

The City-State in Spring-and-Autumn China

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The Spring-and-Autumn period (771-481 B.C.) was the age of the city-state in China. These three centuries mark the transition between the collapse of the last Bronze Age monarchy and the rise of powerful macro-states based on universal military service, the so-called Warring States. During the Spring-and-Autumn period the drainage basin of the Yellow River was divided into hundreds of small states, most of which consisted of a single city and its immediate hinterland. There were also several larger states containing multiple cities, but these cities – usually the sites of secondary courts controlled by collateral lines of the ruling house – enjoyed considerable autonomy. Cities in this period were physically divided into separate districts devoted to political and religious activities, artisan's workshops, and residences. There were also key public sites – the markets, major squares, the schools, the courtyards adjacent to the ancestral temples – in which nobles and citizens routinely met and discussed political affairs, and where the people assembled to make or to support major decisions in times of crisis. The population was divided into at least three major social groupings: nobles, free citizens, and a non-free group consisting of slaves and aliens. The first two groups served in the chariot-based armies that fought in the endemic, small-scale wars of the period. They were also the key actors in the struggles for control of the government that often led to civil conflict. It was institutional innovations to strengthen these armies and armed factions that led to the rise of the great states forged through conquest, and brought an end to the city-state as a political form in China.

This paper will sketch the characteristics of these Chinese city-states and their encompassing political structure and culture. I have organized the exposition around the common characteristics of city-states as listed in the introduction to this volume. To avoid excessive fragmentation, I have grouped the characteristics under four rubrics: the origins of the city-states and of their common “city-state culture” in the Shang and Zhou monarchies, their size and distribution, the system of interstate politics that linked them

together, and their internal social structure. This final rubric will also include a brief discussion of their characteristic cultic and ritual forms. As will be shown, the Chinese case exhibits virtually all the traits by which Hansen defines the city-state, although like Chinese socialism it has its own distinctive characteristics. In the conclusion, I will briefly consider the reasons why the age of the city-states had little impact on the later history of imperial China.

Origins and Common Culture

The city-states of Spring-and-Autumn China emerged from the collapse of an earlier city-state kingdom, the Western Zhou (ca. 1045-771 B.C.). Their emergence as the predominant form of political organization was a direct outgrowth of the structure of the earlier Shang (ca. 1600 – ca. 1045 B.C.) and Zhou states. These states had both been organized as leagues of cities that controlled only their immediate hinterlands. The leagues were held together by the power and prestige of the Shang or Zhou monarchs, so when the Zhou monarchy collapsed in 771 B.C. the league of Zhou cities rapidly broke up into a system of city-states that alternately engaged in warfare and formed alliances. These city-states shared a common elite culture derived from the practices of the Zhou royal court.

Urbanism in China had an ancient history. Neolithic villages of pit houses with thatched roofs had been built on loess mounds along the Yellow River since at least 5000 B.C. The second millennium B.C. witnessed the appearance of large, defensive walls constructed from tamped earth, as well as the division of the walled cities into ceremonial centers for temples and palaces, quarters inhabited by lineages of artisans who produced ritual or luxury goods, and residential areas (Chang [1986] 114-20, 248-9, 286-8, 303, 322-39, 362-3). These settlements in turn were ultimately linked into a polity under the Shang kings. However, the written evidence regarding the Shang state – the divination records found at the royal necropolis in the last Shang capital at Anyang – dates from several centuries after the establishment of the

dynasty. Consequently the origins of the state and its links to the rise of urbanism are not clear. The functioning of the state at its peak, however, can be reconstructed.

The nature of the late Shang state has been most carefully studied by David Keightley. Through examining the oracle records he has determined whom the king could command, what services he could demand of them, where he could proceed without opposition, to whom and with whom he would offer sacrifice, from whom he suffered threats and attacks, and related questions. In this way he has achieved a detailed account of the Shang state in terms of the actions of its ruler and his subjects (Keightley [1983] 523-58).

The Shang state, as reconstructed by Keightley, formed a web of walled settlements that accepted the king's commands. As Chang Kwang-chih has shown, the inhabitants of these towns were organized into one or more consanguineal kin groups (*zu*) that served as military units and performers of sacrifice to their shared ancestor (Chang [1980] 158-65). Scattered among the towns that obeyed the Shang were many settlements, called *fang*, that were routinely in a state of low-level conflict or open war with the Shang. A notable example are the pre-dynastic Zhou, who first appear in the Shang inscriptions as enemies to be fought, then become allies to be commanded, and finally disappear from the record in what appears to be a geographic contraction of Shang activities late in the dynasty (Keightley [1983] 529-32, 543, 545; Hsu and Linduff [1988] 41-9). Thus the Shang state was actually a thin network of pathways and encampments along which the king moved or sent his commands, surrounded by regions that never saw the king or his messengers, and peoples who figure in the Shang records only as enemies in battle and sources of human sacrifice. It was not a continuous, territorial state, but a city-state kingdom, a league of towns allied by kinship or shared religious practice, towns which were dispersed amidst alien and hostile settlements.

A leading Japanese scholar, Akatsuka Kiyoshi, has developed a theory of the Shang state which would explain the emergence of such a structure. Basing himself on the proven principle that men's names were drawn from their places of origins, he has shown that many of the chief diviners in the early records came from allied cities in the Shang confederation, that several early kings in the royal genealogy originated in allied tribes or settlements, and that many of the gods sacrificed to by the Shang were originally the

local gods of allied cities. The pre-dynastic Zhou similarly incorporated Shang ancestors into *their* pantheon (Hsu and Linduff [1988] 48-9). On the basis of these observations he has argued that the Shang state originated from a world of tribes or clans, each having its own walled settlement, its own rulers, its own holy places and its own local spirits. The Shang court was created through a union of several such clans. Indeed, as indicated by the placing of "alien" men or gods in the early generations of the Shang genealogy, the royal lineage itself may have been created through a fusion of tribal leaders. Groups who subsequently fell under Shang domination were drawn into the new state through the adoption of their leaders as diviners and the addition of their gods to the Shang pantheon. In this way kin ties, both real and ascriptive, and shared cult served to bind together a league of originally autonomous towns or cities (Akatsuka [1977]; Keightley [1982] 267-320).

Equally significantly, Keightley's work has shown that the Shang king was constantly on the move. He routinely displayed his power by travelling, hunting, and inspecting along the pathways of his realm. As he moved over the landscape he sacrificed to local spirits, giving nourishment and receiving numinous power at each holy place, while renewing the religious and kin ties that linked him to the other settlements in the league. Apart from the performance of rituals that spiritually incorporated the various localities of his realm, the king also went on regular hunts. Divinations regarding these hunts constitute a significant percentage, more than one third, of the surviving inscriptions. The hunts served for military training, for showing the flag, and as a means of securing booty to reward his followers, but they also seem to have been essential to feed and clothe the court. This suggests that the king did not have a sophisticated administrative apparatus to extract taxes from a peasantry whose agricultural techniques had not changed since the Neolithic.

