

Searching for Peace in the Warring States: Philosophical Debates and the Management of Violence in Early China

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One who takes pleasure in war will perish, and one who covets the spoils of victory will incur disgrace. War is not something to be enjoyed, and victory is not something to profit from.¹

Sun Bin (mid-fourth century BCE)

Introduction

Yuri Pines has recently argued that all the thinkers of the Warring States period in China (circa 500–221 BCE), from Confucius (551–479) on, were unanimous in their advocacy of a unitary empire, what he calls “The Great Unity Paradigm,”² as a result of their disappointment with the collapse of the multi-state international order in the preceding Spring and Autumn period (mid-eighth to fifth centuries) of the Eastern Zhou dynasty.³ The times in which they lived saw increasingly savage warfare waged between rival states, and philosophers and statesmen traveled from one state to another offering their services to the rulers, proposing different policies and recommendations both on how to unify the “All-under-Heaven” (the world as they

knew it) and how to survive physically in those turbulent times. The rulers themselves in turn sought to attract talented men to advise them on what policies to follow and to serve in their increasingly complex administrative organizations, just as they sought to attract peasants from other states who would plow their fields, providing them with tax revenue in the form of grain and textiles, and serve in their armies.⁴

Some states chose the path of aggression, others, in weaker strategic situations, chose to ally themselves with the stronger, hoping that they would not be eliminated. Over time, various coalitions were formed both for and against the rising menace on the western frontier, the state of Qin, and in the end only seven states were left to compete for the ultimate prize of unifying the subcontinent. The most prominent among them were Qin and Chu, the latter a vast country based in the central Yangzi River valley, modern Hubei Province, which had expanded in all directions.⁵ In fact, although the accepted wisdom is that no empire was founded in China until the unification of the subcontinent by the infamous First Emperor of Qin (Qin Shihuangdi) in 221, both Qin and Chu were empires by approximately 300, whereas the other states were more local or regional polities.⁶

As for how rulers and their subjects were to survive physically in those turbulent times philosophers proposed a very wide range of answers, and much of the intellectual debate centered on such questions, as well as on how rulers were to gain and maintain the support of their people and attract and retain migrants into their territories. These debates led to profound analyses of human nature and its relation to the divine or the suprahuman realm, the nature of morality and ethics, appropriate courses of personal and political behavior, and many other topics. Recent archaeological discoveries of long-lost texts relating to views and traditions that contributed to these debates have deepened our understanding of the complex intellectual environment, but often have raised as many questions as they have answered.⁷

The first unified empire was created by the Qin, but it only lasted for barely more than a decade (221–206) before its collapse in a bitter civil war after the First Emperor's death.⁸ Unity was eventually restored by Liu Bang, who founded the Han dynasty in 206. Known in history as Han Gaozu, Liu, a former low-ranking Qin official who served in the former territory controlled by Chu, spent most of his reign mopping up resistance to his rule and meeting military and political challenges to his supremacy not only from his rivals for the throne and the leader of the northern steppe peoples (the Xiongnu), but also from his former generals who sought, as warlords, to return to the multi-state system of the time before the imperial unification by the Qin. Although Han apologists sought to distinguish the Han from their Qin predecessors,

new discoveries of legal texts dating from the early Han make it possible to see that there were very significant continuities in political, legal, and social institutions between the two regimes of imperial Qin and early Han.⁹

Pines quotes from one of these Han apologists, the early Han Confucian philosopher and statesman Jia Yi (circa 200–168) who criticized the Qin in a famous set of essays titled “Finding Fault with Qin” (*Guo Qin lun*) that the Han historian Sima Qian (circa 145–circa 86) preserved in his *Historical Records*:

Now, after Qin faced south and ruled All under Heaven, this meant that there was a Son of Heaven above. The masses hoped that they would obtain peace and security and there was nobody who did not whole-heartedly look up in reverence. This was the moment to preserve authority and stabilize achievements, the foundations of lasting peace.¹⁰

The ideal of unity formulated by the Warring States thinkers dominated all later conceptions of the Chinese imperium, Pines argues, and still influences Chinese policy today. Thus, he ignores the many later centuries when the East Asian subcontinent was divided into competing polities and empires, so that different forms of accommodation and peaceful relations had to be worked out between essentially equal partners, and different philosophical and religious ideologies, such as Buddhism, played crucial, if not central roles. But Pines is not alone in assuming that little changed over the millennia between the Warring States and modern times. Yuan-kang Wang neatly sums up this strain of thinking when he states, “Rarely in human history can we find a case like China in which a single pacifist culture (that of Confucianism) dominated both the bureaucracy and the society for two thousand years.”¹¹ Given that China was among the most inventive cultures in the arts of war and has a rich military history, this claim is far from the mark: China was never a “pacifist culture” and Confucianism was never a pacifist ideology, nor, indeed, was Confucianism uninterruptedly dominant for two thousand years.¹² Nevertheless, Wang, Wright, Standen, and Cui, among others, have documented the nature and structure of international relations in some of these later stages of Chinese history,¹³ while Johnston has written an influential, although historically flawed, study of international relations in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644 CE).¹⁴ The conceptions of peace and the means of achieving it in these later periods of Chinese history, and the influence of Confucian culture and philosophy on those practices, although fascinating, are not the subject of the present chapter, which concerns itself with the time prior to the establishment of the unified empire under the Qin in 221 BCE.¹⁵

Political Conditions in Early China

The three centuries of the Warring States (fifth to third centuries) were a period of intense and almost permanent warfare between rival states that could be viewed as a time of “chronic conflict” in the terms of Caplow and Hicks,¹⁶ while at the same time it was a period of drastic social, political, intellectual, and economic change.

