds. For this he was much criticized.

When Lord Mengchang was sent as an emissary to Qin about 302, he took with him a group of his retainers. In Qin, which had joined in an alliance with Qi, he was received with great generosity and appointed to a high ministerial position. Before he had been long settled there, however, the political situation grew tense once again. The king of Qin became convinced that having Lord Mengchang at court was a liability: he was more likely to behave as a spy than as a minister loyal to Qin. For this reason, he had Lord Mengchang placed under house arrest.

Lord Mengchang sent an appeal to the king's favorite concubine, asking for her help. "I could help you," said the lady, "but only if you fulfill my heart's desire by procuring for me the king's white fox fur." This fox fur was a matchless gift that Lord Mengchang had himself brought to Qin to present to the king, who had ordered it locked in the royal storeroom. Lord Mengchang had no other, and no way of retrieving the one he had brought.

He had, however, brought with him one of his retainers who excelled at certain animal sounds. "A dog is the sound I do best," the retainer told him. "Let me try to get the fur for you." That night, disguised as a dog, the retainer was able to slip into the storeroom and retrieve the fur. When this was presented to the concubine, she kept her bargain and persuaded the king to release Lord Mengchang.

As soon as the guards had disappeared from his gate, Lord Mengchang gathered up his followers and they galloped east, carrying forged papers. A short time later, the king changed his mind and ordered Lord Mengchang placed under arrest once more. When he learned that his prisoner had fled, he ordered that he be pursued.

Lord Mengchang and his group reached the Hangu pass where the road eastward passed out of Qin, but night had long before fallen and the gate was closed. No one would be allowed through until the normal opening time at first cock-crow. With the king's guard likely to be close behind, Lord Mengchang was desperate to find a way through.

As he contemplated his danger, the other retainer skilled at animal sounds said, "The crowing of the cock is the sound I do best. Let me try to open the gate for you." At that, he gave so convincing an imitation of a rooster's crow that in no time the guards were unbarring the gate eastward and Lord Mengchang escaped. After this, no more was heard about Lord Mengchang's unusual taste in men's talents.

When he returned to Qi, Lord Mengchang once again enjoyed the trust of the king and high office. But when King Xuan died in 301 and King Min took the throne, he was suspicious of Lord Mengchang's power and influence and dismissed him as minister. Lord Mengchang returned to live on his estate in Xue. Most of his retainers deserted him, but one at least, a man named Feng

Xuan, remained with him. His story proved again how useful Lord Mengchang's patronage of obscure men could be.

There lived in Qi a man named Feng Xuan who was poor and unable to support himself. He asked an intermediary to arrange for him to be taken under the protection of Lord Mengchang as a retainer. When he arrived, Lord Mengchang asked him, "What is your specialty, Sir?"

"I have no special art," answered Feng Xuan.

"Well then, what are you able to do?"

"I am not able at anything."

Lord Mengchang smiled, and saying merely, "All right," he accepted Feng Xuan into his entourage.

The other retainers disdained Feng Xuan, and when he was served at table, his food was placed in bowls of woven grass.

After things had gone on in this way for some time, Feng Xuan one day drew his long sword from its scabbard and, leaning against a pillar, he began to twang it and sing. "Long sword!" he sang, "shall we go home? At mealtime I receive no fish!"

The other retainers reported this to Lord Mengchang. "Treat him as a regular retainer," he said.

Not long afterwards, Feng Xuan once again plucked at his sword and sang. "Long sword! Shall we go home? When I go out I have no chariot to ride!"

The other retainers reported this to Lord Mengchang. "Provide him with a chariot," he said. "Let it be as good as those of the other retainers with chariots."

When Feng Xuan mounted his chariot he raised his sword and raced past the others shouting, "Lord Mengchang has made a true retainer of me!"

But a short time later, he plucked his sword again. “Long sword!” he sang, “shall we go home? I’ve nothing to give my family!”

Now the others truly despised Feng Xuan, feeling that he was greedy beyond proper restraints. But Lord Mengchang called him in. “Good Sir,” he asked, “have you then a family?”

“I have an aged mother,” Feng Xuan replied.

Lord Mengchang ordered that Feng Xuan’s mother be provided with food and goods to cover all her needs. “Let her lack for nothing!” Thereupon, Feng Xuan sang no more.

