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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Speechless Monarch: Early China's Battle for Intellectual Authority

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Abstract

Although the earliest political text from early China, namely the *Canon of Documents*, comprises speeches attributed to ancient kings, for most of the Eastern Zhou period (770–255 BCE) monarchs remained conspicuously silent. This article surveys the instances of the rulers' speeches in major historical collections and a sample of philosophical texts from the Warring States period. I demonstrate that the rulers' voice in these texts is overwhelmingly confined to short questions, approval of proposed policies, or other insignificant uttering. I argue that this silence was deliberately built into the texts by their composers, so as to preserve the intellectual authority in the hands of the educated elite. It was only with the imperial unification of 221 BCE and the dramatic change in the balance of power between the emperors and the intellectuals that the royal speech regained its prominence and political importance.

Keywords: intellectuals; historiography; monarchism; speeches; Warring States

Introduction

A reader of "The Basic Annals of the First Emperor"—one of the ideological centerpieces of Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–90 BCE) *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記)—may note an interesting change in the depiction of China's unifier. During his first twenty-five years in power, King Zheng 政 (the future First Emperor 秦始皇帝, r. 246–221–210 BCE) remains speechless. Ministers and travelling persuaders talk to him, but the king replies only in deeds, not in utterances. All this changes dramatically once the unification of All-under-Heaven is accomplished. The new era starts with the king's long pronouncement that justifies his wars, glorifies his achievements, and demands elevation of his own status to reflect this unprecedented success. Notably, the selection of the new imperial title (*huangdi* 皇帝, literally "the August Thearch") is based on the king's personal choice: he modifies, rather than

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simply adopts, the suggestion of his courtiers. Henceforth and until his death in 210 BCE, the First Emperor will let us hear his voice on many occasions, most notably through his famous stele inscriptions.[1]

It is difficult to assess whether Sima Qian had deliberately manufactured this dramatic transformation of a speechless king into an assertive and opinionative emperor, or whether it was just an accidental result of his selection of the king-turned-emperor speeches. If deliberate, this was a brilliant insight. From the First Emperor on, Chinese emperors speak—and speak a lot: their edicts and other pronouncements permeate the dynastic histories. For sure many of these edicts were drafted by the courtiers; but we are often given an impression that we listen to the emperor's voice directly. Yet once we go back to the centuries preceding the imperial unification, the situation differs dramatically. In the vast majority of historical and philosophical texts from these centuries, we hear only a very few monarchs who make meaningful pronouncements to their subjects. In most cases, as I shall demonstrate below, the monarchs' utterances are confined to approval or disapproval of their ministers' suggestions. A ruler who has anything ideologically important to say is an exception.

This observation is surprising because the rulers are quite vocal in some of the earliest known texts from the Western Zhou period (ca. 1046–771 BCE). This is true for instance for the bronze inscriptions, not a few of which record royal pronouncements made during the investiture ceremonies, or contain direct addresses by the kings (or by regional lords (*zhuhou* 諸侯)) to their deified ancestors. Even more significant is the collection of the ideologically significant rulers' speeches in the *Canon of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經 or *Shangshu* 尚書). Although most of the Western Zhou documents are attributed not to the kings but rather to the wise minister, the Duke of Zhou 周公 (d. ca. 1035 BCE), who acted as the surrogate of his nephew, King Cheng 成王 (r. ca. 1042–1021 BCE), they are constructed as if they were direct pronouncements of the king to his subjects. These documents establish an important tradition of preserving (or fabricating) the royal speech as singularly significant.[2] Texts attributed to early monarchs—be these the Zhou dynastic founders, their Shang 商 (ca. 1600–1046 BCE) predecessors, such as Pan Geng 盤庚, or earlier paragon rulers, such as Yao 堯—will be composed throughout the centuries preceding the imperial unification of 221 BCE and well into the beginning of the imperial era.[3] The persistence of this genre is important in light of the following discussion, and I shall revert to it at the end of this article.

In what follows I shall try to demonstrate that, despite its ideological importance, the genre of the royal speeches as reflected in the *Canon of Documents* is an exception in the corpus of pre-imperial literature. In a vast majority of texts from the Eastern Zhou period

[1]For the First Emperor's first lengthy utterance, see *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju) 6:235–36; for the stele inscriptions, see Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000).

[2]In English, the best introduction to the *Documents* is Martin Kern and Dirk Meyer, *Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy: Studies in the Composition and Thought of the Shangshu (Classic of Documents)* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

[3]The dating of the documents attributed to pre-Zhou paragons is hotly contested; for such texts as the "Canon of Yao" 堯典 or "Pan Geng," see Jiang Shanguo 蔣善國, *Shangshu zongshu* 尚書綜述 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 140–68 and 204–6; Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 and Liu Qiyu 劉起釪, *Shangshu jiaoshi yilun* 尚書校釋譯論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 2005), 357–91 and 955–81; for the "Canon of Yao" see also Martin Kern, "Language and the Ideology of Kingship in the 'Canon of Yao,'" in Kern and Meyer, *Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy*, 23–61.

(770–255 BCE), kings and regional lords appear as recipients rather than producers of wisdom. I shall survey three collections of speeches—the *Zuo Tradition* (or *Zuo Commentary* on the *Springs-and-Autumns Annals*, hereafter *Zuozhuan* 左傳), the *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu* 國語), and the *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策)—in addition to several products of the Masters (*zi* 子) lore. I shall try to show how this silencing of the royal voices is related to certain basic features of the Warring-States-period (Zhanguo 戰國, 453–221) monarchistic ideology. I shall also assess why the imperial unification marked a watershed in the tradition of "speechless kings."

Kings, Hegemons, and Regional Lords in *Zuozhuan*

Zuozhuan is by far the largest and most detailed historical text from the pre-imperial period. It serves as a commentary on the *Springs-and-Autumns Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), an enigmatic canonical text that gave it name to the period of 770–453 BCE.[4] *Zuozhuan* thickly covers the life of major polities that comprised the Zhou world during the Springs-and-Autumns period, providing invaluable background information for the terse entries in the *Annals*. The compiler(s) of *Zuozhuan* had in all likelihood based their narrative on local histories prepared by the court scribes of individual polities. As such, *Zuozhuan* is representative of significant segments of the Springs-and-Autumns historiographic tradition.[5]

One of the notable features of *Zuozhuan* is the abundance of speeches and utterances by a variety of historical personages. These speeches play a crucial role in the narrative, not just in the unfolding of events, but, primarily, in terms of their post-factum evaluation. They contain moral judgments of the protagonists' actions, conveniently predict the outcome of future events, and, infrequently, present abstract political and moral lessons. I shall put aside the contentious question to which degree these speeches reflect the protagonists' actual sayings and to which they were fabricated or embellished by later composers, editors, and transmitters of *Zuozhuan* itself or of its primary sources. What matters for our discussion is that the speeches constitute the ideological core of *Zuozhuan*. For many of *Zuozhuan*'s readers, the speeches that allowed gleaning historical lessons from the narrated events were by far more important than the details of these very events.[6]

[4]These dates are used for heuristic convenience. The *Annals* themselves cover the years 722–479 BCE (or, in another version, to 481 BCE); the *Zuozhuan* narrative continues to 468 BCE and the last entry deals with the events of 453 BCE. For the nature of the *Annals*, see Newell Ann Van Auken, *Spring and Autumn Historiography: Form and Hierarchy in Ancient Chinese Annals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023).

[5]For discussions about *Zuozhuan*, see David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001); Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722–453 B.C.E.* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002); Li Wai-yee, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center 2007); Stephen Durrant, Li Wai-yee, and David Schaberg, "Introduction," in *Zuo Tradition / Zuozhuan Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals,"* trans. and ed. Durrant, Li, and Schaberg (Seattle: University of Washington Press); Yuri Pines, Martin Kern, and Nino Luraghi, "Introduction: *Zuozhuan* and the Beginnings of Chinese Historiography," in *Zuozhuan and Early Chinese Historiography*, ed. Pines, Kern, and Luraghi (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 1–20. For *Zuozhuan*'s source materials, see also Yuri Pines, "*Zuozhuan* Source Materials in Light of Newly Discovered Manuscripts," in *Zuozhuan and Early Chinese Historiography*, ed. Pines, Kern, and Luraghi, 21–62.

[6]These speeches are the core of didactic anecdotes, which became the major units of historical knowledge ever since the Warring States period; David Schaberg, "Chinese History and Philosophy," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to AD 600*, ed. Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 394–414. Note that most anecdotes display only rudimentary interest in the

With this background in mind, let us investigate how many of the ideologically important speeches are pronounced by the rulers.

The Zhou kings

Let us start with the top of political hierarchy, the Zhou Sons of Heaven. Their position during the period under discussion was very ambiguous. Ritually speaking, they remained unrivalled rulers of All-under-Heaven. Politically speaking, however, they were more often the not dependent on powerful regional lords and were in no position to dictate their will. This tension between the image and reality is duly reflected in the royal pronouncements assembled in *Zuozhuan*. At times, the text cites a few of the kings' appointment speeches, which clearly echo the Western Zhou precedents (e.g., *Zuozhuan*, Xi 28.3i; Xiang 14.8).[7] These speeches do remind us of the king's nominal authority, but they cannot mislead us into believing that the kings were really powerful political players. Suffice it to say that only two months after a solemn ceremony in 632 BCE, in which King Xiang of Zhou 周襄王 (r. 652–619 BCE) appointed Lord Wen of Jin 晉文公 (r. 636–628 BCE) to the position of an overlord (*bo* 伯, i.e., the position of superiority over other regional lords), Lord Wen humiliated his royal protégé by *summoning* him to an interstate meeting (*Zuozhuan*, Xi 28.9). In light of this, the appointment speech itself does little to hide the royal weakness.

