

Sages, Ministers, and Rebels: Narratives from Early China Concerning the Initial Creation of the State

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DURING the Warring States period, a large number of narratives were written about the emergence of the state, with differing descriptions of how statecraft came to be formed and whether it was a natural product or a human creation. This essay will trace the development of these narratives and explore the complexity of many of the issues that came under dispute. Since much of this debate came, by the third century B.C., to focus around the figures of Huangdi 黄帝 and Chi You 蚩尤, I will also devote a substantial portion of the paper to re-examining this much-discussed myth. A proper contextualization of the Huangdi-Chi You stories within the wider debates of Warring States China will shed considerable light on precisely what issues and concerns motivated the formation of the narratives concerning these two figures. Before moving to the full analysis, however, it will be helpful first to provide a brief discussion of some of the secondary literature on early Chinese mythology, as this will make it possible to introduce many of the ideas that have influenced previous scholarship on Huangdi and Chi You.

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THE PROBLEM OF EARLY CHINESE MYTHOLOGY

The subject of mythology in early China has generated much controversy, largely because the narratives that survive from the Warring States and early Han periods are frequently short and contradictory. As Derk Bodde has stated, in ancient China there is “not a systematic mythology, meaning by this an integrated body of mythological materials. On the contrary, these materials are usually so fragmentary and episodic that even the reconstruction from them of individual myths—let alone an integrated system of myths—is exceedingly difficult.”¹

One of the earliest and more extensive attempts to solve this perceived problem was undertaken by Henri Maspero in his article, “Légendes mythologiques dans le *Chou king*.”² According to Maspero, many of the chapters of the *Shujing* represent an attempt by Warring States authors to present various traditional myths in a humanized, rationalized form. Gods were thus transformed into virtuous sages, and myths into history. Maspero’s aim was to recover the mythology from which the authors of the *Shujing* chapters were working, a recovery he attempted by using some of the more fantastic narratives that appear in much later texts, such as the *Shanhaijing* 山海經. Maspero assumed, in other words, that there must have existed a body of early myth that can be reconstructed by taking specific statements in Warring States and Han works out of context, ignoring elements he deemed to be too rationalistic, and highlighting elements he deemed more fantastic.

Similar concerns about mythology can be seen in the roughly contemporaneous work undertaken by Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 and his followers.³ One of Gu Jiegang’s projects was to demonstrate that the earliest figures of Chinese history, such as Huangdi, were in fact mythological. His argument involved two separate claims. The

¹ Derk Bodde, “Myths of Ancient China,” in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, ed. Samuel Noah Kramer (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1961), p. 370. Reprinted in *Essays on Chinese Civilization*, ed. Charles Le Blanc and Dorothy Borei (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1981), p. 46.

² *JA* 204 (1924): 1–100.

³ Many of the more important essays by Gu and his colleagues are given in the *Gushibian* 古史辨, ed. Gu Jiegang et al., vols. 1–7 (1926–1941; rpt., Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1982).

first, and most often celebrated, of these claims was that the earliest figures of Chinese history appear only in relatively late texts. In the earliest strata of texts analyzed by Gu, namely the *Shijing*, Yu is the most ancient figure mentioned. Later texts, such as the *Analects* and the early portions of the *Mozzi*, refer to Yao and Shun as the earliest sages.⁴ Huangdi, who was claimed to predate Yao and Shun, first appears in texts from the late Warring States.⁵ In short, the later the text, the older were the sages posited. To demonstrate this, Gu and his followers undertook a careful study of the dates of early texts and tried to trace the historical development of the various figures mentioned in the narratives. Their well-known conclusion was that the revered sages of early Chinese antiquity were in all likelihood the inventions of authors from the Warring States and Han periods.