Some time later, Lord Mengchang decided to settle his accounts and asked who among the retainers was a practiced accountant, able to manage the collection of the income due in his estate of Xue. Feng Xuan sent in a reply saying that he could do this. Lord Mengchang was puzzled. “Who is this?” he asked.

His advisors replied, “It’s the fellow who sings to his long sword about going home.”

Lord Mengchang laughed and said, “So he has a skill after all. How I’ve neglected him! I have not had him in to see me. Please ask him to come.”

When Feng Xuan appeared, Lord Mengchang addressed him by saying, “I have been fatigued with work and exhausted with care, and so my spirit has grown dull and stupid. Immersed in affairs of state I have offended against you, Sir. Yet you, Sir, are nevertheless willing to demean yourself and offer to collect accounts for me in Xue, am I correct?”

“Indeed,” replied Feng Xuan, “I am willing.”

Thereupon Feng Xuan prepared to set off. He prepared a carriage and provisions and loaded all of the tally slips that had to be matched with those of the debtors in Xue. Then he went to bid farewell to his lord. “When I have completed the collection of the debts,” he said, “what shall I purchase with them as I return?”

“Look around,” said Lord Mengchang. “See what is lacking in my household.”

Feng Xuan rode off, and when he reached Xue he ordered the local officer to summon all the people owing debts to assemble together so that their tally slips could be collected and matched with the slips he had brought.

When all the slips had been matched and the debts ascertained, Feng Xuan arose and addressed the assembled people. In the name of Lord Mengchang he declared that all their debts were to be returned to them as a gift, and accordingly, he had the tallies burnt. The people all cried out, “Long live Lord Mengchang!!”

Then Feng Xuan rode straight back to the capital city without stopping and sought an audience with Lord Mengchang at first light. Lord Mengchang was amazed at the speed with which Feng Xuan had returned. He put on his robes and cap and received him saying, “Are the debts all collected already? How quickly you’ve returned!”

“I have collected the debts,” said Feng Xuan.

“And what did you purchase with them on your way back?”

Feng Xuan said, “My lord, you told me to look and see what was lacking in your household. I presumed to calculate that within your pavilions, precious jewels are piled high, dogs and horses fill your stables, beautiful women are everywhere arrayed – truly, all that my lord’s household lacked was righteousness. Hence I have presumed to purchase some righteousness on behalf of my lord.”

“How does one go about purchasing righteousness?”

“Well, my lord,” replied Feng Xuan, “you possess Xue, but though it is a tiny place, you do not treat your dependent people there with parental love and kindness. Rather, you treat them as a merchant would, as if they were commodities that can yield you a profit. Hence I presumed to address them on your behalf and make a gift to them of all their debts. Then I burnt the tally slips and the people all cried out, ‘Long live Lord

Mengchang!!' This is how your servant went about purchasing righteousness for you, my lord."

Lord Mengchang was displeased. "All right," he said. "Go rest now, Sir."

One year later, the new king of Qi addressed Lord Mengchang. "I cannot presume to employ the ministers of the former king as my own," he said, and Lord Mengchang went off into retirement in Xue.

When his entourage was still 100 li distant from Xue, the people appeared along the road, leading their children and supporting their old, all welcoming Lord Mengchang to Xue. Lord Mengchang turned round and looked back at Feng Xuan. "Your purchase of righteousness, Sir!" he said. "I finally see it today."

(Zhanguo ce, Qi ce 148)

* * *

The Story of Lord Xinling

The biography of Lord Xinling pivots on his treatment of retainers and the remarkable men he assembled in a warlord court. In this way, his story resembles that of Lord Mengchang in Qi, whose court clearly served as a model for Lord Xinling. But the nature of Lord Xinling's entourage and the adventure that forms the center of his story reflect the strong military traditions which Wei, as a successor state to Jin, was heir to. In this way, it also serves as an excellent illustration of the cult of the warrior *shi* that became a prominent feature of Warring States society.

The heart of the following story concerns Lord Xinling's single-handed rescue of the state of Zhao from the besieging armies of Qin in 257, but an equal portion of his biography is devoted to establishing his character and introducing the mystifying figure of Hou Ying, a "recluse living in society," whose keen powers of understanding remain hidden from others until Lord Xinling finds the key to releasing them.