Earlier, in the Western Zhou period (mid-eleventh to mid-eighth centuries), the Zhou kings dominated and controlled their subordinates—polities that were centered on aristocratic lineages linked by blood or marriage to the Zhou Ji clan—through ritual rules (*li*), administrative techniques, and their own military might.¹⁷ In this earlier period, Zhou power managed interstate rivalries as well as the expansion of those polities into unclaimed territory in the East Asian subcontinent, including the traditional territory of non-Zhou peoples, only some of whom were at a state level of organization. Central Zhou dominance was lost in the years just prior to 770, as a result of a succession dispute and an internal revolt. In the subsequent decades, the Zhou were forced from their original homeland in the Wei River valley in north-western China to move to a much smaller territory surrounding the city of Luoyang in the flood plain of the Yellow River in modern Henan province.¹⁸ There, the Eastern Zhou rulers maintained their ritual authority until their line eventually died out in 256.¹⁹

The early Eastern Zhou is known as the Spring and Autumn period after an annalistic chronicle of the minor state of Lu supposedly edited by Confucius (died 479).²⁰ During this period, a series of hegemonic leaders (*ba*), whose military might was vastly superior to that of the Zhou, was able to maintain a balance of power between increasingly restless and expansionist states by acting in the name of the Zhou kings to enforce international agreements or treaties called covenants (*meng*).²¹ These covenants initially had strong religious overtones: they were confirmed by oaths and blood sacrifice and guaranteed by the gods. Violation of the treaties was punished not only by the sworn partners themselves but also by the gods who would administer divine justice. But over a relatively short time these covenants lost their religious and legal authority to enforce peace between warring parties and their allies. Those involved, including the hegemons themselves, cynically manipulated the force of the covenants: they brought forbidden weapons and armor to the covenant site or swore the oath in full knowledge and expectation that they would violate the terms of the peace treaty in order to conduct their foreign policy in accordance with current and fleeting changes in international military power relations; in doing so, they completely ignored the higher authority and wishes of their nominal overlords, the Zhou kings, any commitment to principles of peace, or fear of divine retribution.²²

In the sixth century, states that had expanded in the Spring and Autumn period at the expense of their smaller neighbors began to split apart internally as lineages headed by close relatives of the rulers started to assert their independence and vie for political and economic power. They established their own seats of government based on their own walled hometowns, and they began to build their own military organizations and administrative networks to exploit the resources in the surrounding countryside. The structured world of the Zhou polity seemed to be disintegrating and lineage fission worked its way down lower into the social hierarchy. It is striking that it was just at this period of seeming social disintegration that the beginnings of conscious intellectual ferment began.²³

Both the rulers of the states whose authority was being challenged and the upstart heads of the lineages who were expanding their power at their nominal ruler's expense needed men to advise them on policy initiatives and to carry them out in practice. Thus the conditions of apparent social and political collapse in a period of increasing military strife actually opened the doors for the rise of a new type of individual: a man with talent and intelligence who could serve loyally and offer innovative solutions to the practical problems of governance. This type of man seems to have been found among the members of the lesser lineages whose connections to the ruling houses were more distant. They wanted employment and opportunities to exercise their talents. These men eventually developed into the so-called *shi* class and they sought out teachers who could provide them with an education, which they could then parlay into service for the leaders of the competing powers. The first of such teachers was Confucius, followed in short order by Mozi (Master Mo, otherwise known as Mo Di), among many others whose names mostly have not come down to us.

The Warring States

In his article on the Grand Unity Paradigm, Pines (2000) reviews the ideas of the leading proponents of this new intellectual activity—the Ru or Confucians, Mohists (the followers of Mozi), and Daoists—and argues that all of them believed strongly that the anarchy of the Warring States period succeeding that of the Spring and Autumn could only be solved by the elevation of a single ruler as Son of Heaven. Only the creation of a strong centralized monarchy could end the constant warfare among the competing independent states and their theoretically subordinate lineages. The rulers of these states paid no attention to the wishes of their erstwhile overlords, the Zhou kings, disrupted the lives of the people, and brought about general impoverishment of the

population by their own personal extravagance and desires and their efforts to conquer their rivals by force of arms.

However, each of these traditions of thinkers (Confucians, Mohists, and Daoists) and others of the so-called Hundred Schools, proposed that this ideal single ruler should possess different moral qualities, act in different ways and conform in different ways to the cosmos, and initiate different policies to achieve unity of the All-under-Heaven.

Confucius and his immediate followers advocated a return to forms of government of the early Western Zhou kings; they emphasized the priority of ritual performance and urged that the ruler act as a moral exemplar and listen to advisors who cultivated themselves in the principles of humaneness or benevolence, right thinking (righteousness), trustworthiness, loyalty, filial piety, and wisdom. Their principal rivals were the Mohists—it was said that the founder of the school, Mozi, had initially been one of Confucius's disciples but had left his master as a result of profound philosophical disagreements. They deplored offensive warfare, saying that it was no more than robbery on a grand scale, and urged reduction of government and personal expenses and the establishment of a clear bureaucratic hierarchy in which the most worthy were placed in the higher positions and each lower rank accepted without question the dictates of the rank above them. All policies were to be subject to a test of their benefit to the people as a whole, a principle coupled with the imposition of the moral value of all-encompassing care (*jian'ai*),²⁴ whereby all were to treat everyone else with equal concern and without regard to their kin relationship. As Confucians modeled their moral system on the basis of kin relations, this was a direct challenge to Confucian ideas.