The second claim that Gu and his followers made, although not as well known as the first, nonetheless had more influence on the study of early Chinese narrative. This second claim involved the attempt to demonstrate that the source of these early “sages” was oral mythology. In other words, figures like Huangdi, before being posited in the late Warring States as early human sages, were gods in oral myth. This argument was pursued in particular by Yang Kuan 楊寬, who attempted to reconstruct the earlier myths from which the Warring States and Han authors were working.⁶

I emphasize this second claim for a specific reason. The *Gushibian* essays are often referred to in scholarly circles as the first historical attempt to provide a careful chronology of early texts, and are often contrasted to the anthropological work of Maspero. In fact, however, Gu Jiegang and his followers used a research approach quite comparable to that of Maspero: both used anthropological and mythological models of the day to reconstruct an earlier, Bronze Age mythology out of the narratives given in Warring States and Han texts.

This emphasis on mythological reconstruction continues throughout twentieth-century scholarship on early Chinese narratives. A

⁴ See Gu Jiegang, *Gushibian*, 1:105–50. For a good summary of the argument, see Gu’s preface, 1:52.

⁵ See, for example, Yang Kuan’s 楊寬 discussion in his “Zhongguo shanggushi daolun” in 中國上古史導論, *Gushibian*, 7a:189–93. Yang’s work will be discussed below.

⁶ See Yang Kuan, “Zhongguo shanggushi daolun,” in *Gushibian*, 7a:65–421.

perfect example here is Bernhard Karlgren's essay, "Legends and Cults in Ancient China."⁷ The essay is ostensibly a careful historical analysis written in opposition to the anthropological speculations found in the work of Maspero and others.⁸ Karlgren arranges his essay topically around certain figures, and then attempts to trace the development of each figure by dating every version of the germane narratives. In terms of attentiveness to chronology, his essay remains one of the more careful and comprehensive studies of early Chinese narratives in Western scholarship.

When it comes to providing explanations for the fact that so many of the versions of a given narrative are mutually contradictory, however, Karlgren falls back on the same notion of myth that he is attacking. Karlgren bases his discussion on a distinction between what he calls "ancient traditions"⁹ and the narratives individual authors wrote for their own purposes. He argues that fragments of the ancient Chinese mythological tradition can be found in what he calls "free texts," i.e., Warring States texts like the *Mozi*, in which the author would, *en passant*, record the ancient myths. Karlgren contrasts such works with what he calls "systematizing texts"—like the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, *Liji* 禮記, *Zhouli* 周禮, *Shiben* 世本, and *Shiji*. In these, he claims, the authors would rewrite the myths in order to place them into their own systems of organization.¹⁰ The consequence of this is that, although Karlgren strongly supports an historical approach to these texts, his argument about the differing nature of the works nonetheless leads to a bifurcation in his analysis. Making a distinction between authentic mythology and individual fancy, he treats the narratives found in the "free" texts as records of an ancient mythological tradition, but dismisses the narratives found in the "systematizing" texts as simply idiosyncratic inventions of individual authors.

To be sure, Karlgren's conclusions differ greatly from those of Maspero: the very Han texts that Maspero would see as promising the best clues for reconstructing early Chinese myth are the ones

⁷ Bernhard Karlgren, "Legends and Cults in Ancient China," *BMFEA* 18 (1946), 199–365.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 201, among other places.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 199–203.

that Karlgren rejects as the most removed from the authentic oral myths of early China. But the two scholars make the same assumption: the differing and contradictory narratives of Warring States and Han texts can best be explained by defining only certain portions of the extant corpus as representing an authentic tradition of mythology, and dismissing the other portions as a corruption (due either to rationalization or individual fancy) of that authentic tradition.

The concern for reconstruction has also guided the work of Yuan Ke 遠珂, perhaps the leading living scholar of Chinese mythology. In a recent essay, he explicated the concerns and methodological assumptions that have defined much of his life project:

For a long time people have admired the mythologies of ancient Greece and Rome and Northern Europe for their rich variety and beauty of form and content. At the same time, they have thought that China had a dearth of myth, or they even considered that China was a nation that had no myths at all. This is a profound mistake. There is, in fact, a treasure trove of ancient Chinese myths, and they are so extraordinary, so magnificent, and so full of imaginative power that they stir the human soul to its very depths.¹¹