Lord Xinling was a member of the ruling clan of Wei. His name was Wuchi, and he was a half-brother of King Anli of Wei, who came to the throne in 276. At this time, the state of Qin had placed Wei under great pressures, and the new king was grateful for the military leadership that Lord Xinling could offer. But an incident made him suspicious of his brother.

One day when the two were playing a game of chess word came that beacon fires had been lit on the northern border and the king of Zhao was launching an attack. The king leapt up, but Lord Xinling merely said, "The king is out hunting. There is no invasion," and he continued to play. The king was unable to concentrate; he believed that an attack was imminent. But after a time another messenger arrived and reported that the Zhao armies had indeed been no more than a hunting party.

"How did you know?" the king asked his brother.

"I have retainers who are kept informed of all the doings in Zhao. They pass their information along to me. That's how I knew."

The king, recognizing the craft and power of his brother, began from this time to watch him warily.

There lived in seclusion in Wei an old man of seventy named Hou Ying. He held a sinecure as the warden of Yi Gate in the city of Daliang, where King Hui of Wei had moved the capital of that state about seventy years earlier. Hou Ying was very poor, but Lord Xinling nevertheless

heard that he was a worthy man and went to see him with gifts, hoping to add him to his group of loyal men. When he arrived at Yi Gate, however, Hou Ying, rather than being overwhelmed by his largess, declined the gifts.

Lord Xinling was nevertheless impressed with Hou Ying, and he devised a plan. He arranged a great banquet and invited many distinguished guests. They had already taken their seats when Lord Xinling announced that he needed to fetch one last guest, and he drove off to Hou Ying's narrow alley, leaving the left hand space of his chariot vacant in order to bring the old man back with him.

When he arrived at Hou Ying's house, the old man agreed to go with him, but rather than standing at the left, he took the post of honor at the right, carefully keeping an eye on Lord Xinling. But Lord Xinling merely increased the respectfulness of his manner and took the reins.

"I have a friend named Zhu Hai who is a butcher at the market," Hou Ying said. "Would you mind stopping there on the way?"

When they reached the butcher's house, Hou Ying descended and stood chatting with his friend longer and longer, watching Lord Xinling from the corner of his eye. But Lord Xinling merely waited patiently. The people in the market began to gawk at Lord Xinling, who did not ordinarily appear in the position of a lowly charioteer, and the riders who had accompanied him out began to grumble, knowing full well how impatient the elegant assembly at the banquet must be growing. But Lord Xinling gave no sign that any of this concerned him.

When Hou Ying saw Lord Xinling's calm manner, he bade his friend the butcher good-bye and once again mounted the chariot.

Once they reached Lord Xinling's compound, Lord Xinling introduced Hou Ying to all and made him take the seat of honor before the astonished guests. During the feast, he walked across to Hou Ying's place and offered him a formal toast.

Hou Ying looked at him and replied, "I have tested you hard today, my lord. I am merely the warden of Yi Gate, yet when you called upon me in person, I made you go out of your way and stand holding the reins in the marketplace while I stood gossiping with my friend. Yet throughout, you maintained your courtesy and composure." And from that time on, he became an honored retainer of Lord Xinling.

Later, Hou Ying recommended the butcher Zhu Hai to Lord Xinling. "He has withdrawn to the lowly position of a butcher only because none have recognized his high abilities," he said. Lord Xinling called on Zhu Hai several times, but the butcher showed absolutely no sign of appreciation or any inclination to form a bond, and Lord Xinling puzzled over this.

In 257, the armies of Qin routed the forces of Zhao and advanced upon the Zhao capital of Handan. The sister of King Anli and Lord Xinling was married to the younger brother of the king of Zhao, and she sent desperate pleas to her brothers to help lift the siege. King Anli sent 100,000 men under the general Jin Bi to rescue Zhao, but as they were setting out, an envoy from Qin appeared at the capital. "Handan will fall to us any day now," he announced. "Should any state send armies to her aid, we will take our revenge as soon as Zhao has been taken." The frightened king revised his orders to Jin Bi, telling him to garrison his men at the border city of Ye near Handan, so that Wei could claim to have come to Zhao's aid without actually doing so.

Lord Xinling tried repeatedly to persuade King Anli to change these orders and save Zhao, but the king would hear none of it. Finally, desperate to respond to his sister and her family in Zhao and save his own honor, Lord Xinling determined to set out for Handan on his own with a party of his private force of warriors and die defending his kinsmen.