The Daoists, on the other hand, such as those represented in the “Inward Training” chapter of the compendium *Guanzi* (“Neiye”),²⁵ and later the *Laozi*,²⁶ emphasized that the ruler should engage in psychosomatic training through meditation, avoid actively engaging in governing, and let things in the world take their natural course. The ruler would rule by harmonizing himself with the Way, the origin of all things in the cosmos. When people's desires were reduced to the basic necessities (food, drink, and housing), there would no longer be destructive wars and peace would come of itself; those in one village would not even know the affairs of the next village, and everyone would live out their natural life-span without fear or strife.

All these traditions essentially argued that it was only through the methods of peace that war could be brought to an end. In fact, it was only the militarists, such as Wu Qi, and the “legalists,” such as Lord Shang in Qin, Shen Buhai in Han, and Han Feizi, one of the two famous students of the Confucian philosopher Xunzi, who advocated the creation of unity by force

of arms and developed a strategy of strengthening the military, legal, and economic resources of the state to overcome, by military might alone, all other competing states.²⁷

Nevertheless, as far as I can determine at present,²⁸ each of the states in the Warring States period developed its own internal system of laws and legal procedures with little input from the policy suggestions of the philosophers. It was rather the numerous and now mostly unidentifiable administrators who issued legal statutes and ordinances in the name of the rulers of their respective states and developed the legal procedures that were directed towards ensuring internal peace and stability, the monopoly of force by state authorities, the definition and limitation of jurisdiction, and the preservation of the boundaries of the state against external enemies. Their efforts provoked tremendous resistance from the population. Abscondence (*wang*), in other words, migration and flight, became a major problem for all the states,²⁹ and great efforts had to be invested into forcing the population to stay put, so that the state functionaries could register them, tax them, and force them to perform corvée labor, and train and fight in the increasingly large armies.

All these administrative measures and other innovations were a necessary condition, in my opinion, for the development of more abstract notions concerning the form that an ideal peace might take, and of ideas about people's obligations and duties and even rights to life and property. For example, by the late Warring States period, rules of military combat had been worked out that aimed at preventing innocent civilians from suffering harm by an invading army and punishing violators of the army's regulations under military law, which was even harsher than civilian law.³⁰ The Confucian scholar Xunzi was highly impressed by the internal peace and order that existed within Qin boundaries when he went to pay a visit to King Zhaoxiang and the prime minister Fan Sui in the 260s.³¹ All that was lacking in Qin, he averred, were Ru (Confucian) scholars.

In short, I believe that the increasing ability of the states to reduce and punish crimes and random as well as inter-lineage violence within their own boundaries made it possible for the philosophers and theoreticians not only to demand peace abstractly but to contemplate what an ideal peace might actually look like. "Strengthening the State" became a buzzword not only for "legalists," but even for a Confucian philosopher like Xunzi.³² Thus, while there is much of value in Pines' interpretation with which I began,³³ I disagree with it in essential respects. I will now turn to examine more closely and within the context of changing political and military conditions some of the ideas current in Warring States China concerning the notion of "peace" in a time of almost perpetual war.

Peace in the Warring States

Before going further, it is worth noting that the early Chinese language lacked a precise word that denoted warfare as an abstract concept. The word that was most commonly used in the abstract was *bing*, which also meant “weapons.” The word with the closest associated meaning was *zhan*, meaning “battle” or “fight.” On the other hand, the Chinese had a word, indeed several words, that came close in meaning to the concept of peace, such as *an*—the modern equivalent is a binome, *anping* or *ping’an*, that links originally similar words, *an* (literally “safe”) and *ping* (literally “level,” “flat” or “even-handed”) or, more commonly, *heping* (literally “harmony” and “peace”).³⁴ In addition, they also used the word *ding* (literally to “settle” or “fix” [the people and the state]) in the context of peace, as well as other words meaning “quiet” (like *ning*). For all this it hardly matters whether we accept Caplow and Hicks’ opinion that “(p)ease is best visualized as an interim condition between wars...; (p)ermanent peace, as distinct from an interim between wars, is normally established when two formerly warring groups come under a common authority and lose their independent war-making capacity,” or subscribe to Müller’s more nuanced definition: “Peace is a state between specific social and political collectives characterized by the absence of direct violence and in which the possible use of violence by one against another in the discourse between the collectives has no place.”³⁵

Needless to say, there are many other ways to define peace, and Müller’s definition begs for a clarification of the scope and meaning of “violence.”³⁶ But many early Chinese came to view peace not as an *absence*, as Müller would define it, but as a condition or state with positive characteristics among which the emanation of moral virtue by the ruler and his high officials was especially important. If only the ruler emanated virtue or charisma (*de*) and faced south in the ritually correct posture, then the world would acknowledge his authority, and peace and prosperity would ensue; all would rush to till his fields, travel on his roads, and live in his cities. As the common saying went, if someone by mistake dropped a precious object on the road, no one would pick it up and steal it. And, further, the cosmos itself would be in order: the triad Heaven, Earth, and Man would be in harmony and all would follow its natural course.³⁷

However, in the period that we are considering in early China, to a large extent the philosophers and statesmen were concerned with *order* (*zhi*) and *disorder* (*luan*) rather than with the notion of peace, as were early thinkers in ancient Greece, as Raaflaub demonstrates in his chapter.³⁸ As Sato has recently argued, the philosophers at the court of the rulers of the coastal state of Qi (modern Shandong province) in the fourth and third centuries, for example,

engaged in an intense debate on what constituted order and disorder, although, since virtually all of their writings are now lost to us, we cannot clearly discern their differences of opinion.³⁹ This concern with the suppression of disorder is found throughout Chinese history down to the present day; hence the suppression of student unrest at Tiananmen in 1989: protest of current economic and political conditions was deemed “disorder” by the authorities and thus the communications between the demonstrators and the government were suspended and the crowds of students and their sympathizers were dispersed by force of arms.

