Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

World views and military policies in the early Roman and Western Han empires

Wang, Z.

Citation

Wang, Z. (2015, December 17). *World views and military policies in the early Roman and Western Han empires*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/37048

Version:	Not Applicable (or Unknown)
License:	Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden
Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/37048

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page

Universiteit Leiden

The handle http://hdl.handle.net/1887/37048 holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

Author: Zhongxiao Wang
Title: World views and military policies in the Early Roman and Western Han empires
Issue Date: 2015-12-17

Chapter 6
The Son of Heaven: from the Great Unifier to the Wise Monarch

1. The roles of the Chinese emperors of the Qin and Han dynasties

Unlike Rome, China had a long-standing tradition of monarchy before the Empire emerged. Although Qin Shi Huang is seen as the first emperor in Chinese history, in many respects the duties he was expected to fulfill and the roles he was expected to play were determined by the monarchic traditions of the pre-Qin period.

One century before the unification of China in 221 BC, Qin had attained great power as a result of Shang Yang's reforms. These reforms significantly weakened the influence of the hereditary aristocratic families and helped to centralize power in the hands of the Qin rulers. Benefiting from this strong basis, Qin Shi Huang managed to incorporate all Chinese states within a unified empire. As noted in Chapter Two, he changed the title of the Qin monarch from king to "August Thearch" to underline the fact that his power exceeded that of all previous overlords and kings. Interestingly, when Liu Bang and his followers established a new dynasty in 202, he decided to keep the title of "August Thearch", despite the fact that Qin Shi Huang had been deeply detested by many of his subjects.[1]

The roles that the early Chinese emperors played reflected the long-standing traditions of Chinese monarchy and kingship. Nevertheless, these roles were not static and some important new developments took place. For instance, by carrying out various sacrifices the emperor highlighted his close connections with the highest deities, a tactical move which allowed him to endow himself with superhuman powers which, on paper, liberated him from all the restrictions of the terrestrial world.

The Chinese emperor was much more than the lawgiver and the supreme judge, he was the embodiment of law and justice; he had the authority to override existing laws.[2] This situation contrasts sharply with the case of his

[1] *Shiji* 8, 379.

[2] In contrast to the Roman emperors, Chinese emperors seem not to have participated in lawmaking and they did not often intervene in particular law cases. Instead, an emperor usually appointed or ordered certain officials to tackle various kinds of judicial or legal matters.

counterpart in Rome, where "good" emperors were supposed to subscribe to the principle *leges super principem*.[3]

The Chinese emperor was also the head of the administration. No important political decision was made without consulting the emperor. Although imperial decision making usually meant that the emperor discussed specific issues with court officials,[4] it should be noted that the extent to which emperors applied themselves to state business depended on the actual capabilities and on the character of the reigning monarch. Sima Qian records that the First Emperor was a diligent ruler who spent a great deal of his time reading and responding to submissions written on bamboo strips.[5] In contrast to his diligence, the early emperors of the Western Han dynasty showed less enthusiasm for dealing with public affairs. Part of this neglect can be attributed to the fact that, during the early Han period, court culture was influenced by the Huang Lao doctrine which decreed that emperors should adhere to the principle of "reigning without interference" (*Wuwei er zhi* 無為而治).[6] In practical terms, this doctrine meant that the emperor was expected to respond passively to the propositions submitted by his subjects.[7] However, this is not to say that all early Han emperors remained indifferent to all practical matters. As already discussed, the degree of their active involvement in administrative affairs depended on the inclinations and personalities of the individual emperors.[8]

---

[3] Plin. *Pan.* 65,1: *quod ego nunc primum audio, nunc primum disco, non est "princeps super leges" sed "leges super princepem"* (*what I now heard, and what I just now learned, is not "the princeps is above the laws", but "the laws are above the princeps"*). The *Lex de imperio Vespasiani* also refers to the principle *leges super principem*, although the *princeps* is said to be exempt from certain laws. See *ILS* XI 244 = McCrum and Woodhead (1961) 1-2; Ferri (2003) 74, n.179.

[4] Examples can be found in Chapter 4 in which I address Han foreign policies towards the Xiongnu.

[5] *Shiji* 6, 258.

[6] A doctrine of *wuwei* is set out in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, a work produced at the court of Liu An 劉安 (180-122 BC), who was a cousin and rival of Emperor Wu. The author of this treatise argues that "the ruler of people" (*renzhu* 人主) should remain quiescent and take no part in public affairs. For a translation of three chapters of this treatise and a commentary, see Major (1993). For the latest studies on the *Huainanzi*, see the collected papers edited by Queen and Puett (2014).

[7] As the *Huainanzi* says, "the method of the ruler of mankind is such that he is situated in a position in which no positive action is taken; he sets in motion orders which are not spoken." See Loewe (2004) 555.

[8] Emperor Wu was a famously ambitious monarch, his keen intervention in almost every aspect of the state affairs elicited the criticism of some conservative senior

For example, both Emperor Wen and Emperor Jing were praised by Sima Qian because during their reigns the people of the empire were exempted from various corvée duties and not disturbed by constant demands for them to do military service.[9] The approach of these emperors stands in sharp contrast to that of Emperor Wu whose energetic interference in almost every aspect of state affairs elicited bitter criticism from some senior officials after his death. In this context it should be remembered that, during the reigns of Emperors Wen and Jing, the Han empire was at a grave disadvantage in its dealings with the Xiongnu on the northern frontiers. In contrast to this, Emperor Wu launched a series of ambitious military campaigns which resulted in the total defeat of the Xiongnu and also significantly extended Han territory. Interestingly, a close look at the historical accounts relating to the Western Han period reveals that Emperor Wu's achievements did not win him much praise in the classical texts.[10] During the final years of his reign, Emperor Wu himself issued an edict in which he admitted that his imperial militaristic policies had seriously disturbed the population of the empire and had provoked many complaints.[11]

Needless to say, although much more can be said about imperial roles in Qin and Han China, even this very brief survey is enough to reveal some of the distinctive features of Chinese conceptions of the roles emperors had to play. In the first part of this chapter, I shall focus specifically on the relationship between Chinese emperors and the army. Obviously, the Chinese emperor had the final say in decision making to do with military affairs,[12] but in striking contrast to Roman emperors, Chinese emperors rarely appeared on the battlefield to take personal command of their armies. On the contrary, almost all the emperors of the Qin and Han empires avoided direct involvement in warfare and violence. It is my contention that this difference between Roman and Chinese ideas about the relationship between the emperor and the army is connected to the difference in Roman and Chinese worldviews which has been discussed in the first two chapters as well as to differences in actual military

---

officials. See Tian Yuqing 田餘慶 (2004) 55-61.

[9] *Shiji* 10-11, 413-449.

[10] For Ban Gu's general appraisal on the life of Emperor Wu, see the *Hanshu* 23, 1101. For Sima Qian's implicit criticisms of his contemporary, Emperor Wu, see Durrant (1995) 159, n.35.

[11] *Zizhi Tongjian* 22, 739. For the discussion about the edict, see Chen Suzhen (2011) 282-289.

[12] Some examples are given in Chapter 4 in the discussion of the policies for dealing with the Xiongnu at court.

policies. In brief, an examination of the relationship between Chinese emperors and the army helps us to discern some of the distinguishing features of the workings of imperial power in Qin and Han China, and it simultaneously illuminates some of the driving forces behind the frontier policies pursued by Chinese emperors between the late third and late first centuries BC.

2. The anti-militaristic tradition in Pre-Imperial and Early-Imperial China

Students of ancient Chinese history are familiar with the thoughts of Confucius and his followers, who argued that the best way to subdue an enemy was not by violence but by the exercise of benevolence, righteousness and ritual. Such ideas can be traced back to the fifth century BC or even earlier. It should be noted that from the late Spring and Autumn period, especially during the Warring States period when the so-called "Hundred Schools" (*Baijia* 百家) of Thought became a dominant force in Chinese intellectual life, an anti-warfare mentality became increasingly common among the members of the elite. Master Mo (Mozi 墨子 d. 391 BC), the founder of Mohism, was the most famous anti-war thinker of the early Warring States period. His antipathy to war is well reflected in his philosophical ideal of "universal love" (*jianai* 兼愛) and "no offensive warfare" (*feigong* 非攻).[13] Developing Confucian thought, Mencius emphasized the ruler's *de* 德 (virtue) and *ren* 仁 (benevolence), claiming that the wise ruler should use his superb moral qualities rather than force of arms to attain the unification of the *tianxia*.[14] Master Zhuang (Zhuangzi 莊子 d. 280 BC), the most prominent representative of Taoism after Laozi 老子, similarly stressed that violence was not the optimal way to solve conflicts.[15] A basically

[13] About the theory of war propounded by Mozi and his followers, see Huang Pumin 黃樸民 (1995); Paul van Els (2013).

[14] In Mencius' opinion, the sole righteous reason to begin a war is to eliminate despotic rule. Nevertheless, Mencius maintains that, if the ruler is sufficiently benevolent, war and violence can and will be avoided, and the entire world will be peaceable and unified. This idea is clearly reflected in the dialogue between Mencius and King Lianghui 梁惠王. The latter asked Mencius how the *tianxia* could be pacified. Mencius replied that, to be at peace, the *tianxia* would have to be unified. The king then asked who could unify the *tianxia*, and Mencius replied this could be done by a person who is not obsessed with killing. See *Mengzi* 1,6: 12.

[15] Lewis sees Mencius as the most forthright pacifist in ancient China. See Lewis (1990)

negative attitude to warfare is even to be found in the writings of the school of Militarism. In *The Art of War* (*Sunzi Bingfa* 孫子兵法), a well-known military treatise ascribed to Sun Wu 孫武 (544-496 BC), the author subscribes to the view that not fighting is the best way of subduing the enemy.[16]

From the mid-Warring States period, an increasing number of educated men became aware of the fact that power could be obtained only by using violence, and this change of heart prompted the emergence of more positive attitudes towards warfare. Shang Yang, the architect of the reforms of the Qin state in the fourth century BC, stressed the crucial roles of both warfare and agriculture in the struggle for the supreme power in a state. He believed that a wise monarch should mobilize all available resources to develop farming but also not neglect to prepare for war.[17] Han Fei 韓非 (280-233 BC), a philosopher and Shang Yang's successor in Legalism, who was also a Qin statesman, emphasized the crucial role of warfare in bringing about political unification.[18] He frowned on the Confucian values which emphasized the ruler's personal morality, arguing that a state could not rise to prominence if the ruler despised warfare.