As his group rode out through the Yi Gate, Lord Xinling stopped to explain to Hou Ying where he was going. "Farewell my lord," said Hou Ying, "I am too old to go with you."

Lord Xinling set off, but as he galloped it began to gall him that after all the favors he had shown Hou Ying, the man had said hardly a word to him as he rode off to his death. He wondered whether he had somehow offended Hou Ying, and the thought became so urgent that he finally stopped his men and turned back to Daliang.

"I knew you would come back," said Hou Ying when Lord Xinling reached Yi Gate. "Here you go off throwing yourself at Qin like meat to a tiger. What's the use of making all these friends if you don't use them? I knew that when I responded to you so coolly after all your goodness it would start you thinking."

So Lord Xinling sent everyone away, bowed, and begged Hou Ying to advise him.

"I have been told that the tally that matches Jin Bi's orders is kept in the king's bed-chamber," Hou Ying began. "Now, the king's favorite concubine owes you a great debt, for after her father was murdered, only you were willing to listen to her pleadings and avenge him. You must have her steal the tally for you, and then you can ride to the front and give Jin Bi new orders."

It was so arranged and the tally was taken, but as Lord Xinling prepared to ride off again, Hou Ying stopped him. "Jin Bi is a fine general, and general in the field is not obligated to follow his king's distant commands if they endanger the state. I suggest you take my friend Zhu Hai with you, for he is a powerful man. If Jin Pi refuses to accept your orders, Zhu Hai can kill him for you."

At this Lord Xinling began to weep. "Are you afraid of dying?" asked Hou Ying.

“No,” replied Lord Xinling. “It is the thought that I may have to kill a man like Jin Bi. He is utterly fearless, and unlikely to obey me.”

When Lord Xinling approached Zhu Hai, the butcher began to smile. “You have shown me courtesies again and again,” he said, “though I am only a lowly butcher drumming my knife in the market. I have never responded to you, because petty displays of propriety are useless. Now you need me and my life is at your disposal.”

This time, Lord Xinling set off in a single chariot, alone with Zhu Hai. As he rode once more through the Yi Gate, Hou Ying said, “I truly am too old to ride with you, but I shall prove my loyalty. I will calculate the time of your journey, and when I know you have arrived at the battle, I will face north and kill myself on that day.”

Jin Bi was indeed suspicious when Lord Xinling arrived with new orders and the tally that matched his own. “I command 100,000 troops here far from the capital,” he said. “My responsibilities are very grave. I must ask you to explain how it is that you have come on so critical a mission of state in a single unaccompanied chariot?” As he prepared to refuse Lord Xinling’s orders, Zhu Hai stepped forward and struck him with a heavy pestle that he had hidden beneath his coat.

Then Lord Xinling took command of the armies of Wei. He appeared before the troops and addressed them. “If there are any fathers and sons who are both in service here, the father may return home. If there are any who are brothers, the elder may go back. If any among you are only sons, they may return to their parents and care for them.”

Then with 80,000 picked troops, he led an attack against the forces of Qin that surrounded Handan. The Qin armies retreated and the siege was raised. Zhao had been saved. The king of Zhao himself rode out to welcome Lord Xinling. “Among all the worthies of the ages,” he said, “none has ever equaled you!”

Back in Wei, Hou Ying, facing north, swung his sword and cut off his head in loyalty to his lord.



After these events, Lord Xinling’s career took many turns. He remained for several years in Zhao in order to establish to Qin’s satisfaction that he had acted alone in seizing control of the armies of Wei, thus protecting his brother the king and the state of Wei from reprisals. Eventually he returned home and embarked on further adventures in Wei’s behalf. Ultimately, though, King Anli became so jealous of his fame and suspicious of his motives that he dismissed him, and Lord Xinling ended his days living among his entourage. We are told that he devoted himself thoroughly

to wine and women in his last years, until he ended by drinking himself to death. He died in 243, the same year as King Anli.

The historian Sima Qian records that when he was a young man, the First Emperor of the Qin was much taken with tales of Lord Xinling's daring. After he had conquered the other states of China and become emperor, he would offer sacrifices at Lord Xinling's shrine whenever he passed through Daliang. Eventually, he appointed five families to serve as guardians of Lord Xinling's tomb, and ordered that in each of the four seasons sacrifices should be offered up to him every year forever.