Politically weak as they were, the kings could from time to time utilize their ritual superiority to preserve a semblance of their prestige. The same King Xiang, who was restored to his position by Lord Wen of Jin in 635 BCE, adamantly refused to grant his savior royal sumptuary privileges: "This is the distinctive mark of a king. To have two kings when there is as yet no virtue to replace that of Zhou—that is something that you, my uncle, would detest!" (王章也。未有代德，而有二王，亦叔父之所惡也。; *Zuozhuan*, Xi 25.2). Lacking political authority, the king still could invoke ritual norms to protect himself from undue encroachment.

The most interesting example of a royal speech in *Zuozhuan* is yet another case of the king's manipulation of his ritual superiority so as to protect himself politically. In 589 BCE, the victorious ruler of Jin sent the spoils of his victory over the state of Qi 齊 to King Ding of Zhou 周定王 (r. 606–586 BCE). The king, who did not authorize Jin's assault on Qi in the first place, was reluctant to legitimate it post-factum by accepting the Qi captives. Simultaneously, he had to avoid alienating his powerful protector, the lord of Jin. The act of balancing was performed by a skillful resort to Zhou ritual norms. In a lengthy speech (*Zuozhuan*, Cheng 2.9), the king reminded the Jin messenger, first, that Zhou rituals allowed presentation of the spoils of victory only in the cases of authorized attacks against alien ethnic groups, and not in the case of overcoming fraternal polity. Second, he complained about the low rank of a Jin messenger, Shi Zhuangbo 士莊伯, who was not a high minister (*qing* 卿), and hence was not authorized to lead the Jin delegation to the royal court. Third, the king mildly reprimanded Jin for attacking Qi, asking "Was it

factual setting of a quoted speech; see Yuri Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed: The Bamboo Manuscript Xinian and Early Chinese Historiography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 93–94.

[7]In citing *Zuozhuan*, I follow the passages numeration adopted in Durrant, Li, and Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition*, which, in turn, is based on Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1990). I also follow, with minor modifications, Durrant, Li, and Schaberg's translation.

[Qi] indeed beyond remonstrance and instruction?" (抑豈不可諫誨). This question implied that the Jin assault on Qi was neither authorized by the king, nor justified in general.

Yet having dumbfounded the Jin envoy, the king performed a pirouette: he first treated Shi Zhuangbo as a low-ranked messenger who had reported on felicitous news rather than brought the spoils of victory, but then arranged a lavish private feast in honor of Jin's envoy. The king acknowledged that the feast itself was a violation of ritual norms, but this acknowledgment allowed the king to achieve his goal: he had assuaged possible wrath of Jin leaders. Going beyond the king's political acrobatics, what is notable for our discussion is the remarkably mild tone of the king's admonition. It was not a pronouncement of a sovereign displeased at the violation of his orders, but rather, a soft chiding of a powerful ally cum protector of the Zhou house, whose excesses the king disliked, but whom he could not call to order. The king's appeal to ritual regulations, rather to his nominal position as Jin's superior shows the Son of Heaven's weakness. For all practical reasons, his speech is indistinguishable from similar invocations of ritual norms by weak states so as to soften the pressure of major powers, particularly Jin.[8] In the context of the Springs-and-Autumns interstate relations, the king's speech was not that of a sovereign but just of a sophisticated ritually-educated leader.

Hegemons

The weakness of the Zhou kings throughout the Eastern Zhou period readily explains why we are not supposed to discover a real sovereign's voice in their speeches. Let us move now to the second tier of the Springs-and-Autumns-period political hierarchy: the hegemons (*ba* 霸), who strived to act as surrogates of Sons of Heaven and who were powerful enough to subjugate many, albeit by no means all, regional lords. The two most powerful hegemons of that age were Lord Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685–643 BCE) and Lord Wen of Jin. Both were remembered in the future generations as paragon leaders, who succeeded in bringing about relative stability to the multi-state system of their age. The *Zuozhuan* depiction of both is not uniformly laudatory, but overall the text readily acknowledges their achievements. It is then interesting how much space it gives them to present their own views.

Let us start with Lord Huan of Qi, the first truly powerful overlord of the Springs-and-Autumns period. Having risen to power amid fratricidal struggle, he succeeded not only to stabilize his domestic position but also to attain leadership in the eastern part of the Zhou realm. His achievements are duly narrated in *Zuozhuan*, but the lord himself remains mostly silent throughout the decades of his rule. He is cited directly only thrice. Once he boasts of his military power to scare the Chu leader, who promptly silences Lord Huan by reminding him that maintaining amicable ties with distant countries requires virtue rather than multitudes of soldiers (*Zuozhuan*, Xi 4.1). On another occasion, Lord Huan defends his plan to arrange a coup in an allied state, only to be immediately dissuaded by his aide, Guan Zhong 管仲 (d. 645 BCE) (*Zuozhuan*, Xi 7.4). Finally, shortly before his death, Lord Huan displays humility and respectfulness toward the Son of Heaven, rejecting excessively polite treatment by the king's envoy and performing

[8]See, e.g., *Zuozhuan* Xiang 24.2, 31.6, Zhao 13.3f, 16.3c. Another interesting instance of a king's indirect speech is a lengthy reprimand of a Jin leader who used the Rong 戎 allies so as to intimidate Zhou nobles. In this case, however, the king did not speak directly, but through an envoy; *Zuozhuan*, Zhao 9.3a.

obeisance in front of the envoy (*Zuozhuan*, Xi 9.2). Altogether the three utterances account to just a few dozen characters.

Ideologically important pronouncements related to Lord Huan are not made by him but by his celebrated aide, Guan Zhong. It is the latter who convinces Lord Huan to adopt the stance of pan-Xia 夏 ("Chinese") solidarity against the alien "savages" (*Zuozhuan*, Min 1.2); it is the latter who urges Lord Huan to maintain ritual propriety as the foundation of inter-state relations; it is the latter who convinces Lord Huan that maintaining trust of regional lords is more important than gaining immediate political benefits (*Zuozhuan*, Xi 7.3). It is implied that the success of Lord Huan is in following Guan Zhong's advice, not in maintaining an independent stance. As we shall see in the next section, this understanding would be echoed in later accounts of Lord Huan's hegemony.

The case of Lord Wen of Jin is similar to that of Lord Huan of Qi, although there are also certain notable differences. The deeds of Lord Wen are covered in *Zuozhuan* much thicker than those of Lord Huan of Qi, and this coverage provides more opportunities for the lord and his advisors to speak. Lord Wen was a man of remarkable destiny. Like Lord Huan, he rose to power amid fratricidal struggle; yet before he seized the throne of Jin, he spent no less than nineteen years in exile. The story of his wanderings, which "is as close as we come in *Zuozhuan* to a story of a hero's journey,"[9] made him a celebrity already during his lifetime. We may expect an extraordinarily powerful personality, the one who rose from rags to riches, from a position of a fugitive prince to that of the indisputable leader of the Zhou world. Yet once we read Lord Wen's own words we remain somewhat disappointed. For sure, Lord Wen speaks oftener than Lord Huan of Qi, but neither as a fugitive nor as a ruler does he speak a lot. Most—albeit not all—of the stories depict him as neither a very resolute nor a very courageous personality. His success is attributed primarily to his remarkable aides, of whom Hu Yan 狐偃 (appellative Zifan 子犯) is the most prominent. Actually, the topos of Hu Yan's perspicacity is so pervasive in many of Lord Wen-related stories, that one may wonder whether or not the accounts of Lord Wen's wanderings and subsequent achievements were manufactured by Hu Yan or his supporters.

Only a very few times Lord Wen's speeches indicate that he was not only a follower of his aides' advice, but also an independently minded leader. Two of these are relevant to our discussion, because they both occur after Lord Wen assumes power. The first takes place in 635 BCE, when Lord Wen's forces laid a siege to a town of Yuan 原. Lord Wen ordered the army to carry three days' provision of grain, and after three days he commanded departure, even though the spy informed him that Yuan was about to surrender. Lord Wen dismissed his officers' request to continue the siege: "Trustworthiness is the treasure of the state; it is the refuge of the people. If I gain Yuan but lose trustworthiness, how can we give the people refuge? What is lost will be even greater" (得原失信, 何以庇之? 所亡滋多). The text tells us: "[The Jin troops] retreated one day's march and Yuan surrendered" (退一舍而原降; *Zuozhuan*, Xi 25.4). On another occasion, Lord Wen refuses Hu Yan's advice to attack the former ally, the lord of Qin, who betrayed their erstwhile alliance: "To rely upon another's strength and then to injure him is not benevolent. To lose one with whom you have been allied is not wise. To replace good order with disorder is not martial. We should just return home" (因人之力而敝之, 不仁; 失其所與, 不知; 以亂易整, 不武。吾其還也; *Zuozhuan*, Xi 28.4). In both cases, Lord

[9]Durrant, Li, and Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition*, 251.