But let us return to the fourth and third centuries to consider the views of some of the philosophers whose works have come down to us. Mencius (Meng Ke), whose ideas formed part of the “Confucian-Mencian paradigm” deemed by some scholars to represent the dominant pacifist ideology of pre-modern China, lived at a time of major military conflict between the states on the north China plain. As Nivison has cogently pointed out, when the lord of Qi won a great victory over the state of Wei in the famous battle of Maling in 342, he claimed the title of king (*wang*), a title that previously was officially reserved only for a Zhou dynast.⁴⁰ In short order, rulers of other states made the same claims, and there was some mutual recognition of the title. But these claims were interpreted by rulers of other states as an implicit declaration that the ruler was seeking hegemony over all the other states: it was an implicit declaration of war. And warfare did indeed erupt as a result.

At the same time, philosophers and rulers began a vigorous discussion about the nature and appropriateness of hereditary succession as opposed to merit-based rulership. Some advocated that a ruler should be the one who was most qualified, not one who had merely inherited his position from his father, and that the ruler had the right to abdicate and dispose of the throne as he saw fit. One ruler even went so far as to put this into practice and tried to give his throne to his leading official. This act only resulted in a civil war. Some of these heated debates have been recovered from newly excavated and retrieved texts,⁴¹ and Nivison claims that the discussions recorded in the text of the book of *Mencius* about the right of rulers in China’s ancient past to give the empire to another was therefore a most pressing and pertinent issue.⁴² Mencius argued that no one had the right to give the empire to another: only Heaven had that right; so implicitly the lords of his own day had no authority to claim to be kings on the basis of victory in warfare. In other words, Mencius was arguing from historical precedent about current military and political affairs. His description of what a “true ruler” would be like—a moral exemplar who took care of his people first and who ruled under the authority and approval of

Heaven, with no mention of military preparations—was not an indication that Mencius was necessarily a devoted pacifist who had no interest in military affairs, but a measured philosophical response to the particular military and political conditions of his day: the claim to be a “king” resulted in war and war resulted in the destruction of the people.⁴³

While Mencius did not directly confront the issue of war and peace in his own time, Xunzi (Xun Qing or Xun Kuang), a later follower of the Confucian tradition in Warring States times, certainly did. On the one hand, he engaged in a direct debate on the principles of warfare with the Lord of Linwu, one of the practitioners of the method of warfare propagated by Sunzi (also known as Sun Wu).⁴⁴ On the other hand, he addressed the question of peace by detailing policies that a true king should enact and institutions that such a ruler should establish so that “Perfect Peace” could be achieved. True to his Confucian principles, Xunzi argued that a “true king” would have his army act on the basis of humanity or benevolence and justice, and that therefore he would not engage in “warfare,” but only in “punitive expeditions” against those who failed to acknowledge his supremacy: only those who sought their own personal immediate and short-term profit engaged in “warfare.” The army of a true king would be so well-ordered and disciplined that it would win in any combat, no matter what formation it deployed.⁴⁵ When he was questioned by his student, the future prime minister of the Qin Empire, Li Si, who pointed out that Qin had been victorious for four generations without following the principles dear to Xunzi, the latter replied that, although Qin had been successful, “it has been constantly seized with fear and apprehension lest the whole world unite together in concerted action to crush Qin with their collective power.”⁴⁶ Of course, at the time Xunzi could not have known that Qin was eventually going to be successful in defeating its rivals; but, then again, given the fact that Qin fell so quickly after the First Emperor’s death in 210, the argument could be construed that the principles of humanity and justice were more important for long-term success. Indeed, Xunzi may have lived long enough to have seen the unification happen, but we do not know his reaction to it.

However, probably in Xunzi’s lifetime, under the direction of Lü Buwei, a rich former merchant, who was prime minister of the state of Qin, scholars in 239 compiled a blueprint for the ideology of the Qin state—a couple of decades before it succeeded in eliminating all its rivals and founding the empire. This work, called the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü* (*Lü shi chunqiu*), was presented to King Zheng who later became the famous First Emperor of China and whose mausoleum with its enormous numbers of terracotta warriors and horses is one of the world’s most remarkable archaeological sites.⁴⁷

In Book 7, chapters 2–5, the writers consider the history of warfare and the issues of war and peace.⁴⁸ First, they argue that warfare existed in high antiquity, even from the beginning of human existence, that no ruler ever discarded the use of weapons, and that fear of weapons derives from human nature (*xing*), which in turn derives from heaven or nature (*tian*). Indeed, “Fighting and conflict originated long ago, so they can be neither forbidden nor halted. Thus the sage-kings of antiquity held to the righteous use of weapons, and none thought of abolishing weapons.”⁴⁹ In the light of humans’ natural instinct to fight each other, a hierarchy of authority had to be established from the bottom up, from chieftains to lords, and culminating in a Son of Heaven, who took his position above everyone else.