The reason that the greatness of Chinese myth has not been recognized, Yuan claims, is due to the way that it has been handed down to us. The myths were “preserved and kept alive through oral traditions,”¹² traditions, of course, to which we no longer have access. Accordingly, what we possess consists entirely of the bits and pieces that Warring States authors quoted in their texts. Only much later, Yuan believes, were the myths written down as such: “In the Chinese case, myths at first appeared in a piecemeal fashion, in a variety of versions, fragmented and truncated, and were collated as mythological material only fairly late, if at all.”¹³ Nonetheless, Yuan argues, it is in a sense an advantage that authors in the Warring States period only mentioned the myths in passing, for this means that the myths have been less worked over than in other ancient traditions:

¹¹ Yuan Ke, “Foreward,” in Anne Birrel, *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. xi.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

In their very diversity, in their sprawling, disorganized confusion, the myths have been used by a great many different authors. Significantly, they have been used piecemeal, and so they have not suffered a complete reworking at the hands of literary authors and others. . . . It is possible to argue that by an accident of history, Chinese myths remain in a more or less pristine condition compared with mythological texts of the Greco-Roman and Judaic traditions. One may further conclude that for this reason Chinese myths, despite their protean and contradictory forms, are more reliable documentary evidence of a primitive and archaic oral tradition in the world of myth.¹⁴

Yuan has accordingly devoted his career to recovering this lost mythological tradition through a thorough synthesis of all existing stories. Much of his work has therefore involved isolating various themes, such as the battle between Huangdi and Chi You, and, by collating all of the materials that refer to that theme, trying to reconstruct the myth from which the author of each text was working.¹⁵

Clearly, then, the concern for reconstruction has dominated much of the scholarship on early Chinese narratives. Despite their numerous differences, all of the approaches discussed thus far involve the assumption that the narratives given in Warring States texts can best be explicated through reference to some more basic mythological tradition, a tradition that is lost but can be reconstructed, or at least inferred, from the narratives themselves.

Considering the dominance of such an assumption, it is perhaps worthwhile to pause occasionally and question its adequacy. On the one hand, there is certainly nothing wrong with hypothesizing about the earlier history of a given figure that appears in Warring States narratives: many of these characters may indeed have been gods, and archaeological finds may someday show, for example, that Yang Kuan's reconstructions were correct. But to use such reconstructions as an explanatory principle for analyzing the Warring States narratives is dangerous. With each text, one is dealing with an author who provided a particular version of a narrative for a specific reason, and any reader of these narratives, even one whose sole interest lies in reconstruction, has to confront the question of why the author, in this particular context, chose this particular narrative. Even if such an author were working from an oral mythologi-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

¹⁵ See Yuan Ke's numerous works, particularly *Zhongguo gudai shenhua* 中國古代神話 (revised ed., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960).

cal tradition, his version of the myth would reflect the concerns and interests of his period, with the result that his writings would bear little resemblance to that oral tradition.

To illustrate the dangers inherent in the approaches discussed thus far, let me briefly return to Yang Kuan, who unfortunately utilizes the notion that characters in Warring States narratives can be traced back to earlier gods not only as the beginning of his historical reconstruction but also as an explanatory principle for understanding the later Warring States versions. For example, he claims that the reason so many stories concerning creation were written about Huangdi and his ministers is that, in fact, Huangdi is simply a humanized version of Shangdi 上帝, the god on high. Since, Yang argues, the god on high was seen in the Bronze Age as a creator god, so in the Warring States narratives are Huangdi and his ministers associated with creation.¹⁶

There are several problems with Yang Kuan's view. First of all, even if it were true that Huangdi was a humanized Shangdi,¹⁷ this would not explain why Warring States authors would focus on notions of creation in their narratives about him. Second, his theory cannot explain why there exist so many differing versions of creation: why is it, for example, that in some narratives acts of creation are assigned to Huangdi, while in others they are ascribed to ministers or rebels? This problem is of some importance, for many of

¹⁶ Yang, "Zhongguo shanggushi daolun," p. 207.