Wen emerges as morally superior to his aides. In the first case, his uprightness is immediately rewarded by Yuan's surrender.[10] In the second case, the reward comes later, as Jin overpowers Qin shortly after Lord Wen's death. From the point of view of *Zuozhuan*'s narrative, these successes confirm the correctness of Lord Wen's speeches and actions.

One may dismiss both stories as instances of pro-Lord Wen propaganda, which may surely be the case. Yet recall that *Zuozhuan* does not excessively beautify Lord Wen, nor is he consistently depicted as a highly moral personality. And when we do have a piece of blatant pro-Lord Wen propaganda, his success is unequivocally attributed to following the prudent advice of Hu Yan (*Zuozhuan*, Xi 27.4c). In light of this understanding, a few cases in which Lord Wen appears as morally superior to his aides become important. These cases suggest that *Zuozhuan*'s sources did not adopt a uniform view of Lord Wen. Some stories diminish Lord Wen's personal role in his success, but other allow him to retain a certain degree of moral agency.[11] Not every ruler was supposed to remain a disciple of his ministers.

Other regional lords

Our observation with regard to Lord Wen may be applicable to the general mode of depiction of regional lords in *Zuozhuan*. Normally, these lords figure primarily as recipients of their advisors' wisdom; but from time to time they may emerge as morally and intellectually superior to their entourage. For instance, a ruler of a tiny statelet of Zhu 邾, having heard a prediction that the capital's relocation would benefit his state but not his person, prefers to sacrifice his own life for the sake of his subjects: "Heaven gave birth to the people and set up a ruler for them in order to benefit them. If the people were to benefit, I, the lone one, would certainly share in it" (天生民而樹之君, 以利之也。民既利矣, 孤必與焉; *Zuozhuan*, Wen 13.3). This high moral stance is contrasted with that of the ruler's retainers who urge him to preserve his own life instead of thinking of others. Similarly, King Zhao of Chu 楚昭王 (r. 515–489 BCE), facing unfavorable predictions about his imminent death, refuses to perform sacrifices so as to shift dangers onto his ministers, or otherwise violate ritual regulations. "What good would it do to expel an illness from my midriff only to inflict it upon my limbs [i.e. ministers]?" (除腹心之疾, 而寘諸股肱, 何益？ *Zuozhuan*, Ai 6.4b). King Zhao merits praise from no less than Confucius himself, the singularly important commentator, whose views are scattered through *Zuozhuan* (*Zuozhuan*, Ai 6.4c). Definitely, certain rulers could be moral teachers of their ministers.

Of the latter cases, perhaps the most notable is that of King Zhuang of Chu 楚莊王 (r. 613–591 BCE), a leader whose power approximated that of Lord Huan of Qi and Lord Wen of Jin. King Zhuang is often treated with great sympathy in *Zuozhuan*, and he is one of a very few rulers to whom is attributed an ideologically important speech. Following the

[10]This story of winning over the enemy through display of trustworthiness became one of the most celebrated anecdotes, retold in numerous texts from the Warring States to the Han era; Paul van Els, "Old Stories No Longer Told: The End of the Anecdotes Tradition of Early China," in *Between Philosophy and History: Rhetorical Uses of Anecdotes in Early China*, ed. Paul van Els and Sarah Queen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 331–56.

[11]For the complex portrait of Lord Wen of Jin in *Zuozhuan*, see Pines, "*Zuozhuan* Source Materials," 32–38.

epochal victory over Jin at Bi 邲 (597 BCE), King Zhuang refuses the request of his officers to commemorate the victory by making a mound of the corpses of Jin soldiers. In a lengthy and exquisitely constructed speech (*Zuozhuan*, Xuan 12.2i), King Zhuang demonstrates his extraordinary cultural refinement, employs a broad assortment of rhetorical devices, and elaborates on the topic of virtue (*de* 德) as an essential quality of a political leader.[12] We cannot know whether this speech is genuine or not, but whoever put it into the king's mouth certainly considered the ruler as being able to outdo his subjects in terms of morality, intellectual depth, and cultural refinement. Yet it is equally notable that there is nothing "royal" in King Zhuang's speech. It could be pronounced by any statesman. Much like in the case of the Zhou Son of Heaven, explored above, the king's authority derives purely from his cultural and moral attainments. It has nothing to do with his political power. He speaks as an outstanding political actor, but not as ruler.

This understanding, mutatis mutandis, applies to the overwhelming majority of the rulers' utterances spread throughout *Zuozhuan*. Rulers rarely make authoritative statements; and even when they do, these statements are normally devoid of a distinctive monarch's flavor. This is not accidental. With a very few exceptions, the rulers of the Springs-and-Autumns period were not powerful autocrats but, rather, embattled leaders, whose position within their states was as precarious as that of the Son of Heaven vis-à-vis regional lords. The rulers faced an uphill battle against their powerful ministers, who often amassed political, military, and economic power which rivaled that of the nominal masters.[13] By the second half of the Springs-and-Autumns most of the regional lords were completely sidelined by their aides, and not a few were killed or expelled by the rebellious ministers. Most of them were simply not in a position to speak authoritatively.

This latter point can be confirmed by one exceptional ruler's speech which directly invokes the notion of the ruler's political authority. It was pronounced by Zhouzi 周子 (the would-be Lord Dao of Jin 晉悼公 [r. 573–558 BCE]), a scion of a collateral branch of the Jin ruling lineage who was suddenly enthroned at the age of fourteen, following the assassination of his predecessor, Lord Li 晉厲公 (r. 580–574 BCE). The latter tried to get rid of his powerful ministers, who then murdered and posthumously humiliated him. Zhouzi, who ascended the throne from the beginning as a puppet of the assassins of his predecessor, sought to establish viable relations with his fearsome aides. His first speech to those is most remarkable:

> 周子曰:「孤始願不及此, 雖及此, 豈非天乎! 抑人之求君, 使出命也。立而不從, 將安用君? 二三子用我今日, 否亦今日。共而從君, 神之所福也。」

> Zhouzi said, "I, the orphaned one, did not at first wish to come to this position. And even if I have now come to this, is it not by the workings of Heaven? Yet men seek a ruler to have him issue commands. If they establish him as a ruler and then do not follow him, what use would they have for a ruler? Today is the day when you, sirs, can use me; it is also the day when you can fail to use me. Those who are respectful and follow the ruler are the ones who receive blessings from the spirits." (*Zuozhuan*, Cheng 18.1)

[12]See the analysis of this speech in Li Wai-yee, *The Readability of the Past*, 301–6.
[13]Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, 136–63.

Lord Dao's speech is doubly interesting. First, it is one of a very few speeches in *Zuozhuan* that provides the rationale for the monarchic order: the ruler is needed to "issue commands," i.e. to let the state administration function properly. Second, this speech is notable for the ruler's incomparable humility. Lord Dao requests his ministers to be able to "use" (*yong* 用) him, i.e., to be ready to respect his authority and heed his commands. The subordination is no longer taken for granted: the ruler has to invoke the spirits so as to bolster his plea for cooperation (and recall that the invocation of spirits was not considered a particularly compelling argument in the Springs-and-Autumns world).[14] In the final account, this distinctively "rulersome" speech turns out to be that of a supplicant rather than of a sovereign. But Lord Dao's overt humility proved to be a prudent stance: *Zuozhuan* hails him for restoring mutual trust, respect, and cooperation between the ruler and the ministers.

Lord Dao was a weakling, and his humble stance reflects the brutal reality of his powerlessness. Yet even those rulers who were incomparably more secure on their throne —such as the ruthless King Ling of Chu 楚靈王 (r. 540–529 BCE)—do not speak authoritatively. The question to be asked is whether the notion of a pliable, non-assertive, and remonstrance-heeding ruler that permeates *Zuozhuan* was fabricated by the text's compiler(s) and/or the authors of its primary sources, or whether it reflects general weaknesses of contemporaneous sovereigns who could become accustomed (or groomed) to keep low profile.

The answer is not simple. On the one hand, the rulers were surely not as voiceless as *Zuozhuan* would make us believe. Suffice it to read several lengthy bronze inscriptions of Qin rulers, or of the aforementioned Lord Wen of Jin, who proudly claim to possess Heaven's Mandate (*tianming* 天命)—the claim that they never make in *Zuozhuan*—to note the difference between the rulers' self-presentation and their presentation in the historical texts.[15] A few other recently published inscriptions of the rulers of Zeng 曾 (Sui 隨) show how assertive and proud were the rulers of even a tiny polity, which was of minor interest to *Zuozhuan* compiler(s), but which played an important role in the history of the neighboring state of Chu.[16] One of these inscriptions, on the chime bells cast by the widow of a Zeng ruler, a Chu princess Mi Jia 嬭加 (fl. 600 BCE), is particularly noteworthy. Mi Jia presents herself as an undisputed leader of Zeng who skillfully navigates it toward ever stronger alliance with her natal state of Chu. This assertive voice of a female ruler is not something we normally encounter in *Zuozhuan*.[17] These examples suffice to caution against accepting *Zuozhuan*'s narrative as fully reflective of contemporaneous political realities.

[14]For this latter point, see Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, 76–84.

[15]For these inscriptions and for the concept of Heaven's Mandate in the Springs-and-Autumns period, see Luo Xinhui and Yuri Pines, "The Elusive Mandate of Heaven: Changing Views of *Tianming* 天命 in the Eastern Zhou Period." *T'oung Pao* 109 (2023), 6–26.

