

*Part 1*

Overview

*An Assessment of Traditional Culture*

Part I of this book offers a critical assessment of China's traditional culture. The first three chapters look at pre-Qin/Han China, which I would term 'dynamic China', from a variety of perspectives. Chapter 4 focuses on China from the Qin–Han period onwards, or what I would term a 'stagnant China'. Chapter 5 looks at Chinese history in its entirety. Although the five chapters were originally published separately, one can still draw them together tenuously under one category. On the one hand, these essays contain a great deal of criticism and holding to account of Chinese culture, but they go far beyond meaningless cutting remarks. On the other hand, these chapters appreciate and edify our traditional culture without self-aggrandisement. Where there is self-congratulation, it has been substantiated by the events of the war; where there is self-reproach, there is no need for revision. The War of Resistance was about more than defeating an occupying force: it was about building a new state. In order to create this new state, we must first understand the good and bad of traditional culture – particularly the bad. Chinese culture is diverse and complex and far beyond the capacity of any one individual to explain. If the chapters that follow can provide the Chinese reader with a better understanding of traditional China, then I will have succeeded in my endeavour.

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Haizong Lei  
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## 1 China's Military

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Most historians' records throughout Chinese history have tended to focus on military institutions; there is substantially less interest in the Chinese military psyche. Where this chapter does touch on the military as an institution, reference can be made to works such as *Wenxian Tongkao* 文獻通考 which have covered this topic extensively. My chief objective is therefore to explore, from the limited scope provided by the scattered materials available, the identities of the troops, the discipline enforced, the culture within the army, and the psyche of soldiers, from the Spring and Autumn period until the latter days of the Eastern Han. This work only briefly touches on changes in the military system because the system is merely the framework that encompasses the psyche. I am confident that this method will prove useful in enlightening the reader on the causes of the rise or fall of the Chinese nation.

### The Spring and Autumn Period

There are no historical records on which we can rely to ascertain details of the military system of the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE); furthermore, ideal historical records from later periods are scant. Nevertheless, assuming a broad similarity with other nations during their feudal eras, then all males who belonged to the aristocracy (the warrior class, *shi* 士) would have served in the military. Ordinary civilians would not have served, or at most in marginal numbers, and then in only lowly positions.

In spite of the detailed records about the Spring and Autumn period contained in the *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳 and *Guo Yu* 國語, we are still very much in the dark about the military systems of the time, with the exception of a glimpse of the military system of the state of Qi under Prime Minister Guan Zhong, detailed in the *Guo Yu*.<sup>4</sup> The situation in other Chinese states is unclear. The *Guo Yu* records that

Guan Zhong divided the country into twenty-one districts or *xiang* (鄉). Of these, there were six districts which grouped artisans and merchants together (*gongshangxiang* 工商鄉), and fifteen districts controlled by the aristocracy which would field soldiers (*shixiang* 士鄉).

<sup>4</sup> *Guo Yu*, Vol. VI, 'Records of Qi'.

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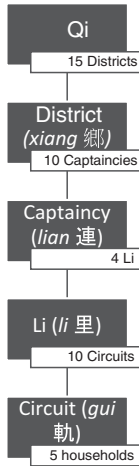


Figure 1.1 Administrative structure of the Qi military.

Five of these latter fifteen districts were controlled by the ruler; five by Guozi; and five by Gaozi.

This short record provides an interesting fact: artisans and merchants had no military duties, because only those living in the fifteen aristocratic districts could serve in the army. These ‘aristocrats’ most likely held inherited positions and would have for generations viewed war as their primary occupation. The army of Qi was organised in a binary system with military and administrative power complimenting each other. The administrative structure is laid out in Figure 1.1.

Running parallel to this administrative system was a military system:

- 1 Every five households would field five men in a band (*wu* 伍), reporting to the circuit head (*guizhang* 軌長).
- 2 Every Li would field fifty men, forming a bicentury (*rong* 戎). The bicentury had one armoured chariot team, commanded by the *li* director (*liyousi* 里有司).
- 3 Every Captaincy would field 200 men: these formed an infantry division (*zu* 卒), with four chariot teams, led by a captain.
- 4 Every district would field 2,000 men, forming a battalion (*lü* 旅) with forty chariot teams, led by the district governor (*xiangliangren* 鄉良人).
- 5 Every five districts would field an army (*jun* 軍) of 10,000, with 200 armoured chariot teams.
- 6 There were three armies, with 600 armoured chariot teams, led by the duke, Guozi and Gaozi.