The fact that king could spend so much time away from the capital – one military campaign reconstructed in detail from multiple divinations kept the king in the field for more than three hundred days – also suggests that he was not primarily an administrator. Indeed, power so itinerant in nature suggests that the capital may well have been a base of operation, a cult center, a necropolis, or an artisanal center rather than a fixed administrative and redistributive center. This absence of administration is demonstrated by the fact that the king rarely delegated his power, and then only to relatives and immediate followers.

Armies were commanded by the king himself, his wives, or relatives from the Shang court. Moreover, the range of Shang divination was also tightly circumscribed to his own kin, and included allies only where they were fighting together with Shang forces. The absence of delegation of authority and the narrow ambit of divinatory concerns both reinforce the impression that even in its own capital the Shang state remained an extended clan or lineage structure. This patrimonial state lacked any effective administrative apparatus, and in practice existed only where the king, his immediate relations, or the closest of his followers were present. Thus only the thinnest of threads held together the walled settlements that made up the Shang realm.

The Zhou inherited and in many ways extended the Shang model of the state as a league of cities bound together only by the power of the ruling house. Having conquered the entire Yellow River valley, they enfeoffed relatives or allies in walled towns scattered throughout their still restive realm. These cities occupied by the Zhou nobility functioned as armed garrisons to control the conquered populations. They owed allegiance to the Zhou king, from whom they received titles and regalia in a ceremony at the royal ancestral temple, but they wielded religious and military authority within their own realms. Even the Shang kings were established in the city of Song, in order to maintain the sacrifices to the potent shades of the deceased kings (Itū [1975] 225-46; Itū [1987] 77-153; Hsu and Linduff [1988] 151-85; Lewis [1990] 33-36, 54).

Because the Zhou relied on these walled towns occupied by relatives and allies to control their far-flung territories, it became a basic pattern of Zhou society that an armed nobility was based in the cities, surrounded by a countryside occupied by a servile peasantry. This geographic separation of nobility and free citizens from the peasantry became fundamental to Zhou society, which developed an elaborate vocabulary to distinguish and hierarchize the cities and their inhabitants, those dwelling in the villages immediately around the cities who provided their food, and those who lived at great distances and played no role in the state (Lewis [1990] 54-58).

Like the Shang cities, those of the Zhou state were held together by the power and prestige of the monarch. As long as the king remained militarily supreme, and as long as his conquests provided new territory to award to his followers, the Zhou were able to dominate their feudatories, even shifting them from one place to another. However, expansion stopped

after the death of King Zhao and the loss of his entire army in a disastrous southern campaign in 957 B.C. From that time on royal power declined as the kings increasingly secured allegiance and paid for offices through gifts of land that gradually whittled away their resources (Hsu and Linduff [1988] 278-86; Shaughnessy [1999] 322-31). With the seizure of the old capital by the Quan Rong and disaffected nobles in 771 B.C., and the transfer of the dynasty east to Luoyang under the protection of the rulers of Zheng and Jin, royal power vanished. All of the fiefs, most of them individual towns and their hinterlands, were left as *de facto* independent states.

However, while the Zhou had vanished as a ruling power, they survived as a cultural heritage. For reasons that will be discussed below, no fief dared claim the status of monarch, and the Zhou dynasty was preserved as the ritual figurehead of a coalition of city-states. It was the heritage of the Zhou, and its historical memory, that provided the common culture within which the city-states operated. I will here sketch a few elements of that culture.

One major element was the structure of the cities themselves. Some two dozen major cities of the Spring-and-Autumn period have been excavated but, as Nancy Steinhardt has shown, they are all of three basic types. All these cities were built with four-sided walls and included two separate walled areas: one for the government or ceremonial district, and one for the rest of the city. They vary only in whether the ceremonial area was placed at the center of the area defined by the outer wall, just inside the outer wall, or against it on the outside. This is clear evidence of a vision of proper urban structure that was shared throughout the Yellow River valley and even down to the Yangzi (Steinhardt [1990] 43-50).

A second element of common culture was the system of court music. A major part of ritual performances, music performed on suspended bells and stones was common to the entire Zhou cultural area. Sets of bells discovered in recent tombs have shown that even in the cultural area of Chu, which was located in the Yangzi valley and had not been part of the Zhou state, the court had imported the same scales and presumably performance practices as those of the Zhou (von Falkenhausen [1993] 193-5, 318-20).

The same is true of another major element of Zhou ritual, the precious bronzes used for offerings of wine and food. While there were different regional casting traditions, they all operated within a common system of vessel types and decor. In addition to shared patterns in bronze decor, the ensembles of vessels buried

in tombs across the Spring-and-Autumn world shared a common system. The inscriptions on the bronzes from the period, although far less frequent than those of the Western Zhou, are also written in what amounts to a common script, although the inscriptions from Chu include many unusual graphs. This situation contrasts with that of the subsequent Warring States period (481-221 B.C.), when several distinct regional graphic traditions had emerged (von Falkenhausen [1999] 463-501, 509, 523-5, 532-3, 537-9, 542-4).

Perhaps the most important shared cultural element was a certain community of language and literary heritage. We have only tentative reconstructions of a spoken Zhou language, and major regional variations must have existed, but written sources indicate that members of various states were able to communicate with one another in their frequent personal travels, diplomatic missions, and interstate assemblies. Thus at least among members of the elite there must have been a *lingua franca*. One notable element of this *lingua franca* was composed of a substantial body of inherited verse. These poems, originally the lyrics of songs sung at the Western Zhou temple and court, enjoyed great prestige as part of a common cultural heritage, and they were routinely recited in exchanges between visitor and host as an indispensable element of diplomatic negotiations in the period (Lewis [1999b] 155-9).

Size and Distribution

Later overbuilding and lack of systematic excavations mean that we have little information about Spring-and-Autumn cities, apart from dimensions and shape of their tamped-earth walls. This evidence indicates that the larger cities were 8-9 sq. km., while some were one half or a quarter of that size. While we have no evidence for the populations of cities, references to the size of armies and to the populations of much physically larger cities from the Warring States period would suggest that a large city would have numbered in the tens of thousands, and that small ones would have had a few thousand people (Steinhardt [1990] 43-50; Yang [1980] 95-8).

Major public buildings were rectangular, constructed of wood, and had tamped-earth foundations. They seem to have been largely of a single story, and only towards the end of the period do we find evidence of attempts to build higher foundations for the multi-storied towers that became important in the Warring States period. In some cases large ceremonial buildings, sometimes associated with cemeteries,

were located just outside the walls. The majority of the population, including some of the elite, still lived in semi-subterranean thatched rectangular or oval huts, much like those of the Neolithic period (von Falkenhausen [1999] 453-63).

Further evidence for considering the scale of these city-states can be derived from the number of city-states within a given area, the extent of their distribution, and the size of their territory. Again we have no precise information on these questions, but there is a variety of evidence which can suggest orders of magnitude for a range of greater or lesser states. Most of this evidence comes from sources of the Warring States, but since some smaller city-states still existed in this period, and some now-lost records may have been available, they can provide indications of the number, scale, and variety of city-states that existed in the Spring-and-Autumn period.