[16]Zeng is known from *Zuozhuan* and received texts by its alias Sui (probably the name of its capital). The sheer number and complexity of the newly discovered Zeng inscriptions—which cover the entire history of the polity from the early Western Zhou to the middle Warring States period—prevents me from dealing with them systematically here. For a good introduction, see Huang Tingqi 黃庭頎, *Beige nanfeng: jinchu Zengguo qingtongqi mingwen zonghe yanjiu* 北歌南風: 近出曾國青銅器銘文綜合研究 (Taipei: Zhengzhi daxue chuabnshe, 2024). I deal with Zeng/Sui inscriptions in Yuri Pines, *China in the Aristocratic Age: The Springs-and-Autumns Period as a Historical Junction* (in progress), chapter 8.

[17]For Mi Jia's inscription, see Huang Tingqi, *Beige nanfeng*, 209–17; see also Chen Zhaorong 陳昭容, "Zenghou furen Mi Jia de shengming guiji" 曾侯夫人嬭加的生命軌跡, *Gujin lunheng* 古今論衡 38 (2022), 82–98. The political role of the rulers' spouses as presented in *Zuozhuan* (and as can be discerned from inscriptional evidence) cannot be adequately treated in the current study.

This being said, *Zuozhuan*'s depiction of voiceless rulers fits well the general trend of the rulers' diminishing political role in most (albeit not all) Springs-and-Autumns polities. As time passed, we encounter fewer and fewer rulers who led the armies, participated in interstate meetings, intervened in appointments, or meted out rewards and punishments. The rise of ministerial oligarchies, which monopolized power in all but a few polities (Chu being a major exception), meant that the rulers were sidelined and their voices mattered little.[18] In addition, recall that historical texts that served the *Zuozhuan* compiler(s) were in all likelihood important educational materials for future rulers.[19] Hence, insofar as these materials portrayed passive and compliant sovereigns, it is likely that this image was duly internalized by many rulers, who acquiesced to the role of ritual figureheads rather than active policymakers. As such, dearth of the rulers' authoritative statements in *Zuozhuan* may be reflective of real situation in most courts, rather than being a pure historiographic construct.

Discourses of the States

Discourses of the States (*Guoyu* 國語) is a heterogeneous collection of model speeches roughly from the period covered in *Zuozhuan* (two sections contain speeches allegedly from the Western Zhou period). Its core sections (Zhou, Lu, Jin, and Chu) are based, in all likelihood, on the same sources that served the *Zuozhuan* compilers, although there are indications that speeches cited in the *Discourses* were more heavily edited than those in *Zuozhuan*.[20] Yet in what follows I prefer to focus on a few other sections that were composed independently of *Zuozhuan* source materials and may reflect a distinct political outlook. In particular, I am interested in the sections "Discourses of Qi" ("Qi yu" 齊語) and "Discourses of Wu" ("Wu yu" 吳語). The composition of both sections should have started in the first half of the Warring States period, because they are closely paralleled in two Warring States-period bamboo manuscripts.[21] Both texts belong to what I have dubbed elsewhere "didactic narratives," that is, texts that edify the reader less

[18]The changing power of the rulers in the second half of the Springs-and-Autumns period is discussed in Zhao Boxiong 趙伯雄, *Zhoudai guojia xingtai yanjiu* 周代國家形態研究 (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu, 1990), 301–20; Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, 136–63; and the updated discussion in Pines, *China in the Aristocratic Age*, chapter 7.

[19]For the importance of historical texts for educating the crown prince, see Xu Yuangao 徐元誥, ed. *Guoyu jijie* 國語集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002) 13.8: 415 ("Jin 7") and 17.1: 485–86 ("Chu 1").

[20]The relations between *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu* were discussed many times, with not a few scholars assuming that one of the texts served a source for the other. These speculations were safely refuted by Zhang Yiren 張以仁, "Lun *Guoyu* yu *Zuo zhuan* de guanxi" 論國語與左傳的關系, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 33 (1962), 233–86 and idem, "Cong wenfa, yuhui de chayi zheng *Guoyu, Zuo zhuan* ershu fei yiren suo zuo" 從文法、語匯的差異證國語、左傳二書非一人所作, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 34.1 (1963), 333–66. There are still no systematic studies of the dating of *Discourses of the States* and of the degree of editorial intervention in its content. For some preliminary observations, see Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, 39–45; Luo and Pines, "The Elusive Mandate of Heaven," 18–19. For an example of both texts' sharing a common third source, see William G. Boltz, "Notes on the Textual Relationships between the *Kuo Yü* and the *Tso Chuan*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 53 (1990), 491–502.

[21]Tomb 36 at Shibancun 石板村, Cili 慈利 County (Hunan), dated to the "early Warring States-period" (Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 湖南省文物考古研究所 and Cili xian wenwu baohu guanli yanjiusuo 磁利縣文物保護管理研究所, "Hunan Cili xian Shibancun Zhanguo mu" 湖南磁利縣石板村戰國墓, *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 2 (1995), 173–207) yielded badly damaged slips with parallels to the "Wu yu" section (Zhang Chunlong 張春龍, "Cili Chujian gaishu" 慈利楚簡概述, in *Xinchu jianbo yanjiu* 新出簡

through moralizing speeches than through tendentious depiction of political actions and their outcome.[22] In our case, one of the author's primary concerns is the proper nature of the ruler–minister relations.

"Discourses of Qi" focuses on a single period in Qi history: the rule of Lord Huan and the reforms allegedly launched by him and his aide, Guan Zhong. The first meeting between them sets the tone of the interactions throughout the section. It starts with Lord Huan's outlining the grim situation he faces. It is full of condemnations of his predecessor, Lord Xiang 齊襄公, whose wastefulness and infatuation with female attendants brought the state of Qi to the brink of collapse. The speech ends with an exclamation: "I am afraid, that our ancestral temples will no longer be swept, the altars of soil and grain will be without bloody offerings. I dare to ask: what should be done about this?" (恐宗廟之不掃除, 社稷之不血食, 敢問為此若何?; *Guoyu* 6.1: 217–18).[23]

The solution to the state's troubles is outlined in the context of Lord Huan's speech: it is to find a worthy advisor, Guan Zhong, the addressee of the question "what should be done about this?" Thenceforth and throughout the entire section, Lord Huan's role would be largely confined to asking Guan Zhong's advice and duly implementing it. His most frequent uttering is "how" (*ruo he* 若何) which recurs no less than fifteen times through the "Discourses of Qi"; it is followed by words of approval such as "good!" (*shan* 善) and "approved" (*nuo* 諾). Only twice the lord issues short commands to his officials who are urged to perform their tasks appropriately. Otherwise, the only real speaker throughout the "Discourses of Qi" is Guan Zhong. The authors summarize the reason for Lord Huan's ultimate success: "It is only because he was able to make use of Guan Yiwu [Guan Zhong], [and other worthy advisors, such as] Ning Xi, Xian Peng, Bin Xuwu, Bao Shuya, and their like, that the achievement of overlordship was established" (唯能用管夷吾、寧喜、隰朋、賓胥無、鮑叔牙之屬而伯功立; *Guoyu* 6.7: 241).

"Discourses of Wu" presents an entirely different story. The text focuses on the reign of King Fuchai of Wu 吳王夫差 (r. 495–473 BCE), under whom Wu first reached the apex of its power and then collapsed and was annihilated by its arch-rival, the state of Yue 越. The text starts with Fuchai's assault on Yue, which brought the latter to the verge of extermination. King Goujian of Yue 越王句踐 (r. 496–464 BCE) heeded the advice of his trusted aide and sought humiliating peace so as to preserve his state. Fuchai was ready to accept the offer:

> 吳王夫差乃告諸大夫曰:「孤將有大志于齊，吾將許越成，而無拂吾慮。若越既改, 吾又何求? 若其不改, 反行, 吾振旅焉。」
>
> King Fuchai of Wu declared then to his grandees, saying: "I, the orphaned one, have great plans about the state of Qi. I intend to approve peace with Yue. Do not go

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研究, ed. Ai Lan 艾蘭 (Sarah Allan) and Xing Wen 邢文 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2004), 4–11). A manuscript preliminary named "Lord Huan of Qi Returned from Ju to Qi" 齊桓公自莒返於齊, unearthed in 2020 from the Warring States-period Tomb 46 at Zaolinpu Paper Mill 棗林鋪造紙廠, Jingzhou (Hubei) parallels, at times quite closely, the text of "Qi yu" (as well as another variant of the same narrative, the "Xiao kuang" 小匡 chapter of *Guanzi* 管子). For the preliminary publication of the Zaolinpu manuscript, see Zhao Xiaobin 趙曉斌, "Jingzhou Zaozhi jian 'Qi Huangong zi Ju fanyu Qi' yu '*Guoyu*-Qi yu,' '*Guanzi*-Xiao kuang'" 荊州棗紙簡《齊桓公自莒返于齊》與《國語•齊語》《管子•小匡》, *Chutu wenxian yanjiu* 出土文献研究 21 (2023), 100–07.

[22]See Yuri Pines, "Didactic Narrative and the Art of Self-Strengthening: Reading the Bamboo Manuscript *Yue gong qi shi* 越公其事." *Early China* 45 (2022), 375–412.