The Biography of Lü Buwei

Lü Buwei's position in Chinese history is unique. According to historical gossip, he could be said to be the father of Imperial China – the rumor is that the First Emperor was actually his illegitimate son, a rumor that Sima Qian reports as fact. But Lü Buwei himself was not even a patrician. He was a member of the despised merchant class, although he rose to an eminence beyond that of any other merchant. Despite the fact that the details of his biography have clearly been shaped by the historian Sima Qian to confirm as many slanderous tales about the state of Qin as possible – with great emphasis upon sexual excess (notice which gender is depicted as the source of wild desires) – the story of Lü Buwei still gives us valuable insights into the fluid social arena of the late Warring States period, one that could allow a middle aged merchant from the weak state of Han to become the prime minister of Qin on the eve of its conquest of China.

The text here translates the entire biography of Lü Buwei, as it appears in the *Shiji*.

Lü Buwei invests in a prince

Lü Buwei was a wealthy merchant from Yangdi in the state of Han. He traveled from place to place buying cheap and selling dear until his household had accumulated thousands of catties of gold.

In the fortieth year of King Zhao's reign in Qin (267 B.C.) the heir apparent died, and two years later the king installed his second son, Lord Anguo, as the new heir. Lord Anguo had over twenty sons. Among his consorts, he was particularly infatuated with one whom he had installed as his principal wife with the title Lady Huayang, but who bore him no children.

Now among Lord Anguo's children was one named Zichu. Zichu's mother, Lady Xia, was not much favored by Lord Anguo, and consequently, when it became necessary to send a prince to the state of Zhao as a good faith hostage, Zichu was selected.

Because Qin had repeatedly attacked Zhao, Zichu was shown few courtesies there. Zichu led a wretched existence as a minor prince, hostage in an alien state. His

carriage and food allowances were far from lavish, and he lived most unhappily in hard circumstances.

At this time, Lü Buwei happened to travel to Handan, the capital of Zhao, and saw the prince. He felt sorry for him and thought to himself, "This is a piece of merchandise that would be worth investing in." He went to visit Zichu and said to him, "I can raise your state in the world."

Zichu laughed and said, "Better raise your own first, and then you can attend to mine."

"You do not understand," replied Lü Buwei. "My state depends upon yours to rise."

Then Zichu understood what Lü Buwei was getting at. He motioned to him to sit down, and the two fell deep into talk.

Lü Buwei said, "The king of Qin is growing old. Lord Anguo will succeed him. Now I happen to know that Lord Anguo favors Lady Huayang, but Lady Huayang has no child of her own to install as crown prince. Nevertheless, I believe that Lady Huayang alone will determine who will be named as Lord Anguo's heir. Now you are a middle son among twenty brothers, and you certainly have received no special favor. You've been long left stranded here as a hostage. When the old king dies and Lord Anguo ascends the throne, what chance have you to be named his heir when your brothers crowd before him day and night contending for the title?"

"True," said Zichu, "but what can I do about it?"

"You are poor," replied Lü Buwei, "and a wanderer in this place. You've no means to offer gifts to your father or attract retainers about you. Now I, though poor myself, ask leave to travel west on your behalf with a thousand catties of gold and lay these before Lord Anguo and Lady Huayang in order that they should designate you the heir."

Zichu fell before him and bowed his head to the ground. "If your plan succeeds as you propose," he said, "I beg to divide the state of Qin and share it with you!"

So Lü Buwei took five hundred catties of gold and gave it to Zichu in order that he could outfit himself properly and begin to attract retainers for his entourage. With the other five hundred, he bought an array of rare and valuable objects which he took with him to travel west to Qin, where he sought an audience with Lady Huayang's elder sister. Through her, he presented all of his valuable gifts to Lady Huayang. Thus gaining an interview, he praised the worth and wisdom of Zichu to her, spoke of how Zichu had attracted patrician retainers from all corners of the realm, and recounted how Zichu constantly sighed of how he regarded Lady Huayang as Heaven itself, and cried each night as he thought of her and the Lord Anguo far away.