A text from the third century A.D. states that in the time of the mythic ruler Yu there were 10,000 states, at the beginning of the Shang 3,000, at the beginning of the Zhou 1,713, and at the beginning of the Spring-and-Autumn period 1,200 (*Di wang shi ji* [1964] 119). While the later figures have no known textual grounding and seem too high, the initial figure of 10,000 (here a purely notional figure that would mean "myriad", "many thousands") states in the time of Yu appears in several texts from the middle and late Warring States period (*Zuo zhuan* [1981] 1642; *Shang shu* [1976] 70). One of these adds the remark that "none of their walls exceeded [a circumference of] 750 meters, and even the most populous of them did not exceed three thousand households (*Zhan guo ce* [1985] 678)." This indicates that as late as the middle of the Warring States period, scholars still understood the term "state" (*guo*) to apply to walled settlements that could be quite small. They projected recent political history, in which large states had absorbed numerous smaller ones, as a continuous process back into the distant past, thus imagining that at the beginning of this steady consolidation there must have been huge numbers of small city-states.

While this Warring States model of the shifting relation of urban settlement and political order demonstrates the survival of city-states as an idea into later centuries, it offers no insight into the actual number of states in the Spring-and-Autumn period. Most discussions of this problem begin with the research by the nineteenth-century scholar Gu Donggao, who in the process of compiling a table of the events of the period produced a list of all named states. Some twentieth-century scholars have supple-

mented the list, producing a total of 209 names (Kaizuka [1978b] 277-9). However, as Miyazaki Ichisada has demonstrated, Chinese scholars working in the sixth century A.D. had been able to identify many small towns that in the Han had been ranked below county (*xian*) level with earlier “states” of the Spring-and-Autumn period (Miyazaki [1978] 6-15). These towns were too small to figure in the political histories of the period, and many of them do not appear in the lists derived from Gu’s work. This indicates that the figure of approximately 200 city-states would refer only to those of some status or political significance. In addition to these larger city-states there were numerous towns that functioned as states, whether independent or subordinate, which were not important enough to be mentioned in chronicles.

A second important feature of distribution was that a handful of large states with several cities – Qi in the east, Jin in the north, Qin in the west, and Chu in the south – ringed the edges of the Chinese world. These few states, consequently, had room for expansion. Within this ring of larger states hundreds of other states were restricted to the western part of the flood

plain of the Yellow River. On the basis of the number of known states and the area in which they were distributed, Miyazaki Ichisada has calculated that the average distance between two significant city-states was between 90 and 100 km (Miyazaki [1957] 73). This is somewhat longer than the distance from Athens to Corinth. Many states, of course, were much closer than this, e.g., Lu and Teng were only 60 km apart.

Chinese texts from the Warring States provide further evidence regarding the dimensions of city-states. The *Mencius* asserts that a high-level feudal lord should have a territory of a square of 100 *li* (about 50 km.) per side. Lesser lords should receive less. The figure of 100 *li* is obviously a round figure suggesting an order of magnitude. It appears elsewhere in the *Mencius* as the size of state from which the Shang and Zhou founders began their conquests, and is also cited in such legalist works as the *Shang jun shu* and the *Guanzi* as the size of a typical or average city-state. The *Mencius* also states that a state of less than 100 *li* per side would be unable to maintain the sacrifices of a proper ancestral temple. However, many lesser city-

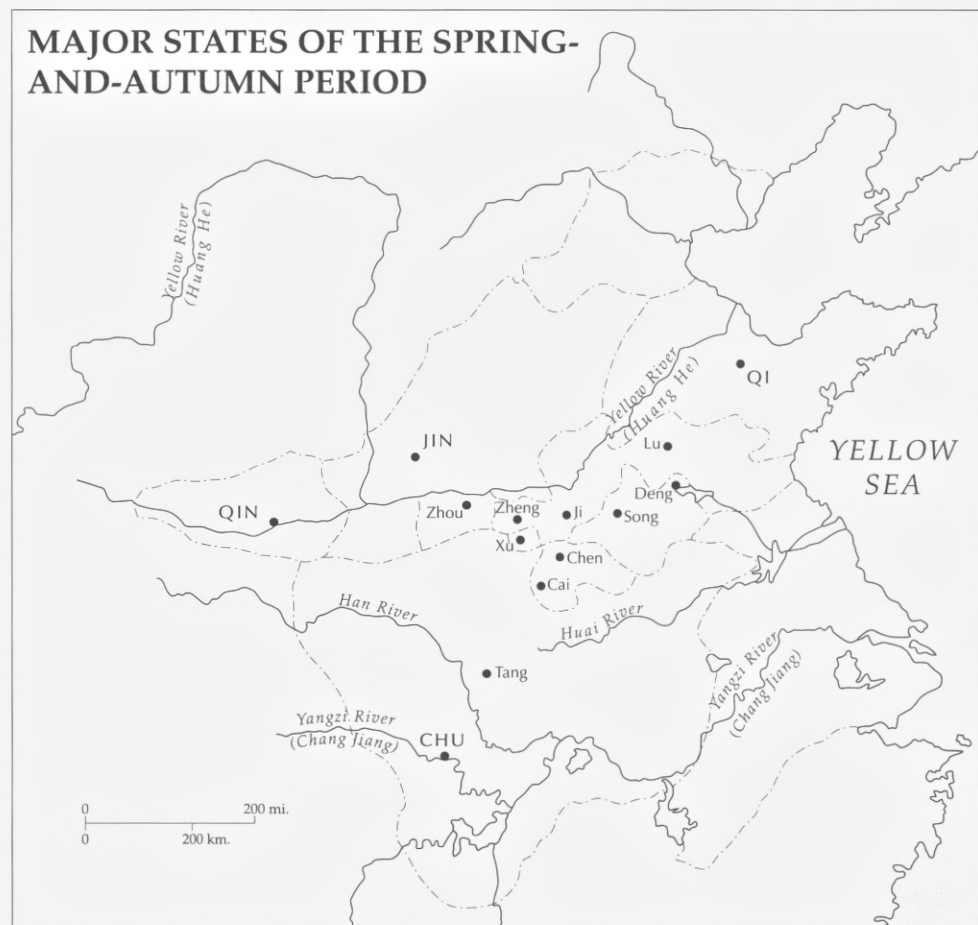


Fig. 1. Map of ancient China.

states were clearly smaller than this figure, and the *Mencius* describes the small state of Teng as having only 50 *li* per side (*Mengzi* [1974] 40, 105, 128, 130, 189, 402, 502; *Shang jun* [1974] 308; *Guanzi* [1974] 17).

The figure of 100 *li* per side indicates a territory smaller than Miyazaki's average, but if one omitted from the calculations land that was not part of the Zhou city-states because it was useless due to salt deposition, occupied by non-Chinese peoples, or left empty as a buffer between two states (*Zuo zhuan* [1981] 1673), the two figures are not too far apart. A state of this size would be less than one-third the size of Sparta and just smaller than Athens (Ehrenberg [1960] 29). Assuming that the city lay at the center of the state, it would entail a 25 km walk to the frontier, comfortably within the 30 km figure suggested by Mogens Hansen as the maximum possible for a true city-state. Even granting that the figure of 100 *li* is simply an order of magnitude, it indicates that the vast majority of the states of Spring-and-Autumn China fell within the geographic limits of a classic city-state.