[23]All citations from *Discourses of the States* are to Xu Yuangao, *Guoyu jijie*; translations are mine.

against my plans! If Yue had mended its ways, what else can we demand of it? And if it did not mend, and things go against the plan, I shall arrange my army victoriously." (*Guoyu* 19.2: 539)

This is a highly unusual speech. The king does not seek advice of his grandees but simply "declares" (*gao* 告) his will to them, and explicitly forbids expressing dissenting opinions. When the major advisor, Wu Zixu 伍子胥 (d. 484 BCE; in the text he is named Shen Xu 申胥)[24] remonstrates, his advice is dismissed. Fuchai proceeds with his plans, letting the due-to-be-annihilated state of Yue to survive. Instead, ten years later, he assaults the distant state of Qi in the north. The attack is successful, and in its aftermath, Fuchai turns on Wu Zixu, saying:

昔吾先王體德明聖, 達于上帝, 譬如農夫作耦, 以刈殺四方之蓬蒿, 以立名于荊, 此則大夫之力也。今大夫老, 而又不自安恬逸, 而處以念惡, 出則罪吾眾, 撓亂百度, 以妖孽吳國。今天降衷于吳, 齊師受服。孤豈敢自多, 先王之鍾鼓, 實式靈之。敢告于大夫。

Formerly, my predecessor king [Helu, 吳王闔盧, r. 514–496 BCE] embodied virtue and radiated sagacity, which reached the Lord-on-High. [You and him] were like a pair of plowing peasants, eradicating the weeds from the four quarters and therewith establishing your name at Jing [Chu].[25] All this was due to your efforts, Grandee. Now you, my Grandee, became old, but you do not want to rest at ease. Instead, when at home you harbor negative thoughts; when outside, you blame my multitudes, and wreak havoc in all the norms, bringing therewith disasters to the state of Wu. Nowadays, Heaven displayed favor to the state of Wu, and the Qi army had submitted. How can I, the orphaned one, have temerity to claim all this for myself? It is due to the spiritual power of bells and drums of the former kings. I have temerity to declare this to you, Grandee. (*Guoyu* 19.5: 543–44)

A certain degree of politeness—such as the recognition of Wu Zixu's previous merits in service of Wu, as well as using an unusual (in a speech with one's underling) "I have temerity" (*gan* 敢) phrase, do not conceal the harshness of Fuchai's message. Wu Zixu is guilty of incitement against the king and subverting the royal power. The elderly grandee understands the message well and commits suicide. The thin veneer of politeness cannot mask the threat of execution behind Fuchai's speech. Disagreement with the king is suicidal.

In the latter part of the story, as Wu suffers setbacks, Fuchai becomes more conciliatory and seeks advice of his grandees, but overall continues his imprudently assertive policy until the gloomy end: his state is annihilated by Yue. The talkative king, who dared to act on his own, overturned loyal advice, and punished the annoying remonstrator, meets the deserved bad end. His adversary, Goujian, is also attributed with a lot of statements, but these are based on heeding his ministers' ideas. Hence, the text concludes that all the successes of Yue have a single source: its king "was able to put himself below his ministers, and collect their strategic plans" (夫唯能下其群臣, 以集其謀故也; *Guoyu* 19.9: 562).[26]

[24]Wu Zixu held a land grant at Shen 申, hence he is sometimes named Shen Xu.

[25]This refers to Helu's and Wu Zixu's major success: the victory over Chu and the occupation of Chu's capital in 506 BCE.

[26]The question of the king's versus the advisor's agency in ensuring Yue's success is at the focus of several Warring States-period texts that deal with the epochal Wu-Yue struggle; Pines, "Didactic Narrative."

The message of both sections of *Discourses of the States*, and of the collection as a whole is crystal clear. The ruler should not act on his own. Nor should he speak in an authoritative voice. The ruler who wants to succeed should seek advice of his ministers and implement their plans. The ruler who deviates from this norm should learn from an example of King Fuchai of Wu, whose miserable fate proves: an authoritatively speaking monarch is a self-ruining monarch.

Stratagems of the Warring States

Stratagems of the Warring States (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策) is yet another composite text, which was compiled by a Han librarian, Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE), from no less than six smaller collections. Judging from its content, as well as from the parallels in the *Zhanguo zonghengjia shu* 戰國縱橫家書 (*Letters of the Warring States* [*-period supporters of*] *the Vertical and Horizontal Alliances*), discovered in 1973 in Tomb 3, Mawangdui 馬王堆, Changsha 長沙 (Hunan), the overwhelming majority of the anecdotes date from the Warring States period with a few Han-era additions. The text focuses on speeches of travelling persuaders who attempted to outwit each other and convince the rulers of the competing warring states to adopt a proposed course of action. The reliability of most of these speeches is minuscule (i.e., many of them are pure invention unrelated to real historical events),[27] although in some cases the historicity of an anecdote and even of a speech should not be dismissed. Unlike the moralizing *Discourses of the States*, however, the *Stratagems* presents a very different world, full of machinations and intrigues. In Paul R. Goldin's words, it "espouses a world view antithetical to orthodox Confucianism."[28] Yet echoing Goldin, therein lies the text's value—not only for "ancient readers," but for all those eager to understand important undercurrents in the world of thought of the Warring States. The very fact that the *Stratagems* lacks identifiable unified ideological agenda makes it a richer repository of intellectual trends of the Warring States period than most, or any of, other contemporaneous texts.[29]

The overwhelming majority of hundreds of speeches cited in *Stratagems* are those by travelling persuaders, diplomats, ministers, or other advisors. The rulers are the recipients of these speeches, and in most of the anecdotes they remain silent, much like Lord Huan of Qi in *Zuozhuan* and *Discourses of the States*, confining themselves to brief questions about how to achieve the desired outcome or to even briefer approvals of the proposed action. Only rarely and exceptionally do they contradict the speaker; normally their attitude is deferential, and they are depicted as devoid of any individual agency. This is most visible in the series of opposing persuasions by two major opponents, whose speeches permeate the entire *Stratagems*: Su Qin 蘇秦 (d. 284 BCE), the architect of anti-Qin "vertical alliance," and Zhang Yi 張儀 (d. 309 BCE), the architect of pro-Qin "horizontal alliance."

[27]See David Schaberg, "On Quoted Speech in Anecdotal History: *Zhanguoce* as Foil to *Zuozhuan*." In *Zuozhuan and Early Chinese Historiography*, ed. Pines, Kern, and Luraghi, 209–43.

[28]See Paul R. Goldin, *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 89.

[29]The only comprehensive English-language study of the *Stratagems* is James I. Crump Jr., *Intrigues: Studies of the Chan-kuo Ts'e* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964; rev. ed. 1996), which is woefully outdated; Kim V. Vasil'ev, *Планы Сражающихся Царств (Исследования и переводы)* [Stratagems of the Warring States: Studies and Translations] (Moscow: Nauka, 1968) is by far more engaging, even if not flawless. For an excellent study of the text's composition, see He Jin 何晉, *'Zhanguo ce' yanjiu*《戰國策》研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001).

The editors of the *Stratagems* paired their speeches so as to espouse in full the rhetorical mastery of both diplomats. This pairing also highlights the ease with which the rulers were receptive to the persuaders' rhetorical tricks.

In the current arrangement of the *Stratagems*, Su Qin normally speaks first, trying to convince reluctant rulers to join the anti-Qin alliance. Once he finishes his speech to the king of Qi, the latter exclaims: "I, the unworthy one, am not perspicacious. Now, you, my master, have commanded me with the instructions of [Su Qin's employer] the King of Zhao. I respectfully submit my altars of soil and grain to follow [Zhao]" (寡人不敏, 今主君以趙王之教詔之, 敬奉社稷以從).[30] Yet following Zhang Yi's persuasion to join the horizontal alliance, the same king exclaims: "Qi is peripheral and secluded, based on the Eastern Sea shores. We have never heard about the lasting benefits to the altars of soil and grain. Now you, my esteemed guest, have gracefully instructed me: I beg to submit my altars of soil and grain to serve Qin" (齊僻陋隱居, 托於東海之上, 未嘗聞社稷之長利。今大客幸而教之, 請奉社稷以事秦). Following this, the king "submitted three hundred li of fish and salt-producing territory to Qin" (獻魚鹽之地三百[里] 於秦也).[31] The king has no agency: he simply follows the last persuader. The same dynamics recurs after the persuaders' visit to the states of Chu, Zhao, Wei 魏, Han 韓, and Yan 燕.[32]

It is only once that a persuader is firmly refuted. An anecdote which probably was designed to serve as the beginning of Su Qin's saga tells of his visit, at the dawn of his career to his future arch-enemy, the state of Qin. There, Su Qin tried to convince the king of Qin "to annex the regional lords' [states], to swallow the world, to declare yourself Thearch and to bring about orderly rule" 可以并諸侯, 吞天下, 稱帝而治. Yet the king rejected the advice, saying:

> 寡人聞之, 毛羽不豐滿者不可以高飛, 文章不成者不可以誅罰, 道德不厚者不可以使民, 政教不順者不可以煩大臣。今先生儼然不遠千里而庭教之, 愿以異日。
>
> I, the unworthy one, have heard: he, whose feathers are not thick enough, will not fly high; he, whose manifested refinement is not complete, cannot employ punishments and penalties; he whose way is not bountiful, cannot employ the people; he whose governing and instructions are not complied with, cannot disturb his great ministers. Now, you, sir, with your majestic appearance, did not consider a thousand *li* as too distant a way to come to my court and instruct me; but I beg that we meet on another day.[33]

It is ironic that the only time Su Qin is rebuffed is at the state of Qin, where he proposed a very Qin-like policy of relentless territorial expansion, only to be dismissed by the king

[30] Fan Xiangyong 范祥雍, ed., *Zhanguo ce jianzheng* 戰國策箋證 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2011) 8.16: 539 ("Qi 齊 1"). All translations from the *Stratagems* are mine. Recall that the vertical alliance was directed against Qin; the horizontal was supportive of Qin.