Nevertheless, the Legalists' concern with military strength did not mean that they saw war as the best option if the ruler's political goals could be achieved in other ways. What they did argue was that active preparation for warfare was the only effective way to achieve unification. On the eve of imperial unification, an increasing number of educated men saw warfare as an

---

129. Personally I think Zhuangzi possibly goes even farther than Mencius in condemning fighting. Zhuangzi opposes violence in any form. In the eyes of Zhuangzi, because they were involved in killing and provoked hostility Huangdi, King Tang of Shang and King Wu of Zhou were not as wise as the Confucian and Mohist thinkers thought. See *Zhuangzi* 8,29: 260.

[16] See *Sunzi*, 3: 21. Paul van Els has pointed out the flaws in the simplified anti-thetical views of the pro-war and pro-peace advocates. See van Els (2013) 14.

[17] Shang Yang's thought is reflected in various chapters of *The Book of Lord Shang* (*Shangjun Shu* 商君書). For the importance of agriculture and warfare, see such chapters as *The establishment of foundamentals* (*Liben* 立本), *Agriculture and war* (*Nongzhan* 農戰), *Attention to law* (*Shenfa* 慎法) and *Making orders strict* (*Jinling* 靳令). For an English translation of the *Shangjun Shu*, see Duyvendak (1928).

[18] Interestingly, although Hanfei stresses the importance of military strength in the rise of the state, he places little value on the ruler's personal valour and military spirit. Hanfei was adamant that the ruler should remain in his palace, regulating the state by assigning rewards and punishments and by exercising cruelty and cunning. See Moody (2011).

important means by which to establish a rich and powerful state, but even in their eyes military effort was nothing more than a device by which to end discord, bolster the monarchy and achieve unification.

The stele inscriptions which were set up by First Emperor of the unified empire reflect Qin attitudes to war. For the purposes of this investigation the following five passages are of particular interest:

> *He launched punitive attacks against rebellions. His might shook the four extremities. His martial virtue and righteousness extended to the four regions. …Thenceforth, the Emperor unified the* tianxia*, under one lineage. Warfare shall not occur again!* 討伐亂逆，威動四極，武義直方……乃今皇帝，一家天下，兵不復起。[19]

> *The black-headed people are at peace and tranquil, and do not use weapons and armour.*黔首安寧，不用兵革。[20]

> *The six states had been restive and perverse, greedy and criminal, slaughtering endlessly. The Emperor felt sympathy for the multitudes, so he mobilized his troops to campaign and display martial virtue.* 六國回闢，貪戾無厭，虐殺不已。皇帝哀眾，遂發討師，奮揚武德[21]。

> *Disaster and harm were cut off and stopped, and arms shall forever be halted.*淄害絕息，永偃戎兵。[22]

> *The six kings were despotic and rebellious, greedy and criminal, arrogant and violent…. Relying their strength, they grew overbearing, and frequently put arms and troops into action… By righteouness and awesome might we exterminated them…*六王專倍，貪戾傲猛……負力而驕，數動甲兵……義威誅之……。[23]

As these texts are highly rhetorical, they should not be interpreted as a reflection of the emperor's true feelings towards violence. Nonetheless, from a comparative perspective it is noteworthy that, in his *Res Gestae*, which is equally rhetorical, Augustus displays a radically different attitude towards warfare. As

[19] Inscription of Mt Yi, 4-6; 28-30.
[20] Inscription of Mt Langxie, 55-56.
[21] Inscription of Mt Zhifu, 16-21.
[22] Inscription of Mt Zhifu Dong-guan, 17-18.
[23] Inscription of Mt Kuaiji, 19-20; 23-24; 31.

are Augustus' military feats, Qin Shi Huang's martial prowess is obviously presented in a positive light. However, unlike the *Res Gestae*, which celebrates the subjugation of foreign countries and peoples, the First Emperor does not present his military achievements as a splendid enterprise, despite the fact that the newly unified empire adopted Legalism, noted for its more positive attitude towards warfare, as its basic ideology. Instead of being celebrated as a glorious activity *per se*, war is presented as a righteous activity whose purpose was to eliminate the atrocities and ruthlessness of the six kings and to liberate the people of the *tianxia* from their enslavement to despotic rule.[24] This assertion is emphasized by the fact that waging war without a righteous purpose is condemned; the unquestionable message of the last text. In other words, after despotism has been obliterated, peace and order have been restored and the *tianxia* has been unified, fighting must stop.

Adopting the same attitude to warfare found in the stele inscriptions, the *Shiji* reports that, after the six states had been eliminated, weapons were collected from the length and breadth of the *tianxia* and taken to the capital city of Xianyang, where they were melted down and used to fashion twelve metal statues of men.[25] While this was happening, the imperial army was redeployed to the frontiers under the command of various generals. Distancing himself from the military sphere, the emperor devoted himself to restoring social order, law-making and implementing various radical cultural and economic reforms designed to solidify the unification of the empire.

In his seminal work on violence in early China, Mark Lewis points out that, by the sixth and fifth centuries BC, an anti-militaristic culture had taken root in China and that, from this period, it became far less common for the rulers of warring states to lead their troops in person.[26] Instead, soldiers were entrusted to the hands of generals who were professional military men. The reasons behind this development can be sought in the declining importance of the city states and the concomitant rise of territorial states after the decline of Zhou. During this process, changes in weaponry and other military innovations exacerbated the cruelty of war. Simultaneously, the numbers of men needed to wage a war increased dramatically. As a result, after the sixth and fifth centuries

[24] In classical texts, this type of war is sometimes referred to as *yi bing* 義兵, the righteous war. I shall discuss it and its difference with the Roman *bellum iustum* in the final section of this chapter.
[25] *Shiji* 6, 239.
[26] Lewis (1990) 15-52.

BC, warfare was no longer a predominantly aristocratic activity.[27] After the introduction of quasi-universal military service, the states of Pre-Imperial China grew much more bellicose and aggressive, and the divide between military and civil society simultaneously deepened with the emergence of professional generals.[28] The new military specialists needed to have a thorough grounding in military affairs and the skill required to command armies. After military command had been transferred to these professional generals, they enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in military affairs.

Some might want to attribute the ideology of anti-militarism simply to the ideals formulated by Confucius and his followers. Although the influence of Confucianism cannot be denied, it would be a mistake to see it an autonomous force operating independently of military and societal developments. Confucianism claimed that a wise ruler should be able to ensure the harmony and compliance of everything under heaven by exercising the power of virtue rather than by using force. This philosophy made it clear that it made no sense for a ruler to lead armies.[29] It should be noted that, during the same period, non-Confucian schools of thought also attached little importance to the ruler's military ethos and duties, as mentioned above. These anti-militaristic ideologies perfectly fitted the circumstances of the Warring States period in which military leadership was, in most cases, transferred to subordinate generals. Monarchs were simply not supposed to become too deeply involved in military affairs.[30]

In classical literary sources, some references can be found to kings leading their armies in person. The most famous example is that of King Wuling of Zhao 趙武靈王 (r.325-299 BC) in the middle of the Warring States period.[31] Through a series of reforms, King Wuling forced the Zhao nobles to adopt the same clothes as the Hu barbarians and to learn how to wield a bow on horseback. Nevertheless, such examples are extremely rare in early China. Even the aggressive policy of King Wuling, whose territory extended into present-day Inner Mongolia and was therefore on the frontline, had been developed in response to the constant raids of the nomadic tribes living on the northern borders.[32]

[27] Rosenstein (2009) 40.
[28] Lewis (1990) 127.
[29] For example, Mencius stresses that the virtues of the ruler eliminated any need for a commander. See Lewis (1990) 129.
[30] *Sunzi* 9: 75.
[31] About King Wuling of Zhao and his reforms, see *Shiji* 43, 1806*ff.*
[32] For the motives of the military actions of King Wuling of Zhao, see Di Cosmo's

Although intense warfare and high levels of violence were the hallmarks of the last phase of the Warring States period, all the victorious armies of Qin were commanded by professional generals. In striking contrast to the situation in the Roman empire, Chinese rulers had ceased to command armies and to involve themselves personally in military affairs long before the foundation of the empire.[33] This clear distinction between civilian and military affairs continued to exert a profound influence on Chinese dynastic culture, and contributed to the rise and persistence of conceptions about the responsibilities and duties of rulers in which martial qualities and achievements did not play any significant part.

3. Soldiers and civilians in the Qin and Western Han periods

In his monograph on the military meritocracy of the early Western Han period, Li Kaiyuan 李開元 describes in elaborate detail how after the collapse of Qin, as a sort of regional "bandit group" Liu Bang and his followers step by step built up a large-scale military and political entity. So successful were they that, in only a few years, the Liu Bang group had established an empire encompassing the territories of Qin.[34] Quoting a statement made by Liu Bang himself, Li Kaiyuan concludes that control over the *tianxia* was established by weapons and on horseback.[35] After the creation of the Han empire, all senior posts at the imperial court and in the central government, like that of the Chancellor 丞相, the Supreme Commander 太尉 and the Imperial Councillor 御史大夫, were awarded to close friends of Liu Bang who had won military honours during the latter's bid for power.[36] At the same time, a new "meritocratic class" consisting of approximately 600,000 men who had given Liu Bang military support was created.[37] This class became the new nobility of Han society.[38]

---

analysis, Di Cosmo (2008) 134-138.

[33] I shall leave the main comparative discussion of this issue in the summary at the end of the chapter.

[34] This work has become an influential monograph on studies of early Chinese imperial history in Chinese and Japanese scholarship, but has not yet been paid sufficient attention by Western scholars.

[35] *Cf.* Section 4 of this chapter.

[36] According to Li Kaiyuan, old friends from Liu's hometown accounted for 47% of the highest offices during the reign of Emperor Gao and for 67% during the reign of Empress Lü. See Li (2000) 158; Wang Aihe (2001) 33.

[37] Li Kaiyuan (2000) 225.