The figures discussed above seem to refer to states that consisted only of a single city and its hinterland. As noted above, the most powerful states of the period were considerably larger and contained several cities. Thus *Mencius* describes the state of Qi as consisting of a square with sides of 1,000 *li*, the figure which he describes as proper to a Son of Heaven (*Mengzi* [1974] 54, 502). (It may not be irrelevant that it was during *Mencius*'s lifetime that several of the leading states, including Qi, began to claim the title of king.) The leading powers, particularly those at the periphery, were clearly no longer simple city-states.

Nevertheless, even in these larger states the individual city often remained the *de facto* unit of political control. This is demonstrated by the continued practice of subinfeudation through at least the first century of the Spring-and-Autumn period. Just as brothers and nephews of the Western Zhou king had been enfeoffed in key garrisons, so in turn collateral lines of these original fief holders were often established in secondary cities. These collateral lines were lords within their own domains as reduced replicas of the state court. Zhou power had thus been progressively extended, and gaps filled in, through the segmentary multiplication of semi-autonomous city-states that controlled their own affairs so long as they met minimal conditions of ritual obedience to their immediate superiors in the kin structure. There is clear evidence that this practice continued in several of the leading Spring-and-Autumn states.

When Jin conquered territory that had hitherto belonged to the Di and Rong peoples, it established a secondary capital under a collateral line at Quwo in 746 B.C. In subsequent decades other collateral lines, meritorious officials, and even refugee nobles from other states were all awarded walled fiefs. This creation of a powerful nobility scattered in city-states across the state was encouraged by the topology of the Jin region, divided up by mountain ranges and narrow gorges that made communication difficult. In 678 the junior line at Quwo supplanted the original house of Jin. The new ruler destroyed most of the relatives of the former rulers, but he replaced them with his own loyal followers who in subsequent decades emerged again as a rebellious nobility based in their individual city-states. Struggles between the rulers of Jin and their nobility continued even in the period of Jin's greatest power, after the victory at Chengpu in 632. After the assassination of the Jin ruler in 573 by two of his nobles, effective power passed into the hands of the nobility. These continued to fight sporadic civil wars from their local bases until Jin was finally partitioned in the late fifth century (Maspero [1978] 175-6, 194, 203-4, 212-3, 225-32). Thus during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. Jin, for most of the period the largest and most powerful state in the Yellow River valley, was actually a congeries of semi-independent city-states that spent almost as much time fighting their ruler and each other as waging war with other states.

A similar case, on a smaller scale, was the state of Lu. A relatively small state of little political importance, it was best known for its preservation of the Western Zhou cultural heritage, particularly music and rites. In 626 B.C., three sons of the ruler who had been involved in violent struggles over the succession were pacified by being granted their own walled city-states. From these bases they came to dominate the state, and an attempt in the late Spring-and-Autumn period to revive the ruler's power by destroying the walls of the collateral states ended in total failure (Maspero [1978] 207, 245). Thus in the late fourth century the *Mencius* states that Lu was "five [units] of 100 *li* per side," i.e., a state composed of five *de facto* city-states (*Mencius* [1974] 502).

Chu, the great power of the Yangzi valley, was distinguished by a relatively weak monarchy and a court dominated by powerful nobles who had their own city-states. Chu was probably the first state to introduce the institution of the administrative district (*xian*) in newly conquered areas, the earliest record of which appears in 690 B.C. The governors of these

areas were often the generals who had conquered them. This institution was perhaps an attempt by the king to extend his own power and limit that of his nobles. However, all these early *xian* enjoyed considerable autonomy, and most of them seem to have reverted to the status of hereditary fiefs (Maspero [1978] 185-6, 204-5, 215-6; Hsu [1999] 574). Thus in seventh-century Chu, just as in Jin, attempts to expand the state's power tended simply to produce more city-states that served as the basis for ambitious men who assimilated themselves to the status of the old nobility and frequently challenged or even supplanted the rulers.

Evidence of the continuing tendency of larger and middle-sized Spring-and-Autumn states to split into multiple city-states is also provided from the origin of surnames. Writing in the Han dynasty, Wang Fu (ca. A.D. 90-165) sought to trace the origins of the surnames that existed in his day. Many of these had first appeared in the Spring-and-Autumn period, when aristocratic houses received new surnames in association with the granting of a fief. Thus each of the three collateral lines in Lu, and the six leading lineages that contested for power in fifth-century Jin, had established surnames. No less than seven names had originated from the state of Zheng. This state was a middle-sized power located between the Yellow River and the Yangzi that had played a dominant role in the eastward shift of the Zhou capital, but soon sank to the level of a buffer state between Jin and Chu. Even more remarkable was the state of Song, another middle-sized buffer state, that produced no less than fifty-one named lineages (Hsu [1999] 571). It is impossible that all of these could have held their own fiefs, but Song was in fact notorious for its internal struggles between rival noble lines.

Thus seventh-century B.C. China consisted of a large number of small autonomous cities clustered in the flood plain of the Yellow River, and a series of larger states around the periphery that were themselves little more than leagues of semi-independent city-states only feebly bound together through ties of kinship or patronage. These larger states had begun to expand their power through conquering non-Chinese peoples and smaller neighbors. For want of alternatives, however, newly conquered areas were turned into city-states that soon threatened their nominal ruler's power as much or more than the "hostile" states they had replaced. Over the course of the next two centuries the larger states gradually developed new institutions that allowed them to directly administer larger territories and mobilize their peasant popu-

lations for battle. However, the creation of macro-states, the so-called Warring States, was often a process of two steps forward and one back. Even Qin state – which from the middle of the fourth century B.C. had carried out the most thorough program of having territories directly administered by servants of the king, and peasant populations registered and mobilized for battle – still distributed newly conquered cities as fiefs to leading nobles who dominated the court. Only in the third century B.C., approaching the end of the Warring States period, did any political figure articulate the principle that all conquered territory should remain under the king's control (Lewis [1999a] 639). Thus the city-state as an idea, and a limited institutional reality, survived almost until the creation of the first empire.

Interstate Politics

Having emerged from the collapse of early monarchies that had held together leagues of cities through kinship, religious cult, and military domination, the city-states of Spring-and-Autumn China continued to function as members of leagues led by the most powerful states. However, in these new leagues ties of kinship were non-existent or ignored, and ritual suzerainty remained with the powerless Zhou dynasty. The leagues thus took the form of shifting alliances that recognized the leadership of whichever state could assert its military dominance. The ruler of the dominant state was given the title of "senior" or "hegemon" (*ba*) by the Zhou king, who charged him to defend what was still in name the Zhou realm. Formally these leagues were hierarchical groupings of independent states, bound together through treaties sanctified with blood oaths or "covenants" (*meng*).

The political history of interstate relations in the period thus consisted of struggles for dominance between a handful of great states who based their power on the more thorough mobilization of their populations and the occupation of lesser neighbors. At the same time, the hundreds of lesser city-states attempted to retain their self-government through swearing allegiance to whichever leading state offered to protect them. The hegemon, for their part, gained prestige and authority as leaders of the league through conspicuous displays of preserving or restoring certain city-states, even as they destroyed others to extend their power. The linking of supreme authority to such displays of a commitment to the preservation of city-states, along with the reliance on subinfeudation discussed above, maintained the individual city

as the basic political unit. This lasted under the hegemon – from the late eighth until the early sixth centuries – and through the sixth century, when civil wars between powerful ministerial houses created by subinfeudation tore apart the leading states. Only in the late sixth and the fifth centuries did practices and institutions introduced by the ministerial houses create a new political order that permanently transcended the city-state.