[31] *Zhanguo ce* 8.17: 548 ("Qi 1"). Note the improbability of granting the king of Qin a territorial gift along Qi's coastal areas, too far removed from Qin's core territories.

[32] See respectively *Zhanguo ce* 14.17: 788 and 14.18: 795 ("Chu 楚 1"); 19.1: 1019 and 19.3: 1042 ("Zhao 趙 2"); 22.10: 1264 and 22.11: 1274 ("Wei 魏 1"); 26.5: 1480 and 26.6: 1492 ("Han 韓 1"); 29.1: 1644 and 29.5: 1664 ("Yan 燕 1"). Notably, the kings of Chu and Han display much stronger enthusiasm when requested to join the anti-Qin alliance.

[33] *Zhanguo ce* 3.1: 141 ("Qin 秦 1").

who resorted to Confucian-sounding arguments about the import of refinement (*wen* 文), the Way (Dao 道), and instructions (*jiao* 教). The anecdote shows that Su Qin had only himself to blame: he was not sufficiently argumentative to convince the king. Enraged by this rebuttal, Su Qin traveled home, prepared himself anew, and achieved the stunning success as the architect of the anti-Qin alliance. The message is clear: a well-trained persuader has nothing that can stop him (perhaps aside from an equally well-trained counter-persuader, such as Zhang Yi). The rulers are expected just to heed the travelling masters' instructions and duly implement their advice.

The rulers' meekness in the *Stratagems* is one of the collection's most notable features. Only exceptionally does the ruler speak authoritatively. Of these rare instances the single most interesting is a series of anecdotes related to the decision of King Wuling of Zhao 趙武靈王 (r. 325–299 BCE) to introduce in 307 BCE "Hu [steppe tribesmen] garments" (胡服), i.e., trousers and other clothes that facilitated horse-riding. The king's speeches are among the ideological centerpieces of the *Stratagems of the Warring States* and they deserve a closer look.

The story starts with an informal exchange between King Wuling and his aide, Fei Yi 肥義. Fei Yi notes that the king contemplates something and asks whether or not the king is absorbed in thinking about how to restore the glory of Zhao's founders, Zhao Jianzi 趙簡子 (d. 476 BCE) and Zhao Xiangzi 趙襄子 (d. ca. 442 BCE), under whose aegis this would-be state reached the early peak of its power and prestige. The king answers affirmatively: he plans to adopt the nomadic garments and the art of mounted archery, but he is fearful that this radical departure from customary ways would arouse widespread censure. Fei Yi assuages these fears: "He who hesitates in his undertakings will not succeed; he who hesitates in his conduct will not [attain a fine] name" (疑事無功, 疑行無名).[34] The king should not bother himself with the opinion of ignoramuses, he should simply act. This prompts the king to dispel with doubts and adopt the nomadic clothing.

As numerous observers had noted, the exchange between Fei Yi and King Wuling, as well as significant chunks of the king's subsequent debates with his conservative opponents resemble—often verbatim—a famous debate allegedly held in 359 BCE at the court of Qin, when Lord Xiao 秦孝公 (r. 361–338 BCE) decided to launch far-reaching reforms. The latter debate constitutes the opening chapter of the *Book of Lord Shang* (*Shangjunshu* 商君書). For the purpose of the current discussion it matters less whether the *Stratagems*' text is derivative from that of the *Book of Lord Shang* (as most scholars suspect), or vice versa.[35] What is important that in the *Book of Lord Shang* the major speaker on behalf of innovation and dispelling with hesitations is the great reformist, Shang Yang 商鞅 (d. 338 BCE), rather than Lord Xiao. In the *Stratagems*, by contrast, aside from a short encouragement from Fei Yi, it is the king himself who puts forward the arguments in favor of reforms. And it is the king—and only the king—who becomes engaged in a series of controversies with his courtiers once the garments' reform is launched.

[34] *Zhanguo ce* 19.4: 1046 ("Zhao 2").

[35] For the relative date of both texts, see Zheng Liangshu 鄭良樹, *Shang Yang ji qi xuepai* 商鞅及其學派 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989), 9–19 and Tong Weimin 仝衛敏, *Chutu wenxian yu* Shangjunshu *zonghe yanjiu* 出土文獻與《商君書》綜合研究 (Yonghe [Taipei County]: Hua Mulan chubanshe 2013), 73–77. Note that both exchanges appear almost verbatim in *Shiji* as well (43: 1806–11 for King Wuling; 68: 2229 for Lord Xiao).

The first of these exchanges focuses on the king's uncle, Ducal Son Cheng 公子成. The king urges him as follows:

寡人胡服, 且將以朝, 亦欲叔之服之也。家聽於親, 國聽於君, 古今之公行也; 子不反親, 臣不逆主, 先王之通誼也。今寡人作教易服, 而叔不服, 吾恐天下議之也。夫制國有常, 而利民為本; 從政有經, 而令行為上。 … … 今寡人恐叔逆從政之經, 以輔公[36]叔之議。 … … 使緤謁之叔, 請服焉。

I, the unworthy one, wear the Hu garments, and plan to attend the court therewith. I want you, my uncle, to wear them as well. The family heeds the parent, the state heeds the ruler—this is the proper conduct in the past and in the present. The son should not oppose his parent, the subject should not act contrarily to the sovereign—this is the all-pervasive dutifulness of the former kings. Now, me, the unworthy one, issued instructions to change the garments, but you, my uncle, did not wear [the new ones]. I am afraid that All-under-Heaven would criticize me. Besides, there are constant [norms] of ruling the state, and benefitting the people is the root of these. There are basic rules for those who take part in the government, and obeying the orders is the supreme of these. … Now, I, the unworthy one, am afraid that you, my uncle, go against the basic norms of those who partake in the government, so as to support your dissenting opinion. … I have dispatched my messenger, [Royal Grandson] Xie to you my uncle, with the request to wear these clothes.[37]

King Wuling could have focused—as in his exchange with Fei Yi—on obvious advantages of the proposed new clothing in terms of facilitating war in the steppes and Zhao's northward expansion. He opted for a different type of argumentation: a dictum of the minister's obedience to the ruler. This obedience, like that of a son toward his parent, should be unequivocal and absolute. Obeying orders is the basic norm (*jing* 經) for those who take part in the government, and adhering to one's dissenting opinion is not a tolerable option. In his reply, Ducal Son Cheng attempts to defend his opposition by appealing to the cultural argument: the culture of the Central States (China) is incomparably superior to that of savage aliens, and adopting the latter's customs goes against the wisdom of the ancients. King Wuling counters this argument with an eloquent defense of cultural relativism: different people follow different customs, but all these customs are useful for their immediate surrounding and for the people's immediate undertakings.[38] Then the king turns to what could have been stated from the beginning: the military advantages of the clothing reform. To this second speech, Cheng replies humbly: "Your stupid subject did not understand Your Majesty's opinion and had the temerity of presenting a customary opinion of our generation. Henceforth, I shall follow the intentions of [Zhao] Jian[zi] and [Zhao] Xiang[zi], so as to comply with the aspirations of the former kings. How would your subject have the temerity not heed your command?" (臣愚不達于王之議, 敢道世俗之間。今欲繼簡、襄之意, 以順先王之志, 臣敢不聽令).[39]

[36]This character is probably redundant.

[37]*Zhanguo ce* 19.4: 1047 ("Zhao 2").

[38]For the analysis of King Wuling's speech in term of its promotion of cultural relativism, see Yuri Pines, "Beasts or Humans: Pre-Imperial Origins of Sino-Barbarian Dichotomy." In *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 78–79.

[39]*Zhanguo ce* 19.4: 1048 ("Zhao 2").

The deferential voice that is so often associated in *Stratagems* with the rulers is now adopted by a subject facing the monarch.