The three armies mentioned above were the state of Qi’s capital (*guo* 國) armed forces, comprising 30,000 men from 30,000 households. It should be noted that

*guo* referred to only the state capital and the surrounding area; in other words, only a small fraction of the total territory of the state. Apart from artisans and merchants, residents of the capital area were all hereditary members of the *shi* or warrior aristocrat class. No farmers resided in the capital area. Artisans and merchants were under no obligation to do military service, right up to the reign of Duke Huan of Qi (685–643 BCE). It is unascertainable whether or not farmers had to perform military service initially; however, after the legal reforms by Guan Zhong, they were indeed obligated to serve. Even then, not all farmers had to join up: the state selected the best talent. The *Guo Yu* records,

For this reason, agriculture is forever a hereditary occupation. Farmers live in the wilderness undisturbed by unhealthy habits; the best of them have the potential to become warriors and must surely be trustworthy in such a position. If a *li* director discovers such talent and does not inform his superiors, then he shall be subject to the Five Punishments.

It is clear that selection of able farmers who could ‘become warriors’ was an important duty for the *li* directors.

Everywhere outside the capital zone was known as *bi* 鄙. There were certainly some aristocrats scattered around these areas, but the majority of the population in *bi* would, of course, have been the peasantry, who formed the bulk of the nation's population. Guan Zhong implemented the following system to administer *bi*:

- 1 thirty households to a village (*yi* 邑);
- 2 ten villages to a troop (*zu* 卒), i.e. 300 households;
- 3 ten troops to a district (*xiang* 鄉), i.e. 3,000 households;
- 4 three districts to a county (*xian* 縣), i.e. 9,000 households;
- 5 ten counties to a region (*shu* 屬), i.e. 90,000 households;
- 6 five regions formed the *bi*, i.e. 450,000 households.

In the capital zone, every household would send one man to do military service. However, this was not the case with *bi*. Since the law stated that outstanding members of the farming population could be selected to join the warrior class, this means that there was no fixed number. Nevertheless, the *Guo Yu* does state that Duke Huan had ‘eight hundred leather-tarp chariots’. In the capital zone, there were only 600 chariots. The remaining 200 chariot teams, or 10,000 men, seem to have been drawn from *bi*. Even if these purported figures exceed historical reality, they are at least the standard set by Guan Zhong. If we suppose that the 450,000 households provided 450,000 foot soldiers, of whom 10,000 were selected for chariot teams, that equals one soldier in forty-five.<sup>5</sup> Therefore it is evident that during the Spring and

<sup>5</sup> These figures are, of course, estimates and rounded up, but they may well be close to the reality. If each of the 450,000 households of the *bi* area provided one soldier, assuming an average size of five people per household, the total population would be 2.25 million. Assuming an average size

Autumn period, in addition to the entire aristocracy performing military service as in the past, the state of Qi required a small part of the army to consist of farmers.

We have no means of ascertaining the situation in other states. However, development patterns within one cultural sphere tend to be broadly similar; most states during the Spring and Autumn period (771–476 BCE) were likely in a similar position to Qi. According to a legend popular during the Warring States period about Duke Mu of Qin (659–621 BCE),

Long ago, when Duke Mu rode his chariot into battle, he was defeated. The third of his four horses was killed and the corpse taken by the barbarians.

When he saw his captors were about to eat his horse on the southern slope of Qishan, he cried, ‘To eat such wonderful horseflesh without some wine to go with it might be bad for your health!’ Thereupon, they drank together. After the duke and the barbarians had lived together for a year, there came the Battle of Hanyuan. The Jin army surrounded Duke Mu’s chariot. Of the wild men who had been at Qishan that day, there were more than three hundred at Hanyuan. All of them fought valiantly to defend the duke.