A political order structured as a league of city-states under a hegemon began to take shape shortly after the eastward shift of the Zhou capital. The state of Zheng, which had taken the lead in rescuing the king, soon began to overshadow royal power. A war of the Zhou king and his allies against Zheng resulted in a defeat for the former that ended all pretence of royal authority. The leading states in north China recognized Zheng's leadership, until a succession struggle in 701 led to civil war and its ultimate eclipse (Maspero [1978] 172-4).

With no effective monarchy or leading power in the first half of the seventh century B.C., the Zhou city-states fell into confusion and turmoil. In the north the Rong and Di peoples successfully attacked and destroyed several Zhou cities, while the state of Chu in the Yangzi valley – which had never recognized the Zhou – began to expand northward. This crisis led to the establishment of the first formally recognized hegemony by the state of Qi, which had become a dominant military power through introducing the complete mobilization of the population of its capital and the immediate hinterland. In 667 an assembly of leading cities recognized Qi as its leader, and shortly thereafter the king bestowed the title of hegemon and charged the ruler of Qi to lead military actions to defend Zhou states in the name of the powerless monarchy. In 659 Qi restored two city-states that had been destroyed by the Rong, and a few years later they led a coalition of states against Chu. Having defeated Chu, Qi forcibly summoned the rulers of all major states to a general assembly that swore a blood covenant to recognize Qi's leadership (Maspero [1978] 180-5).

This history demonstrates the role of the hegemonic league. Menaced by hostile forces on several sides, the Zhou cities could not defend themselves individually, but the monarchy was too weak to take the military lead. At the same time, no city-state was strong enough to claim the title of king without alienating the rest. The invention of the hegemony resolved this dilemma by preserving the Zhou monarch as a ritual figure-head who sanctioned the hegemon's military

role while thwarting untoward ambitions. The hegemon, in turn, justified his pre-eminence through conspicuously restoring cities that had been destroyed by non-Zhou peoples, while absorbing smaller cities within his own region. The rest of the city-states gained the power of collective action and recognition of their independence. As participants in the covenants that cemented the leagues, they pledged to respect each other's borders and not to shelter rebels. This balance of ritual Zhou suzerainty, a *de facto* leading military power or powers, and a multitude of city-states joined in one or more leagues provided the political framework for the Spring-and-Autumn period. Although the identity of the leading state changed, and in some cases two states – each with its own league of allies – battled for dominance, this structure preserved a world of city-states for two centuries.

The balance of this section will be devoted to the major features of interstate politics in the world of the hegemony. First, the political world was divided between a small number of great states who struggled for the hegemony, and hundreds of lesser states that at best preserved their autonomy by participating in leagues under the domination of a leading power. The four great powers were the aforementioned peripheral states that had room for expansion – Qi in the north-east, Jin in the northwest, Qin in the west, and Chu in the south. In the sixth century these states were joined in the struggle for dominance by Wu and Yue in the southeast. These great powers were unique in containing multiple large cities, and they could be regarded as macro-states except for the practice of subinfeudation that redivided their territory even as they accumulated it. The four great states are recorded to have destroyed 128 city-states, virtually all the cases recorded for the Spring-and-Autumn period (Hsu [1999] 567). Thus while the great powers presented themselves as leaders of leagues and defenders of lesser states, they were the pioneers of the expansion through armed might that culminated in the creation of the Warring States.

Second, the world of Spring-and-Autumn China was marked by endemic warfare. The major chronicle of the period lists 540 interstate wars, and more than 130 major civil wars between ministerial houses, in a span of 259 years. Moreover, it can be demonstrated that the record is far from complete. Warfare was a constant fact of life and a defining hallmark of the city-based nobles. In one case a ruler noted that his people were threatening to overthrow him and deny him proper burial because he had disgraced his ances-

tors by failing for several years to lead the army on campaign. Such incessant warfare was possible because the armies were small – varying from a few thousand men for most states to no more than 30,000 for a great power – and the campaigns brief. Many could end after only minor skirmishes. Major battles between leading powers took place only once every few decades (Lewis [1990] 22, 36, 38, 60-1).

Third, the inverse of constant, low-level warfare was a steady stream of diplomatic missions, and, more sporadically, major interstate assemblies summoned by the hegemon. Lesser missions might be marked by simple banquets and the exchange of gifts or verses. Larger assemblies would usually entail a blood covenant used to encourage lasting ties and impose shared codes of practice in a form of international law. The chronicles of the period list hundreds of such covenants, although they provide textual details for only a handful of them. Archaeological excavations have provided many more examples. In the beginning, covenants were employed to form the leagues under a hegemon, often known as “master of the covenant”. Soon they were used also to sanction any agreement between states. As the power of ministerial lineages grew and feudal states were torn apart by civil wars, covenants were used to form alliances between several lineages, between lineages and another state, and between contestants for power and the population of the capital city. The sacrifices of the covenants thus came to replace those of the ancestral cult as the primary means of establishing political order, and this order thus detached itself from kin groupings (Liu [1963]; Lewis [1990] 43-50; Lewis [1999b] 158-9).

In addition to warfare and diplomacy, a variety of practices linked the city-states of Spring-and-Autumn China into a common political structure. Younger sons of rulers and nobles were sent to foreign courts where they served as hostages or pledges of good faith. Women moved between the states as primary wives or concubines, helping to establish new kin ties based on marriage where those based on common descent had faded away. Losers in civil wars or younger brothers of newly crowned kings could find shelter as refugees, and sometimes became pawns in interstate conflicts. The states were also bound by the exchange of luxury goods and precious commodities, and archaeology has revealed the long-distance circulation of ritual bronzes. Such exchanges took the form both of peaceful trade or gift exchange, and the transfer of goods between states as the booty of war.

It is also significant, as evidence for the routiniza-

tion of these forms of interstate exchange, that many of them were codified in rules of ritual conduct stipulating how they were to be conducted. The narrative of the *Zuo zhuan*, the major surviving account of Spring-and-Autumn history, is tagged with more than a hundred statements by participants or the authors that a particular action is or is not in accord with the ritual rules of the period. As noted above, all political alliances between states, lineages, and individuals were sanctioned by the covenant ritual, the procedure for which is described in the text. Elaborate rules of hierarchy and protocol were also developed for the great interstate assemblies. Every step of a military campaign, from the first issuing of weapons, through the march, the battle itself, the return, and the presentation of prisoners and booty, was framed by appropriate rituals. Moreover, speakers in the text cite many rules for the proper conduct of campaigns, and in a couple of cases indicate the titles of texts in which such rules were recorded. The conduct of interstate marriages was dictated by regulations about how the bride was to be accompanied, received, and escorted to her new home. Similar rules are mentioned for the reception of diplomatic missions when they reach a state, or when they pass through it on the way to final destination. Diplomatic exchanges were also accompanied by a range of rituals of sociability, including rules for staging banquets, drinking wine, performing music and song, and exchanging recitations of verse (Lewis [1990] 22-6, 38-9, 45-6; Lewis [1999b] 133).

