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Citation

Els, P. van. (2013). Righteous, furious, or arrogant?: on classifications of warfare in early Chinese texts. In P. Lorge (Ed.), *Debating war in Chinese history* (pp. 13-40). Leiden: Brill. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3454125>

Version: Publisher's Version

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

RIGHTEOUS, FURIOUS, OR ARROGANT? ON CLASSIFICATIONS OF WARFARE IN EARLY CHINESE TEXTS¹

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Introduction

The Warring States period (475–221 BCE) in Chinese history, an era of chronic social and political instability, witnessed numerous armed conflicts of ever-increasing intensity, duration, and scale. These hostile circumstances prompted thinkers of the time to reflect upon the purpose and desirability of war. Their views, as reflected in texts transmitted from that period, range far and wide.

In some texts, warfare is promoted as a solution to socio-political chaos. For instance, military-strategic treatises, such as *The Art of Warfare* 孫子兵法, “generally accepted warfare as inevitable and devoted little effort to justifying it.”² Rather, they maintain that thorough knowledge of strategies and tactics, and the will to put this knowledge into practice if a situation so requires, are essential for obtaining and sustaining peace. In a similar vein, *The Book of Lord Shang* 商君書, ascribed to the famous statesman Shang Yang 商鞅 (d. 338 BCE), states that “if war is used to abolish war, even war is permissible” 以戰去戰，雖戰可也。³ The book promotes warfare and agriculture as the only two activities that, in Lord Shang’s view, strengthen the state.

¹ This chapter was written under the financial support of an Innovational Research Incentives Scheme grant from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). For maximum consistency and comparability, I provide my own translations of quotations from early Chinese texts. My translations draw upon those of other translators (as acknowledged in the notes), to whom I am greatly indebted. I am also grateful to Carine Defoort, Eileen Holland, Peter Lorge, and Burchard Mansvelt Beck for their insightful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this chapter.

² Mark E. Lewis, “The Just War in Early China,” In *The Ethics of War in Asian Civilizations—A Comparative Perspective*, edited by Torkel Brekke (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 186.

³ *The Book of Lord Shang*, chapter 18. Jiang Lihong 蔣禮鴻, ed., *Shangjunshu zhuizhi* 商君書錐指 (Beijing 北京: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1986), p. 107; J.J.L. Duyvendak, trans., *The Book of Lord Shang—A Classic of the Chinese School of Law* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1928), p. 285.

In other texts, warfare is seen rather as a cause of ongoing chaos. *The Analects* 論語, for instance, contains this informative passage:

Duke Ling of Wei asked Confucius about military formations. Confucius answered: "Sacrificial vessels are something I have been taught about, but how to command troops is something I have never studied." The next day he departed.

衛靈公問陳於孔子。孔子對曰：“俎豆之事，則嘗聞之矣；軍旅之事，未之學也。”明日遂行。⁴

The abrupt departure of Confucius may symbolize his aversion to war. He apparently wished to discuss only non-violent means of government, such as the proper implementation of rituals (here represented by the vessel). The book *Master Mo* 墨子 is even more explicit in its antipathy to war. In its current form, the text contains no fewer than three chapters that condemn warfare as being unethical and unbeneficial.⁵ And the book *The Old Master* 老子 likewise denounces warfare in no uncertain terms, as it fulminates against those who "intimidate the world by a show of arms" 以兵強天下 and brands weapons as "instruments of ill omen" 不祥之器.⁶

Given the overwhelming attention paid to strategy and tactics by Master Sun and other military thinkers, and the ardent promotion of non-violent solutions to socio-political problems by Confucius and others, it is tempting to see these views as antithetical: the one being pro-war and the other pro-peace. However, such a conclusion would be inaccurate because these views are not complete opposites. For instance, Master Sun may recommend strategies and tactics for winning battles, but he also emphasizes that the best general is one who is able to "bend the enemy to his will without fighting" 不戰而屈人.⁷ Confucius, despite his aversion to war, states that the common people may be sent to war on the condition that "an upright man has trained them for seven years" 善人教民七年.⁸ It

⁴ *The Analects*, 15.1. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, ed. and trans., *Lunyu yizhu* 論語譯注 (Beijing 北京: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1980), p. 161; D.C. Lau, trans., *Confucius: The Analects* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 132.

⁵ *Master Mo*, 17, 18, 19. Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, ed. *Mozi jianqu* 墨子間詁 (Beijing 北京: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1986), p. 118–144; Ian Johnston, trans., *The Mozi: A Complete Translation* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2010), pp. 166–197.

⁶ *The Old Master*, 30, 31. Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之, ed., *Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校釋 (Beijing 北京: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2000), p. 119, 123; D.C. Lau, trans., *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 35–36.

⁷ *The Art of Warfare*, 3. Yang Bing'an 楊丙安, ed., *Shiyijia zhu Sunzi jiaoli* 十一家註孫子校理 (Beijing 北京: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1999), p. 45; Ralph D. Sawyer, trans., *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), p. 161.

⁸ *The Analects*, 13.29. Yang, *Lunyu yizhu*, p. 144; Lau, *The Analects*, p. 123.

appears that these views mainly differ in the degree to which they propagate “civil virtue” 文 and “martial vigor” 武, the proverbial brush and the sword, as a cure for the socio-political chaos. As Rand explains, there are those who advocated “the predominant use of martiality” to excise conflicts and those who “insisted on the primacy of civility” to prevent and mitigate the ongoing chaos.⁹ A preference for civil virtue does not necessarily mean the exclusion of martial vigor, and vice versa. That being said, the precise position of these thinkers and texts on the wide spectrum between civility and martiality is often not immediately clear.

In some texts we find more pronounced and nuanced views on warfare. These texts do not promote or condemn warfare as such, but analyze, summarize, classify, and label different motives for waging war. They also predict outcomes and conceive of possible wartime countermeasures based on each motive. In so assessing different kinds of warfare, they make clear which ones are permissible and which ones are not.

One text that classifies warfare this way is *Master Wu* 吳子, one of ancient China’s most popular military-strategic treatises. The opening chapter of *Master Wu* contains a passage that distinguishes five types of warfare and offers a name, a motive, a description, and a countermeasure for each type. For over two thousand years, this passage in *Master Wu* had been considered fairly unique, as few other known texts contained similar classifications of warfare. But in 1973, two ancient manuscripts were discovered that did contain similar classifications. A silk manuscript that has come to be called *The Four Canons of the Yellow Emperor* 黃帝四經 (herein also referred to as *The Four Canons*) and a bamboo manuscript titled *Master Wen* 文子, both stored in tombs that were closed in the Former Han dynasty (202 BCE–8 CE), distinguish different motivations for warfare and offer brief explanations and evaluations for each motive. The spectacular discovery of these manuscripts draws attention to the importance of such classifications in debate on warfare in those days.

This chapter studies classifications of warfare in *Master Wu*, *The Four Canons*, and *Master Wen*. In sections one through three, I analyze the classifications in their original contexts. How do they relate to the texts in which they appear? In what way does each classification feed into the overall philosophy of the text? In section four, I compare the three classifications. What are their similarities and differences? In section five, I discuss the possibility of a relationship between the three classifications.

⁹ Christopher C. Rand, “Chinese Military Thought and Philosophical Taoism,” *Monumenta Serica* 34 (1979–1980): 173.

Are any perhaps directly and demonstrably influenced by another? I hypothesize that the classification of warfare in *Master Wu* may have served as a source for those in *The Four Canons* and *Master Wen*. In section six, I explore the development of classifications of warfare in writings from the Warring States period to the early Han dynasty. How did the classifications evolve from military–strategic writings to texts of politico–philosophical nature? Finally, in section seven, I survey the impact of classifications on the wider political debate on warfare in those days. Did classifications influence the debate? If so, to what effect? My chapter engages all the other chapters in this volume on a fundamental philosophical level, but it is in section seven that the concrete connections are clearest. Most obviously, Shu-hui Wu’s chapter takes up the debates that immediately follow those I discuss in section seven.