The writers were here adopting an idea of the Mohists, who had been the first to argue that social order required the establishment of a rigid hierarchy; otherwise, it would be just one man against another, and one group against another, each defending their own interests first and considering that they were right (*yi*) in their actions.⁵⁰ The Mohists, however, had argued that it was the quasi-religious entity of Heaven who had set up the hierarchy from the top down, rather than that such a hierarchy arose naturally out of human nature from the bottom up, as the *Lü shi chunqiu* writers asserted. Thus, the latter were arguing for the necessity of a supreme figure of authority, and they did this at a time when the line of the Zhou kings had disappeared; there was no such highest authority in China at the time and, in Qin, King Zheng was still a minor. In addition, they argued (as just pointed out), it was as absurd to abolish all weapons just because someone lost his state as it would be to banish food because someone died from food poisoning; you could no more abolish them than you could abolish fire or water. What mattered was *how* you used the weapons. They had to be employed in a righteous cause and used in a skillful fashion. Thus, they rejected the ideas and practices of those who opposed warfare, “(l)earned men of the present age (who) condemn offensive warfare... while adopting the policy of defensive warfare.”⁵¹

These “learned men” most likely were the later Mohists who had developed practical expertise in defending cities and towns from attack, adopting and developing the latest technology to achieve their ends.⁵² We no longer have access to any arguments that the latter may have made in support of their military activities, apart from the earlier ideas mentioned above—that war was a waste of resources, even for the victors, caused untold damage, and was of no benefit for the people as a whole. Still, the writers of the *Lü shi chunqiu* accused them of defending those who were immoral or “lacked the Dao (Way).” It is not possible, in other words, to determine whether these later Mohists believed that by resisting attack they were paving the way for some ideal ruler to appear

to institute an ideal peace, or accepted the political status quo of a multi-state world and were trying to create a balance of power that would make a form of interim peace possible.

Such activities seem also to have been the aim of a group of mercenary diplomats called the “strategists of the horizontal and vertical alliance” (*Zongheng jia*), who travelled from state to state seeking employment and advocating alliances for and against the state of Qin, depending on the political realities of the day. For certain, they strove to preserve the existence of all the political entities of the time; by playing off one ruler and one state against another, so that the entire political system was maintained in a state of uneasy equilibrium, they gained riches, status, and political power for themselves, even if only for the time being.⁵³ Such opportunities would have disappeared under a single monarch in a unified state, for their activities would have challenged the ultimate authority of a supreme ruler.

Finally, another group of philosophers, whose works have only recently been recovered after being lost for more than two thousand years, known as the followers of the Huang-Lao tradition,⁵⁴ advocated that the ruler rest in peace or engage in active warfare only to defeat his enemies according to the rhythms of the cosmos.⁵⁵ Only by carefully and minutely examining the actual social and political conditions of his own country and of that of his enemy, of himself and the enemy ruler, as well as the seasons, and the greater rhythms of the cosmos, the perpetual movement of Yin and Yang and the Dao (Way), and acting at the right time, would he be able to manifest his power and bring peace to the world. Only then would he be able to rule as a “true king” (the concept of the “ideal ruler” that was also elaborated by the Confucian philosopher, Mencius) and bring “Grand Peace,” if he acted as part of a triad with Heaven and Earth, making his punitive attacks against the immoral inevitable, and ruling without any private bias and only in the interests of the entire land.⁵⁶

Conclusion

In the conclusion of his introductory essay in this volume, Raaflaub posits that “three conditions determined a society’s ability to develop concepts or theories of peace—exceptionally harsh war experiences, capacity of abstract and philosophical thinking, and independence of the thinkers.” I do not think that it is possible in the present state of our knowledge to determine whether the increasing occurrence of warfare in the Spring and Autumn period, and its changing nature, necessarily *caused* the development of philosophical debate and abstract thinking in early China. The harshest forms of warfare occurred

in the fourth and third centuries, at least a century and a half after the beginnings of philosophical reflection that started with Confucius. Further, in China, the independence of thinkers from the state apparatus never seems to have gone as far as it did in Greece and Rome: most Chinese thinkers wished to have their ideas implemented in the real world and therefore argued their views in the presence and for the benefit of contemporary rulers or high officials and statesmen.⁵⁷ With the establishment of the Qin and Han Empires, thinkers, like all the rest of the population, were definitely subordinated to the dictates of the central authorities and struggled mightily through the rest of imperial Chinese history to free themselves from ideological constraints imposed from above. And while there seems in early times to have been some kind of cult devoted to a god of war, Chiyou, it was not widely disseminated, nor did a cult of peace develop.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, we have seen that in China philosophical debate about crucial political issues, including war and peace, did begin in the sixth century, at a time when rulers of larger states had begun the process of assimilating their smaller neighbors through warfare and their polities were growing so big that they began to fission internally. This process necessitated the development of administrative reorganization and centralization, which in turn required the development of a new type of expert who was trained to execute the policies of the rulers and to manage the integration of increasing numbers of ordinary commoners into the state structure. Confucius was the first teacher of this new breed of experts, and he considered it most essential that such individuals be trained in moral self-cultivation. Later, military specialists appeared, such as Sunzi (Sun Wu), but they concentrated on developing techniques to be deployed on the battlefield in order to be victorious in warfare. They were not interested in what peace might look like once victory had been achieved.