The battle ended with Jin being routed. Duke Mu’s troops managed to capture Duke Hui of Jin and made their way back.<sup>6</sup>

Although this story was told much later than the events it describes, *Lüshi Chunqiu* is from the Qin state, and as a record about the founding father of Qin, is not necessarily entirely fiction. This story indicates that during the Battle of Hanyuan, there were at least 300 commoners fighting as part of the Qin army. Although such non-professional soldiers had been part of the military since the Spring and Autumn period, the main body of the army was still the aristocracy. Armies in general during the period could still be said to be aristocratic in character. Control by this class meant that the army was still run in line with the

of eight people per household, the total population would be 3.6 million. The population of the capital area was mostly composed of warrior aristocrats who would have lived as part of large clans, so it is unclear how exactly to interpret the 30,000 ‘households’ (*jia* 家) in these sources. Nevertheless, compared to the *bi* area, the capital area would have had a much smaller population. We can still be confident that the population of Qi during Duke Huan of Qi’s time was no more than 3.6 million. The sharp increases in the Chinese population in more recent times are an anomaly that has occurred since contact with the West and offer no basis for comparison. The population of China at the end of Emperor Qianlong’s reign, after a century and a half of peaceful Manchu rule, can be taken as the point of highest population density in the nation’s history. According to the ‘Hukou Kao 戶口考’ in Vol. XIX of the Qing-era *Wenxian Tongkao*, in the forty-eighth year of Qianlong’s reign (after which there are no more population statistics for the provincial level or below), the population of Shandong was 22,012,661. Although this is only an approximate figure, population statistics have been broadly reliable from the time of Emperor Kangxi’s abolition of the head tax (*rending shui* 人丁稅). This Shandong population figure is, furthermore, ten times 2.25 million, or six times 3.6 million. We cannot map the exact territory of Qi as held by Duke Huan during his rule, but it would have been approximately one-sixth the size of modern-day Shandong. Even allowing for a smaller population than in later times, the figures as provided by the *Guo Yu* broadly match historical fact.

<sup>6</sup> *Lüshi Chunqiu*, Vol. VIII, ‘Zhongqiu Records’, chapter 5, ‘Beloved Soldiers’.

values of the feudal martial spirit (*xiayi* 俠義). The aristocracy, as a product of the feudal system, produced men who viewed military service as a profession, honour and hobby. Inability to serve was viewed as a disgrace. Figures in the *Zuo Zhuan* and *Guo Yu* all, without exception, have military experience. All were more than willing to fight on the battlefield. The ruler of a state would often go into battle himself, leaving himself open to the risk of capture, like Duke Hui. The ruler's male relatives would also train in the martial arts – from a very young age. Duke Dao of Jin's youngest brother Yang Gan entered the army when he was no more than fifteen or sixteen; his immaturity led to disorder among the ranks.<sup>7</sup> Even the Sons of Heaven of the Zhou royal house would go into battle and sometimes be wounded. Duke Huan of Zhou once led an army in an expedition against the state of Zheng, and was hit by an arrow.<sup>8</sup>

The states of the Spring and Autumn period were full of people itching to join the armed forces – from the Prime Minister down to ordinary young men from the warrior class. Military service was not seen as a lowly profession; it was the honourable preserve of the highest strata in society. The science of warfare may have still been relatively primitive, but there was no shortage of morale. Soldiers were almost fearless: throughout the entire *Zuo Zhuan* there is not a single instance of desertion out of fear.

There was no clear distinction between military and civilian professions at the time. Members of the warrior aristocracy studied both literary and martial arts from childhood. There were a small number of scribes and diviners who served an administrative or religious function, and who would not take part in military campaigns. Nevertheless, these men were drawn from the same class of society as their warrior peers; they would certainly have been trained in arms during their youth. Only their official duties prevented them from serving in the armed forces.

For example, Confucius, who advocated the importance of a literary education, knew about military affairs. In the 'Shu'er pian' 述而篇 of the *Analects of Confucius* the philosopher is recorded as saying, 'I do not use a net to fish; I do not hunt and shoot animals while they rest.' This demonstrates that Confucius knew how to hunt, unlike the stay-at-home scholars of later times who could not even have trussed a chicken. In the 'Jishi pian' 季氏篇 of the *Analects of Confucius*, Confucius talked about the 'three taboos of the gentleman': 'When you have reached your physical peak, avoid getting into fights.'

In this passage, the 'gentleman' to which Confucius refers is not just the social class, but an ethical ideal, like that epitomised by Confucius and his students. In order to avoid fighting, they would have had to know the

<sup>7</sup> *Zuo Zhuan*, 'Xianggong Sannian' 相公三年. At the time, Duke Dao himself was only seventeen years old, not to mention Yang Gan.