1. *Master Wu*

Master Wu is a short military–strategic text in six chapters, each more or less on a different topic (such as assessing the enemy and managing troops). Perhaps more than other texts in the same genre, *Master Wu* advocates a balance between civil virtue and martial vigor as two complementary tools of statecraft. Probably not coincidentally, this balance is embodied by the historical Wu Qi 吳起 (d. 381 BCE), the statesman and general after whom the text is named.

1.1. *Wu Qi*

According to historiographical sources, Wu Qi, a native of Wei 衛, was educated in the school tradition of Confucius. He espoused Confucian principles such as “humaneness” 仁 and “righteousness” 義, but also understood that social and political stability depend both on sound government and on military vigilance. Hence he immersed himself in military–strategic thought. In the career that followed, Wu Qi served several states as a general and an official, until aversion to his policies and envy over his growing influence eventually led to his death.¹⁰

In the centuries following his death, Wu Qi’s life and accomplishments were narrated in countless stories, a clear indication of his fame. In those days, Wu Qi was always mentioned in the same breadth as the famous Sun

¹⁰ For extensive biographical details on Wu Qi, see Sawyer, *Seven Military Classics*, pp. 191–202.

Wu 孫武, to whom *The Art of Warfare* is ascribed, and every household reportedly owned a copy of their writings.¹¹ However, over the course of its many centuries of transmission, *Master Wu* probably underwent major revision. As a result, the authenticity of the received *Master Wu* and the attribution of this text to one single author are disputed.¹² The dominant view nowadays is that *Master Wu* may have been thoroughly edited during the Han dynasty. Most scholars nonetheless maintain that, by and large, the text reflects Wu Qi's worldview and may even contain passages written by the general himself.¹³ Regrettably, no one has specifically identified these supposedly authentic passages in the text.

1.2. *Classification of Warfare in Master Wu*

The opening chapter of *Master Wu* discusses the fundamentals of statecraft and the military's role therein. One passage in the chapter outlines five motives for raising the troops:

¹¹ This is attested to, for instance, in *Records of the Historian* 史記, which combines the biographies of Sun Wu and Wu Qi in one chapter so as to mark their status as the two leading experts on military-strategic thought. See Sawyer, *Seven Military Classics*, pp. 191, 195.

¹² There are several reasons for suspicion. For example, whereas some passages in the transmitted text mention Wu Qi's title (e.g. "Master Wu said" 吳子曰), other passages refer to him by his personal name (e.g. "Qi replied" 起對曰), a change of style that suggests plural authorship. Also, the text refers to military practices that demonstrably postdate the lifetime of the historical Wu Qi. For instance, the text mentions "pipes and whistles" 笳笛 being played in military camps at night, but these musical instruments are supposed to have only entered the army after the Han dynasty. For more details, see Zhang Xincheng 張心澂, *Weishu tongkao* 偽書通考 (Taipei 臺北: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan 臺灣商務印書館, 1939 [1960]), pp. 801–2.

¹³ For instance, Sawyer suggests that the core of *Master Wu* "was probably composed by Wu Qi himself, then expanded and revised by his disciples—perhaps from their own memories or from court records. Much of the original version appears to have been lost; what remains has been edited into a succinct, fairly systematic, and remarkably comprehensive work" (*Seven Military Classics*, p. 192). Sawyer tentatively dates the core of *Master Wu* to the early Warring States era, but he does not explain what parts of the text would constitute this core (*Seven Military Classics*, p. 18). Zhang Shichao 張世超 argues that *Master Wu* was not written by Wu Qi or his disciples, but by someone in the late Warring States period who was interested in military matters. Zhang does suggest, however, that this military enthusiast may have borrowed from actual writings by Wu Qi or from related materials. Zhang Shichao 張世超, "Wuzi yanjiu 《吳子》研究," *Guji zhengli yanjiu xuekan* 古籍整理研究學刊 6 (2002): 29. Xu Yong 徐勇 maintains that *Master Wu* may have been edited by several people in the course of its transmission, but adds that even in its received form, the text reflects the basic ideas of Wu Qi. Xu Yong 徐勇, "Wuzi de chengshu, zhulu ji qi junshi sixiang 《吳子》的成書、著錄及其軍事思想," *Junshi lishi yanjiu* 軍事歷史研究 3 (2001): 142–48.

Master Wu said: “There are five motives for raising troops: a struggle for fame; a struggle for profit; an accumulation of resentment; chaos within the realm; and a response to famine. Each of these five has its own name: ‘righteous warfare,’ ‘strong warfare,’ ‘hard warfare,’ ‘oppressive warfare,’ and ‘contrary warfare.’ Putting an end to oppression and rescuing people from chaos is termed ‘righteous.’ Relying on the masses to launch an offensive is termed ‘strong.’ Mobilizing the army in an outburst of anger is termed ‘hard.’ Abandoning propriety while greedily seeking profit is termed ‘oppressive.’ Embarking on military campaigns and mobilizing the masses when the state is in chaos and the people are exhausted, is termed ‘contrary.’ Each of these five also has an appropriate countermeasure. The righteous can only be overcome with propriety. The strong can only be overcome by modesty. The hard can only be overcome by retreat. The oppressive can only be overcome by deceit. The contrary can only be overcome by a tactical balance of power.”¹⁴

吳子曰：凡兵之所起者有五：一曰爭名，二曰爭利，三曰積惡，四曰內亂，五曰困飢。其名又有五：一曰義兵，二曰強兵，三曰剛兵，四曰暴兵，五曰逆兵。禁暴救亂曰義，恃衆以伐曰強，因怒興師曰剛，棄禮貪利曰暴，國亂人疲舉事動衆曰逆。五者之數各有其道：義必以禮服，強必以謙服，剛必以辭服，暴必以詐服，逆必以權服。¹⁵

This passage lists five motives, names, descriptions, and countermeasures, but not systematically. The five names, descriptions, and countermeasures always occur in the same order: righteous, strong, hard, oppressive, contrary. The five motives, however, do not seem to match this order. For instance, the first motive, a struggle for fame, sounds too negative to be named righteous warfare or described as “putting an end to oppression and rescuing people from chaos.” Moreover, the second motive is profit, which also occurs in the description of the fourth name, oppressive warfare. I suspect that the beginning of this passage is corrupt. In my view, the passage would make more sense if we readjusted the order of the motives so as to better match the order of the names, descriptions, and countermeasures. The following table shows what I take to be the intended order. The last column represents what I believe to be the text’s evaluation of each motive, that is, whether the text approves (↑) or disapproves (↓) of the motive.

¹⁴ Note the special usage of 權 as “a tactical balance of power.” For an explanation of this technical term, see Sawyer, *Seven Military Classics*, p. 433, n. 39.

¹⁵ *Master Wu*, 1.5. Fu Shaojie 傅紹傑, ed. and trans., *Wuzi jinzhu jinyi* 吳子今註今譯 (Taipei 臺北: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan 台灣商務印書館, 1985), pp. 62–63; Sawyer, *Seven Military Classics*, p. 208.

Table 1. Classification of Warfare in *Master Wu*

#	Motive	Name	Description	Countermeasure	↓
1	chaos	righteous	putting an end to oppression; rescuing people from chaos	propriety	↑
2	fame	strong	relying on the masses to launch an offensive	modesty	↓
3	resentment	hard	mobilizing the army in an outburst of anger	retreat	↓
4	profit	oppressive	abandoning propriety while greedily seeking profit	deceit	↓
5	famine	contrary	mobilizing the masses when the people are exhausted	balance of power	↓

Here is, in my understanding, what the passage intends to say: righteous warfare is meant to end disorder in a state. The righteous ruler of one state mobilizes his army in order to oust the oppressive ruler of a neighboring state and bring that state back to order. Strong warfare is supposed to bring fame to the ruler who attacks smaller states simply because the size of his population enables him to do so. Hard warfare is a violent outburst of accumulated anger, where the infuriated ruler is blind to diplomacy and other non-violent means of ending a dispute. Oppressive warfare is meant to quench the ruler's quest for possession with cartloads of booty. Contrary warfare is undertaken by an incompetent ruler against an external enemy in an attempt to lead attention away from the famine and chaos in his own realm. Judging by Wu Qi's descriptions of these types of warfare, only righteousness is a permissible motive; the other four are unacceptable. Wu Qi also describes countermeasures for each type of warfare. For example, an army launched in search of profit can be countered by deceit, and an army mobilized out of anger by retreat. In the exceptional case of righteousness, the only justified motive in Wu Qi's eyes, the unrighteous ruler under attack can only achieve victory if he turns to propriety.