The Mohists articulated principles on which policies should be instituted and they gave preference to those that would benefit the people as a whole. At the same time, as they began the process of thinking how a state should be ordered internally and that Heaven provided the justification for social and political hierarchy and thus for a ruler's authority, they organized themselves along military lines and developed expertise in the techniques of military defense. Objecting to the Mohists' emphasis on benefit, the Confucians Mencius and Xunzi elaborated what they believed would bring peace to the world as they knew it. They posited the notion of a "true king" whose moral rule would almost effortlessly bring about the end of war so that "perfect peace" would be achieved.

As these philosophers and others, such as the Daoists, were debating how to solve the problems of incessant warfare and social dislocation, the competing

states in the fourth and third centuries developed internal legal structures and claimed a monopoly on the use of force both internally and externally: Qin appears to have become the most advanced in this respect and the most successful. Finally, in a somewhat specious argument, the writers of the *Lü shi chunqiu* rejected the positions of earlier thinkers and strategists, and claimed that “people express their hatred for those who lack the Dao and behave immorally by punishing them, and they seek those who possess the Dao and behave morally by rewarding them.”⁵⁹ Killing the unrighteous in a righteous cause was perfectly acceptable. This, they claimed, was logical and rational. All an army had to do was to proclaim that it was righteous, march in, declare the leaders of the enemy unrighteous, and carry out the appropriate punishments. In essence, those who had might were right: any resistance by those who wished to retain their independence was ipso facto deemed unrighteous. Peace, therefore, was to be created by the subordination of the weaker to the stronger, by military means if necessary, with only a thin veneer of morality or justification.⁶⁰

It was indeed this group around the Qin Prime Minister Lü Buwei who ultimately came out on top and oversaw the elimination of all the competing states and the unification of China under the First Emperor in 221, even though many of them lost their own lives in the process—Lü himself was accused of a plot against the Qin ruler and was forced to commit suicide. First under the Qin dynasty, and then under the Han (206 BCE to 220 CE), internal unity and peace was achieved, but at great cost in lives and property. Yet even this internal peace generated a new challenge: the Xiongnu steppe peoples under their leader Maodun seized the opportunity to raid the northern borders and demand trade. For decades after, the early Han emperors were obliged to sign treaties with the Xiongnu, pay them off with enormous quantities of silks and other precious commodities, and to marry off Han princesses to the khans, to seal the peace through marriage relations.⁶¹ A new type of peace was achieved, until Emperor Wu (r. 140–87) took the offensive once again. At immense cost of men and material, he pushed Han forces far to the West and opened up the Silk Road.⁶² But his military exploits resulted in a stalemate with the Xiongnu and near bankruptcy of the imperial coffers.⁶³

Yet, despite these political realities, Chinese philosophers endorsed the importance of the ruler ensuring peace and harmony with the cosmos. By maintaining affairs of state in good order internally, ensuring that taxes were fair, crimes punished, duties and responsibilities carried out in a timely fashion from top to bottom of the social hierarchy, and gender relations harmonious, then, as Xunzi believed or hoped, “Rival states submit without first having to be subjugated. All the people within the Four Seas are unified without waiting for a decree. This may indeed be described as Perfect Peace.”⁶⁴

But the rulers and statesmen themselves realized that peace could never be maintained for long without a strong army. They took to heart Sunzi's dictum: "War is a vital matter of state: it is the field on which life or death is determined and the road that leads to either survival or ruin, and must be examined with the greatest care."⁶⁵ Those who forgot this paid the penalty not only with their own lives but with the demise of their dynasty.

Thus, the ultimate solution for the early Chinese thinkers was that war and peace alternated as part of the rhythms of the cosmos: in spring and summer, as Yang rose in strength, all things grew and flourished. Rewards should be offered then to encourage success. In autumn and winter, the natural world withered and died in harmony with Yin's ascendance. That was the right time when punishments should be administered and war should take place. It was never, therefore, possible to have a perpetual peace. Indeed, a perpetual peace would have been unnatural, and probably dangerous.

Notes

- 1 Lau and Ames 1996: 129 ("An Audience with King Wei of Ch'i [Qi]").
- 2 Pines 2000, 2009. All dates are BCE, except when explicitly noted otherwise.
- 3 Hsu 1999.
- 4 This policy is said to have been recommended by Shang Yang, otherwise known as Gongsun Yang or Lord Shang, the so-called "Legalist" statesman and philosopher who reformed the laws of the state of Qin in the mid-fourth century under Lord Xiao (r. 361–338). See Duyvendak's (1963) translation of the *Book of Lord Shang*, ch. IV, par. 15 ("The Encouragement of Immigration"), 266–74, a text that was probably composed about a century after Lord Shang's death and was attributed to him by later followers. In the text, Lord Shang suggests giving immigrants tax breaks for three generations. It is quite possible that the policies being recommended in the text were being proposed in Qin in the mid-third century. The men would provide the grain and the women would provide the cloth.
- 5 The seven states were Qin, Wei, Zhao, Han, Qi, Yan, and Chu. Most notably, Chu conquered the region of the lower Yangzi River Valley, previously controlled by the states of Wu and Yue, both of which were known for their advanced knowledge of metal technology, especially that of casting bronze swords, and for developing iron casting, as well as for their famous conflict in which it is said that some of China's leading military theorists, such as Sunzi (Master Sun), Wuzi Xu, and Fan Li took part (Sawyer 1993; Wagner 1993; Milburn 2013). For an overview of the political history of the Warring States period, see Lewis (1999), who calls the period leading up to the unification the "century of alliances" and divides it into three stages. However, he only focuses on the struggles in north China, and the three stages are "(1) the last half of the fourth century, (2) the period of Qi, 301–284 B.C., and (3) the period of Zhao, 284–260 B.C." (Lewis 1999: 634).