In the period immediately following the foundation of the Han empire, the emperor realized that he had to rely on the men who had supported him. Therefore, when Emperor Gao ascended the throne, many prominent ministers were granted large tracts of land to "share the *tianxia*" (*gong tianxia* 共天下).[39] Later, the emperor would fear that his reign was under threat from those of his former supporters who maintained armies in their allotted territories. Therefore, shortly after the establishment of Han, many generals, among them Han Xin 韓信, Xin of King Han 韓王信, Ying Bu 英布 and Lu Wan 盧綰, were murdered on the pretext that they had rebelled against the new emperor. After Emperor's Gao's death, power devolved into the hands of the Empress Dowager Lü and her family and the position of the Western Han nobility was weakened even more.[40]

In the previous section, attention was drawn to the fact that Chinese rulers had been in the habit of entrusting military commands to professional generals since the Warring States period. However, during the Qin and Han empires the distinction between military commanders and civil administrators became less rigid. As before, the task of carrying out military missions was often entrusted to people who had ample military experience and a specialized knowledge of fighting. Nevertheless, many of these men had not been specifically trained as generals, and their long careers were often not exclusively spent in the army. A civil official could become a general by imperial appointment. Conversely, some famous military commanders of the Western Han period, like Zhou Bo 周勃, Wei Qing, Li Guang 李廣, Huo Qubing and Gongsun He, went on to pursue civil careers in the local or central administration after building up a military reputation by commanding armies against the barbarians. It should be emphasized that there is nothing to suggest that military glory was regarded as an important asset to those wishing to pursue an administrative career. The conclusion is rather that, as soon as the stability of the new regime was ensured, the Han emperors began to build up a vast bureaucratic apparatus which was thoroughly civil rather than military in character.

During the reign of Emperor Wu, the government set up a new system for recruiting government officials. Those aspiring to posts in the imperial

---

[38] *ibid.*

[39] Qin Jincai 秦進才 (2004).

[40] For the nobility of the Western Han, see Loewe (2004) 279-323.

administration now had to pass an examination which focused on the presence or absence of various virtues, such as intelligence and excellent virtue (*xianliang* 賢良), uprightness (*fangzheng* 方正) and filial piety and integrity (*xiaolian* 孝廉).[41] Military talent and prestige did not play a part in this competition. Some generals were appointed to prominent positions but principally because they were related to the Liu family rather than on account of their military experience or their popularity with the troops. The most obvious examples are Wei Qing and General Ershi Li Guangli in the reign of Emperor Wu.

Shifting the focus of attention to the armies of the Qin and Han empires, it is difficult to avoid the impression that these were far less professional than their Roman counterparts. On paper, the laws of the Qin and the Western Han stipulated that all adult males had to undergo regular military training and to serve in the army, although only for a very short period.[42] In practice, a large proportion of the population obtained immunity from military obligations by paying a special tax.[43] Lei Haizong's 雷海宗 data reveals that, during the twenty-six foreign wars which were fought during the reign of Emperor Wu, there were at least six campaigns in which the main body of Han troops consisted of such irregular soldiers as convicts, vagrants and foreigners.[44] As mentioned in Chapter Four, Chao Cuo advised Emperor Wen to establish military colonists in the frontier zone with enough land to support themselves by growing their own food. This recommendation reveals the weakness of the early Han imperial army.

4. The emperors, the frontiers and the army

When Qin Shi Huang created his unified empire, the dominant worldview was based on the opposition between the Chinese world, which was conceptualized as a political and geographical entity, and the rising nomadic empire of the

[41] *Ibid.* 175. For the system of recruitment adopted by Emperor Wu, see Loewe (2004) 119-154. For the recruitment and training of officials in the Western Han period, see Yan (2004) 65-70; Loewe (2011) 136-42. For the transformation of the system for selecting officials and the role of examinations between the Western Han period and the Six Dynasties, see Yan Buke (1991).

[42] About the Western Han corvée service and military system, see Lao Gan 勞榦 (1943); Huang Jinyan 黃今言 (1982); Zhang Zhifei 臧知非 (1988); Huang Shuihua 黃水華 (1998); Shigechika Hiroki (1986).

[43] Xie Guihua 謝桂華 (1989); Zhu Shaohou 朱紹侯 (1990) 3-8.

[44] Lei Haizong (2001) 32.

northern steppe. Later this binary worldview became even more entrenched. The distinction between the two geographical concepts of *nei* 内 (inner) and *wai* 外 (outer) became even more important than before, the nomadic barbarian peoples of the steppe, including the Xiongnu, now being regarded as the "other people" who did not belong to the world of the *huaxia*.

As noted in Chapter Two, some of these ideas seem to have taken shape before the foundation of the empire. Some states, in particular Qi and Zhao, had begun to build parts of the Great Wall to mark themselves from the nomads.[45] After Meng Tian's successful attack on the barbarian tribes living beyond the northern frontier of the newly created empire, a new section of the Great Wall was constructed north of the Yellow River.[46] The importance of the construction of the Great Wall in Chinese history cannot be overstated, as O. Lattimore recognized in his classic work *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*.[47] During the next two millennia interactions between the Chinese agrarian world within the Wall and the nomadic world beyond the Great Wall played an important part in Chinese history.[48]

In what follows, I shall focus on the roles that the Qin and early Han emperors were expected to play after the process of unification had been completed and the new conception of a non-barbarian *tianxia* had been established.

I have already referred to the fact that the First Emperor tried to prevent potential rebellions by ordering all the weapons in the old six states to be collected and melted down. Furthermore, the Qin government tried to promote cultural unity on an intellectual level by burning the canonical scriptures (*fen-shu* 焚書) and by burying six hundred Masters and Confucians alive (*keng-ru* 坑儒).[49] Harsh laws were promulgated to prevent revolts. From the stele

---

[45] It should be noted that the construction of the Great Walls in some states on the northern borders in the mid-late Warring States period was not always motivated by defensive considerations. Drawing attention to the Great Wall of Zhao, Baiyin Chagan argues that the principal purpose of the construction of the Great Wall along the Yin mountain range on the Zhao border during the reign of King Wuling was an attempt to expand the amount of arable land controlled by Zhao. See Baiyin Chagan (2000) 81-86.
[46] See Chapter 4.
[47] Lattimore (1951) esp. 13-27.
[48] For a critical assessment of the view that the Great Wall marked the boundary line between the nomadic world and the agrarian Chinese world, see Di Cosmo (2004) 127-160. For the functions of the Great Wall in early imperial China, see Chapter 4.
[49] Qin Shi Huang's real attitude to the Confucians is a matter a dispute. Some scholars pointed out that those who were buried alive by Qin Shi Huang were not Confucian

inscriptions it appears that the emperor also made a series of inspection tours, at least partly for the purpose of strengthening the relationship between himself and the millions of commoners inhabiting the *tianxia*.

Although the Qin and early Han emperors took various measures to prevent future rebellions, they showed little interest in expanding the territory of the empire into the so-called *haiwai*, "the outside world".[50] As a general rule, as far as their relationship with the army was concerned, these emperors followed the Pre-Imperial tradition of avoiding personal involvement in military affairs and appointed professional generals to carry out campaigns and fight battles. Of all the emperors of the Western Han dynasty only Emperor Gao, the founder of the Han empire, actually commanded an army against the Xiongnu during the military campaign of 200 BC. As we have seen, this military adventure ended in a total disaster. Licking its wounds, the Han government now adopted a more defensive frontier policy and, until the end of the Western Han dynasty, not a single military campaign was led by the emperor in person, even after Emperor Wu (r. 141-87 BC) had embarked on a more aggressive military policy.[51]

In stark contrast to the rulers of the Roman empire, who took pride in being addressed as *imperator*, the emperors of the Qin and Han periods never assumed any title referring to a military role.[52] The reason for this is quite simply that the Chinese emperor was not expected to lead his soldiers to or on the battlefield. In fact, any attempt to persuade the ruler to become involved in war was seen as highly problematic and dangerous. When Emperor Gao was troubled by the advice of his statesman about Lu Jia, who was in the habit of arguing that the *tianxia* could be conquered only from horseback rather than by studying the Classics, the latter warned the emperor that, even if the *tianxia* were to be taken by weapons, it could not be ruled in the same way.[53] His advice was praised by the emperor.

---

scholars but Magic Masters. See Zhou Fang (2013); Pines (2013) 232-233.

[50] For a detailed discussion the frontier policies of the Qin and early Han emperors, see Chapter 4.

[51] For a more detailed discussion of frontier policies and the relationship between the Han empire and the Xiongnu, see Chapter 4.

[52] So far none of the generals of Shi Huangdi's famous terracotta army has been identified as the First Emperor. See Falkenhausen, Thote, Pines *et al.* (2008); Pines (2013) 2.

[53] Emperor Gao took pride in the fact that, as a commoner, he conquered the world by "wielding a short sword". See *Shiji* 8, 391.

Another example is presented by the execution of Chao Cuo 晁錯 (200-154 BC). It is said that an important reason for having him killed was that he had tried to persuade Emperor Jing 景帝 (157-141 BC) to quell the rebellions of the seven kingdoms in 154 BC by commanding the imperial army in person.[54]

In the early Western Han era, two fundamental factors reinforced this anti-militaristic ideology. The first of these, as argued in detail in Chapter Four, was that the rise of the powerful Xiongnu confederacy on the steppe in the last decade of the third century, an event which happened to coincide with the creation of the Han empire in the south, impeded expansion to the north. The defeat of the army led by Emperor Gao in 200 BC prompted the Han government to implement an appeasement policy devised to maintain peace and stability in the frontier zone. The second of these factors was that the early Han rulers seem to have felt that the economy and society of their recently created empire needed to recover after the devastations and atrocities of the civil war. This suggestion does go some way towards explaining the popularity, in early Han times, of the Huang Lao doctrine, according to which the emperor should interfere as little as possible in public affairs.[55] For example, when Minister Cao San 曹参 displaced Chancellor Xiao He 萧何 and took charge of state affairs, the emperor expressed his discontent about Cao San's inactivity in administrative issues, suspecting this negligence could be attributed to his own apathy towards public affairs. Cao San countered this criticism by claiming that it was the primary task of the monarch and his Chancellor not to neglect their duties rather than to take the initiative.[56]

As Confucianism gradually gained prominence, the emperors' moral and civic virtues were paid an increasing amount of attention. It is true that the military successes of Emperor Wu elicited a certain amount of praise when his

---

[54] *Shiji* 101, 2747. This was not in fact the most fundamental reason for the execution of Chao Cuo. But, in the eyes of Chao Cuo's antagonists at court, his attempt to persuade the emperor to go the battle presented the best pretext for demanding his death. Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), a famous poet and politician in the Song dynasty, who wrote an essay entitled "On Chao Cuo" (Chao Cuo Lun 晁錯論), rightly pointed this out. See *Su Shi Wenji*, Vol. 4, 107-108.