1.3. Warfare in *Master Wu*

As mentioned earlier, the book *Master Wu* advocates a balance between civil virtue and martial vigor. Notably, balance does not mean equal sides, as the former is clearly more important. The text promotes four basic principles for skillful management of state affairs, which it jointly refers

to as “the four virtues” 四德. These are: “the Way” 道, “humaneness” 仁, “righteousness” 義, and “propriety” 禮. It argues that these four virtues, if properly cultivated, lead to support from the population, and hence to success. But *Master Wu* also maintains that the ruler cannot rely exclusively on these non-violent virtues. He must cultivate military preparedness as well. This idea is nicely illustrated in the opening passage of the text, where Marquis Wen of Wei 魏文侯, Wu Qi’s patron, expresses his dislike of military affairs.¹⁶ Wu Qi replies by holding him responsible for any deaths caused by invading enemy troops. In Wu Qi’s view, failure to use the sword renders any skills of the brush useless. However, if neglecting the military is unwise, excessive use of arms is an even graver mistake, for it paradoxically leads to defeat, as this passage purports:

Among the warring states in the world, those with five victories will meet with disaster; those with four victories will be exhausted; those with three victories will bring forth hegemons; those with two victories will bring forth kings; and those with one victory will bring forth an emperor. That is why there are few who gained the empire through multiple victories, and many who so lost it.

天下戰國，五勝者禍，四勝者弊，三勝者霸，二勝者王，一勝者帝。是以數勝得天下者稀，以亡者衆。¹⁷

Warfare obviously should be kept to an indispensable minimum. The ruler who understands this principle fights only one unavoidable battle, so as to end possible disruptions to his righteous rule once and for all. Only this mentality makes him capable of ruling the entire world.

The enlightened ruler, *Master Wu* states, “nurtures the interior through the virtue of civility, and controls the exterior by preparing the military” 內修文德，外治武備.¹⁸ The fivefold classification of warfare may serve as an instrument in attaining and maintaining this fine balance between civility and martiality. The classification stimulates reflection on the underlying rationale behind going to war, and forces the ruler to contemplate the justification of a military campaign. The outcome of the campaign is bound to be unsuccessful if the underlying motive does not conform to the principle of righteousness. Any other motive would fail to gain the support of the population, which is of principal concern in *Master Wu*. As such, the

¹⁶ While the historical Wu Qi may have indeed served under Marquis Wen, it is interesting to note that the text expresses aversion to military affairs through a protagonist with the (posthumous) name of Wen 文, which denotes “civil virtue.” This possible pun may bear witness to fictional elements in the transmitted text.

¹⁷ *Master Wu*, 1.4. Fu, *Wuzi jinzhū jinyi*, p. 59; Sawyer, *Seven Military Classics*, p. 208.

¹⁸ *Master Wu*, 1.1. Fu, *Wuzi jinzhū jinyi*, p. 42; Sawyer, *Seven Military Classics*, p. 206.

fivefold classification nicely feeds into the overall philosophy of *Master Wu*.

2. *The Four Canons of the Yellow Emperor*

In 1973, Chinese archaeologists excavated a Han dynasty tomb at the Mawangdui 馬王堆 site near Changsha 長沙 in Hunan Province 湖南省. This tomb, the posthumous abode of a former Changsha kingdom chancellor's son, was closed in 168 BCE. It stored a wealth of maps, charts, and texts inked on silk scrolls. The texts include well-known works such as the *Book of Changes* 易經 and *Strategies of the States* 戰國策, as well as texts hitherto unknown to us.¹⁹

2.1. *The Four Silk Manuscripts*

One silk scroll contains a copy of four previously unknown texts. The first text, titled "Canon and Law" 經法, is a philosophical reflection on various aspects of statecraft. The second text, "Sixteen Canons" 十六經, focuses on warfare, mostly through accounts of ancient battles and discussions between the (now considered mythical) Yellow Emperor 皇帝 and his ministers. The third text, "Aphorisms" 稱, contains over fifty sayings, some of which are also found in transmitted writings. The last text, "The Origin of the Way" 道原, is a mystical verse on the origins of the universe. Scholars soon identified these texts as *The Four Canons of the Yellow Emperor*, a long-lost work whose title is mentioned in the Han dynasty imperial library catalogue. However, whether the four texts actually are *The Four Canons of the Yellow Emperor* is debatable and, given their heterogeneous content, it is even doubtful if the four texts constitute one integral unit.²⁰ Perhaps the four texts are best seen, as Carrozza puts it, as "an anthology containing

¹⁹ Loewe discusses the manuscripts found in the Mawangdui tomb; see Michael Loewe, "Manuscripts Found Recently in China: A Preliminary Survey," *T'oung Pao* 63 (1978): 115–25.

²⁰ Some scholars argue that the silk manuscripts, which bear no unitary title, cannot be plausibly linked to *The Four Canons of the Yellow Emperor*. They use other names to refer to the four manuscripts. I nonetheless stick to *The Four Canons of the Yellow Emperor* as a convenient label, for this seems to be the name used most in the field. In using this name, I am not suggesting that this was the original title of the work, nor that this work is related to the title listed in the imperial library catalogue. Nor I am suggesting that, in fact, the four manuscripts form a coherent unit. For more on the title and the content of the four silk manuscripts, see Paola Carrozza, "A Critical Review of the Principal Studies on the Four Manuscripts Preceding the B Version of the Mawangdui Laozi," *B.C. Asian Review* 13 (2002): 49–69.

works of different origin, put together at some point in time according to specific editorial criteria.”²¹ If subject matter was among the criteria, recurring themes would include the origins of the universe, the humane rule of the ancient sages, and warfare.

2.2. *Classification of Warfare in The Four Canons*

Warfare is a particularly strong concern in the second of *The Four Canons*. This text contains a section titled “The Fundamental Types of Attack” 本伐, that outlines three motives for warfare:

The Fundamental Types of Attack

Each state that houses armories and stores weapons has a way of warfare. The ways of warfare in our present times are three: there are those who act for profit, those who act out of righteousness, and those who act out of fury. To act for profit: observing famine, that state and its families are not at leisure, their superiors and inferiors are in discord, you may raise troops and take punitive action against that state. It may bring you no great profit, but there is no great harm in it either.

To act out of righteousness: fighting chaos and putting an end to oppression, promoting the worthy and dismissing the inept. This is the principle of righteousness. A righteous cause is what the masses give their lives for. Therefore, while states may attack the rest of the world, among the rulers of large states with ten thousand chariots there are few who do not start from this principle, but not many are able to uphold it to the end. This is not a question of constancy of heart, but because when things reach their limit, they turn around.

To act out of fury: no matter how furious you are in your heart, you cannot simply act from anger, because an outburst of anger will have its consequences. Even if you are successful and have nothing left to desire, you have, in fact, begun to act in contravention. This is not the Way. Actions that correspond to the Way are marked by inevitability. Since they are marked by inevitability, they are limitless. Therefore, to ... is to expand, and to prohibit is to force. That is why one may carry it out everywhere without cease. 諸（儲）庫臧（藏）兵之國，皆有兵道。世兵道三，有為利者，有為義者，有行忿者。所胃（謂）為利者，見□□□飢，國家不暇，上下不當，舉兵而誅之，唯（雖）无大利，亦无大害焉。所胃（謂）為為義者，伐亂禁暴，起賢廢不肖（尚），所胃（謂）義也。義者，衆之所死也。是故以一國攻天下，萬乘之主□□希不自此始，鮮能冬（終）之，非心之恒也，窮而反（返）矣。所胃（謂）行忿者，心唯（雖）忿，不能徒怒，怒必有為也。成功而无以求

²¹ Carrozza, “Critical Review,” p. 61.