¹⁷ The evidence Yang marshals to make this claim is not persuasive. He argues, for example, that in one text, the "Lü xing" 呂刑 (which will be discussed below), Shangdi is referred to as "huangdi" 皇帝. He then points to various texts from a much later time period that refer to Huangdi by the same epithet. This use of the same term to describe both Shangdi and Huangdi reveals, he argues, that they are in fact the same figure ("Zhongguo shanggushi daolun," pp. 195–96). However, "huang" here simply means "august," and is used throughout the early period to refer to important figures in general. Heaven itself, for example, is referred to in the *Shijing* as "Huang Tian" 皇天, "august Heaven" (Mao 282). The use of such an adjective hardly shows an identity between the figures thereby modified. Another argument that Yang uses is that Huangdi is occasionally described as residing in divine places ("Zhongguo shanggushi daolun," p. 196). For example, he is described in two of the outer chapters of the *Zhuangzi* as spending time in the Kunlun mountains (*Zhuangzi*, "Tian di," *Sibu beiyao* edition [hereafter SBBY], 5.2b and "Zhi le," 6.17b), an area associated in the Warring States and Han periods with various gods and immortals. However, the fact that certain authors place him in the Kunlun mountains hardly means that he should be equated with Shangdi. For a careful critique of many of Yang's arguments, see Mitarai Masaru 御手洗勝, "Kōtei densetsu ni tsuite" 黄帝傳說について, *Hiroshima daigaku bungakubu kiyō* 広島大學文學部紀要 27 (1967): 33–59.

the narratives that appear in the Warring States period are retellings of a limited number of stories, and much of their significance lies in discovering why particular characters are employed and why particular actions are attributed to them.

I would also voice concerns about Karlgren's use of the distinction between "free" and "systematizing" texts to distinguish authentic mythology from individual fancy. It is not at all clear that such a distinction between "free" and "systematizing" texts can be made, and it is not at all clear that a different hermeneutic ought to be applied to the texts. In both cases, one is dealing with authors who are providing specific narratives for particular purposes, and the attempt to define the narratives in terms of a putative relationship or lack thereof with some sort of ancient mythological tradition seems doomed to failure. Therefore, instead of searching for some authentic, or more basic, mythology, the goal should be to understand why, in each case, a particular narrative, or a particular version of a more common narrative, is being given.

Also problematic is Yuan Ke's commitment to reconstruction, which leads him to provide completely de-contextualized readings of narratives. For example, in his work on Huangdi he isolates all of the relevant stories given in numerous late Warring States and Han texts and then, having taken them out of their contexts, he tries to reconstruct the basic myth underlying the various versions. Here again, there is nothing inherently wrong with hypothesizing about earlier versions of a given narrative, but to do so after taking the narratives from their contexts risks a severe misreading of those narratives, and thus renders dubious any reconstruction that could be made from them.

It is, I suspect, with concerns such as these in mind that Charles Le Blanc and Jan Yün-hua have written about early Chinese mythology by simply analyzing the versions themselves, without referring to a purported oral tradition.¹⁸ Their studies are particularly relevant to the current analysis, insofar as both focus on Huangdi. They analyze the way that Huangdi is presented in Warring States texts, and restrict the analysis to such presentations. Le Blanc, for

¹⁸ Charles Le Blanc, "A Re-Examination of the Myth of Huang-ti," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 13-14 (1985-1986): 45-63, and Jan Yün-hua, "The Change of Images: The Yellow Emperor in Ancient Chinese Literature," *Journal of Oriental Studies* 19.2 (1981): 117-37.

example, explicitly opposes the project of providing a “historical reconstruction of the myth of Huang Ti,”¹⁹ and aims instead to “organize the various sayings about Huang ti and of Huang Ti according to affinitive categories or themes, and to see whether a structure or pattern might not emerge from this ordering.”²⁰ He thus categorizes many of the seemingly endless statements made about Huangdi into such “themes” as “teacher of civilized institutions,” and “master of esoteric arts and doctrines,”²¹ and he concludes that the myth of Huangdi can best be understood by analyzing the symbolic structure that emerges from these various statements themselves, rather than by trying to posit some oral myth from which Warring States authors derived their statements. He accordingly searches for the “unified meaning of the Huang Ti myth”²² in terms of the symbolism of Huangdi himself:

The ultimate symbolism of Huang Ti would thus appear to be the assertion that the world of man and society abides by the same rules as the world of nature and is structured by the same principles. . . . In this sense, the structural elements of the myth of Huang Ti reveal perhaps more importantly a deep level of human consciousness than an archaic stratum of unrecorded lore.²³

Although I fully agree with Le Blanc’s endeavor to shift attention away from some purported mythological tradition and to the narratives themselves, I would nonetheless question his method of analysis as well. To begin with, Le Blanc tends to lose sight of the very aspect that Yang Kuan and Karlgren illuminated so well, namely the historical development of the narratives. Le Blanc’s search for some basic symbolism behind the figure “Huangdi” is also questionable: considering that various authors utilized Huangdi in such radically different ways, it is unclear that there really exists an “ultimate symbolism” to the figure. Although Le Blanc’s formulation accounts for the way that some authors utilized the figure, it does not, as I shall argue below, account for all, or even most, of the texts that discuss him. Above all, Le Blanc’s non-contextual reading of these narratives is problematic. Each of these narratives was constructed

¹⁹ Le Blanc, “A Re-Examination of the Myth of Huang-ti,” p. 48.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 50–51.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

within a larger text for a specific reason; in each case the analyst needs to discover the tensions and concerns that motivated its construction.

In terms of rooting the production of these narratives in an historical context, the analyst is in luck, for Mark Edward Lewis has attempted to do just that in the fifth chapter to his fascinating *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*,²⁴ a chapter devoted to the narratives concerning Huangdi and Chi You. Lewis interprets the stories as “charter myths” for the rising centralized states of the Warring States and Han periods, and thus reads them within their historical context.²⁵ I found Lewis’s analysis invaluable for developing much of the argument presented below, and I shall frequently have occasion to refer to his insights. Here, however, I must mention one point of disagreement with his methodology, namely, that he, too, attempts to reconstruct a single myth concerning Huangdi and Chi You. Unlike some of the other scholars I have mentioned, Lewis does locate such a reconstructed myth in the Warring States period, and, as a result, he provides a far more convincing reading of the narratives than appears in other such interpretations. Nonetheless, because he attempts such a reconstruction he misinterprets some of the texts and fails to recognize the complexity of some of the tensions he himself has noticed.

Lewis’s primary interest lies in those narratives that present Chi You as the creator of weapons and Huangdi as the civilizing sage. Unfortunately, however, Lewis, like Yang Kuan, not only argues that the Huangdi–Chi You myth was based on earlier traditions, but also uses such reconstructions to explicate many of the features of the story. For example, in some of the narratives Chi You is described as Huangdi’s minister, and in others the two are presented as opponents. Lewis explains such a contrast by reading the former relationship as based on earlier rituals dating back ultimately to the Shang dynasty: “The origin of Chi You as shaman and votary of the rain god would also account for the mythic doubling of the two figures and for the tradition in various later texts that Chi You was

²⁴ Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

the Yellow Emperor's minister.''²⁶ In contrast, Lewis argues, it was only during the Warring States period that the figures appeared as rivals, with the sage Huangdi defeating the rebel Chi You.²⁷ Thus, the fact that the relationship between Chi You and Huangdi is at times posed in Warring States texts as one between a sage and a minister and at times as a rivalry between a sage and a rebel is accounted for by Lewis not in terms of a debate within the Warring States period itself but rather in terms of the shift from earlier ritual to Warring States myth. Instead, then, of simply hypothesizing about possible antecedents to the story, he uses such a reconstruction of earlier rituals as an explanatory principle with which to account for the narrative variations that do not fit his definition of the basic Warring States myth.