[55] van Ess (2007) 246.

[56] See *Shiji* 54, 2029-2030. Cao San's reply does not give an accurate picture of Han administration since, as the right-hand man of the emperor, in the early Han period the chancellor was expected to supervise many public affairs. Nevertheless, the story illustrates that the Huang-Lao doctrine was a real force in early Han politics.

aggressive militaristic policy towards the Xiongnu brought spectacular successes. However, in this context it should be noted that when he ascended the throne, the emperor was actually called Liu Che. It was only after his death that he was "canonized" as Emperor "Wu" 武 (martial), evidently because of this martial feats. This assumption raises a problem since because Liu Che's aggressive military policies were criticized both during the final years of his reign and after his death, it is by no means obvious that the title "Wu" should be interpreted as a reflection of a widely shared positive appreciation of his military feats and territorial expansion. In fact, according to the sources, widespread disapproval of Liu Che's policies prompted the Han statesmen to debate whether or not he should be granted any posthumous title at all.[57] When the title was eventually bestowed, it might have been intended as descriptive rather than as unambiguously positive and honorary.

Whatever the case might be, it should not be overlooked that, even though Emperor Wu is regarded as one of the most bellicose monarchs in Chinese history, he never actually gained any experience in commanding the army during his long reign. The only military activity over which this emperor is reported to have presided was a triumphal ritual organized to celebrate the victory which his generals had won over the Xiongnu in 111 BC.[58]

In a nutshell, it is a truism that warfare played an important part in shaping Chinese worldviews. As a result of the power of the Xiongnu nomads living on the periphery of the newly founded Chinese world, initially Chinese rulers did not find themselves in a position from which they could try to establish hegemonic power over the entire far eastern world. Emperor Wu (or his generals) managed to eliminate the Xiongnu threat and conquered many new territories, but his principal aim appears to have been making his empire safe from external attack. The traditional attitudes to warfare and the loose relationship which existed between Chinese rulers and their armies acted as disincentives for pursuing continuous territorial expansion. Unlike their Roman counterparts, the emperors of the Qin and Han dynasties appear to have had little interest in pursuing universal domination over foreign lands and people by military means. This striking difference raises the question of exactly how the idea of "empire" was conceptualized by Chinese intellectuals.

---

57 Loewe (2006) 346.

58 Loewe (2009) trans. Wang Hao 王浩, 148.

5. The emperor as a moral sage

5.1. The **de** *of Qin 秦德*

Various Han sources attribute the rapid demise of Qin to its deficiency in *de* 德, "virtue", or "morality". Jia Yi, a statesman living in the early Western Han period, wrote a famous and thought-provoking essay entitled *Guo Qin lu* 過秦論 (On the Faults of Qin) in which he adopted precisely this position towards Emperor Qin Shi Huang and his son, Qin Ershi 秦二世.[59] As a Confucian thinker, Jia Yi produced good reasons to explain the failure of Qin in terms of a failure to observe the code of conduct (*li*) and righteousness (*yi*), both of which were paramount principles in Confucian morality.[60] The First Emperor and his ill-fated empire were held up as a warning to Han rulers so that they should avoid the faults of Qin. Those writers who tried to convey this message painted a picture of Qin Shi Huang and Qin Ershi which stands in total contrast to the idealized images of the ruler delineated in Confucian ethics.[61] In the light of the

[59] The entire essay can be found in the biography of Shi Huangdi by Sima Qian. See *Shiji* 6, 276-84. This essay can also be found in Jia Yi's politico-ethical treatise, The New Books (*Xinshu* 新書). For the study of Jia Yi's Xinshu, see Charles Sanft's unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Münster, 2005).

[60] *Xinshu*, *baofu* 保傅, 183-185. In contrast to the long-standing dynasties of Shang and Zhou, Jia Yi sees extremely cruel punishments untempered by any moral cultivation as an important reason for the speedy downfall of the Qin. On *li* in Jia Yi's writings, see Chen Suzhen (2011) 145-148.

[61] In the Chinese political landscape, which was dominated by Confucian thought from the early Eastern Han period to the late Qing period, views on the First Emperor have been constantly reshaped by Chinese rulers to serve specific political purposes. Since roughly the early decades of the 20th century, with the escalation of the anti-Confucian campaigns in Chinese society, a number of liberal intellectuals, such as Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (1869-1936), Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) and Hu Shi (1891-1962) 胡適, challenged the stereotypical views of Qin Shi Huang which had long dominated the Chinese ideological realm. They arrived at a re-evaluation of the role played by Qin Shi Huang in Chinese history, promoting the Legalism of Qin as an alternative system to Confucianism (*ru* 儒). Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893-1976) publicly expressed his admiration of Qin Shi Huang's accomplishments, leading Chinese historians to present a far more positive image of the first emperor in Chinese history. Nevertheless, this is not the place for an in-depth examination of the ways in which views about the First Emperor have evolved during the past two millennia. Recent discussions of this topic include Kern (2001), 155-163; Pines (2013) 227-238; and van Ess (2013), 239-257.

existence of this hostile tradition, it is by no means easy to establish how the First Emperor of China perceived his roles and duties, but it is important at least try to achieve a better understanding of these perceptions, if only because they are highly relevant to any attempt to elucidate the nature of the Chinese empire in its early stages.

One of the key terms which still remains to be examined is the appellation "emperor" (*huang-di* 皇帝), a new title coined by Qin Shi Huang himself to broadcast his achievements after heeding the proposals of Chancellor Wang Wan 王綰, Imperial Secretary Feng Jie 馮劫 and Li Si. The passage from Sima Qian's *Annals of Qin Shi Huang* referring to the creation of this new title runs as follows:

> *In days of old, the territory of the Five Emperors was 1,000 square* li*, and beyond this was the territory of the feudal princes and of the barbarians. Some of the feudal princes came to court and some did not, for the Son of Heaven was unable to exercise control [over them]. Now Your Majesty has raised a righteous army to punish the oppressors and bring peace and order to all under Heaven, so that everywhere within the seas has become our provinces and districts and, as a result, the laws and ordinances have been unified. This is something which has never ever existed, which the Five Emperors did not attain in remote antiquity or thereafter. Your servants have carefully discussed this with the scholars of broad learning and, as in antiquity there was the Heavenly August, the Earthly August, and the Supreme August, and the Supreme August was the most highly honored, so your servants, risking death, submit a venerable title, and propose that the King should become "the Supreme August". His commands should be "edicts", his orders should be "decrees", and the Son of Heaven should refer to himself as "the mysterious one".' The King said: 'Omit the word "supreme" and write "august" and pick out the title of "thearch" used from remote antiquity, so that the title will be "August Thearch".*[62] "昔者五帝地方千里，其外侯服夷服諸侯或朝或否，天子不能製。今陛下興義兵，誅殘賊，平定天下，海內為郡縣，法令由一統，自上古以來未嘗有，五帝所不及。臣等謹與博士議曰：古有天皇，有地皇，有泰皇，泰皇最貴。臣等昧死上尊號，王為 '泰皇'。命為'制'，令為'詔'，天子自稱曰'朕'"。 王曰："去 '泰'，著 '皇'，採上古'帝'位號，號曰'皇帝'"。

Sima Qian asserts that the victorious king of Qin was fully aware of the fact that his achievements surpassed those of the three most honourable Augusts

[62] This passage is translated by Dawson. See Dawson (2007) 62.

and the Five Thearchs of remote antiquity. He adopted the character *huang* 皇 (August) to advertise that his grand enterprise was on a par with that of the sages of the past.[63] The title *di* 帝 (Thearch) had been used to address monarchs for many centuries. The king of Qin combined these two characters to form a title which broadcast the fact that his feats surpassed those of all earlier rulers. Shrewdly he established an ideological connection with remote antiquity to increase the legitimacy of his position as emperor.

Writers of the Western Han period attributed the rapid collapse of the Qin to the introduction of cruel laws, abuse of manpower, the heavy burden of public works and high levels of taxation. Ultimately, the Qin rulers themselves were held responsible for the demise of their dynasty. Qin Shi Huang and Ershi were accused of having neglected moral cultivation and of having relied too much on coercion through punishment.

From the mid-Warring States period to the late Western Han period, Legalism 法 and Confucianism 儒 offered two radically different approaches to administration and politics. After the triumph of Confucianism in the first century AD, the moral and civilizing transformation of the *tianxia* became a central theme in treatises dealing with imperial rule. The Qin rulers were heavily influenced by Legalism, but also incorporated moralizing conceptions of imperial power in the ethos of their reigns. In the stele inscriptions of Qin Shi Huang, for example, the term *de* 德, "morality", appears nine times.[64] This has led Martin Kern to call attention to the links between Qin culture and the rituals of the Zhou period.[65] By comparing the texts of the Qin bamboo strips excavated at Shui-hu-di 睡虎地 (in present-day Yunmeng 雲夢, Hubei Province) to the stele inscriptions, scholars like Kanaya Osamu 金谷治, Bodde and Kern have demonstrated that, as far as social and moral concepts are concerned, no clear-cut dividing line existed between Confucianism and

[63] According to *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 (Explanation of Characters), *huang* 皇 means "greatness 大". The Shuowen explains that the character was used to refer to the earliest kings who ruled the *tianxia*. See Xu Shen, Shuowen jiezi zhu 2,185, com. Duan Yucai 段玉裁.

[64] See Chapter 2. In interpreting the sources referring to the Qin emperors, it should be borne in mind that all the writings of classical literature were only collected and compiled many centuries after they were written. The Stele Inscriptions of Qin Shi Huang and some other contemporary sources offer a contemporary window on the self-presentation of the First Emperor.

[65] Kern (1999) 19, note 26.