Thus the city-states of Spring-and-Autumn China not only developed a wide range of practices for the maintenance of interstate relations, but also formulated and wrote down elaborate codes for all such actions. This routinization and codification of interstate dealings served to knit the city-states into a structured political whole, and thereby to preserve and develop the shared heritage from the Zhou state that provided the basis for their common culture.

Internal Political and Social Structure

The fact that the political units of this period were city-states is clearly marked by the terms applied to them. The most common term for a state – *guo* – referred both to the entire state and the capital city. As a consequence, in most states, particularly those that had only a single urban center, the name of the state was simply the name of its capital city. This usage continued even after the rise of macro-states, for in imperial China the name of *xian*, the lowest adminis-

trative unit, was usually identical with the name of the major walled town that served as its capital. The urban nature of *guo* was also marked by the fact that the character was regularly contrasted with *ye*, a term meaning “fields” that referred to the territory of the state outside the city walls.

The written graph for *guo* also insisted on its urban status, for it was composed of elements representing a city wall and a weapon, later supplemented by an element indicating inhabitants. A second term for state, *bang*, was also represented by a graph that marked it as a city. This character consisted of the graph *yi*, an early term for a walled settlement, combined with a depiction of the altar of the soil. The latter, as will be discussed below, became the major religious site for urban settlements.

We have no detailed accounts of the internal organization of these city-states, and the information that emerges from historical narratives is fragmentary. Nevertheless, the sources do reveal certain general patterns of the distribution of authority and the conduct of politics. This final section will deal with the powers and limits of the rulers, the role of the citizenry and assemblies, the emergence of new forms of political actors, the political geography of the city, and the manner in which the devolution of power from the monarchical league to the individual cities was manifested in religious cult.

Spring-and-Autumn China was dominated by a nobility defined through participation in the “great services” of the state: sacrifice and warfare. This warrior elite was in turn divided into a set of hierarchical roles – king, feudal lord, hereditary minister, noble – according to kin ties and cultic rankings defined by their relation to the royal lineage. Ascent in the hierarchy was marked by the granting of additional forms or numbers of key ritual items – tripods in offerings, numbers of dancers, rows of bells, types of armor, layers of coffins – but all members of the elite were linked by a common nobility based on their participation in warfare and sacrifice. This idea of a common nobility led to a proximity of status and a sharing of authority which were radically different from the later, imperial system (Lewis [1990] 17-36).

Under the “feudal” system of the Zhou monarchy, each city of a lord had been a lesser replica of the Zhou capital, with its own temple, court, and army. Offices at the courts of both the Zhou king and the feudal lords had been granted to brothers and younger sons of the ruling house along with fiefs to provide income and followers. Although in theory these were revocable at the birth of the holder, in practice both

offices and the fiefs soon came to be transmitted from father to son as hereditary privileges (Kaizuka [1978b] 260-8). The cities granted through subinfeudation as domains to these hereditary ministers in turn formed lesser replicas of the cities of the feudal lord. Thus even when the monarchy was still powerful, the Zhou state already contained a multitude of cities with their own rulers, courts, and temples. With the collapse of the monarchy, power shifted to the feudal lords, and in subsequent centuries in many states it continued to devolve downward to the hereditary ministerial houses, or collateral lineages established as city-states through subinfeudation in the eighth and seventh centuries. Consequently each of the city-states of the period had a hereditary ruler, but power was distributed among a group of noble families who had hereditary offices, their own ancestral temples, and servile followers.

The principle of shared nobility and the existence of hereditary offices led to a collegial mode of authority in which the ruler was first among equals, but actual decisions would require a consensus. In practice, power often depended on force of personality, and the chronicles show many cases in which chief ministers or ministers of war would wield effective authority. Accounts of campaigns provide abundant evidence of this pattern of authority. In some cases the ruler desired to launch a campaign, but was prevented from doing so by his minister of war. In other cases the minister of war was able to launch campaigns over the objection of the ruler. Sometimes the power to command the armies and decide on campaigns passed in rota among noble houses. The decision of whether or not to fight could be taken by a collective decision of the leading nobles after an extended debate (Lewis [1990] 22, 34-7).

Even clearer evidence of collective authority comes from the composition of armies. Each lineage provided a contingent from its own lower ranking nobles and followers, and the state army was an amalgam of these lineage-based units. Accounts of campaigns reveal that in the field these levies remained under their own commanders, that major decisions were generally made by group consultation among the leaders, and that the units were so loosely bound that a commander might lead his own men to withdraw or attack without regard for the rest of the army. This principle of organization also facilitated the numerous armed feuds and civil wars that figure in the records of the period (Lewis [1990] 35-37).

Below the nobility the population consisted of people who were defined by their hereditary occupa-

tions. These were primarily artisans, merchants, and the peasants of the immediate hinterland, but some texts contain more detailed lists, including those who worked in orchards or gardens, stable hands, wood gatherers, herdsmen, menials, and such female categories as seamstresses. While such social categories are mentioned in passing, as individuals they do not figure in the records (Lewis [1990] 31-2).

Such commoners, however, along with the lower levels of the nobility do appear more than four hundred times in the major chronicles as a collective group identified as the "people of the capital" or "citizens" (*guo ren*). The nobles and perhaps the others regularly participated in the army. For important decisions they were summoned to the court by the ruler or leading nobles who appealed to them to carry out a particular course of action. While the assembly of the citizens does not appear to have been a regular feature of government, dozens of cases are cited in the records. Most frequently they were summoned in times of crisis, which required the extraordinary mobilization of the populace, or at times of disputed successions, when the support of the citizenry served to ratify the victory of one or another competing faction (Lewis [1990] 22, 29, 44, 48; Masubuchi [1970] 139-79; Du [1989] 38-40, 47-50, 56-61; Ri [1989] 27-35).

Such appeals for the support of the citizenry became sufficiently common that one chapter of the *Shang shu* written in the late Spring-and-Autumn or early Warring States period depicts the Shang king Pan Geng assembling all his people and delivering an elaborately crafted oration to persuade them of the necessity of moving the capital. An earlier chapter in the same work attributes a discussion of the importance of public opinion to the hero of the Zhou foundation, the Duke of Zhou. In the same manner the *Zhou li*, a middle or late Warring States text, describes the existence of popular assemblies convoked in all cases of crisis, succession, or moving the capital (Kaizuka [1978a] 97-118; Kaizuka [1978b] 325). While the account of these assemblies as a regular institution appears to be an error, it does reflect the great frequency of their occurrence in the records and the key role played by the citizens in times of crisis.

As struggles between rival nobles within states intensified, the citizens often played the decisive role in civil conflicts. The assembled populace could overthrow one government and establish a new one in its place. The chronicles of the period contain several dozen references to the citizens killing, expelling, or seizing a ruler, or of blocking by force of arms the

attempted seizure of power by a noble faction (Ri [1989] 32-6). As was noted above, the citizens were assembled so frequently to decide or ratify disputed successions that later scholars imagined this was a routine procedure. Consequently it became a maxim that the anger of the populace was like a raging fire, or that the wishes of the citizenry could not be blocked. The records often explain that a certain decision was undertaken to quiet or appease the citizens (Lewis [1990] 48). Thus while there are no records of the assembled body of citizens ever taking control of the government, their support was crucial to anyone who sought to do so.