- 6 Whether or not Qin and Chu should be categorized as empires prior to the unification under the First Emperor depends, of course, on the definition of “empire.” For a discussion of the concept of “empire” in the early Chinese context in relation to the comparative study of empires, see Yates 2001. Needless to say, the bibliography on empires is vast and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to enter into a discussion of the problems of the application of the concept to political and economic conditions of Warring States China.
- 7 Most notably, such texts have been found in tombs both of the early Han period (Mawangdui, Changsha, Hunan) and of the state of Chu (Tomb no. 1, Guodian), from circa 300. In the Mawangdui tomb, texts were found that probably belong to the Huang-Lao and Yin-Yang traditions (Yates 1997), together with two early versions of the Daoist (Taoist) *Laozi* (Ames and Hall 2003; Yates 1997), medical texts (Harper 1998), and texts and charts belonging to various other esoteric traditions (Chen Songchang 2001). The term “Huang-Lao” refers to texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor and Laozi, one of the three traditions of ancient Daoism. The other two traditions were based on the text of the *Laozi* or *Daode jing*, and on the text of the mystical *Zhuangzi* (see Yates 1997). For discussions of war and peace according to the *Laozi*, see Ellen Y. Zhang 2012; for the question of order in the *Zhuangzi*, see Vervoorn 1981. In the Guodian tomb, texts related to the *Laozi* and Confucian traditions were retrieved (Henricks 2000; Middendorf 2008; Perkins 2009; Cook 2012). Other texts have been looted from tombs and sold on the antiques market in Hong Kong. The most important cache of looted philosophical texts was purchased by the Shanghai Museum. On the challenges and problems of using such looted texts, see Goldin 2013.
- 8 For a discussion of the military aspects of the Qin’s successful campaigns against its rivals, see Yates 2007b and Zhang Weixing 2001; cf. Pines et al. 2013.
- 9 Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015; cf. Loewe 2006; Sanft 2014.
- 10 *Shi ji* 6.283. Pines 2000: 317 bases his translation on that of Watson (1993: 81). A more accurate translation appears in Nienhauser (1994: I. 168), where the last sentences read: “Since the multitude of people were longing to settle down to a peaceful life, everyone gave up his preoccupations to look up to the sovereign. Just at this time, the First Emperor could keep his prestige and secure his merit. The basis of stability or instability lay in this.”
- 11 Wang Yuan-kang 2011: 5.
- 12 Among the outstanding military inventions of the Chinese must be counted the crossbow, the trebuchet, gunpowder and gunpowder weapons (such as cannons and anti-personnel mines), flags, and so on; see Needham, Yates, et al. 1994.
- 13 Wright 2005; Standen 2007. More generally, for a history of the relations between northern frontier or borderland peoples and polities and those based in what is now the Chinese heartland, see Cui 2005. For studies of Han-Xiongnu relations, see Duman 1981; Psarras 2003; Holotová Szinec 2005; Kroll 2010.
- 14 Johnston 1995.

- 15 For a discussion of the Buddhist influence on Chinese ideas during the Tang dynasty, see Chapter 3 (Bronkhorst) this volume, at n. 76; see also Jerryson and Juergensmeyer 2010. It should be noted that the appellation “Xiongnu” probably was a derogatory epithet applied to northern steppe peoples by the Qin and Han; it was not the only eponym they used for themselves, and by its generalized application it may hide what was a diversity of peoples on the steppe.
- 16 Caplow and Hicks 2002: 8–9.
- 17 Li Feng 2008.
- 18 Li Feng 2006.
- 19 There is much debate as to whether the Qin destroyed the Zhou (the traditional Chinese view) or whether the Zhou royal line simply died out and its people scattered before the Qin invasion; see Pines 2004 for the evidence.
- 20 See Schaberg 2001; Pines 2002; Wai-ye Li 2008.
- 21 Lewis 1990; Weld 1997; Liu 1998: 147–72; Yates 2007a; Williams 2012–13.
- 22 For a lengthy discussion of the fall of the Western Zhou, the formation of the hegemonic system, and the development of the multi-state system, see Hsu 1999 and his previous analysis of social mobility in this time period (Hsu 1965).
- 23 Nivison 1999: 747–48.
- 24 The standard translation of this Mohist concept is “universal love.” Here, I follow the rendition proposed by Roberts 2012–2013: 436 in his review of Johnston 2010.
- 25 Rickett 1998; Roth 1999.
- 26 See Lau 1982. The earliest versions of the *Laozi* or *Daode jing*, dating from roughly the latter part of the fourth century, were recovered from Tomb no. 1, Guodian, in the Chu culture sphere. See note 7 above.
- 27 On Wu Qi, see Griffith 1973; on Lord Shang, Duyvendak 1963; on Shen Buhai, Creel 1974; on Han Feizi, Liao 1959; Wang and Chang 1986.
- 28 Ye Shan 2007.
- 29 Zhang Gong 2006.
- 30 Yates 2009.
- 31 Knoblock 1988–1994: II, ch. 16 (“On Strengthening the State”), 246.
- 32 See the same chapter of *Xunzi*. Knoblock, *ibid.* 235, believes that the concept of “strengthening the state” originated with Ru (Confucian) thinking in the state of Wei, as Marquis Wen had invited Confucius’ disciple Zixia there, and military and legal experts such as Wu Qi followed. Li Kui became the prime minister of that state after studying under Zixia. This latter statesman is credited with writing a *Canon of Laws*, which, it was said, Lord Shang took with him into Qin before he changed the laws of that state. However, the story of Li Kui’s writing such a text is most likely apocryphal, despite its continuing popularity among scholars studying the history of Chinese law. For a strong argument in favor of considering the *Canon of Laws* a later forgery, see Pokora 1959; see also Moriya Mitsuo 2010: 414–41.
- 33 See introductory section above.