While building on the insights given by figures as diverse as Yang Kuan, Bernhard Karlgren, Charles Le Blanc, and Mark Lewis, I shall try to avoid the trap of using a reconstruction of a myth of certain figures, or even a unifying symbolism behind any one of the figures, to explain the narratives. Like Yang Kuan and Karlgren, I have approached the texts chronologically, but I have selected them in terms of topic, not in terms of the figures utilized: rather than focusing on all the texts that, for example, mention Huangdi, I have focused instead on the Warring States debates over the origins of the state. I have then traced the differing narratives in detail in order to identify the issues at the heart of the debate. In other words, instead of organizing my analysis around Huangdi and inferring a putative mythological tradition or unified symbolism behind the presentation of the figure, I have turned the question around to ask why, at a certain time, did the authors choose to write about Huangdi and to characterize him as they did. The resulting analysis, it is hoped, will make it possible to explicate the diversity of the narratives, to explain why certain narratives are reversed, why specific acts are attributed to different figures in different texts, and why figures such as Huangdi are brought into the narratives at all. In short, I shall argue that the contradictory narratives can be explicated only by analyzing the debates from which they emerged.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 195-96.

NARRATIVES OF THE ORIGIN OF THE STATE:
THE FIRST STRATUM OF WARRING STATES TEXTS

The narratives concerning the origin of statecraft that date from the fourth century B.C., or possibly somewhat earlier, were to become highly influential in the later debates on the nature of statecraft and the legitimacy of centralized institutions. Unlike the later, third-century B.C. texts, which revolve primarily around Huangdi and his ministers or adversaries, these early narratives focus on such figures as the Miao, Yu, and Bo Yi, who play a minor, if any, role in the later narratives. Nonetheless, the early texts employ narrative structures that are repeated again and again in the works of the third century B.C., a fact that lends support to one of the conclusions reached in the previous section, namely, that our efforts at interpretation should focus less on reconstructing myths of particular figures and more on understanding the concerns that led authors to structure narratives in particular ways. With this in mind we can turn to the analysis of the narratives themselves.

The Barbarian Creators: The “Lü xing” Chapter of the Shangshu

One of the earliest and most influential attempts to deal with the problem of the creation of certain aspects of statecraft is the “Lü xing” 呂刑 chapter of the *Shangshu*, which dates from no later than the fourth century B.C.,²⁸ and was written to explain the emergence and correct use of punishments. The author has based the text on the reign of King Mu,²⁹ who ruled roughly midway through the Western Zhou. In turning to the subject of the introduction of punishments, the author raises a set of questions concerning the use of organized violence by the state.³⁰

²⁸ That the “Lü xing” was written no later than the fourth century B.C. is clear from the fact that the chapter is referenced in a number of other works dating from that century, such as sections of the *Mozi* (“Shangtong, zhong,” SBBY, 3.6a) and *Guoyu* (“Chu yu, xia,” SBBY, 18.1a–2b), both of which will be discussed below. It probably does not predate these other works by very much, however, for, as will also be discussed below, the figures referred to in the work belong to the same strata as other fourth-century B.C. compositions, such as the *Mencius*.

²⁹ The king is never explicitly mentioned by name in the chapter, although the traditional interpretation has been that the king referred to here is in fact Mu. Below, I will mention various aspects of the text that seem to confirm the traditional interpretation.

³⁰ My use of the term “organized violence” owes much to the excellent analysis by Mark Edward Lewis in his *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*.

The text opens with the king planning to create punishments: “The kings had enjoyed the state for one hundred years.³¹ Since it was old and wasting, [the king] planned to create punishments in order to restrain the people of the four quarters.”³² Punishments are thus immediately presented as necessary (in the sense that rulers must at times turn to them in order to maintain a state in decline), and yet as not an ideal form of statecraft.³³

With this as the frame of the story, the author goes on to describe the king as providing a narrative of the origins of disorder and punishments in general:

The king said: “According to the teachings of antiquity, Chi You was the first to create (*zuo* 作) disorder. [Disorder] spread to the peaceful people, and everyone became robbers and thieves—rapacious, villainous, and traitorous—grabbing, plundering, lying, and killing.”³⁴

Disorder is not a natural condition—the people were originally peaceful—but rather a creation (*zuo*) of Chi You.³⁵ This is one of the earliest references we possess to this figure, who will appear prominently in third-century B.C. accounts of the origins of the state. Many commentators have attempted to read some of the later

³¹ This statement that the beginning of King Mu’s reign occurred one hundred years after the beginning of the dynasty is attested in other Warring States texts as well. For a discussion, see Edward Shaughnessy, “On the Authenticity of the Bamboo Annals,” *HJAS* 46.1 (1986): 176–79. For an argument that historically Mu’s reign may really have marked a centennial in the dynasty, see Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History: Inscribed Bronze Vessels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 246–54.