Lady Huayang was delighted, and Lü Buwei followed this interview up by urging Lady Huayang's sister to give the lady this counsel: "I have heard that when one courts a man's favor by means of one's beauty that favor will wane when the beauty fades. Now you are greatly loved by the crown prince, but you have no sons. Should you not therefore attach yourself to one among the crown prince's sons who is worthy and filial, have him installed as the heir and then treat him as your own son? While your husband lives you will enjoy high honors, and after his death, when he whom you have adopted becomes king, you will never lose your influence. Would not my one piece of advice yield a thousand generations of profit? If you do not care for the roots while the flowers bloom, then when your beauty fades and the favor wanes, though you might wish to put in a word it will be too late! Now Zichu is a worthy man. He knows that as a middle son he is not in line to be heir, nor has his mother received particular favor. But now he has attached himself to you, and if you would truly seize this opportunity to have him appointed as heir then you will be favored in Qin as long as you live."

Lady Huayang was persuaded and, catching her husband when he was enjoying his leisure with her, casually spoke about Zichu's exile as a hostage in Zhao and the reports she had heard of his outstanding character from all who visited him there. Then she burst into tears. "I am so lucky to have been chosen as your concubine, and so wretched to be childless! I beg you to install Zichu as your heir and allow me to be entrusted with his care."

Lord Anguo consented to her request, and had a jade tally engraved that he divided, giving her half to witness his pledge that Zichu should succeed him. Then he and Lady Huayang sent rich gifts to Zichu and asked Lü Buwei to serve as his tutor. As a result, Zichu's reputation began to spread among the patrician lords of all the states.

Lü Buwei's rise to power

Lü Buwei had taken as a mistress a great beauty of Handan who excelled as a dancer. She lived together with him, and had become pregnant by him. One day, Zichu went to see Lü Buwei and as they were drinking, he spied this woman and wanted her. He rose to propose a toast and asked to have her. Lü Buwei was furious, but reflecting upon how he had nearly bankrupt his household with his "investment" in Zichu he decided to give him the woman. For her part, his mistress concealed the fact that she was with child. When her time came she gave birth to a boy whom she named Zheng. Zichu then decided to designate her as his principal wife.

In the fiftieth year of King Zhao of Qin's reign (257) the king ordered Wang Yi to besiege Handan. When the situation became desperate, the men of Zhao determined to kill Zichu. Zichu consulted Lü Buwei and by bribing one of the gatekeepers with 600 catties of gold, they were able to sneak out of the city and flee to the Qin encampments. In this way, Zichu was able to return home. Learning that Zichu had escaped, the people of Handan sought his wife and child, intending to kill them in revenge. But his wife was the daughter of a prominent family of Zhao, and she was able to find places to hide out long enough that in the end both she and the boy survived.

In the fifty-sixth year of his reign (251) the old king of Qin died and his heir Lord Anguo assumed the throne with Lady Huayang as his queen and Zichu as the crown prince. At this time, Zhao permitted Zichu's wife and son to go to him in Qin.

The new king reigned only a year before dying. He was buried with the posthumous name of King Xiaowen. Prince Zichu succeeded him as King Zhuangxiang. The new king's adoptive mother, Lady Huayang, became the Dowager

Queen Huayang, while his true mother, Lady Xia, was known as the Dowager Queen Xia.

In the first year of King Zhuangxiang's reign, he appointed Lü Buwei as a chancellor of state and bestowed an estate on him, granting him the title Lord Wenxin. The territories from which he was to draw income included areas of 100,000 households in the Henan and Luoyang districts.

After reigning for three years, King Zhuangxiang died and his son Zheng ascended the throne. He raised Lü Buwei to the post of prime minister and addressed him as 'Second Father.' The king was still young, and without his knowledge his mother, who was now a dowager queen, resumed her old affair with Lü Buwei. Receiving favors such as these, Lü Buwei's household grew to a staff of 10,000.

This was the era of the great warlord ministers: Lord Xinling in Wei, Lord Mengchang in Qi, Lord Chunshen in Chu, and Lord Pingyuan in Zhao. These men vied with one another in their reputations for attracting retainers and treating them with courtesies. Lü Buwei was chagrined that for all of Qin's strength, he did not compare with these men. So he undertook to attract his own retinue of retainers and treated them with such generosity that he soon had 3,000 *shi* under his patronage.