<sup>8</sup> *Zuo Zhuan*, 'Huangong Wunian' 桓公五年.

techniques and been brave enough to fight in the first place – unlike their literary descendants whose battlefield of choice was the written word, and whose ‘martial skill’ was that of insulting others.

### The Warring States

The culture of the early Warring States period ushered in tremendous change in every sphere. It is a pity that there are very few historical sources covering this period. The *Zuo Zhuan* and *Guo Yu* do not cover the period, while *Zhanguo Ce* (*Annals of the Warring States* 戰國策) is neither a reliable source nor particularly informative. An authentic copy of the *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年) was discovered, only to be then lost via the inaction of an idiotic Prime Minister of a later age. Thus the revolutionary and tumultuous era of the Warring States has been the object of frustration for many later scholars. *The Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) offers only the most approximate notes for that century of history (c. 470–370 BCE), telling us that there were several political revolutions which resulted in the states becoming autocracies, while the old aristocracy lost the last vestigial rights they had enjoyed during the Spring and Autumn period. The end of the Spring and Autumn period and the early Warring States also saw increasing political activity by the nascent artisan and merchant industries.<sup>9</sup> The myths about Fan Li,<sup>10</sup> Zigong and Bai Gui<sup>11</sup> indicate the development of commerce during this period and the improved status of the merchant class.

The traditional aristocratic politics and society had been overthrown. In their place rose the autocratic rule of despots and the elimination of the social hierarchy. In name at least, the new societies were ones of equality. During this transformation, old cultural artefacts were naturally of no further use; the education system that had produced an aristocratic class skilled in both the literary and military arts broke down. Instead, everyone had to rely on their own efforts and luck in search of better positions in the political and social hierarchy. This was the beginning of the divergence of *wen* 文, or literary education, and *wu* 武, military training. The story of Zhang Yi is a classic example of the new, rising class of literati:

Zhang Yi had completed his studies and was offering his counsel to the various feudal lords. His travels once took him to a banquet with Chu’s prime minister. After the

<sup>9</sup> *Guo Yu*, Vol. XIV, ‘Records of Jin 8’, notes, ‘Wealthy merchants in Jiang . . . plate their carts with gold and jade, wear clothing with brocade and intricate patterns, have the power to bribe all the feudal lords, but draw no official’s salary.’ It is clear that by the time of the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, there were already merchants who were wealthy, but who had no political standing. The story of how the merchant Xian Gao rescues Zheng, as related in ‘Xigong Sanshisannian’ 僖公三十三年 of the *Zuo Zhuan*, attests how well-developed commerce was by the Spring and Autumn period.

<sup>10</sup> *Records of the Grand Historian*, Vol. XLI, ‘The House of King Goujian of Yue’.

<sup>11</sup> *Records of the Grand Historian*, Vol. CXXIX, ‘Accounts of Usurers’.



banquet was over, the royal *bi*-jade stone was reported missing. The minister's subordinates pointed to Zhang Yi, saying, 'Zhang Yi is poor and unprincipled: he must be the thief!' Zhang was seized by several men who proceeded to whip him hundreds of times. Zhang refused to admit any wrongdoing and was released. Zhang's wife cried, 'Yi! If you hadn't studied and become a travelling adviser, would you have received the treatment you did today?' Zhang Yi replied, 'Is the tongue still intact in my head?' His wife smiled and replied, 'Yes . . .'

Yi continued, 'Then that's enough for me!'<sup>12</sup>

Men like Zhang Yi survived through their ability to speak and their knowledge of political theory to influence heads of state. If such men were lucky, they might become Prime Minister or similar; if not, they might be humiliated and beaten up. They had no knowledge of military strategy, and likely no knowledge about self-defence. They were entirely civilian.