The increasing power of the citizens led to the appearance of a new style of political action, which in some ways resembles the rise of the law-givers and tyrants in ancient Greece (McGlew [1993]). In some cases established rulers extended their power through drawing members of the citizenry into their government and securing a more complete mobilization of the populace. In other cases lower nobles rose to power through skilfully playing off noble factions one against the other, while mobilizing the support of the populace at large. At the end of the Spring-and-Autumn period the citizens played a key role in establishing the power of several rising noble lines who were to take the lead in creating the Warring States forms of government.

The earliest example of this was Lord Huan of Qi's (r. 685-643) appointment of Guan Zhong and the reforms undertaken by the latter. Guan Zhong was of merchant origin, and his appointment to high office along with some of his acquaintances suggests that Lord Huan was attempting to secure his position by filling key posts with dependent commoners rather than nobles who would act on their own behalf. (It is thus perhaps not an accident that the practice of gathering refugee nobles as dependent retainers is first recorded in the struggle for the succession to Lord Huan.) Interestingly the reforms of Guan Zhong consisted in extending military service throughout the capital and its immediate hinterland. It was probably this complete mobilization of the citizenry that allowed Qi to become the dominant power and establish the first official hegemony (Ri [1989] 93, 95; Lewis [1990] 54-6, 76).

A more striking case is that of Zi Chan, who emerged as virtual tyrant of Zheng in 543. A member of the lower nobility, Zi Chan first achieved prestige through playing a key role in suppressing a rebellion by five leading lineages. He subsequently served as subordinate commander of an expedition, and then

conducted several successful diplomatic missions. Proclaiming that the people's anger could not be confronted and that the ruler could not obtain his personal desires without their support, Zi Chan persuaded the chief minister to burn some covenant texts that had aroused public opposition. He cultivated personal prestige through study of arts and religious lore. A quotation attributed to Confucius praised his literary skills. The celebrated connoisseur of music Wu Ji Zha saluted him as a kindred spirit. In anecdotes he is cited as an authority on the origins of states and their sacrifices, the nature of ghosts, the influence of the stars, and the interpretation of dreams. Through the increasing support of the citizenry he was selected to join the highest councils of government. Following another civil war in 543 he seized effective power, and shortly thereafter the chief minister yielded the government to Zi Chan (Ri [1989] 96-7).

In Zi Chan's first year in power, a man reported that the people of Zheng were routinely gathering in the city's schools where they criticized government policy. He suggested that the schools be destroyed. Zi Chan refused, arguing that he would take public opinion as his guide. This was justified both because the people would know best the consequences of policies, and because the suppression of criticism would simply lead to rebellion (*Zuo zhuan* [1981] 1191-2).

Once firmly established in power Zi Chan initiated a whole series of reforms involving the building of irrigation channels to fix standardized units of land, the imposition of a land tax, the introduction of units of mutual responsibility for crimes, and the extension of military service. These reforms were at first fiercely criticized by the people, and although they soon came to support the new policies, the balance of Zi Chan's career is marked by far less visible concern for the opinions of the populace. Instead he worked steadily to extend the power of the government. On his deathbed he announced that severity was the only way to control the people (Lewis [1990] 59; Martin [1997] 76-83). In this way his career followed the classic pattern of the tyrant or demagogue who cultivated popular support to seize power, but then relied on amassing wealth and military force in order to maintain it.

While Zi Chan turned away from direct appeal to popular support, many ambitious nobles in the late sixth and early fifth centuries continued to seek the support of the citizenry through conspicuous displays of generosity. When the three great sublineages of Lu defeated an attempted restoration of the ruler's power and drove him from the state, their victory was

explained by the adherence of the people, whose backing they had gained through decades of philanthropy. Similarly the Tian clan rose to dominate Qi by buying the support of the populace with their generosity (Lewis [1990] 48, 76). This support no doubt proved crucial in their victory over the other great lineages of Qi, and their establishing themselves as the new ruling house in 481.

The city-states of Spring-and-Autumn China still had relatively small populations, ranging from the thousands to the tens of thousands; therefore daily life and political activity were still conducted on a face-to-face basis. There was a variety of occasions for assembling the adult males of the city, and several key sites at which such assemblies took place. The most common occasion would have been the military campaigns. These involved gathering at the ancestral temple, collective marching, assembling in formation on the field of battle where prayers were given and oaths sworn, and participating in ceremonial assemblies and presentations at the ancestral temple after the return from battle.

In addition to such military gatherings at the ancestral temple, much of the male citizenry was also occasionally gathered at the court, in major public squares, or in the market. The aforementioned assemblies of the citizens called by rulers or nobles during crises or disputed successions were generally held in a great courtyard facing the ancestral temple. Where such assemblies lacked the sanction of the city's leaders, as in cases of attempted insurrection, they could also be sometimes held at major squares. The marketplace was also an important public gathering place that sometimes played a political role. With large numbers of people always gathered to exchange both goods and opinions, it was sometimes used as a location for the presentation of arguments to the people. The role of the court and the market as public spaces was also marked by the fact that the corpses of major criminals or traitors who had been executed were generally exposed in one or the other of them (Kaizuka [1978a] 313-8). As shown in the anecdote about Zi Chan, in some cities the schools were also employed as places where citizens who wished to discuss politics could assemble and discuss the issues or the personalities of the day. Finally, much of the populace could be assembled at state altars for important religious rituals. The most important assemblies, as will be discussed below, were those convened at the altars of the grain and soil to seal blood covenants between the ruling lineage and the assembled heads of all households in the city. In all these sites both the day-

to-day business of politics and major crises could be discussed and dealt with by either small groups of interested individuals or by the assembled citizenry.

A final key aspect of the internal structure of the city-states was the rise of new cults and rituals particularly associated with the city as a unit, or the adoption of established rituals for the purpose of forging cities into self-conscious political units. The primary example of the former was the altars of the soil and grain (*she ji*), and the most important example of the latter was the extension of covenants to the entire city and hinterland in the process of mobilizing the population and forming new state structures.

The transformation of the Chinese state from the early leagues of cities under a theocratic dynasty to the great territorial empire was marked by a shifting of cultic primacy from the ancestral temple to the cults of Heaven and major landscape features such as mountains (Bilsky [1975] 14-6, 58-60, 66, 126-7, 162-9, 183-90, 235-46, 274-6, 297-308, 318-24; Lewis [1990] 162; Lewis [1999c] 55-8, 74-6). As an intermediate step in this process, the age of the city-states was marked by the rising importance of the cults of the soil and grain. Since the Zhou state had been structured according to kin links to the royal lineage, it was natural that the most important cult was devoted to ancestors. As the city-states became independent units, and the role of kinship in the political order declined, priority shifted to cults in which the entire city could participate and which would give symbolic form to the city as a unit.