This exchange is followed by two remonstrance speeches by king's other relatives, Zhao Wen 趙文 and Zhao Zao 趙造. Both oppose the reforms because of their steadfast adherence to the past ways and both are dismissed by the arguments in favor of changing with the times, which, again, echo the discussion from the *Book of Lord Shang*. In both cases, the king's admonition to his conservative subjects ends with a resolute statement: "Abandon [your opposition], sire" (子其釋之) and "Do not oppose [me again], sire" (子其勿反也). In both cases, the last word is the king's: the advisors are no longer heard.[40] Yet the road ahead is still bumpy: the same section of *Stratagems* contains three other encounters between the king and his opponents. First, the king goes to convince a proud recluse, Zhou Shao 周紹, to accept appointment as a tutor of the heir-apparent and adopt therewith the Hu garments (which apparently became a mandatory attire for the officials). When Zhou protests and tries to show that he is inept and inadequate for his mission, the king reminds him: "Nobody is better suited than the father to select one of his sons; nobody is better suited than the ruler to assess his subjects. The ruler is me, the unworthy one" (選子莫若父, 論臣莫若君。君, 寡人也).[41] Zhou Shao is still not convinced but he has no choice:

> 乃國未通于王胡服。雖然, 臣, 王之臣也, 而王重命之, 臣敢不聽令乎?
> The state had still not comprehended Your Majesty's Hu garments. Nonetheless, I, your subject, is Your Majesty's subject, and Your Majesty had issued the second command. How would your subject have the temerity not heed your command?"[42]

Zhou Shao, like other ministers, cannot withstand the pressure of the ruler who makes full use of the enormous resources of his authority. The magnitude of this authority is not surprising: after all, much of the political thought and political practices of the Warring States period were designed so as to bolster the sovereign's power.[43] What is peculiar here is that the king himself makes an excellent use of these resources, overpowering recalcitrant subjects and subduing their ideological opposition. This ability to utilize the political discourse of his time to his advantage is reflected in yet another exchange between the king and his opponent: the king's admonition to Zhao Yan 趙燕, who was among the last to adopt new garments:

> 事主之行, 竭意盡力, 微諫而不嘩, 應對而不怨, 不逆上以自伐, 不立私以為名。子道順而不拂, 臣行讓而不爭。子用私道者家必亂, 臣用私義者國必危。反親以為行, 慈父不子; 逆主以自成, 惠主不臣也。寡人胡服, 子獨弗服, 逆主, 罪莫大焉。以從政為累, 以逆主為好, 行私莫大焉。故寡人恐親犯刑戮之罪, 以明有司之法。」

[40] *Zhanguo ce* 19.4: 1049–50 ("Zhao 2").
[41] *Zhanguo ce* 19.5: 1069 ("Zhao 2").
[42] *Zhanguo ce* 19.5: 1070 ("Zhao 2").
[43] See Mark E. Lewis, "Warring States: Political History." In *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, edited by Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 587–650 (for political reforms that created a "ruler-centered" state); Liu Zehua 劉澤華, *Zhongguo de Wangquanzhuyi* 中國的王權主義 (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2000) and Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 13–111 (for the ideology of monarchism).

> In serving the sovereign, you should fully dedicate your mind and exhaust your energy, remonstrate mildly and not noisily, respond [to the orders] and harbor no resentment. You should neither contradict the superior so as to boast of yourself, nor seek fame through establishing private [opinions]. The way of the son is to be compliant and not disobeying; the way of the minister is to be yielding and not contesting. When a son employs private ways, the house will surely be in turmoil; when a minister establishes private righteousness, the state will surely be endangered. He whose behavior is based on opposing the parents, even a loving father will not consider him a son; he who considers contradicting the sovereign as merit, even a kind sovereign will not consider him a minister. I, the unworthy one, wore Hu garments, and you were the only one not to submit. This is disobeying the sovereign—no crime is greater than that! To be tired of partaking in the government and be fond of disobeying the sovereign—no conduct can be more selfish than that! Hence, I, the unworthy one, am afraid that you my relative, committed a crime that deserves mutilation or execution, and shall use your case to clarify the laws of office-holders.[44]

King Wuling does not try any longer to justify his directives either philosophically (the desirability of "changing with the times") or politically (the benefits of introducing mounted archers to Zhao's army). Rather he focuses on a single point. Obedience is obligatory for a subject, just as it is obligatory for a son. Those who disobey do it primarily to attain the reputation (the name) of a righteous person. Yet this name-seeking means engagement in despicable "private" or "selfish" (*si* 私) ways at the expense of "common" or "impartial" (*gong* 公) interests, represented, of course, by the sovereign. The ideas expressed here had a strong currency among segments of the Warring States-period thinkers, such as the authors of the *Book of Lord Shang* and *Han Feizi* 韓非子.[45] Yet no other Warring States-period text cites a ruler who was able to make such skillful use of the political discourse of his age. King Wuling (if the statements were really made by him) may have anticipated the new mode of expression associated with China's imperial rulers, some of whom excelled in appropriating aspects of the common monarchistic political discourse so as to silence their opponents.[46] And, expectedly, he was successful: Zhao Yan meekly asked to be forgiven for violating the ruler's instructions and promised to "respectfully embrace" the new garments. The king's authority could not be challenged effectively.

[44] *Zhanguo ce* 19.6: 1075–76 ("Zhao 2").

[45] For the *si* and *gong* controversy, see, e.g., Goldin, *After Confucius*, 58–65; Liu Zehua, "Chunqiu Zhanguo de 'li gong mie si' guannian yu shehui de zhenghe" 春秋戰國的 "立公滅私" 觀念與社會整合, rpt. in idem, *Xi er zhai wen gao* 洗耳齋文稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 332–73. For the name-seeking in the Warring States period and its political importance, see Yuri Pines, "'To Die for the Sanctity of the Name': Name (*ming* 名) as Prime-mover of Political Action in Early China," in *Keywords in Chinese Culture*, ed. Li Wai-yee and Yuri Pines (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2020), 169–218; cf. Mark Edward Lewis, *Honor and Shame in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). For Han Fei's assault on private name-seeking as subversive of political order, see Yuri Pines, "*Han Feizi*: The World Driven by Self-Interest," in *Dao Companion to China's "fa" Tradition: The Philosophy of Governance by Impartial Standards*, ed. Yuri Pines (Dordrecht: Springer, 2024), 131–34.

[46] Perhaps the best example of these is Yongzheng Emperor 雍正 (r. 1723–1736), forwhose polemical skills, see, e.g., David S. Nivison, "Ho-shen and his Accusers: Ideology and Political Behavior in the Eighteenth century," in *Confucianism in Action*, ed. David S. Nivison and Arthur F. Wright (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), 209–43.

The Masters' Literature

Limitations of space prevent me from systematically addressing the role of the rulers in the so-called Masters' (*zi* 子) literature—to wit, the polemical texts of competing thinkers—but one observation should be made. Just like in the historical or quasi-historical texts surveyed above, the rulers in the Masters' texts appear overwhelmingly as passive recipients of the Masters' advice. This is certainly true for Confucian texts—such as *Mengzi* 孟子—which postulated the moral and intellectual superiority of the ruler's advisor over the sovereign. There the rulers are depicted as so meek as to be unable even to openly silence Mengzi when the latter blatantly affronts them.[47] Yet even in the texts of the staunchest supporters of monarchic rule—such as the *Book of Lord Shang* and *Han Feizi*—the rulers normally remain silent.

Take the *Book of Lord Shang*, for instance. There, Lord Xiao of Qin appears only in the first chapter, where he outlines his plans to alter the existent laws so as to strengthen his state, then listens to the advisors' opinions, and finally approves Shang Yang's proposal to institute radical reforms. Henceforth, the lord disappears from the text entirely except for the final chapter in which he asks a single question how to let the officials internalize laws and regulations and remains silent thereafter. Perhaps for the book editors' this was the desirable degree of the ruler's activism: to outline his plans, to listen to his ministers' arguments, and then to make the decision. Normally, the state should be run through strict observance of laws and regulations, with minimal individual input from the sovereign. Any whimsical intervention of the ruler in established procedures is highly unwelcome, and there is no need for him to make any authoritative statement.[48]

A similar observation applies, mutatis mutandis, to *Han Feizi* as well. The book is notorious for its advocacy of the ruler's empowerment at the expense of his aides, whom the author compares to hungry tigers eager to devour the sovereign.[49] Yet his resolute monarchism notwithstanding, Han Fei remains deeply suspicious of the individual rulers' abilities. Among hundreds of anecdotes scattered throughout *Han Feizi* we find ready examples of the rulers being duped, and many examples of the rulers who acted on their own, disregarding the aides' advice, and brought about dire consequences for their states and themselves. Only very rarely we do encounter a truly intelligent ruler.[50] The message is clear: it is in the ruler's best interests to refrain from speaking and acting. Indeed, Han Fei explicitly recommends the rulers to refrain from any display of personal inclinations, from any pronouncements that could be twisted and utilized against the sovereign. Refraining from personal maintenance of affairs (*cao shi* 操事), from making individual planning (*jilu* 計慮), and from speaking (*yan* 言) is the best way to ensure the sovereign's position.[51] And, as a sinister observer would note, Han Fei's recommendations result in

[47]See detailed discussion in Yuri Pines, "From Teachers to Subjects: Ministers Speaking to the Rulers from Yan Ying 晏嬰 to Li Si 李斯," in: *Facing the Monarch: Modes of Advice in the Early Chinese Court*, ed. Garret Olberding (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 80–89.

[48]For the text's dislike of the ruler's whimsical intervention in political life, see *Book of Lord Shang* 14.4 (cited according to Yuri Pines, *The Book of Lord Shang: Apologetics of State Power in Early China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017) and the discussion ibid., 88–89.

[49]See Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, ed., *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu* 韓非子新校注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), 8: 164 ("Yang quan" 揚權); cf. 5: 74–75 ("Zhu dao" 主道) and Pines, "*Han Feizi*," 124–27.

[50]See Romain Graziani, "Monarch and Minister: The Problematic Partnership in the Building of Absolute Monarchy in the *Han Feizi* 韓非子," in *Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China*, ed. Yuri Pines, Paul R. Goldin, and Martin Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 155–80.