³² *Shangshu zhengyi*, “Lü xing,” SBBY, 19.10a.

³³ The situation presented by the author here may have some basis in fact. It now appears that the reign of King Mu was indeed marked by both a gradual decline in state power and a growth in legal disputes. For a discussion of the apparent contraction of the Zhou state during Mu’s reign, see Itō Michiharu 伊藤道治, *Chūgoku kodai ōchō no keisei* 中國古代王朝の形成 (Sōbunsha, 1975), p. 307. For the rise of legal disputes during the reign of Mu, see Itō Michiharu, *Chūgoku kodai kokka no shihai kozo* 中國古代國家の支配構造, (Sōbunsha, 1987), pp. 277–336. Thus, the author’s claim here that Mu introduced punishments in response to the declining power of his state may have been based in part on historical accounts of his reign. It appears likely, then, that some traditions concerning Mu were in existence during the Warring States period. A comparison of this text with the *Mutianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳, which also concerns the reign of King Mu, deserves study.

³⁴ *Shangshu zhengyi*, “Lü xing,” 19.10a.

³⁵ The strong connotations of “create” that the term *zuo* came to have in the Warring States period are discussed in detail in my article, “Nature and Artifice: Debates in Late Warring States China concerning the Creation of Culture,” in *HJAS* 57.2 (December 1997): 471–518.

motifs about Chi You as being implied here,³⁶ but I think this is mistaken. The text presents disorder as an outside imposition on an otherwise peaceful populace, and Chi You thus functions as the instrument by which to account for disorder: instead of being an inevitable or natural condition, disorder is described as the creation of an evil figure.

The consequence of this creation is that it became necessary for rulers to learn how to control disorder. This was first attempted by a barbarian people called the Miao. The king's narration continues: "The Miao people did not use virtue but instead restrained with punishments. It was they who created the five oppressive punishments and called them the law. They killed and slaughtered the innocent and then became the first to enact the excessive cutting off of noses, the cutting off of ears, beatings, and brandings."³⁷ The creation of punishments is thus ascribed to morally depraved barbarians who acted arbitrarily and excessively.

The Miao's actions elicited an intercession of divine power:

Those who were oppressed and terrified and facing execution announced their innocence to the powers above. The god on high surveyed the people, but there was no fragrant virtue, and the punishments sent out a smell that was rank. The august god³⁸ pitied and felt compassion for those among the multitudes who, though inno-

³⁶ Mark Lewis (*Sanctioned Violence*, p. 196), for example, attempts to read the entire "Lü xing" narrative in terms of the later Huangdi-Chi You stories. Thus, he argues that this statement concerning Chi You is an implicit reference to his creation of weapons: disorder arose because Chi You invented weapons. As I will argue, below, however, the attribution of the creation of weapons to Chi You does not occur until later and is a result of later concerns.

³⁷ *Shangshu zhengyi*, "Lü xing," 19.10a-10b.

³⁸ This reference to Shangdi, the god on high, as "huangdi" 皇帝 is one of the passages used by Yang Kuan to argue for a linkage between Shangdi and the sage Huangdi 黃帝 ("Zhongguo shanggushi daolun," pp. 196, 199). For a critique of such a reading, see n. 27.

Mark Lewis, in keeping with his attempt to read the text in terms of the later Huangdi-Chi You cycle, argues that the figure here is not Shangdi but rather Huangdi himself. He does so by emending the text from *huang* 皇 to *huang* 黃, and thus reading the figure in question as Huangdi, as opposed to the god on high mentioned a few lines earlier; *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, pp. 196-97, 314 n. 116. He thus rejects the claim that the *huangdi* referred to here is Shangdi, but accepts Yang's claim of the linkage between *huang* 皇 and *huang* 黃. The reason for this emendation is that, as will be detailed below, later texts pose Huangdi as defeating Chi You in battle.