At first it appears incongruous that the central cult of the urban areas should be devoted to agricultural deities, but the phenomenon can be explained. The altars of soil and grain were an ancient form of shrine that had existed for centuries as the primary locus for offerings to the land, and each village had possessed its own altars (Ikeda [1983] 108-21, 696-9). They were thus the standard cult for human habitations defined as a territorial unit. For this reason they were the most readily adapted to a cult for the deities charged with the protection of the city as a territorial unit, deities who could receive sacrifice not only from their descendants but from all members of the community. In texts of the late Spring-and-Autumn and Warring States periods, the "altars of the grain and soil" had become the most common symbol of the state, and they were frequently employed as a metonym for the state itself. In some texts they are listed together with the ancestral temple in an extended metonym (Kaizuka [1978b] 337-41).

In general it appears that each city had one pair of

altars, but one account of a covenant held to establish the tyranny of Yang Hu in the state of Lu states that he performed the covenant with the ruler and nobles of Lu at the [Duke of] Zhou altar of the soil, and with the capital populace at the Bo altar of the soil. The subsequent ceremony of cursing those who violated the covenants was held at a major square in the capital. This distinction between two altars of the soil probably derived from the fact that at Lu's foundation the Duke of Zhou was awarded a large number of former Shang subjects organized in their lineages, as is shown in bronzes and texts. Each group, still clearly separated at the beginning, worshipped at its own altar, with the Zhou colonists at an altar established by their founder, and the Shang subjects at the altar which came to serve as that of the non-noble citizenry. The continued existence of two altars at the end of the sixth century may reflect the cultural conservatism for which Lu was noted.

One interesting outgrowth of the increasing centrality of the state's altars was the articulation of a new theory of the relation between the people and the spirits. In a speech supposedly delivered at the end of the eighth century, a noble upbraided a ruler who thought that his sacrifices would assure victory in battle with the observation that "the people are the masters of the spirits", so that a ruler who failed to win the support of the people could not rely on help from the spirits. The "master" of a sacrifice was the sacrificer, i.e., the person who sponsored it and on whose behalf it was made. Since the people provided the wealth for the sacrifices, and the altars of the state were their altars, they were the masters of the sacrifices and hence of the spirits (Kaizuka [1978b] 330-6). By the Warring States this argument had developed into an elaborate defence of the priority of proper administration over proper sacrifices, the insistence that Heaven shared the perceptions and desires of the people, and the Mencian theory of the propriety of rebellion against evil monarchs.

The second major ritual innovation linked to the rise of the city-state was the swearing of covenants between rulers and the collective citizenry. As noted earlier, such covenants became increasingly frequent as the citizens came to play the decisive role in civil wars between noble lineages. The covenants staged by Yang Hu cited above were classic examples of this practice, and it is significant that they were held at the altars of the soil. Since these altars had become the cultic embodiment of the city and its people, it is not surprising that they should become the standard site for such ceremonies.

New evidence on the importance of this form of covenant in the late Spring-and-Autumn has been provided by archaeological finds at Houma, Wenxian, and Qinyang. At Houma, archaeologists have excavated more than 300 pits containing fragments of the texts of covenants and the remains of sacrifices. All the texts refer to a single political struggle that, according to the most likely theory, took place between 496 and 495 B.C. The participants in the covenants were the members of the Zhao clan that had temporarily seized power and their followers. Most of the texts contain pledges of obedience, with the names of the gods who would enforce the pledge, or bans and collective death sentences placed on enemy lineages and households. These texts thus bound together groups not related by kin ties, and expelled other elements from the newly emerging body politic (Lewis [1990] 49-50, Lewis [1999] 19).

These documents reveal the culmination of the use of covenants to establish new political units and a new public realm following the breakdown of the old state forms defined by kinship. In one of the many civil wars that plagued Jin throughout the sixth century and led to its ultimate division, one party and its adherents gathered at the state altars where they sealed collective oaths which drew up itemized lists of the enemies who were to be driven from the state and killed if they returned. Even as they tore apart the old political forms they began to reconstitute the state through binding its members with covenants and ostracizing all those who would not join. The inclusion of new elements of the population in the public realm, the redefinition of the bonds between ruler and ruled, and the occasional focus on kin units defined by individual households show how the process of creating city-states also created the tools for forging the macro-state into which they would be absorbed.

Conclusion

Although the age of the city-state in China lasted for approximately three centuries, it left surprisingly little trace in later history. There are several reasons for this. First, unlike in ancient Greece, where a long Dark Age separated the Bronze-Age monarchies from the rise of the city-states, city-states in China emerged directly out of the political collapse of the monarchy, and they existed in a common culture still defined by the heritage of the royal Zhou and in which the monarch continued to play a significant ritual role. The continued presence of the Zhou monarchy as a ritual reality and a political idea militated against the

emergence of more collective forms of government. While the citizenry frequently played a decisive role in determining who would be ruler, at no point to our knowledge did they ever attempt to rule as a group.

Second, the expansion of some states beyond the limits of the city by means of the extension of military service to the peasantry had already begun in the middle of the seventh century. This and related practices such as population registration and land allocation gradually augmented the power of whichever lineage could seize control of the state machinery, and reduced the importance of the nobility and the urban population. Particularly in the wake of the partition of states or seizure of power by new lineages in the sixth and fifth centuries, this panoply of institutional reforms resulted in the concentration of power in the hands of the ruler even as the geographic extent of the states expanded. Squeezed between the lingering prestige of the old monarchy and the rising power of the emerging macro-states, the city-states of China created no radically new forms of authority made possible by their relatively small size.

Third, because Chinese civilization was continental and had little access to water transport, large-scale trade in bulk commodities was impossible, and merchants played a relatively minor role. As merchants and merchant wealth have often provided the foundation for distinctive urban cultures and political forms, their relative weakness in early China inhibited the full-blown development of the city as a distinct and autonomous form of social organization.

Fourth, because the city-state was never able to establish itself as a political form wholly distinct from the old theocracy or the emerging Warring States, Chinese civilization developed no theory of the autonomous city and general participation in government. This intellectual lacuna was exacerbated by the fact that philosophy did not begin to emerge until the late fifth century, and written works were not widely disseminated until the fourth. Thus by the time of the Chinese equivalents of Plato and Aristotle, or even of the pre-Socratics, the city-state survived only in the form of a few dozen little polities clinging on in the gaps between the great states. Moreover, since even these vestigial city-states were ruled by hereditary dynasties, they did not provide a model for alternative political forms. Instead, they simply inspired an imaginary antiquity in which the world had consisted of myriads of autonomous cities, or suggested the sorts of states from which the sage-kings of antiquity might have achieved world domination through the power of virtue.

Thus whereas the city-states of classical antiquity in the West left a written heritage that provided models for alternative forms of government to Renaissance and early modern thinkers, the intellectual legacy of the city-states of China was simply to serve as elements in a discourse on the limitations of military power, and the dangers of relying on conquest to create a state. Although the city-state was the basic political unit in China for three centuries and provided the framework within which the institutional foundations of the Warring States and the later empire were created, the success of these new institutions swept away not only the city-states themselves but almost all memory of their historical reality. In imperial Chinese historiography the city-states appeared only as remnants of a shattered Zhou state, the penultimate stage in a long process of political decay. Only in the twentieth century has the light provided by comparisons with other cultures and by newly excavated sources allowed us to recapture something of the reality of the ancient Chinese city-states as a historical phenomenon in their own right.

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