This was also the era of the great debaters, and the patrician lords supported many such men, such as the Confucian Xunzi, all of whom composed books that spread throughout the realm. Lü Buwei ordered his protégés to gather together all that they had learned and collect a series of essays in a work of over 200,000 words, arrayed in eight surveys, six treatises, and twelve compilations. In the belief that this text included all the affairs of heaven and earth, the world of things, the present and the past, he titled it with his own name as "The Almanac of Lord Lü." He had the text displayed at the gate by the Xianyang market and above it he hung a thousand catties of gold. He invited traveling persuaders and retainers from all states to read it and offered the gold to whoever could find a single word to add or subtract from it.

As Zheng, the future First Emperor, grew older, his mother's behavior grew increasingly wanton. Lü Buwei became afraid that her conduct would be discovered and his liaison with her would bring his downfall. Through private inquiry he learned of a man named Lao Ai who was endowed with a very large penis and he took him

into his household. He held entertainments of lascivious dancing and made Lao Ai parade among the dance with a wooden wheel dangling around his member, making sure that reports of this reached the dowager queen in order to inflame her. And indeed, when she heard about Lao Ai she was anxious to have him. Lü Buwei arranged that he should be presented to her so that she could see him.

Then Lü Buwei had Lao Ai falsely accused of a crime deserving the punishment of castration. He secretly spoke to the queen, "If it were arranged that this man's castration were only feigned, then he would be permitted to serve as a eunuch in the inner chambers of the palace." The queen accordingly bribed the officer in charge of castrations to issue a false report, and had Lao Ai's eyebrows plucked so that he would appear to be a eunuch. Then he was entered into her service. The queen quickly put Lao Ai to the test and from then on she was wild about him.

Later the queen became pregnant and grew afraid that her secret would be discovered. She had it falsely reported that she had been instructed through divination that she must retire from the capital for a time and she moved to a palace in the old city of Yong, where Lao Ai was in constant attendance upon her. She rewarded him with lavish gifts and all her affairs came to be managed by Lao Ai. Soon Lao Ai had a private household of several thousands and over a thousand office seekers sought his patronage as retainers.

In the seventh year of the First Emperor's reign (240) the Dowager Queen Xia, the mother of King Zhuangxiang (Prince Zichu), died. The Dowager Queen Huayang had earlier died and been buried in the Shouling tomb beside her husband, King Xiaowen (Lord Anguo). King Zhuangxiang had been buried in the Zhiyang tomb, and his mother had asked to be buried separately east of Du. "That way," she had said, "I will look east towards my son and west towards my husband. A hundred years from now, there will surely rise a city of 10,000 households."

In the ninth year of the First Emperor's reign, someone reported that Lao Ai was not a eunuch, that he and the dowager queen were constantly engaged in indecency, and that they had by then given birth to two sons whom they kept in hiding. The informer told the king that Lao Ai and the queen had plotted together to arrange that their son should succeed to the throne upon the king's death. The king ordered that the magistrates should investigate the matter thoroughly and in the end,

the prime minister, Lü Buwei, was implicated. In the ninth month, Lao Ai was executed along with all his kinsmen to the third degree. The two boys were killed, and the dowager queen removed to the city of Yong. All of Lao Ai's retainers had their properties confiscated and were forcibly removed to the distant region of Shu.

The king wished to execute Lü Buwei, but in view of his great services to the late king, and in light of the vast number of retainers and learned men in his service the king could not bear to carry out the punishment.

In the tenth month of the tenth year of the First Emperor's reign, Lü Buwei was dismissed from his post as prime minister. At the persuasion of Mao Jiao of Qi, the First Emperor allowed his mother the dowager queen to return to the capital city of Xianyang, and sent Lord Wenxin, Lü Buwei, into retirement on his estates in Henan.

After a year had passed, the roads were so crowded with visitors and envoys from all corners of the realm going to visit Lü Buwei that the First Emperor became frightened that he was plotting a rebellion. He sent Lü Buwei a letter. "How great has your service to Qin been that you should have been made lord over Henan, with the revenues of 100,000 households at your disposal? How dear have you been to Qin that your title should have been 'Second Father?' Depart with all of your household and followers – you are banished to Shu!"

Lü Buwei considered the possibility of disobeying, but he feared that he would only suffer execution. Rather than this, he chose to drink poison and die. Once both Lao Ai and Lü Buwei, who had incurred the king's wrath, were dead, all of Lao Ai's retainers who had been banished to Shu were allowed to return.