也，即兼始逆矣。非道也。道之行也，由不得已。由不得已，則无窮。故□者，撫者也；禁者，使者也。是以方行不留。《本伐》■²²

This passage describes three motives for going to war. Regrettably, unclear syntax and illegible graphs impede a full understanding of these motives.

The first motive, “profit” 利, probably means that the humane ruler of a flourishing state who observes a neighboring state on the verge of collapse may raise troops and annex it. Given the famine and social disruption in that state and the effort and cost of rebuilding it, the annexation will not bring the humane ruler great profit but, in view of the little resistance he can expect from the impoverished and demoralized people in that state, it will not cause him great harm either.

The second motive, “righteousness” 義, is to replace a tyrant with a humane ruler and incompetent ministers with capable ones. This receives the wholehearted support of the people, who would give up their lives to fight for this noble cause. The problem with this motive, the text seems to suggest, is that rulers may attack other states out of righteous principles, but they rarely manage to uphold these principles to the very end because the desire for power and material possessions often overcomes them. Hence, the text approves of righteousness as a motive for attack, but only on the condition that the ruler’s righteous principles remain upheld.

The third motive, “fury” 忿, takes warfare as a means for the ruler to vent his pent-up rage. But even if he successfully defeats the ruler who made his blood boil, and thereby extinguishes the cause of his fury, he is obviously held hostage by his emotions and, because he ignores diplomatic solutions, he is clearly blind to reason. Hence, the text disapproves of this motive.

The following table summarizes the three motives. The last column lists what I believe to be the text’s evaluation of each motive (the ↔ symbol means neutral).

²² *The Four Canons*, 2.11. Guojia wenwuju guwenxian yanjiushi 國家文物局古文獻研究室, ed., *Mawangdui Hanmu boshu* 馬王堆漢墓帛書, vol. 1 (Beijing 北京: Wenwu chubanshe 文物出版社, 1980), p. 75; Robin D.S. Yates, *Five Lost Classics: Tao, Huang-Lao, and Yin-yang in Han China* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), p. 140–141. When the editors of the Chinese transcription understand one graph in the silk manuscript to stand for another graph (e.g. 諸 for 儲), they keep the former and follow it with the latter in parentheses. Illegible graphs on bamboo strips are represented as □ in the Chinese transcription and as ... in my translation. The ■ symbol represents the black dot in the manuscript that marks the end of the section.

Table 2. Classification of Warfare in *The Four Canons*

#	Motive	Description	↕
1	profit	taking punitive action against a state where superiors and inferiors are in discord	↔
2	righteousness	fighting chaos and putting an end to oppression, promoting the worthy and dismissing the inept	↑
3	fury	bursting out in anger, giving free rein to feelings of fury in the heart	↓

The text denounces war out of anger as contravening the Way, it sees no harm in war for profit, and it conditionally supports righteous warfare. This conditional support for righteous wars leads Yates to suggest that the section “Fundamental Type of Attack” may have been composed around 239 BCE, about the same time as passages in *The Annals of Lü Buwei* 呂氏春秋 that also argue in favor of righteous warfare.²³

2.3. Warfare in *The Four Canons*

Attention to warfare in *The Four Canons*, particularly in the first two canons, is striking. Several passages elaborate on why and how to engage in warfare. For instance, the first canon makes a clear distinction between “moribund states” 死國, which are ripe for conquest, and “viable states” 生國, which deserve support.²⁴ This view is consistent with the profit motive in the second canon, discussed earlier, which is the permissible conquest of states on the verge of collapse. Other passages in the text describe the ancient conflict between the Yellow Emperor and Chiyou 蚩尤, a mythical battle between good and evil. As the victor of that battle, the Yellow Emperor represents the beginning of Chinese civilization. He is credited with the invention of warfare and praised for putting his military skills to good use, for he rid the world of evil to establish his humane rule.²⁵ To *The Four Canons*, the Yellow Emperor embodies a perfect blend of civil virtue and martial vigor, both of which are required for good government, as shown in this passage from a section in the first canon, titled “The Ruler’s Government” 君正:

²³ Yates, *Five Lost Classics*, p. 31.
²⁴ *The Four Canons*, 1.6. Guojia wenwuju guwenxian yanjiushi, *Mawangdui Hanmu boshu*, p. 54; Yates, *Five Lost Classics*, p. 84–85.
²⁵ See Lewis for an extensive description of various Warring States and Han dynasty myths regarding the Yellow Emperor and his adversaries; Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 174–85.

Heaven has a season for life and a season for death. States, accordingly, have a policy for life and a policy for death. If, in the season for life, you nurture those who are meant to live, this is called “civil virtue.” If, in the season for death, you execute those who are meant to die, this is called “martial vigor”. If you appropriately implement both civil virtue and martial vigor, the whole world will follow you.

天有死生之時，國有死生之正。因天之生也以養生，謂之文；因天之殺也以伐死，謂之武：文武并行，則天下從矣。²⁶

Yates notes that the emphasis on both civil virtue and martial vigor was unusual in traditional China, because martiality was associated with death and with the world of ghosts and spirits, and so it “was generally avoided in discussions of the correct behavior of a ruler.”²⁷ For *The Four Canons*, however, both are indispensable for successful government.

As the two pillars of statecraft, civil virtue and martial vigor are among several pairs frequently mentioned in the text. Other pairs include “yin and yang” 陰陽, “female and male” 雌雄, and “punishment and reward” 刑德. All these pairs contain one strong, hard, male component and one weak, soft, female component. The perfect ruler, according to the text, is capable of striking a balance between the two. Notably, this balance does not mean equal weights on both sides of the scale. One passage explicitly states that a perfect balance entails “two portions of civil virtue and one portion of martial vigor” 二文一武, and that those who realize this balance shall reign as true kings.²⁸

The threefold classification of warfare may help the ruler in determining when the one portion of martial vigor is required. If he is persistently motivated by righteous principles, martiality is allowed. If profit is his aim, he may deploy troops, but only to oust an oppressor and liberate an impoverished people. If, on the other hand, he is furious at another ruler, diplomacy is definitely the preferred option.

3. Master Wen

In 1973, the same year in which *The Four Canons* were unearthed from the Mawangdui tomb, archaeologists excavated another Han dynasty tomb

²⁶ *The Four Canons*, 1.3. Guojia wenwuji guwenxian yanjiushi, *Mawangdui Hanmu boshu*, p. 47; Yates, *Five Lost Classics*, p. 62–63.

²⁷ Yates, *Five Lost Classics*, p. 41.

²⁸ *The Four Canons*, 1.5. Guojia wenwuji guwenxian yanjiushi, *Mawangdui Hanmu boshu*, p. 52; Yates, *Five Lost Classics*, p. 76–77.

near Dingzhou 定州 in Hebei Province 河北省. This tomb is said to have been the posthumous residence of Liu Xiu 劉脩, King Huai of Zhongshan 中山懷王, who died in the year 55 BCE. The tomb yielded precious funerary objects made of gold, bronze, and jade and a large cache of inscribed bamboo strips. Sadly, many centuries ago robbers caused a fire in the tomb. As a consequence, the bamboo strips are now charred, broken, disordered, and incomplete. After concluding the painstaking work of numbering, analyzing, and arranging the bamboo strips and transcribing all legible graphs, the research team was nonetheless able to announce the discovery of the remnants of eight distinct manuscripts, including the earliest hand-written copies of *The Analects* and *Master Wen* ever found.²⁹

3.1. *The Bamboo Manuscript*

The *Master Wen* manuscript consists of 277 bamboo fragments with 2,799 legible graphs. The bamboo fragments mention only two protagonists: Master Wen 文子 and King Ping 平王, presumably the first ruler of the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770–256 BCE). Their conversation must be fictional because the text is demonstrably not that old. Textual evidence indicates that *Master Wen* was created in the Han dynasty, roughly between the reigns of Emperor Gaozu 漢高祖 (r. 202–195 BCE) and Emperor Wu 漢武帝 (r. 140–86 BCE).³⁰

The main concern in *Master Wen*, as expressed on one bamboo strip, is to ensure that “misfortune and chaos do not arise” 禍亂不起.³¹ The ultimate recipe for preventing socio-political chaos, according to the text, is

²⁹ For more on the Dingzhou discovery and the texts discovered in that tomb, see Paul van Els, “Dingzhou: The Story of an Unfortunate Tomb,” *Asiatische Studien / Études asiatiques* 63 (2009): 909–41.