Legalism. Instead, the same social and cultural values "seem to have succeeded remarkably well in coexisting with Legalism during the First Emperor's reign."[66]

The upshot has to be that the existence of what was known as the *Hundred Schools of Thoughts* in the mid-late Warring States period does not imply the existence of radically different and contesting views about the duties of rulers.[67] In the stele inscriptions of Shi Huangdi, restoring peace, order and harmonious social standards are presented as essential prerequisites for the creation of a stable and prosperous society governed by laws and regulations. In short, the emphasis on legal principles does not necessarily mean that moral ethics played no part in the Qin conception of imperial administration and that, consequently, the emphasis on the ruler's moral cultivation cannot be regarded as an exclusively Confucian theme.[68]

5.2. The emperor as a source of moral transformation in the Western Han period

Confucian officials of the early Han period such as Lu Jia paid ample attention to the ruler's moral self-cultivation. Lu Jia's main contribution was the formulation of a moral-cosmic philosophical doctrine which combined Confucian moral doctrine with cosmological theories.[69] Lu Jia claimed that the legendary kings of remote antiquity had been sages who possessed superb moral and intellectual qualities. Later Chinese rulers were believed to have applied the classical writings which had been transmitted from this legendary period in their government of the state and the people. Confucius was assigned a key role because he had classified and collated various kinds of classical writings, among them the Book of Poetry 詩, the Book of Documents 書, the Book of Music 樂 and the Book of Rituals 禮.[70] Lu Jia believed that any ruler

[66] Bodde (1990) 75-76; Kern (2000) 165. The compilation of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, the encyclopaedic compendium compiled under the patronage of Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (291-235 BC), Chancellor of the Qin state, might be seen as a sign that various prominent philosophical ideas which had developed since the late Spring and Autumn and early Warring States period were beginning to converge.

[67] Kern (2000) 165-166.

[68] Lu Xiufen (2006).

[69] On Lu Jia's politico-philosophical principles, see Wang Aihe (2000) 145-47.

[70] Confucius presented himself as a transmitter rather than as an original thinker. For example, see Lunyu 7,1: *The Master said, A transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients, I venture to compare myself with our old Peng.*

who did not adhere to the ethical values laid down by Confucius and his disciples displayed an insufficient knowledge of Heaven. As did Jia Yi, whose ideas have already been discussed, Lu Jia attributed the failure of Qin to the moral deficiencies of its rulers. As already noted, Lu warned Emperor Gao that, if he wanted to avoid the fate of Qin, he should follow the path of morality in order to maintain the sovereignty.[71] Given the fact that the early Han court was heavily influenced by the Huang-Lao school of thought, particularly under the patronage of Empress Dowager Dou 竇太后, the influence of Lu Jia's theory on the practical politics in this period can hardly be overestimated.[72]

The influence of Lu Jia's theory can also be seen in the writings of such later thinkers, as Dong Zhongshu's 董仲舒, who developed the innovative theory of "the Resonance between Human and Heaven" (*tianren ganying* 天人感應).[73] Influenced by Lu Jia's moral-cosmic theory, Dong Zhongshu stressed the importance of the emperor's moral duty in connecting Heaven and mankind. Dong believed that all portents which can be observed in the temporal world are to be interpreted as revelations made to mankind by Heaven. Auspicious portents signified that Heaven was content with the way the temporal monarch ruled by exercising his superb moral qualities, whereas bad omens were meant to alert the emperor to the fact that his rule was not entirely based on the principle of moral transformation. According to this theory, the principal duty of the ruler was to act as an intermediary between men and Heaven rather than as a lawgiver, a bureaucratic administrator or an effective general.[74] This aim

[71] In the first part of this chapter, I have mentioned the dialogue between Emperor Gao and Lu about the best way to rule the *tianxia*. In the Xinyu, the author not only emphasizes the importance to monarchs of the self-cultivation of morality, but also advocates that crown princes should receive a moral education from childhood. This required the employment of sagacious teachers capable of assisting the young masters to govern their behaviour and cultivate their virtues.

[72] For the Huang Lao school of thought and its relation to the early Han politics, see the PhD dissertation of Csikszentmihalyi (1994) esp. 7-58. M. Loewe has pointed out that, in the early years of the Western Han, 'the references in official writings to the character, thoughts and actions of Confucius, or to the values of his sayings, are rare, one might almost say extremely rare.' See Loewe (2012) 7-8.

[73] Dong's philosophical thoughts and political beliefs have been treated in many monographs and essays. See Loewe's latest monograph: *Dong Zhongshu: The Confucian Heritage and the Chunqiu Fanlu*, 2011.

[74] Di Cosmo claims that one of the roles of the Chinese emperor was that of supreme lawgiver. See Di Cosmo (2004) 218. It has been said of the Chinese emperor that "his will —or whim —could override any existing regulations or immunities", see Hulsewé (1986) 529. Pertinently the emperor's role as a lawmaker or lawgiver is not highlighted

was achievable if the emperor ruled the world by observing Confucian moral values. In short, the emperor should emulate the behaviour of the wise kings of the past and set his people a moral example. Only in this way could Heavenly favour be procured and the legitimacy of imperial authority be put on a firm footing.[75]

The promotion of Confucian moral principles by Dong Zhongshu and other Confucian scholars was supported by Emperor Wu. In 136 BC the latter ordered the creation of the position of the Erudite (*Boshi* 博士) to supervise the teaching of the Five Classics (*Wujing Boshi* 五經博士) and in 124 BC he opened the Academy (*Taixue*, 太學) in the capital Chang'an.[76] However, Jia Yi's exile from the imperial court and Dong Zhongshu's failure to gain admittance to the emperor's inner circle of advisors are evidence that the Confucian scholar-officials had not yet completely prevailed over other schools of thought. In the *Shiji* Sima Qian obliquely criticizes the emperor's obsession with witchcraft and magical powers.[77] As far as Confucians were concerned, the pursuit of such things was incompatible with traditional values.

During the final years of Emperor Wu's reign, his flamboyant personality and his huge ambitions in both domestic and foreign policy began to draw critical comments from Confucian officials. As was the First Emperor, he was criticized for being obsessed with visiting localities associated with various divine beings and spirits, for being unable to control his appetite for foreign exotics and for trying to obtain elixirs which would make him immortal.[78] On a more pragmatic level, in order to finance the costly wars against the Xiongnu and other barbarian peoples, the emperor carried out a series of unpopular economic reforms, which included the creation of a state monopoly on the

---

in classical literature. In my view, the main roles of the Chinese emperor were that of upholder of order and rituals in the everyday world, and that of being a living moral example, setting the standard for the rest of society. Cf. Gan Huaizhen (2008) 381-391.

[75] For the relationship between the emperor and Heaven, see the discussion below.

[76] For discussions of the establishment of the positions of erudites to teach the Five Classics and of the Academy, see Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅 (1976); Yang Hongnian 楊鴻年 (1985) 191-222.

[77] Sima Qian credited Ji An 汲黯, an administrator and Huang-Lao adherent in the reign of Emperor Wu, with criticizing the emperor's "extravagance behind the façade of benevolence and righteousness". See *Shiji* 120, 3105; *Hanshu* 60, 2317.

[78] Puett (2011), 175; Nylan (2008), 49-50. Both Shi Huangdi and Wu were also criticized for their self-absorption and self-aggrandizement.

production of iron and salt.[79] The task of implementing these reforms was entrusted to a group of cruel officials (*kuli* 酷吏).[80] These policies and concomitant measures explain why the regime of Emperor Wu has been summed up as "Confucianism outside but Legalism inside". (*wai Ru nei Fa* 外儒內法).[81]

Between Emperor Wu's death and the mid-first century BC, Han rulers began to place even more emphasis on Confucian values. Towards the end of Emperor Xuan's reign, a conference was organized in order to establish the value which should be attached to certain exegetical texts, particularly to those of the two commentaries on Confucius' *Chunqiu* 春秋 (The Spring and Autumn Annals), namely *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳 (Gongyang's Commentary) and *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳 (Guliang's Commentary).[82] As Loewe has pointed out, this event can be seen "as the first step towards the formation of a uniformly acceptable set of Confucian ideas."[83] Emperor Yuan 元帝 (r. 49-33 BC) seems to have been the first emperor since Emperor Gao to have received a thorough classical education. He systemically studied such Confucian canons as the Book of Poetry 詩, the Book of Documents 書 and the Analects 論語, and in doing so contributed to the growing status of Confucianism. As already established, Confucian thought highlighted the virtues and merits of the wise rulers of the early Zhou period and saw self-cultivation and the fulfilment of moral obligations in accordance with the Confucian tenets as the ruler's primary duties.

A key figure in promoting the image of the Western Zhou period as a "Golden Age" was the usurper Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BC-AD 23), who launched a series of reforms under the mantle of Zhou traditions during his short reign (AD 9-23).[84] His self-presentation as ruler was based on the idea that a worthy ruler should display the same superb virtues as the ancient sages,

---

[79] Nylan (2008), 49-50.

[80] In the works of both Sima Qian and Ban Gu, the stories about a number of cruel officials can be found.

[81] Loewe (1986) 154.

[82] Loewe (2012) 25.

[83] Loewe (2012) 26.

[84] There has been plenty of research on Wang Mang's reforms behind the façade of ancient Zhou institutions and his short-lived reign, and hence it does not require further discussion here. For example, see Goodrich (1957) 114-118. About Wang Mang and the pseudo text of the *Rituals of Zhou*, see Puett (2010).

an aim which could be achieved by adhering to the moral guidelines outlined in the classical canons.[85] Wang Mang's dream of a renaissance of the Zhou age was clearly inspired by Confucius' over-idealized depiction of the Western Zhou system. Wang associated himself with the Duke of Zhou who was thought to have instituted the Zhou ritual system and afterwards reinforced the legitimacy of his rule by linking the present to the past. Unlike Qin Shi Huang, Wang refused to identify himself as the creator of a new era. Wang's attempt to return to the institutions and rituals of Zhou failed, but his policies did stimulate the development of Confucianism during the early Eastern Han dynasty.

After Wang Mang's political experiment had failed, his nostalgia for ritual and institutions of the Western Zhou meant that they were tainted, but this did not result in a dismissal of Confucian values. On the contrary, in the early Eastern Han period Confucian officials continued to occupy key positions at the imperial court and in local administration, exerting a profound influence on emperors.[86] Precisely because Confucianism remained important, an attempt was made to end the disputes which had arisen between different branches of Confucian thought and to establish a unitary version of the most important classical texts. In 79, during the reign of Emperor Zhang 章帝 (r. 75-88), a court conference was convened in the White Tiger Hall (Baihu Tang 白虎堂) for this purpose. In accordance with a proposal made by the senior official Chunyu Gong 淳于恭, the historian Ban Gu compiled a book entitled *Baihu Tong* 白虎通, based on the discussions which had been held during the conference.