A different breed of people devoted their time entirely to military matters. They saw themselves as the heirs of the ancient martial spirit promoted by the feudal aristocracy, a spirit exemplified in the stories of Nie Zheng<sup>13</sup> and Jing Ke.<sup>14</sup> Although Nie and Jing emulated the martial arts and the outer trappings of this spirit of the ancient aristocracy, the culture represented by that aristocracy no longer existed. In the past, the old aristocracy had relied on their combination of military and civilian skills to uphold the political system. They worked to advance a particular agenda and did not overstretch their talents. Their main objectives were, domestically, to preserve the aristocratic polity and society, and, in the larger Chinese cultural sphere, to preserve the balance of power between the different states. These new warriors had no particular set of political beliefs; instead, they served whoever paid the most. They were even willing to give their lives for their clients. The mercenary nature of these warriors mirrored that of the scholars who found work as political consultants. The rulers of the different states made use of these non-partisan actors for their own ends – namely the unification of all the states. The general atmosphere of the time was very tense, and the military system naturally expanded to an extreme as a result.

Unfortunately, there is no equivalent text to the *Zuo Zhuan* or *Guo Yu* for the period of the Warring States. Consequently, although the Warring States succeeded the Spring and Autumn period, our understanding of the political history and political systems of the Warring States is less clear than that of its predecessor. All of the Warring States appear to have been *militaristic*; they may not have been entirely militarised societies, but their laws encouraged every man to join the army. Only the *Xunzi* offers a brief, unclear reference to these quasi-conscription systems:

<sup>12</sup> *Records of the Grand Historian*, Vol. LXX, 'Biography of Zhang Yi'.

<sup>13</sup> *Zhanguo Ce*, Vol. XXVII, 'Policies of Han 2'.

<sup>14</sup> *Zhanguo Ce*, Vol. XXXI, 'Policies of Yan 3'.

The people of Qi greatly value their Jiji warriors.<sup>15</sup> These men are rewarded with eight taels of gold for each head they take. The ‘Wuzu’ soldiers of Wei are selected according to ability: prospective recruits must wear a full suit of armour in three pieces, carry a crossbow with a draw weight of twelve *dan* and fifty bolts, and a *ge* pike-axe on their back. They must wear a helmet and hang a sword at their waist. They are further issued with three days’ worth of rations. If they can march a hundred *li* in half a day (carrying all this), they are recruited – their families are declared exempt from corvée labour and are given land and housing in favourable areas . . . The people of Qin are given few means to make a living. The Qin state treats its people with cruelty and strictness, and compels its people to fight, either blatantly or through narrowing their other options for survival. Soldiers are incentivised through rewards and kept disciplined through punishments. All the people of Qin are placed in a situation where the only means of gaining advance in life is by warfare.<sup>16</sup>

The passage above is an account by a Confucian historian of the Warring States period. The historian’s disinterest in military affairs is reflected in the vagueness of the details. Nevertheless, it does seem clear that Qin operated a completely militarised society. The states of Qi and Wei, on the other hand, desired at the least to create a standard whereby the great majority of their subjects would participate in the military. Great rewards were used as incentives to push more people to reach the required standard.

Warring States warfare was brutal. In contrast, during the Spring and Autumn period, war had been the preserve of the aristocracy, and was rather like a game. The *Zuo Zhuan* records complicated rituals for every war. Killing was relatively rare; the object of warfare at the time was not to kill the enemy, or to destroy the enemy’s state. Instead, the aim was to preserve the international balance of power. By the time of the Warring States, the fundamentals of war had changed: states aimed to annihilate their enemies. To this end, each state heavily incentivised killing. Prisoners of war, even surrendered troops, were slaughtered and buried in pits en masse as a way to wear down the enemy’s forces. The protracted warfare between the states of Wu and Yue towards the end of the Spring and Autumn period can be seen as the first ‘Warring States’ war.<sup>17</sup> Prior to that war, the larger states had not sought to annex each other; likewise, they pursued only the submission, not the occupation, of their smaller neighbours. Wu was still in the Spring and Autumn mindset – it passed up the opportunity to destroy Yue, despite strong advocacy to the contrary by Wu Zixu. Yue, on the other hand, gave no quarter: it completely annexed Wu and ended its domination of the southeast of more than a century. Yue’s treatment of Wu was to become standard practice.

<sup>15</sup> Translator’s note: a class of warrior skilled in hand-to-hand combat and the beheading of enemy troops.

<sup>16</sup> *Xunzi*, Vol. X, ‘On Soldiers’, section 15.

<sup>17</sup> *Guo Yu*, Vol. XIX, ‘Records of Wu’; Vol. XX, ‘Records of Yue’.