³⁰ For more on the date of *Master Wen*, see Paul van Els, “The *Wenzi*: Creation and Manipulation of a Chinese Philosophical Text” (Ph.D. diss., Leiden University, 2006), pp. 40–45.

³¹ *Master Wen*, bamboo strip 0674. Hebeisheng wenwu yanjiusuo Dingzhou Han jian zhengli xiaozu 河北省文物研究所定州漢簡整理小組, “Dingzhou Xi-Han Zhongshan Huai wang mu zhujian *Wenzi* shiwen 定州西漢中山懷王墓竹簡《文子》釋文,” *Wenwu* 文物 12 (1995): 33. I quote the transcription of the bamboo *Master Wen* manuscript as published in the December 1995 issue of the Chinese academic journal *Cultural Relics* 文物, with simplified graphs changed to traditional graphs for coherence. The Dingzhou bamboo strips were found in disarray, because the threads that originally bundled them did not survive. Hence, each strip of the Dingzhou find was assigned a four-digit number before they were re-grouped into distinct manuscripts. Illegible graphs on bamboo strips are represented as □ in the Chinese transcription and as ... in my English translation. Chinese graphs between brackets exist only on note cards made prior to the Tangshan earthquake, which toppled the storage chest of bamboo strips and rendered these graphs

a quietist form of government through practices such as “being non-active” 無為, “preserving quietude” 守靜, and “holding on to the One” 執一. These practices, repeatedly mentioned on the bamboo strips, indicate that *Master Wen* is profoundly inspired by *The Old Master*, in which such concepts also play a vital role. In fact, the disintombed *Master Wen* fragments contain numerous textual references to *The Old Master*. Take, for example, this bamboo strip:

earth is a large vessel that cannot be held on to and cannot be acted on. Whoever tries to act on it will be ruined. Whoever tries to hold on to it will be lost

地大器也，不可執，不可為。為者敗，執者失³²

This alludes to the following line in *The Old Master*:

The world is a sacred vessel that cannot be acted on. Whoever tries to act on it will ruin it. Whoever tries to hold on to it will lose it.

天下神器，不可為。為者敗之。執者失之。³³

Minor variations in wording notwithstanding, the core message of both texts is the same: the ruler should not try to actively control his realm, but allow the realm to follow its natural course. The idea of being non-active recurs on these bamboo fragments of the excavated *Master Wen*:

Those who [hold on to] grandeur, reduce themselves and reduce even more; those who hold on to a high position, lower themselves and lower even more.

大者，損有損之；持高者，下有下之。³⁴

... asked: “What is meant by ‘reducing themselves and reducing even more, lowering themselves and lowering even more?’” [Master] Wen [answered]

□曰：“何謂損有損之，下有下之？”文³⁵

These bamboo strips urge those who strive for power and prestige to remain low and humble. This idea also occurs in *The Old Master*:

In the pursuit of the Way, they reduce themselves and reduce themselves even more, until they reach the state of being non-active.

為道日損，損之又損之，以至於無為³⁶

on the strips illegible. Hence their transcription can no longer be verified. The mark // represents traces of silk thread that were used to bundle the text.

³² *Master Wen*, bamboo strip 0870. Hebeisheng wenwu yanjiusuo, “*Wenzi shiwen*,” p. 29.

³³ *The Old Master*, 29. Zhu, *Laozi jiaoshi*, p. 115; Lau, *Lao Tzu*, p. 34.

³⁴ *Master Wen*, bamboo strip 0926. Hebeisheng wenwu yanjiusuo, “*Wenzi shiwen*,” p. 31.

³⁵ *Master Wen*, bamboo strip 0813. Hebeisheng wenwu yanjiusuo, “*Wenzi shiwen*,” p. 31.

³⁶ *The Old Master*, 48. Zhu, *Laozi jiaoshi*, p. 192; Lau, *Lao Tzu*, p. 55.

Such references to *The Old Master* occur throughout the bamboo *Master Wen* manuscript.³⁷ They indicate that *Master Wen* drew inspiration from *The Old Master* and its quietist method for curing social chaos. But there are clear differences between the two texts, most notably in their respective views on war.

3.2. *Classification of Warfare in Master Wen*

War receives much attention in what is left of the bamboo *Master Wen* manuscript. For instance, on one bamboo strip King Ping inquires about “the way of troops and soldiers” 師徒之道.³⁸ Regrettably, Master Wen’s answer to this query is now lost. Fortunately, a discussion on different ways of being a true king, which includes a classification of warfare, has survived on various bamboo strips:

King Ping asked: “How many ways of being a true king are there?” Master Wen answered: “There is only one way of being a true king.

平[王曰：“王者]幾道乎？”文子曰：“王者[一道]。

The king asked: “In ancient times, some

王曰：“古者有

reigned on the basis of the Way, and others on the basis of warfare

以道王者，有以兵

How could there be only one Way?” Master Wen answered: “Those who in the past reigned on the basis of the Way//.

以一道也？”文子曰：“古之以道王者//，

those who reigned on the basis of warfare

以兵王者

is called greedy warfare. To rely on the sheer size of one’s realm and take pride in one’s people

[者]，謂之貪[兵]。[恃]其國家之大，矜其人民

sheer number, while desiring to appear more worthy than one’s enemies, is called arrogant warfare. Righteous warfare

衆。欲見賢于適（敵）者，謂之驕[兵]。義[兵]

³⁷ See Paul van Els, “Persuasion through Definition: Argumentative Features of the Ancient *Wenzi*,” *Oriens Extremus* 45 (2005): 221–23.

³⁸ *Master Wen*, bamboo strip 1198. Hebeisheng wenwu yanjiusuo, “*Wenzi shiwen*,” p. 34.

Therefore, the only way of being a true king is that of virtue! Therefore I say that there is only one Way.” King Ping

[故王道唯德乎！臣故曰一道。”平王]³⁹

It is hard to follow the discussion on these damaged bamboo fragments. In fact, it is not even certain if all fragments belong to one and the same discussion in the original text. However, they do occur together, in modified form, in one section of the transmitted text, where they are part of one distinct discussion:

Master Wen asked: “How many ways of being a true king are there?”

The Old Master answered: “Only one.”

Master Wen asked: “In the past, some reigned on the basis of the Way and others on the basis of warfare. How can there be only one?”

The Old Master answered: “Those who reigned on the basis of the Way were virtuous and those who reigned on the basis of warfare were also virtuous. There are five ways of using the army: there is righteous warfare, reactive warfare, furious warfare, greedy warfare, and arrogant warfare. To punish an oppressor and rescue the weak is called ‘righteous.’ To have no choice but to rise in arms when the enemy has invaded is called ‘reactive.’ Not being able to hold back when quarrelling over trivial matters is called ‘furious.’ To profit from other people’s land and desire other people’s goods is called ‘greedy.’ To rely on the sheer size of one’s realm and take pride in the sheer number of one’s people, while desiring to appear more worthy than one’s enemies, is called ‘arrogant.’ Righteous warfare leads to kingship, reactive warfare to victory, furious warfare to defeat, greedy warfare to death and arrogant warfare to annihilation. Such is the Way of Heaven.”