[51]*Han Feizi* 5: 81 ("Zhu dao").

the ruler preserving the semblance of his absolute authority, whereas in practice the state is run by clever ministers, such as Han Fei himself …[52]

Epilogue: Silent Monarchs vs Reigning Sages

The discussion above shows the overwhelming tendency in Eastern Zhou texts to keep the rulers silent. Aside from a very few rulers, such as King Zhuang of Chu, who are credited with intelligent pronouncements, most sovereigns are portrayed as passive recipients of their aides' advice. The rulers who over-trust themselves, like King Fuchai of Wu, are doomed. The only major exception to this rule is the speeches of King Wuling of Zhao in the *Stratagems of the Warring States*, the very peculiarity of which buttress the point that normatively the rulers were not supposed to speak authoritatively. That this understanding is shared by the most authoritarian-leaning texts of the Warring States corpus—the *Book of Lord Shang* and *Han Feizi*—shows beyond doubt that the ruler's silence in historical and philosophical texts is not accidental. It is a deliberate construct of those who selected (or invented) speeches of historical personages that merited remembrance. The rulers' speeches were normally not considered to be worth selection.

Yet how then can we explain then the existence of the specific genre of royal speeches, as manifested in significant parts of the *Canon of Documents* and a few related collections, such as *Leftover Zhou Documents* (*Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書), as well as individual documents from the Qinghua University collection of looted manuscripts?[53] Recall that many of these "documents" were not just transmitted from the past but updated and invented throughout the Eastern Zhou period. Moreover, some of the most notable examples of the ruler's pronouncements, like the "Canon of Yao" ("Yao dian" 堯典), are likely to be the product of precisely the Warring States period, when political atmosphere appears to be quite aversive of assertive rulers of Yao's type.[54] How should we understand this contradiction?

My answer would call into attention the need to distinguish between two types of rulers. Those Eastern Zhou rulers whom we encounter either as protagonists of historical works or as addressees of the thinkers' advice and admonitions, were average sovereigns, whose political superiority was readily acknowledged, but who were viewed as lagging behind their ministers in terms of intellectual abilities or moral qualities. These average rulers were contrasted with an ideal ruler, the sagacious True Monarch (*wang zhe* 王者), who was expected to be superior to his subjects not only politically but also morally and

[52]On this point, see Yuri Pines, "Submerged by Absolute Power: The Ruler's Predicament in the *Han Feizi*," in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei*, ed. Paul R. Goldin (Dordrecht: Springer 2013), 67–86. For an alternative view, to wit, that Han Fei hopes for a mentally capable monarch to occupy the throne, see Mark Edward Lewis, "The Ruler in the Polity of Objective Standards," in *Dao Companion to China's "fa" Tradition*, 315–49.

[53]For the latter documents, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, trans., *The Yi Zhou shu and Pseudo-Yi Zhou shu Chapters*《逸周書》諸篇 and *The Shang Shu and Pseudo-Shang Shu Chapters*《尚書》諸篇, vols. 1–2 of *The Tsinghua University Warring States Bamboo Manuscripts: Studies and Translations*《清華大學藏戰國竹簡》研究與英譯 (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2023 and 2024). For treating the *Canon of Documents* and the *Leftover Zhou Documents* as part of the broader textual corpus, see Yegor Grebnev, "The *Yi Zhoushu* and the *Shangshu*: The Case of Texts with Speeches," in *Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy*, 249–80; see also Sarah Allan, "On Shu 書 (Documents) And the Origin of the Shang Shu 尚書 (Ancient Documents) in Light of Recently Discovered Bamboo Slip Manuscripts," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 75.3 (2012), 547–57.

[54]For "Yao dian," see Kern, "Language and the Ideology."

intellectually. This ideal ruler should emulate the success of the past paragon monarchs. He was due to restore unity to the fragmented All-under-Heaven, put an end to centuries of bloodshed and turmoil, and establish universal good rule. The lionized figure of the True Monarch was used as a foil to the current mediocre sovereigns, who by their sheer inability to unify the realm inevitably fell short of the sagacious unifier.[55]

The ability to unify the fragmented realm was the ultimate litmus test of a ruler being the "True Monarch." Whereas the savior-like figure of the True Monarch was commonly projected in the future, it was also associated with the "sage monarchs" (*shengwang* 聖王) of antiquity. These sage monarchs—from the legendary Yellow Thearch 黃帝 and Thearch Yao to the Zhou dynastic founders, kings Wen 文王 and Wu 武王—figure most prominently in different collections of the rulers' speeches.[56] Other Shang and Western Zhou rulers were not identified as sages, but, insofar as they presided over the unified realm, they were still in a sufficiently prestigious position to merit preservation (or invention) of "their" speeches.[57] By contrast, regional lords, who ipso facto could not be considered "true monarchs," were not in a position to have their speeches recorded and circulated; hence, none of them—not even the Springs-and-Autumns hegemons—merited transmission of their real or imagined speeches.[58]

Insofar as regional lords could never claim a position of a True Monarch, they had to acquiesce to a consensus of the Warring States thinkers—that a regional lord could not be a sage. It was tacitly understood that intellectually speaking a regional lord is normally inferior to his ministers and should heed their advice. His primary task was to select a worthy aide and relegate him power, much like Lord Xiao of Qin did with regard to Shang Yang. An average, regional, ruler was recommended to rule through blessed inaction. He should enjoy absolute ritual superiority but refrain from intervention in everyday government affairs. Naturally, he was not expected to make meaningful political pronouncements.[59] It is notable that their bitter disagreements notwithstanding, thinkers of all intellectual affiliations—from the authors of *Analects* and *Mengzi* to those of the *Book*

[55]See more in Yuri Pines, "The Messianic Emperor: A New Look at Qin's Place in China's History," in *Birth of an Empire: The State of Qin Revisited*, ed. Yuri Pines, Lothar von Falkenhausen, Gideon Shelach, and Robin D. S. Yates (Berkeley: University of California Press 2014), 259–63.

[56]The Yellow Thearch's alleged speeches were not assembled in the canonical or quasi-canonical collections of "documents," but they feature prominently in the so-called *Yellow Thearch Documents* 黃帝書 discovered in 1973 in Tomb 3, Mawangdui. See Wei Qipeng 魏啓鵬, *Mawangdui Han mu boshu* Huang Di shu *jianzheng* 馬王堆漢墓帛書《黃帝書》箋證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), and translation by Leo S. Chang and Yu Feng, *The Four Political Treatises of the Yellow Emperor* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998). For Yao's speech, see the "Canon of Yao" (note 54 above). Speeches attributed to kings Wen and Wu abound in particular among the *Leftover Zhou Documents*.

[57]Two ready examples come from the Tsinghua collection: the "Fu Yue zhi ming" 傅敓之命 (Fu Yue command) is attributed to king Wuding 武丁 of the Shang; the "She ming" 攝命 (Command to She) is associated with a mid-Western Zhou king (whose identity is contested). For these texts, see Shaughnessy, *The Shang Shu*, chapters 3 and 5 respectively. In the *Canon of Documents*, the most notable example is "Pan Geng" 盤庚, attributed to the eponymous mid-Shang king.

[58]The two exceptions to this rule are two last documents in the current "new script" (*jinwen* 今文) edition of the *Canon of Documents*. The first, "Bi shi" 粊誓 (The Harangue at Bi) is associated with the earliest history of the state of Lu, founded by the son of the Duke of Zhou; see details in Maria Khayutina, "'Bi shi' 粊誓, Western Zhou Oath Texts, and the Legal Culture of Early China," in *Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy*, 416–45. The second, "Qin shi" 秦誓 (Qin's Harangue) is the only one associated with the regional lord per se, Lord Mu of Qin 秦穆公 (r. 659–621 BCE). It is highly like that this unusual inclusion was a product of the imperial Qin-era editing of the *Canon of Documents*.

[59]See detailed discussion in Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 82–107.

of Lord Shang, from *Mozi* 墨子 to *Xunzi* 荀子, from *Zhuangzi* 莊子 to *Han Feizi* and *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋—considered themselves intellectually superior to the sovereigns of their age. Having accepted their inferior position in terms of political and ritual hierarchy, thinkers were not going to yield their major asset, the intellectual authority. The ruler was expected to learn from his aides rather than teach them.[60]

This situation, rooted as it was in the thinkers' insistence on the bifurcation between the idealized sages (the realm's unifiers) and the current regional lords, who were commonly expected to be mediocrities, ended abruptly with the imperial unification of 221 BCE. The moment the King of Qin have attained the cherished goal of unifying "All-under-Heaven," he had the right to revise the nature of the ruler-minister relations. Having elevated himself to the new position of the "August Thearch," the First Emperor had set on the course of distinguishing himself from the bygone age of compliant regional lords. Rather, he positioned himself as the long-expected True Monarch, the ruling sage who had the right and the duty to rule actively and lead his subjects intellectually and not just politically.[61] The resultant collision between the First Emperor and the members of educated elite, and the subsequent vilification of the First Emperor are well known. Yet whereas the First Emperor's hubris was widely censured, his posture as a sage was adopted by the subsequent rulers from the Han dynasty on. Henceforth, the ruler had the right to speak authoritatively to his subjects, and as we know many (albeit not all) of the occupants of the dragon throne had duly utilized this right. The era of speechless monarchs had ended once and for all.

Competing interest. The author declares none

[60]For the Warring States-era intellectuals' common conviction that they, rather than the rulers, have preferential access to the Way, to wit, the summa of guiding political, moral, and even cosmic principles, see Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 123–35.

[61]Pines, "The Messianic Monarch."

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