- 34 The police in contemporary China are referred to by the term “public peace” (*gong’an*).
- 35 Caplow and Hicks 2002: 21; Müller 2005: 62.
- 36 For a discussion of the various forms of violence in late imperial and modern times in China, see the essays in Lipman and Harrell 1990, and Yates’ critique of Harrell’s introduction to the volume (Yates 1991).
- 37 Aihe Wang 2000.
- 38 Chapter 5 (Raaflaub) in this vol., e.g., at n. 55. Lloyd (2010) provides an enlightening analysis of the techniques of persuasion from the late Warring States through to the reign of Han Wudi by analyzing the topos of *luan* (disorder).
- 39 Sato 2003: 120–25.
- 40 Nivison 2002: 294–98: “Chinese history in Mengzi’s times and its impact on Mengzi’s thought.” It was at this battle that the military expert Sun Bin defeated his rival Pang Juan. Portions of the text attributed to Sun Bin were recovered from Tomb no. 1 Yinqueshan, Linyi, Shandong, in 1972 (Lau and Ames 1996). A short military text in two chapters was also attributed to Pang Juan in ancient times: fragments of this text may be preserved in the *Heguanzi*, but this attribution is hotly debated; see Defoort 1997.
- 41 Pines 2005, 2005–2006; Allan 2009.
- 42 Nivison: see n. 40 above.
- 43 For an earlier discussion of Mencius’s conception of a benevolent government and the implications of the historical precedents for rulers passing their throne to another, see Schwartz 1985: esp. 278–88 and, more recently, Chung-ying Cheng 2003: 447–48.
- 44 The Lord of Linwu is recorded as having been a general of the state of Zhao and also possibly employed by the state of Chu.
- 45 See Twiss and Chan 2012.
- 46 Knoblock 1988–94: II. 229.
- 47 Portal 2007.
- 48 See Knoblock and Riegel 2000 for a complete translation of this work.
- 49 Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 175–76.
- 50 Mei 1973: 71: “Identification with the Superior,” Part 3.
- 51 Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 179.
- 52 Yates 1979.
- 53 See the “persuasions” contained in the *Zhanguo ce* translated by Crump 1970. Lewis 1999: 639 argues that it was the strategist Fan Sui (d. 255), who had fled from his home state of Wei to serve King Zhaoxiang of Qin, who first proposed the idea of abandoning the policy of shifting alliances and moving to one of continuous expansion for the state of Qin. Lewis does so on the basis of the quotation of a persuasion recorded by Sima Qian in the latter’s biography of Fan Sui. For this biography, see Nienhauser 1994: VII. 232–46 (quotation: 239). While it is entirely possible that Fan Sui did advocate a policy shift in the state of Qin, the historical accuracy of this persuasion is open to question, given that Sima Qian relied for the

- sources of his history not only on Qin archival material that is no longer extant and thus cannot be verified, but also on the often highly elaborated stories about the activities and persuasions of the various strategists that circulated in late Warring States and early Han times. These cannot be taken as historical fact.
- 54 See note 7 above. The dating of their texts is the subject of much speculation. Some scholars suggest that they may have originated as early as the fifth century, in the ideas of a military expert by the name of Fan Li, who participated in the wars between the states of Wu and Yue referred to above. Others argue for a date as late as the first few decades of the Han dynasty, just before the manuscripts were placed in the Mawangdui tomb, which was sealed around 168. See the discussion of the various theories about the date in Yates 1997: 197–202. The consensus at this point seems to be that the texts were produced at different times by different hands and probably are accretions from multiple sources; see Wei Qipeng 2004: 307–19.
- 55 Yates 1997; Sato 2003: 121–22.
- 56 See the text “The Great Distinctions” (Yates 1997: 69).
- 57 Even the radical Daoist Zhuangzi, who rejected personal involvement in political affairs, seems to have been a friend of the logician Hui Shi, who was a high official in the state of Liang (i.e., Wei). The *Laozi* or *Daode jing*, a text which seems to have evolved in the late fourth and third centuries, may well have been interpreted as a guide for rulers and high officials, since, in early versions of the text (recently excavated and retrieved) the two chapters into which the text is traditionally divided, the *Dao* and the *De* (the ‘Way’ and its ‘Power’), are reversed to read *De* and *Dao*.
- 58 Lewis 1990: 137–63; Loewe 1990.
- 59 Knoblock and Riegel 2000: 180.
- 60 For a more extended discussion of “righteous warfare” in the context of third-century intellectual developments, see McNeal (2012), ch. 2 (“Righteous warfare: laying siege to an enemy in disorder”): 40–69.
- 61 Arminio 1996; Cui 2005; Kroll 2010.
- 62 The history of the Silk Road(s) has been the subject of a great deal of recent research and debate. See, among others, Beckwith 2009; Hansen 2012.
- 63 Yü Ying-shih 1967.
- 64 Knoblock 1988–1994: II. 78.
- 65 Ames 1993: 103.

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