文子問曰：“王道有幾？”老子曰：“一而已矣。”文子曰：“古有以道王者，有以兵王者，何其一也？”曰：“以道王者德也，以兵王者亦德也。用兵者五：有義兵，有應兵，有忿兵，有貪兵，有驕兵。誅暴救弱謂之義。敵來加己，不得已而用之，謂之應。爭小故，不勝其心，謂之忿。利人土地，欲人財貨，謂之貪。恃其國家之大，矜其人民之衆，欲見賢於敵國者謂之驕。義兵王，應兵勝，忿兵敗，貪兵死，驕兵滅，此天道也。”⁴⁰

There are obvious differences between the bamboo manuscript and the received text. Most remarkably, the two main protagonists changed from King Ping and Master Wen in the bamboo manuscript, to the Old Master and Master Wen in the transmitted text. Master Wen’s role accordingly changed from political advisor, answering the monarch’s questions, to

³⁹ *Master Wen*, bamboo strips 2419, 0829, 0850, 2210, 1035, 0572, 2217 and 2385, respectively. Hebeisheng wenwu yanjiusuo, “*Wenzi shiwen*,” pp. 29–30.

⁴⁰ *Master Wen*, 5.9. Peng Yushang 彭裕商, ed., *Wenzi jiaozhu* 文子校注 (Chengdu 成都: Ba-Shu shushe 巴蜀書社, 2006), pp. 102–103; Thomas Cleary, trans., *Wen-tzu: Understanding the Mysteries* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1992), pp. 69–70.

inquisitive disciple, posing questions to his master. Such differences confirm that *Master Wen* underwent major revision, probably between the Han and Tang dynasties, when views ascribed to the Old Master were in high demand. Yet even if someone did significantly revise *Master Wen*, the bamboo fragments corresponding to this particular section suggest that the bamboo manuscript and the received text contain similar (if not identical) versions of this classification of warfare and, hence, that the classification may date from the first decades of the Han dynasty, when *Master Wen* was probably created.

Master Wen distinguishes five types of warfare, offering a name, a description, and an assured outcome for each. Not all types of warfare are permissible and each leads to a different result. The respective outcomes of these wars tell us how the text evaluates them

Table 3. Classification of Warfare in *Master Wen*

#	Name	Description	Outcome	↕
1	righteous	punishing an oppressor and rescuing the weak	kingship	↑
2	reactive	rising in arms when the enemy has invaded	victory	↑
3	furious	flying into a rage when quarrelling over trivial matters	defeat	↓
4	greedy	profiting from other people's land and desiring other people's goods	death	↓
5	arrogant	desiring to appear more worthy than one's enemies	annihilation	↓

This classification exhibits a regression, with righteousness being the best motive and arrogance the worst. Righteous wars lead to one's coronation, wars based on arrogance to one's annihilation. When the text states that those who reigned on the basis of warfare also possessed virtue, it probably refers only to the righteous and reactive types of warfare.

3.3. *Warfare in Master Wen*

The unearthed *Master Wen* fragments exhibit a quietist philosophy that centers on union with the Way through, among other things, the practice of being non-active. Warfare may well be the most extreme form of active conduct and certainly something the text would argue against. Indeed, one

bamboo strip unequivocally states that “if you possess the Way, you do not fight wars” 有道則不戰.⁴¹ Even the names of the two protagonists in the bamboo text possibly reflect the non-interventionist stance of *Master Wen*. The word *ping* 平 in the name King Ping carries the literal meaning of “peace” and the word *wen* 文 in the name Master Wen can mean “civil virtue,” the antonym of martial vigor. Such anti-war sentiments in *Master Wen* appear to echo the views of its main source of inspiration, *The Old Master*, but there is one major difference: where *The Old Master* condemns warfare in no uncertain terms (see the introduction to this chapter), *Master Wen* refrains from harsh rhetoric and takes a more pragmatic stance. Of course, war should never be waged out of greed, anger, or arrogance, but certain other ways of warfare can meet with *Master Wen*’s approval. An aggressor who invades one’s state may be driven out, and an oppressor who tyrannizes his population and threatens the region may be ousted. The positive outcomes that *Master Wen* predicts for these two cases indicate a new interpretation of being non-active that, quite remarkably, embraces both types of warfare. While the ruler should essentially stick to a quietist mode of government, situations may occur when doing nothing would be more harmful than dealing with these situations through military means. In other words, in the event that there is no better alternative, even engaging in warfare may be considered being non-active and lead to union with the Way. The true king, as *Master Wen* puts it, is always virtuous, even if he reigns through military means.

4. *Comparison of the Classifications*

Having discussed the three classifications of warfare in their respective contexts, let us now have a look at their most noteworthy similarities and differences.

One notable difference is that both *Master Wu* and *Master Wen* distinguish five types of warfare, while *The Four Canons* identifies only three. Similarly, whereas both *Master Wu* and *Master Wen* provide a label for each type of warfare (such as “righteous warfare” 義兵), *The Four Canons* offers a description (such as “out of righteousness” 為義).

⁴¹ *Master Wen*, bamboo strip 0619. Hebeisheng wenwu yanjiusuo, “Wenzi shiwen,” p. 27.

Table 4. The Three Classifications of Warfare Compared

	<i>Master Wu</i>			<i>The Four Canons</i>			<i>Master Wen</i>		
A	義兵	righteous	↑	為義	righteousness	↑	義兵	righteous	↑
B		-----			-----		應兵	reactive	↑
C	暴兵	oppressive	↓	為利	profit	↔	貪兵	greedy	↓
D	強兵	strong	↓		-----		驕兵	arrogant	↓
E	逆兵	contrary	↓		-----			-----	
F	剛兵	hard	↓	行忿	fury	↓	忿兵	furious	↓

Row A at the top of the table shows that all three texts consider righteousness a justified motive for war. A ruler may deploy troops to oust an oppressor and rescue an impoverished population, if his intentions are (and remain) upright. Row F, at the bottom of the table shows that the three texts jointly disapprove of accumulated anger as a motive for war. Resentment among heads of state, they suggest, should be dealt with through diplomacy, not war.

The three texts offer differing evaluations of profit as a motive for war (Row C). While *Master Wu* and *Master Wen* condemn it, *The Four Canons* does not. *Master Wu* associates profit with a surplus of greed and a lack of propriety. *Master Wen* likewise speaks disapprovingly of profiting from other people’s land and desiring other people’s goods. By contrast, *The Four Canons* discusses only the annexation of weak states that fail to subsist on their own, which it finds acceptable but of little use.

Master Wu and *Master Wen* both mention two additional types of warfare, with one type from each text that appears to correspond to a type from the other.

What *Master Wu* calls “strong warfare” bears a resemblance to the “arrogant warfare” in *Master Wen* (Row D). *Master Wu* succinctly describes this type of warfare as “relying on the masses to launch an offensive.” *Master Wen* is more elaborate: “to rely on the sheer size of one’s realm and take pride in the sheer number of one’s people, while desiring to appear more worthy than one’s enemies.” Both texts seem to condemn this type of warfare as an attack on another state simply because one has the power to do so.

Master Wu’s remaining motive, “contrary warfare,” is explained as an objectionable attempt to divert the people’s attention from the famine and chaos that plague them (Row E). This seems unrelated to *Master Wen*’s

“reactive warfare,” which is the endorsed practice of using military means to defend one’s realm against invasions (Row B).

In sum, there are quite a few similarities between these classifications, especially between those in *Master Wu* and *Master Wen*. There may also be an explanation as to why these two texts diverge where they do, as we shall now see.

5. *Relatedness of the Classifications*

Are these three classifications of warfare related? Were any perhaps written with another in mind?

On the one hand, an intertextual relationship is hard to prove. There are clear differences between the three classifications, and few other parallel passages between the respective texts in which they occur. Moreover, these are just three classifications that we now have at our disposal. We do not know if these are the only classifications that existed or if, perhaps, more of them circulated in those days. After all, there may be other texts with war classifications still buried in tombs awaiting discovery.

On the other hand, the similarities between these classifications, especially between those in *Master Wu* and *Master Wen*, are striking. They agree on the number of different types of war, they offer names for each type, and similar descriptions for most types. It is hard to conceive that they were created entirely independently of one another and I would therefore argue that they are indeed related. What, then, would be the direction of borrowing?