One of the conclusions which emerges from the foregoing discussion is that the time span between the mid-Western and early Eastern Han periods was a key period in the standardization of the Confucian classics.[87] Simultaneously, Confucianism became the mainstream school of thought, a position which it would keep for almost 2,000 years. According to the standardized Confucian tenets, in their late-Western Han shape, the most important obligation that the

[85] Nylan (2008) 39-64.
[86] Loewe (2012) 27-30.
[87] The course of the canonization of the Confucian Classics since the first century AD has been marked by very complicated debates among Chinese scholars, focusing on the Old Text and the New Text of the classical scriptures, which lasted for over two thousand years till the early twentieth century; see Kramers (1986) 760-764; van Ess (1994).

emperor had to fulfill was to study and emulate the acts of the sages of remote antiquity. Despite the spectacular failure of Wang Mang's reforms, the idea that the ruler should govern his behaviour by studying the lessons of the superb moral sages, which could be consulted in a set of authorized texts, had found general acceptance by the end of the first century AD. As a result of this development, such Confucian virtues as *li* 禮 (ritual behaviour) and *xiao* 孝 (filial piety) increasingly gained ground as the principles of behaviour to which any gentleman (*junzi* 君子) was supposed to adhere.

However, if moral excellence was the most important defining characteristic of rulers, how could the principle of dynastic succession be justified? The principle of hereditary succession to power had been followed since the first three Chinese dynasties, Xia, Shang and Zhou. When Qin Shi Huang established the unified empire, he did not abolish this system but strengthened it by proclaiming that the empire would be ruled by his descendants for 10,000 generations.[88] Likewise, succession to power during the Western Han period was based on the principle that control over the *tianxia* was to be transmitted through Liu Bang's lineage.[89] It stands to reason that under this system, not all occupants of the imperial throne would be on a par with the legendary wise kings of remote antiquity.

The next section reveals how this thorny issue stimulated some educated men to look for other ways of legitimizing imperial rule. One of their solutions was to develop the theory that the legitimacy of the emperor's rule derived not only from his superior moral qualities, but also from the fact that he ruled by virtue of a Mandate given by Heaven.

6. The image of emperor as Son of Heaven

It should be noted that the term *tianzi* 天子 (Son of Heaven) was not an innovation when the Qin empire was founded in 221 BC. However, to explore

---

[88] *Shiji* 6, 254.

[89] The *Hansu* reports that, after he founded the Han dynasty, Emperor Gao sacrificed a white horse and swore an oath that, with the exception of Liu's lineage, whomsoever made himself king would incur the hostility of the whole empire. See *Hanshu* 40, 2047. After the death of Liu Bang, the Empress Dowager Lü seized power. Her elevation as a consort from outside the clan of Liu ultimately provoked conflicts between the ruling clan and Lü's family. With the assistance of honorary senior officials in Liu Bang's time, the influence of Lü's family in the end was removed and the position of the ruling clan was solidified with the accession of Emperor Wen.

the origins of *tianzi* in Chinese political terminology is not an easy undertaking, given the many uncertainties surrounding the transmission of the literary sources between the early Western Zhou and late Warring States periods.[90] Nevertheless, since it is known that Heaven was thought of as the highest deity as early as the Western Zhou period, it is not surprising to find that the ruler of Zhou was called *tianzi*, a term which appears widely in inscriptions of the Western Zhou period after *ca* 1000 BC.[91] In the Spring and Autumn and early Warring States periods, as the power of the Zhou kings declined and the elaborate system of Zhou rituals and sacrifices gradually disintegrated, Heaven fell out of favour as the supreme deity in the religious and political landscape.[92] However, after the Qin had annihilated the six major states and transformed the *tianxia* into a single unified community, the king of Qin, Ying Zheng, adopted a series of brand new names to advertise his accomplishments. As mentioned earlier, Qin Shi Huang dispensed with the title of "king" and chose a new title, August Thearch. Nevertheless the title *tianzi* was maintained. This could be an indication that, as the legitimate successor of the Western Zhou rulers, Qin Shi Huang claimed divine support for his rule and aspired to rule the new empire on the basis of the Mandate of Heaven.[93]

---

[90] About the title *tianzi*, see Yuri Pines (2008) note 7, 69. From the very beginning of their dynasty, the Zhou kings claimed that they acted in the name of Heaven, see e.g., the *He zun*, cast in 1036 BC, at the very beginning of Zhou rule (discussed by Shaughnessy 1997, 77-78). The title "Son of Heaven" was coined later but, by the middle of the Western Zhou period, it was already firmly associated with the kings (Takeuchi 1999). Throughout Zhou history this title remained restricted to the Zhou monarchs. Cf. Eno (2009) 101.

[91] See Takeuchi Yasuhiro 竹内康浩 (2009) 101. As time went by, after around the reigns of King Zhao 昭 (d. 977 BC) and King Mu 穆 (?d. 922 BC), *Tianzi* appears frequently in bronze inscriptions. As Kern notes, "in the corpus of the Jinwen yinde, the royal appellation 'Son of Heaven' appears 13 times (in a total of just eight inscriptions) in the early period, 61 times in the middle period, and 84 times in the late period." See Kern (2009) 148.

[92] Zhu Weizheng 朱維錚 (2008) 331.

[93] Here I do not agree with Pines who argues that "the First Emperor's position vis-à-vis the divine powers was not of subservience but at the very least of equality, if not superiority." See Pines (2013) 269. Pines thinks that Qin Shi Huang, unlike "all known rulers of China", saw himself as a Messianic monarch. But, as I shall argue below, the rites of the *feng* and *shan* conducted on Mount Tai were a ritual to seek to cosmic sanction from the highest divinity, though as to details, the First Emperor could not be quite sure whether or not Heaven was the supreme deity. I agree with Pines' argument when he takes pains to stress the unique and distinct character of the new empire and the idiosyncratic personality of the First Emperor. But the inscriptions and transmitted

It is notable that the tours of inspection on which Qin Shi Huang's embarked between 219 and 210 BC were invariably associated with a series of religious practices, of which the most famous and significant one was the sacrificial performance of *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 on Mount Tai.[94] These sacrifices suggest that, while the new ruler was trying to promulgate his image as the supreme monarch of the *tianxia*, he was also intent on affirming the existence of a relationship with Heaven by performing sacrifices on sacred mountains. This would also explain why Sima Qian pays so much attention to the Emperor's cultic activities.

Qin Shi Huang was not the first Chinese monarch to ascend sacred mountains to perform such sacrifices. Chinese historiography relates that the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黃帝), who reigned in the mythical age of remote antiquity, was the first sage-ruler who managed to perform the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices on a sacred mountain, after which he was empowered to ascend to Heaven and became an immortal.[95] The *feng-shan* ceremonies practised by Qin Shi Huang and Emperor Wu were most likely intended to emulate the model of the Yellow Emperor in efforts to obtain eternal life. Perhaps this is why magicians, who were called Technical Masters (*fangshi* 方士) in ancient sources, constantly tried to persuade the First Emperor (and Emperor Wu) to conduct these *feng-shan* ceremonies on sacred Mount Tai. According to the *Shiji*, the stories told by these masters prompted Qin Shi Huang to send a magician named Xu Shi 徐市 accompanied by twenty youths and maidens to the three divine islands, Yingzhou 瀛洲, Penglai 蓬萊 and Fangzhang 方丈 in the Eastern Sea to establish contact with the immortals and to obtain the elixir of immortality.[96] The *feng* and *shan* rites performed on Mount Tai might have served the same purpose.[97]

---

sources do not offer any solid evidence from which to draw the conclusion that Qin Shi Huang identified himself as the equal counterpart to the highest deity. For Pines' article, see Pines (2013) 258-279.

[94] The *feng* and *shan* cult is said to have been recorded in an essay in the *Guanzi*, an encyclopaedic treatise named after Guan Zhong composed in the seventh century BC. Unfortunately the essay has been lost. Sima Qian attributed one book in his *magnum opus* to the rites of *feng* and *shan*. See *Shiji* 28, 1355-1404.

[95] *Shiji* 12, 468.

[96] *Shiji* 28, 1369-1370

[97] Lewis (1999) 55-56. Lewis outlines various certain features in relation to the aspects of the *feng* and *shan* rites. One of them is that the mountain sacrifices in ancient China were linked to immortality. See *ibid.* 58-59.

Whereas this does remain a possibility, a closer look at Sima Qian's record reveals that the search for immortality might not have been the only motive which led Qin Shi Huang and Emperor Wu of Han to perform these ceremonies. Sima Qian recounts that seventy Confucian scholars from the old states of Qi and Lu were summoned to meet the emperor at the foot of Mount Tai to discuss the way in which the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices had been performed in ancient times. When they failed to reach a consensus, the First Emperor became angry and dismissed them.[98] Interestingly enough, a similar incident took place during the reign of Emperor Wu, when the latter ascended Mount Tai to perform the *feng* ceremony in 110 BC.[99] Emperor Wu, like the First Emperor, was displeased by the inability of the scholars he had consulted to offer adequate explanations about the time-honoured rituals on the basis of the ancient texts, and dismissed them.[100]

The fact that both these emperors asked Confucian scholars to offer interpretations of the ancient rituals demonstrates that the early Chinese emperors, from the time of Qin to mid-Western Han, oscillated between two cultic traditions. Importantly, the Masters of Techniques were able to persuade emperors to ascend Mount Tai to perform sacrifices to Heaven and to send men to the islands of the Eastern Sea to search for the elixir of immortality. The Confucian scholars likewise stressed the significance of the *feng* and *shan* rites, but they saw these in a very different light. In their view, the purpose of the *feng-shan* practices was to strengthen the nexus between the emperor and Heaven, the supreme deity in the imperial pantheon. The ascension of Mount Tai and the performance of the sacrifices to Heaven would reaffirm the Mandate of Heaven and the bestowal of Heaven's favour.[101]

The status of Confucianism was raised after the accession of Emperor Wu in 141 BC, especially after the death of Empress Dowager Dou (d. 135 BC), who was a passionate adherent of the Huang-Lao doctrines. Unquestionably, the sources are explicit that Emperor Wu, as had the First Emperor, also devoted abundant energy to trying to establish contact with various gods, ghosts and immortal spirits in an attempt to attain personal immortality. Besides Heaven, Earth and the Five Emperors, the Great One (Taiyi 太一)

[98] *Shiji* 28, 1367.
[99] For Emperor Wu's *feng* and *shan* ceremonies, see the article of by Lewis (1999).
[100] *Shiji* 28, 1399.
[101] Influenced by Confucian thought, Sima Qian expresses his antipathy to the Magicians' propaganda for their cults of immortality. See Lewis (1999) 70-71.

became a very popular deity at the time and was venerated highly by the Han Technical Masters.[102] For example, Miu Ji 謬姬, a famous technical master, advised Emperor Wu to build altars for sacrificing to the Great One on the outskirts of Chang'an. When another altar was built at Ganquan 甘泉, a religious centre situated some seventy kilometres to the northeast of Chang'an, upon the suggestion by Minister Gongsun Qing 公孫卿 in 130 BC, this centre became the principal site for the cult of the Great One.[103]

During the time of Emperor Wu, the link between the temporal monarch and Heaven was strengthened as a result of the efforts of a number of Confucian literati who were interested in promoting Heaven. As mentioned above, one of them was Dong Zhongshu, who developed the theory of the Resonance between Heaven and Men. He and other Han literati said that the emperor played an intermediary role in linking the heavenly and temporal worlds.[104] He also thought that Heaven communicated with mankind by providing auspicious or inauspicious omens.[105]

Yet it was not until the last decades of the first century BC, particularly the pivotal period of the reign of Wang Mang, that the sacrifice to Heaven became the most important cult act performed by the Chinese emperor.[106] In AD 56, the founding Emperor of the Eastern Han dynasty, Guang-wu 光武 (Liu Xiu 劉秀 r. 25-57) visited Mount Tai to perform the *feng* and *shan*

[102] On the origins of the Great One from the perspective of archaeological studies, see Li Ling (2000) 207-239. For the cult of the Great One in the Western Han, see Bujard (2009) 791-792.