In the nineteenth year of the reign of the First Emperor (228) the dowager queen died. She was granted the posthumous title of Empress Dowager, and buried with King Zhuangxiang at Zhiyang.

(Shiji 85.2505-2514)

EPILOGUE: The Final Conquest of Qin

The final years of the Warring States period are a whirlwind of bloody battles and sieges, alliances and betrayals. First Chu, benefiting from the crippling of Qi, began to expand, controlling almost all of southern China. But Qin responded with a swift campaign, seized the capital of Ying for good, and threw the center of gravity of the Chu state eastwards, where it was less able to join with other states. Then, with no one strong opponent, the generals and ministers of Qin coordinated a policy of encouraging its enemies to fight one another, with Qin collecting the spoils after the combatants were too weary to protest.

Qin's conquest was gradual, but relentless. Once the brilliant and ruthless Li Si was firmly established as minister under King Zheng, who was now soon to become the First Emperor, the pace quickened. In 230, the major states began to fall: first Han, then Zhao (228), Yan (226), Wei (225), Chu (223), and finally the once mighty state of Qi.

The period of political fragmentation and civil war was over at last. The grip of the new government over its conquered territories seemed absolute, and its willingness to employ the most extreme forms of political terror against its own populace appeared to allow no room for rebellion. Who could have guessed that wars even more destructive than those of the past century would erupt again only twelve years later and that these would within three more years sweep the Qin Empire entirely away?

Despite the fact that the rule of Qin lasted only a short season in China, and the fact that the fear with which Qin was regarded by the other states of Classical China was matched by the disdain that later historians would express for the brief period of Qin's autocratic control of all China, the Qin conquest was, in essence, a revolutionary movement, that brought an end not only to political disarray, but to social, political, economic, and intellectual systems that were characteristic of the Classical era. The Qin government was able to effect such dramatic transformations only because throughout the Warring States period, the competing states and cultures of late Zhou China were, without much awareness of the fact, actually undergoing deep social transitions. In this sense, the revolutionary dimensions of the Qin conquest should be seen more as a culmination of a long process, rather than the sudden initiation of change. As we explore the society of Warring States China through further readings, we will observe the accelerating changes that led to the birth of the Imperial state under the Qin and its survival after the Qin collapse.

KEY NAMES

Marquis Wen of Wei	Shang Yang	King Hui of Wei
Lord Mengchang	Mencius	Lord Xinling
Lü Buwei	Zheng, king of Qin (The First Emperor)	

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Comparing this narrative to the Spring and Autumn Period narrative, list the major differences you see concerning issues of inter-state politics.
2. List the major social trends of the Warring States period and the ways in which they are in evidence in this narrative.
3. How were “retainers” a significant social force during the Warring States era?
4. What aspects of character made Lord Mengchang and Lord Xinling attractive to the historians who portrayed them as positive figures?
5. How would you characterize class divisions within the Warring States elite class, as pictured in this narrative

Sources and Further Readings

No primary text provides the type of detailed narrative of Warring States political history that we find for the Spring and Autumn period in the *Zuo zhuan*. The closest comparable text is a book called the *Zhanguo ce*, or *Intrigues of the Warring States*, which consists largely of collected speeches of political advisors of the period, delivered to rulers in the context of policy discussion. This book was a major source for the historian Sima Qian as he prepared his *Shiji*. However, scholars now view the *Zhanguo ce* as a text composed less to record actual speeches that contained factual information than as a sort of textbook for aspiring courtiers, illustrating how to develop clever policy arguments so as to prevail in their court careers. This view of the text questions the historical reliability of its accounts. (We will discuss the text in a little more detail in reading 2.4.)

A fine summary overview of the Warring States period is provided in the *Cambridge History of Ancient China* (Cambridge: 1999) by Mark Lewis, in his chapter, “Warring State, Political History” (pp. 587-650). Maspero’s *China in Antiquity*, discussed in the reading on the Spring and Autumn Period, also includes a good account. Hsu Cho-yun’s book *Ancient China in Transition*, also noted earlier as an important work for understanding the social dynamic of the entire Eastern Zhou era, is particularly useful in its discussions of social, political, and economic changes that transformed China during the Warring States era. Some of Hsu’s important ideas are challenged in interesting ways by Mark Lewis in his *Sanctioned Violence in Ancient China* (Albany: 1990).