One way to answer this question would be to look at the historical order of the texts, supposing the earliest text to be a foundation for the later ones. I presented the three classifications of warfare in what tentatively may be their historical order.⁴² It should be pointed out, however, that the complex processes of creation and the long history of transmission and revision of early Chinese texts make it difficult to determine the precise time periods from which texts date, not to mention from which individual passages date.

⁴² First, *Master Wu*, because the core of this text, according to recent scholars, reflects to some degree the ideas of Wu Qi (d. 381 BCE). Next, *The Four Canons*, because this text, and the section “The Fundamental Types of Attack” in particular, is somewhat plausibly said to date from the end of the Warring States period. Finally, *Master Wen*, which in all probability dates from the first decades of the Han dynasty. See the respective sections earlier in this chapter for further details regarding the time periods from which the texts date.

For instance, even if the core of *Master Wu* can be linked plausibly to the historical Wu Qi, it still remains to be determined what passages constitute this core and if the classification of warfare is among them. Hence, the historical order of these three texts remains tentative.

There is, however, a more fundamental reason for seeing *Master Wu*'s classification of warfare as the source of the other two. This has to do with the popularity of enumerated lists in military–strategic circles. *Master Wu* often captures its teachings under a heading, such as “the four vital points of warfare” (which are morale, terrain, affairs, and strength) or “the four disharmonies” (disharmony in the state, in the army, in formations, and in battle). In addition, *Master Wu* also elaborates on “the three things on which the ruler depends,” “the four principles of lightness, two principles of heaviness, and one principle of belief,” “the five affairs to which a general must pay careful attention,” “the six circumstances in which, without performing divination, one should avoid conflict,” and “the eight conditions under which one engages in battle without performing divination.” Such enumerated descriptions occur throughout the text, but they are not limited to *Master Wu* alone. Other early Chinese military–strategic writings, such as *The Art of Warfare* or *The Six Secret Teachings* 六韜, likewise speak of “the three treasures,” “the five ways to know victory,” “the six thieves,” “the seven harms,” and so on and so forth. This kind of enumeration obviously flourished in military–strategic circles, where it had an important function. To students of military thought, enumerative lists served as mnemonic devices and allowed them to keep the essentials of warfare in mind.⁴³ Faced with a situation on the actual battlefield, they could easily go over the memorized lists and take the appropriate action. At the end of the Warring States era, such lists also became popular outside the military–strategic context.⁴⁴ It therefore seems plausible that this specific list, the classification of various types of warfare, originated in a military–strategic context, perhaps even specifically in *Master Wu*, and later spread to a broader politico–philosophical context, to which *The Four Canons* and *Master Wen* belong. We know from contemporary sources that writings ascribed to the distinguished general Wu Qi were popular until well into the Han dynasty, and it is not unlikely that contemporary authors took inspiration from that text. If the classification of warfare already formed part of *Master Wu* in those days, it may have inspired the similar classifica-

⁴³ Martin Van Creveld, *The Art of War: War and Military Thought* (London: Cassell, 2002), p. 29.

⁴⁴ Yates, *Five Lost Classics*, p. 200.

tions in the other two texts, a liberal interpretation in *The Four Canons* and a more literal interpretation in *Master Wen*.

If the classification in *Master Wu* indeed dates from the Warring States period and the classification in *Master Wen* from the Han dynasty, the respective time periods from which they date may explain the main difference between these two classifications. Historiographical sources (such as *Records of the Historian* 史記 and *History of the Han* 漢書) describe the political, social, and economic situation of the early Han dynasty as fairly stable, which does not match *Master Wu's* description of a state in chaos with exhausted people. Hence, grounds for waging *Master Wu's* contrary warfare are lacking. External attacks by the Xiongnu 匈奴, however, constitute an acknowledged and growing problem under the Han dynasty (see also the concluding section in this chapter). These attacks match the description of an invading enemy, for which *Master Wen* permits reactive warfare in defense. If *Master Wen* indeed drew inspiration from *Master Wu*, it may have adapted *Master Wu's* classification to best fit the socio-political realities of its own time of creation.

6. Function of the Classifications

In the preceding section, I suggested that the classification of warfare spread from a specialized military-strategic context to a broader politico-philosophical discourse. What would motivate this development? In my analysis, the classification reflects a realistic socio-political worldview and offers a useful tool for contemplating motives for going to war, two aspects that were lacking in the larger politico-philosophical debate on warfare at the time. Discussions of warfare, particularly those reflected in what are generally seen as relatively early politico-philosophical writings (e.g. *The Analects*, *Master Mo*, and *The Old Master*), are problematic for a number of reasons: they are scarce, they are exceedingly negative, and they are imprecise.

First, passages that specifically address the issue of warfare are often scarce. For example, as we have seen in the introduction to this chapter, Confucius claims that he never studied military matters and the topic accordingly receives little attention in *The Analects*. The text even states explicitly that Confucius was cautious about making any statements concerning warfare.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *The Analects*, 7.13. Yang, *Lunyu yizhu*, p. 69; Lau, *The Analects*, p. 87.

Second, views on warfare in these texts are often highly negative. Think of the abrupt departure of Confucius when he was asked about military matters, which may symbolize his aversion to war (see the introduction to this chapter). Think also of Master Mo, who passionately condemned what is often translated as “offensive warfare” 攻 as the gravest of all crimes, and of the Old Master, who denounced warfare in no uncertain terms.⁴⁶ The idea shared by these texts is that the ruler’s self cultivation, moral or otherwise, renders war unnecessary.

Third, views on warfare are often not as negative as they seem. Confucius, for instance, does conditionally support warfare if the soldiers receive proper training. Master Mo condemns offensive warfare, but does reluctantly and conditionally support “punitive warfare” 誅, military campaigns to punish a ruler who has lost the “Mandate of Heaven” 天命, or the right to govern.⁴⁷ And most texts would agree that defensive wars are permissible.

To sum up, in many early politico–philosophical texts warfare did not receive much attention, and when it was discussed the tone was mainly negative, while the exact positions of the texts on warfare often remains unclear.

By the end of the Warring States era (roughly the date of *The Four Canons*), it must have been clear that a new dynastic order was going to be founded by the victor on the battlefield, and that any idea of a non-military conquest of the empire would be illusory. And the Han dynasty (when *Master Wen* was likely created) was actually founded after a series of military campaigns. Thinkers in this period could hardly ignore the military issue, or adopt strong anti-war rhetoric. Indeed, in the third and second centuries BCE, discussion on warfare changed, as thinkers began to articulate more clearly what Turner aptly calls “an ethic for using force.”⁴⁸ These thinkers did not consider warfare objectionable per se, but called attention to the underlying motives. Various texts from that period express the view that “war should be initiated only if the decision to fight was made dispassionately, without selfish or vindictive motives” and only if it “punished a state that had committed crimes against its own people or threatened to harm the innocent subjects of its enemies.”⁴⁹ The contemporary term for

⁴⁶ *Master Mo*, 17. Sun, *Mozi jiangou*, p. 118–119; Johnston, *The Mozi*, pp. 166–169.

⁴⁷ *Master Mo*, 19. Sun, *Mozi jiangou*, p. 129–144; Johnston, *The Mozi*, pp. 182–197.

⁴⁸ Karen Turner, “War, Punishment, and the Law of Nature in Early Chinese Concepts of the State,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53, no. 2 (1993): 291.

⁴⁹ Turner, “War, Punishment and the Law,” pp. 297, 300.

wars waged dispassionately for punitive reasons is “righteous warfare” 義兵, a concept comparable to the “just war” theory in the Western tradition.⁵⁰ Texts that discuss righteous warfare at length include *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, *Master Xun* 荀子, and *The Master of Huainan* 淮南子. The latter two texts even contain complete chapters that elaborate on the cautious use of force.⁵¹ The primary targets of the righteous warfare doctrine, Lewis argues, were “those near pacifists who argued that the compelling moral power of a true king would make war unnecessary, or that only defensive wars were permissible.”⁵² Graff likewise argues that the righteous warfare doctrine “when joined with the right amount of propaganda and misinformation spread about by a less than virtuous ruler, opened a hole in Chinese pacifism through which a four-horse war chariot could easily be driven.”⁵³

It seems to me that *The Four Canons* and *Master Wen* feed into this larger debate on warfare by introducing a useful tool which they probably borrowed from a military–strategic context. With this one tool, they attain several goals.