[103] Originally Ganquan was a place at which sacrifices were made to the Five Emperors. When the Great One emerged as a popular deity in the mid-Western Han period, it became the main site for the cult of the Five Emperors and the Great One. The altar used to make sacrifices to the Great One also began to be also used to sacrifice to the Five Emperors. See Bujard (2009) 789; Tseng (2011) 83.

[104] Only the emperor was deemed to be qualified to receive the signs directly from Heaven. This belief might be the reason the emperor carried out the sacrifice on the summit of the Mount Tai alone when he performed the *feng* ceremony for the second time.

[105] For omens and their significance and symbolic meanings during the Han period, see Tseng (2011) 92-132.

[106] In fact, the (failed) attempt made by Kuang Heng 匡衡 and Zhang Tan 張譚 to reform the Jiao (suburban altar) sacrifice 郊祀禮 in the reign of Emperor Zhang (AD 75-88) also shows that the educated elite of the Han empire had begun to regard Heaven as the highest deity who bestowed the Mandate upon the ruler of mankind. For the tentative reform of Jiao advocated by Kuang Heng and Zhang Tan, see Gan Huaizhen (2005).

ceremonies.[107] A crucial difference between these sacrifices and those performed by Qin Shi Huang and Emperor Wu is that Emperor Guang-wu explicitly promulgated the idea of the Mandate of Heaven promoted by the Confucian literati. Following the ceremony on Mount Tai, he ordered a stele on which the texts received from Heaven were engraved to be set up.[108] In the same year he sacrificed to Heaven on the outskirts of the Eastern Han capital of Luoyang 洛陽. Emperor Ming 明帝 (r. 57-75) began to sacrifice to Heaven in a new Bright Hall in 59.[109] This innovation did not impede the use of the Bright Hall for also sacrificing to the Five Emperors of remote antiquity and to a number of deceased Han emperors.[110] This Hall played an increasingly important role in linking the emperor to Heaven. When he performed the sacrifices to Heaven in this building, the emperor accepted the sacred authority, bestowed on him by Heaven, to rule the empire and its people. The fact that the deceased ancestors and the immortal spirits were venerated in the same building signified that the dynastic rule of the imperial house was also sanctioned by Heaven.

As Heaven became the supreme deity in the imperial pantheon, the worship of other immortal spirits, like the Great One, either faded away or was integrated into the Heaven sacrifices. Cogently, from the early first century AD, emperors only rarely travelled eastwards to Mount Tai to perform *feng* and *shan* ceremonies. Instead, Luoyang and its suburbs became the places in which emperors conducted ceremonies to sacrifice to Heaven, Earth and the ancestors. After Emperor Wu, the Han emperors no longer showed strong interest in climbing sacred mountains in remote areas in pursuit of immortality. Instead, the continuity of dynastic rule and the political power of individual emperors were both increasingly associated with the *tianming* 天命, the Mandate or Destiny of Heaven.

---

[107] For the details of the ceremony, see the article by Xing Yitian (2011b) 177-201.
[108] Bujard (2009) 799.
[109] The First Bright Hall in Luoyang was built by Wang Mang in 4 BC, see *Hanshu* 25b. The origin of the Bright Hall, which is said to have been in existence from the early Zhou period, remains unclear. See Csikszenmihalyi (1994) 2.
[110] Prior to the last decades of the Western Han period, plenty of funerary temples in which sacrifices were made to the deceased emperors and empresses, had been built throughout the empire. By the reign of Emperor Yuan (r. 49-33 BC), however, many of these temples were being closed on the advice of some literati. Only the temples of a few emperors, like Emperor Gao, the founding emperor, Emperor Wen, Wu, Zhao and Xuan were allowed to stand. See Bujard (2009) 797; Loewe (1992), 302–340.

During the early and middle Western Han periods there had been "no implication that the term *tianming* refers to the appointment of a particular dynasty or person to rule over the mankind."[111] It was not until the late first century BC and early first century AD that such Confucian scholars as Liu Xin 劉歆 (46-23 BC) and Ban Biao 班彪 (3-54), the father of the historian Ban Gu, began to explore and develop the concept of Mandate of Heaven and the idea that the emperor occupied a pivotal position between Heaven and Earth. They developed the doctrine of the Triple Concordance 三統 which taught that Heaven, Man and Earth could only attain harmony if the emperor, under the Mandate of Heaven, were able to govern himself and to rule the people in accordance with the principles laid down by the Classics. In his famous essay *On the Mandate of Kings* (Wangming Lun 王命論), Ban Biao highlights the idea that the sovereignty of the Han dynasty, empowered by Heaven, could be traced back to the great sages of remote antiquity, among them Yao and Shun.[112] The rapid downfall of the short-lived Xin dynasty founded by Wang Mang was interpreted as a sign that the legitimate power of Han, which had been granted by Heaven, could not successfully be broken by usurpers. From the early Eastern Han period, the *ming* 命 (Mandate or destiny) of the ruler and the dynasty and the distinction between the emperor and ordinary mortals were both increasingly emphasized. In this same period, a body of writings known as the apocryphal texts 讖緯, a rich collection of omens and esoteric stories which had either been transmitted from the distant past or recently composed under the cloak of antiquity, assumed an important role.[113] In short, from the late Western Han period, the transmission of the throne within the ruling house of Liu was cemented by the development of the theory of the Mandate of Heaven.

By emphasizing the principle of legitimate succession within the Liu clan and by tracing the beginning of Liu's line back all the way to the mythical age of Yao, the ideological problems created by the fact that some emperors failed to

[111] Loewe (1994) 109. As seen above, the idea that the emperor ruled the state under the Mandate of Heaven had been a political principle as long ago as the Western Zhou period. Emperor Gao's achievement in reunifying the empire and Emperor Wen's defeat of the powerful relatives of the Empress Dowager Lü was seen as owing much to the blessing of Heaven.

[112] *Wenxuan* 52. On Ban Biao's essay, see Loewe (1986) 735-737.

[113] For the study of the apocryphal texts, see the seminal annotation of the Japanese scholars Yasui Kōsan 安居香山 and Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八 (1994); see also Xu Xingwu (2003); Gentz (2009) 833.

possess the superb moral qualities stressed by Dong Zhongshu and some other literati were neatly circumvented. It seems reasonable to suppose that this was one of the reasons the Han rulers eventually took the step of abandoning the shamanistic ideology represented by the Technical Masters and recognizing the cosmological and moral political theory advocated by the Confucians. Viewed in this light, it not surprising that, even during the Eastern Han period, when most emperors were weak, sovereignty continued to rest with members of the House of Liu.[114] Although the authority of some emperors was challenged, the fundamental principle that the supreme power could only be transmitted within that House survived intact until the founding of the Jin 晉 dynasty in the late third century.

7. Rome and China compared

One of the conclusions which emerges from the foregoing discussion is that, during the Qin and Han periods at least, Chinese attitudes to warfare differed profoundly from those prevailing in Early-Imperial Rome. During the Republic, warfare played a major part in the daily lives of a very high proportion of Romans and Italians. By the late second century BC, a succession of very ambitious military campaigns had ensured Rome of hegemonic power throughout the Mediterranean world. During the reign of Augustus, the Roman legions were transferred to the periphery of the Mediterranean world and war was reduced to a distant reality for the majority of the Roman people. Nevertheless, nearly almost all of the Roman emperors of the first and second centuries continued to present themselves as possessing the Roman martial ethos and advertised their military virtues and accomplishments on coins, in inscriptions and by means of statues.[115]

In the *Res Gestae*, Augustus takes pride in the fact that he had re-established peace and order for the Roman population.[116] Nevertheless, the idea that peace had been won by military victories on land and sea is also highlighted.[117] Quite unlike their Chinese counterparts, neither Augustus nor

[114] Loewe (2004) 578-579; (2011a) 274. In Eastern Han, for example, only the first three emperors had attained adulthood when they ascended the throne.
[115] For Roman rulers highlighting their martial prowess through various media see, for instance, Ando (2000) 278 ff.; Campbell (1984) 142-148; (2002) 135-146; Hekster (2007) 342-351.
[116] *RG* 6,2; 13.
[117] *RG* 13.

his successors ceased to see war as the ultimate guarantor of military and social stability. Importantly, military victories continued to be seen as an excellent way to obtain wealth and glory, not only by the emperors themselves but by the vast majority of the ruling class of the empire.

Augustus' military accomplishments throughout the *orbis terrarum* are one of the most important themes of the *Res Gestae*. It was only during the final years of his reign that the elderly emperor began to reconsider the desirability of further territorial expansion. During the two centuries following Augustus' death, the pace of expansion slowed down. Despite the marked reduction in warlike exploits, however, the aspirations for glory and military prestige nurtured by Roman emperors still played an important part in driving forward territorial expansion. Although from the second century some Greek intellectuals, among them Epictetus, Dio Chrysostom and Dio Cassius, did make some negative comments on Roman mainstream propaganda on warfare, the decision makers of the Roman empire, that is, the emperor and most senators, rarely expressed any qualms about engaging in aggressive military expansionism as long as victory was achieved and the emperor's desire for military prestige was satisfied.[118]

Attitudes to violence and warfare in ancient China were, by and large, very different. Mark Lewis has rightly argued that, prior to the seventh and sixth centuries BC, China had possessed an extremely militaristic and bellicose culture.[119] As far as can be ascertained, warfare, hunting and sacrifice played an important part in the lives of the nobility of Western Zhou society.[120] Although rites, music and moral cultivation were given a great deal of emphasis in the dictums of Confucius, whether actual or apocryphal, training in such military skills as archery and chariot-driving, two of the "six arts" (*liu yi* 六藝), is also advocated by the Master.[121] Since Confucius was a product of Western Zhou culture, his positive attitude to military arts should not come as a surprise but,

[118] On negative attitudes to warfare of the Roman philosophers, see Sidebottom (1993) 241-264.

[119] See Lewis (1990) 15-50.

[120] The aristocratic society in the Western Zhou was based on a strict lineage structure. Success in battle was as an important means to win honour for the lineage. See Lewis (1990) 51. But Lewis restricts his argument to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, making no attempt to trace the role of heroism and martial prowess in aristocratic circles to the Western Zhou and Shang periods.

[121] The "six arts" were the six skills which the Western Zhou nobles were expected to master during their education. They were rites, music, archery, chariot-driving, calligraphy and mathematics.

despite the fact that they were undeniably present, these arts occupied a far less prominent position in Confucian thinking than such ritual and non-militaristic values as benevolence and righteousness.[122]

Furthermore, as said in the first part of this chapter, the late Spring and Autumn and early Warring States periods witnessed the emergence of increasingly negative sentiments towards war among the educated classes of the Chinese states, though this negativity by no means implies that China was being transformed into a non-militarized society in either of these periods.[123] On the contrary, warfare played a crucial role in the creation of the Qin empire and, during the 300 years of chaos and violence which preceded this event, war penetrated deep into daily life. Nevertheless, compared to Rome, cultural and social stimuli for going to war were much weaker.[124]

In one of the Chinese classical military treatises composed in the Warring States period, the author Master Wu (Wuzi 吳子) distinguishes five motives for raising troops. As Paul van Els has shown, of these types of warfare only the *yibing* 義兵, the "righteous war" which was fought for the purpose of ending chaos and oppression, was regarded as a fully justified military activity.[125] Mobilizing large numbers of people for the purpose of a "strong war", that is, a war launched for the pursuit of fame, is disapproved of by the author. Similarly, in the fictional conversation between Master Wen and the Old Master, recorded in the bamboo manuscript *Master Wen* (Wenzi 文子), presumably created in the early Han period, the author distinguishes between five types of warfare, namely: "righteous" 义兵 (punitive war), "reactive" 應兵 (defensive war), "furious/indignant" 忿兵, "greedy/covetous" 貪兵 and

[122] Xing Yitian (2011b) 227.

[123] A point stressed by Di Cosmo (2009) 2.

[124] In his discussion of the theory of grand strategy in Chinese history, Alastair Johnston sees violence, in both western and eastern societies, as a "highly efficacious and preferable to all nonviolent approaches, and offensive strategies are favored over static defense." See David Graaf's review article (1997) 450. He dismisses the "stereotypical" view of attitudes to warfare in ancient China represented by John Keegan, claiming that the pervasive sense of antipathy to warfare in the writings of ancient Chinese philosophers, like Confucius and Mencius, is "almost perfunctory or symbolic". See Johnston (1995) 153. In my view, it remains highly significant that Chinese and Roman attitudes to warfare were completely different.

[125] The other four types for war were: "strong/aggressive war" 強兵, "hard/unyielding war" 剛兵, "oppressive war" 暴兵 and "rebellious war" 逆兵. For the translation of this passage, see Van Els (2013) 18. For an English translation of *Wuzi*, see Sawyer (1993) 206-224.

"arrogant" 驕兵. Only the first two kinds of warfare were supposed to bring positive results.[126]

During the Republic, the Romans developed the theory of the "just war" (*bellum iustum*).[127] At first sight, this concept resembles the "righteous" and "reactive" wars of the *Master Wen* manuscript. However, if the scope of the analysis is broadened to include general attitudes to warfare, it is highly significant that, in China, aggressive warfare was rarely promoted by members of the educated elite, whereas in Roman society it was highly valued and admired, both during the Republic and during the Principate. As long as warfare could be presented as ending a perceived threat to the *salus* of Rome, the Romans would not be guilty of waging offensive wars and therefore would have the backing of the gods.[128] In contrast to ancient Chinese attitudes to warfare, the Roman approach was to a certain degree amoral.[129] As J. C. Mann has rightly pointed out, the Romans "had no need to apologize for the growth of Roman power, or try to excuse Roman rule over other peoples."[130]

The highest magistrates of the Roman Republic were all military generals, and had been hailed as *imperatores* after gaining military victories. This tradition survived until the early years of the Principate, when the title *imperator* was monopolized by the Roman emperor and became part of imperial titulature. As argued in Chapter 5, the actual form of the relationship between the emperor and the army varied from one reign to the next. Some emperors, among them Galba, Vespasian, Trajan and Septimius Severus, owed their ascension largely to the army and maintained a close relationship with the soldiers. Other emperors, such as Nero, Antoninus Pius and Commodus, did not attempt to build close ties with the military. Tiberius, who had been intimately associated with the army and had acquired a considerable amount of military prestige under Augustus, displayed a more detached attitude to military affairs after his ascension to the throne. In contrast to this, Caracalla, who had a problematic

---

[126] See van Els (2013) 26-33. For the study of *Wenzi*, see van Els' PhD dissertation (Leiden University, 2006).

[127] On Roman the Roman notion of "just war", see Sidebottom (2007) 25-8. For the "just war" in the Roman imperial context, see Mantovani (1991).

[128] In this regard, the Third Punic War is a good example. See the speech by Cato the Elder in the Senate *ORF*[2] fr. 195. For the role that religion played in Roman warfare, see Rüpke (1990). Rüpke, particularly in Parts Two and Three, argues that, in the Roman context, offensive war could be legitimized on religious grounds.

[129] Brunt (1990) 177. About religion and Roman war, see Birley (1978); Helgland (1978); Rüpke (1990); Stoll (2007) 451-476.

[130] Mann (1979) 176.

relationship with the Senate, was very concerned about his image as a "fellow soldier" of those serving in the legions, especially after his brother Geta had been murdered.[131] Even the most unwarlike emperors had to take the interests of the soldiers into account, restricting this concern not just to the members of the Praetorian Guard in the capital, but extending it to those in the legions stationed in the frontier zone. Throughout the entire period of the Principate, emperors had to find a balance between their own ambitions and the interests of the Senate and the army.

In China relationships between rulers and the army were very different. From the early Warring States period in the fifth century BC, indeed even earlier, the rulers of the multiple states of the Central Plain had gradually distanced themselves from personal involvement in battles. The emperors of the Qin and Western Han empires were not expected to act as commanders-in-chief.

In recent years scholars in the field of Qin and Han history have begun to use visual materials to supplement or correct the deficiency in the literary sources. As a result of this trend more attention is beginning to be paid to tomb frescos and reliefs.[132] In a recent article Xing Yitian draws attention to the fact that many tombstones of the Han period show hunting scenes, arguing that local Han local officials also received a military training. Some other tomb frescoes show Han officials fighting under their leaders against the Xiongnu enemy. Xing Xitian argues that this demonstrates that, in the bureaucratic system of the Han empire, no clear distinction was made between civil and military duties.[133]

It should be noted that almost all of the visual evidence used by Xing comes from the tombs of the local elites and dates to the Eastern Han period. More importantly, frescoes or reliefs of this period never show the emperor or high-ranking members of the Han bureaucracy as military commanders leading campaigns against the Xiongnu or other enemies.[134] To this extent the visual

[131] Campbell (1984) 52.

[132] The pioneering work is Wu Hong's study on the Wu Liang Shrine: Wu Hong 巫鴻 (2006) trans. Liu Yang 柳揚 and Yin He 岑河. The Taiwanese scholar Xing Yitian has made a brilliant study of the arts of early ancient China, focusing particularly on Han frescoes and stone and brick reliefs. See Xing Yitian (2011a).

[133] For a case study interpreting a battle between a local Han army and the Xiongnu represented on a Han tomb stone, see Xing Yitian (2011a) 315-397.

[134] Xing Yitian (2011a) 9-46.

evidence chimes in perfectly with the literary record which does not contain any reference to emperors taking part in battles.

In 51 BC, when Huhanye Chanyu paid a visit to Chang'an to declare his submission to the Han emperor, Xuan, a large force of cavalry was sent to escort him on his journey, and other troops lined the route. In Chang'an, Huhanye was entertained with luxurious banquets and various games.[135] In complete contrast to this, when King Tiridates I of Armenia and the brother of the Parthian king, Vologaeses, visited Rome in AD 66, "armed cohorts stood around the temples in the Forum and [Nero] himself was seated in a curule chair on the *rostra*, dressed in the robes of a triumphant general and surrounded by military standards and flags." Subsequently, after Tiridates had made two supplications, one in the forum and another in the theatre, and has been rewarded with diadem, "Nero placed him in a seat at his own right hand. Acclaimed 'Imperator' for this, Nero offered laurels on the Capitol and closed the gates of the temple of two-headed Janus, to show there were no longer any wars being waged."[136]

As did Vologaeses' visit to Rome, Huhanye Chanyu's visit to Chang'an signalled his submission to the emperor. Unlike Nero, however, the Han emperor appears to have been totally uninterested in using Huhanye Chanyu's visit as an occasion either for a display of Han military strength or as an opportunity to broadcast his personal martial qualities or his close relationship with the army. While late Western Han superiority over the Xiongnu undoubtedly rested on the military strengths of the Han empire, this never resulted in a greater ideological emphasis on the emperor's military role.

---

[135] *Hanshu* 96 b, 3798. Loewe (2009) 86.

[136] Suet. *Ner.* 63,1-6. My translation is a slightly adapted version of that of Catharine Edwards (2000) in the Oxford World Classics series. Between 64 and 65 a new series of *aurei* was issued to commemorate this event. The reverse of these coins shows the closed doors of the temple of Janus, encircled by the legend PACE P R TERRA MARIQUE PARTA IANUM CLUSIT, "Having established peace for the Roman people on land and at sea, he closed the temple of Janus." See *RIC* I Nero, 50.