Since their classifications of warfare permit certain kinds of warfare, they avoid some of the anti-war sentiment that is present in other texts. And by acknowledging different motives for initiating an attack, they enable a more nuanced discussion and position themselves more clearly on the wide spectrum between civility and martiality. Moreover, their classifications of warfare are far more succinct than the elaborate discussions on the use of force in, for example, *Master Xun* or *The Master of Huainan*. The classifications can be used as a sort of easy-to-remember checklist, like the many enumerated lists used in military–strategic circles. Similar to a general who, prior to the commencement of hostilities, may explore memorized lists and decide which tactic would be appropriate in that particular case, a ruler on the eve of war may use this list to check what his motives are and, hence, whether or not the war is justified.

⁵⁰ Lewis, “Just War”; David A. Graff, “The Chinese Concept of Righteous War,” In *The Prism of Just War—Asian and Western Perspectives on the Legitimate Use of Military Force*, edited by Howard M. Hensel (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

⁵¹ *Master Xun*, 15. See John Knoblock, trans., *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works, Volume II, Books 7–16* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 211–234. *The Master of Huainan* 15. See John S. Major, et al., trans, *The Huainanzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 573–615; Edmund Ryden, *Philosophy of Peace in Han China: A Study of the Huainanzi Ch. 15 On Military Strategy* (Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute, 1998).

⁵² Lewis, “Just War,” p. 185.

⁵³ Graff, “Righteous War,” p. 211.

Notably, the classifications of warfare are like a stone that kills two birds: dove and hawk. While the classifications acknowledge different motives for war and even approve of some (hence silencing the dove), their descriptions of allowable wars put the bar so high that any ruler with a clear conscience would have to cancel the proposed attack (hence silencing the hawk). Hence, while *The Four Canons* and *Master Wen* may appear less anti-war than earlier politico–philosophical texts, in an interesting rhetorical twist their approach may be all the more effective.

7. *Influence of the Classifications*

So far, we have seen how classifications of warfare were included in military–strategic writings and politico–philosophical texts. I showed how the classifications may have served as a tool for analyzing looming conflict. But was this tool ever employed in practice, in actual debate on warfare? If so, to what effect?

Fortunately, an apposite example of the rhetorical use of a classification of warfare survives. Over two thousand years ago, the Xiongnu raided Han colonies near Jushi 車師 (in the present-day Turfan 吐魯番 region). Emperor Xuan of the Han dynasty 漢宣帝 (r. 73–49 BCE), having consulted with his generals, thereupon wished to send an expeditionary force to get even with these “barbarians” and prevent them from stirring up the western regions of the Han empire again. Chancellor Wei Xiang 魏相 (d. 59 BCE) then took up his brush to dissuade the Emperor from attacking the Xiongnu. His memorial reads:

I have learned this: To rescue those in chaos and punish an oppressor is called “righteous warfare”; if you wage a righteous war, you shall be king. To have no choice but to rise in arms when the enemy has invaded your territory is called “reactive warfare”; if you wage a reactive war, you shall be victorious. To be unable to hold back your rage when quarreling over a small matter is called “furious warfare”; if you wage a furious war, you shall be defeated. To profit from other people’s land and goods is called “greedy warfare”; if you wage a greedy war, you shall be broken. To rely on the sheer size of your realm and pride yourself on the sheer number of your people, while desiring to show off your majesty to your adversaries is called “arrogant warfare”; if you wage an arrogant war, you shall be annihilated. These five are not just decided by man; they are the Way of Heaven.

Recently, the Xiongnu have treated us with the best of intentions. Each one of our people that they captured, they kindly sent back to us, and on no account did they violate our borders. Admittedly, there were frictions at the colonies of Jushi, but this is not worth our attention. Now I have heard

that the generals wish to raise troops and enter their territory. I humbly submit that I have no idea what kind of war this is meant to be.

At present, the commanderies at the border are poverty-stricken. Fathers and sons share the fur of dogs and goats, they eat the seeds of wild weeds, and their constant fear for their lives would be aggravated by the threat of a war. "In the wake of corps and brigades, there will be years of dearth."⁵⁴ This saying implies that the worrying and suffering among the people damages the harmony of yin and yang. Even if the troops you send out were to be victorious, in their wake there will still be sorrow. Extraordinary death and destruction are likely to come from this.

In recent times, most governors and administrators of our territorial administrations have not been chosen for their qualities. The sense of standards in their regions became wafer-thin, and floods and droughts took us by surprise. According to this year's figures, there have been 222 instances of a son killing his father, a younger brother his elder brother, or a wife her husband. In my humble opinion, these are no insignificant events. Now, the advisors to your left and right do not worry about this. Instead, they wish to launch an army to visit their petty grudges on distant barbarians for their minor act of aggression. This is probably what Confucius meant when he said: "I am afraid that the worries of the Ji Clan lie not in Zhuanyu, but within the walls of their own palace."⁵⁵

I only hope that Your Majesty will consult with the Marquis of Pingchang, the Marquis of Lechang, the Marquis of Ping'en, and other knowledgeable persons, before you authorize this military campaign.

臣聞之，救亂誅暴，謂之義兵，兵義者王；敵加於己，不得已而起者，謂之應兵，兵應者勝；爭恨小故，不忍憤怒者，謂之忿兵，兵忿者敗；利人土地貨寶者，謂之貪兵，兵貪者破；恃國家之大，矜民人之衆，欲見威於敵者，謂之驕兵，兵驕者滅；此五者，非但人事，乃天道也。問者匈奴嘗有善意，所得漢民輒奉歸之，未有犯於邊境，雖爭屯田車師，不足致意中。今聞諸將軍欲興兵入其地，臣愚不知此兵何名者也。今邊郡困乏，父子共犬羊之裘，食草萊之實，常恐不能自存，難於動兵。『軍旅之後，必有凶年』，言民以其愁苦之氣，傷陰陽之和也。出兵雖勝，猶有後憂，恐災害之變因此以生。今郡國守相多不實選，風俗尤薄，水旱不時。案今年計，子弟殺父兄、妻殺夫者，凡二百二十二人，臣愚以為此非小變也。今左右不憂此，乃欲發兵報纖介之忿於遠夷，殆孔子所謂『吾恐季孫之憂不在顓臾而在蕭牆之內』也。願陛下與平昌侯、樂昌侯、平恩侯及有識者詳議乃可。⁵⁶

⁵⁴ This is a quotation from chapter 30 of *The Old Master*.

⁵⁵ This is a quotation from chapter 16.1 of *The Analects*, where Confucius condemns a military offensive by the Ji Clan against Zhuanyu.

⁵⁶ *History of the Han*, 74. Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), ed., *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing 北京: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1962), p. 3136.

The five ways of warfare mentioned at the beginning of the memorial bear a strong resemblance to the classifications discussed earlier, especially to the one in *Master Wen*. Wei Xiang agrees with *Master Wen* on the total number and sequential order of the different ways of warfare, on their names and descriptions, on their predicted outcomes, and on the fact that their outcomes are decided by Heaven, not by man. When the chancellor claims to have learned about the five ways of warfare, he may be specifically referring to *Master Wen*. However, irrespective of the precise source of Wei Xiang's knowledge, the memorial shows that classifications of warfare, once conceived by military strategists and developed by other scholars, exerted influence on contemporary politics. Wei Xiang may feign ignorance in knowing how to label a retaliation against the Xiongnu, but it is abundantly clear he would not praise such an attack as righteous or reactive. More likely, he would condemn it as furious: an excessive response to a minor incident. The *History of the Han*, which stores the memorial, concludes by saying that "the Emperor duly heeded Wei Xiang's advice and halted the campaign" 上從相言而止.⁵⁷ And so the classifications of various ways of warfare may have been of palpable influence over the course of Chinese imperial history.

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⁵⁷ *History of the Han*, 74. Ban Gu, *Han shu*, p. 3136.