Such an emendation, however, is unnecessary. To begin with, the narrator is not talking about a battle, and the narrative at this point is focused on the relationship between this figure and the Miao, not Chi You: the role of Chi You in this narrative is simply to introduce

cent, were facing execution. He requited the oppressors with terror and put an end to the Miao people so that they had no descendants.³⁹

The god on high then proceeded to civilize all under Heaven. The most important part of this process involved domesticating the people, which the god on high commanded three lords to undertake:

The august god inquired clearly of the people below, and the widowers and widows made complaints against the Miao. His virtue was majestic, and they were awed; his virtue was illuminating, and they were illuminated. And he thereupon charged three lords to pity and labor on behalf of the people. Bo Yi handed down statutes; for subduing the people there were punishments. Yu put the waters and land in order and managed the naming of mountains and streams. Ji handed down and disseminated seeds, and farmed and planted the fine grains. When the three lords completed their work, there was abundance for the people.⁴⁰

As described by the author, the civilizing process was divinely inspired, undertaken by sages at the behest of the god himself. The sages, moreover, were teachers and organizers, not creators: two of the lords are described as “handing down” their teachings, and the work of Yu is described as one of “putting in order” and “managing.”

One of the things handed down is punishments, the very thing so strongly criticized before. The king’s narrative continues: “The officers regulated the hundred families on the correct usage of punishments so as to teach reverence for virtue. Majestic above, illuminated below, shining forth to the four quarters, there were none who were not virtuously diligent. Therefore they were illuminated about the correct usage of punishments.”⁴¹ Having thus emphasized that the officers used punishments correctly, the king ends his narrative by calling upon the managers of criminal cases in his own day to emulate the path of Bo Yi and avoid the model of the Miao:

disorder and, once this is done, he does not reappear in the work. Moreover, as we will see below, when the king is posed later in the chapter as reviewing the destruction of the Miao, he explicitly refers to the figure in question as “the god on high,” Shangdi. Trying to read the figure here as Huangdi is simply another example of the dangers of attempting to reconstruct a single myth concerning Huangdi and Chi You.

³⁹ *Shangshu zhengyi*, “Lü xing,” 19.10b.

⁴⁰ *Shangshu zhengyi*, “Lü xing,” 19.12a–12b.

⁴¹ *Shangshu zhengyi*, “Lü xing,” 19.12b–13a.

The king said: “Ah, you supervisors of government and managers of criminal cases throughout the four quarters, are you not Heaven’s shepherds? Now, what should you follow? Is it not this Bo Yi’s path of disseminating the punishments? And now what should you take as a warning (of what to avoid)? These Miao people, who did not look into the applicability of the criminal cases and who did not select good men to look into the correct usage of the five punishments. They were the terrifying ones who snatched bribes and applied the five punishments, thereby bringing chaos to the innocent. The god on high did not pardon them but rather sent down misfortunes on the Miao.⁴² Since the Miao people could offer no excuses, he cut off their later generations.”⁴³

The issue, then, is not that the five punishments are inherently oppressive but that they were incorrectly used by the Miao. Those now charged with using punishments are referred to as the Heavenly shepherds and are urged to emulate Bo Yi. The text concludes with a lengthy statement by the king advising his followers on the proper administration of the punishments.

This chapter was, I suspect, written in response to the rise of centralized states, states that could be characterized in part as employing ever more powerful institutions of organized violence. Instead of taking an idealistic stance and opposing such institutions altogether (as Mencius would later do), the author acknowledges them while retaining a generally moralized vision. His method of doing so is cast in terms of an allegory of the emergence of punishments, a clear example of the use of organized violence by the state. The story of how punishments had to be instituted when the Western Zhou dynasty started declining, with an embedded narrative concerning the initial creation of punishments in the distant past, thus provides the author with a way of discussing, indirectly, the growth of the states of his own day.

Throughout, punishments are presented as a lesser form of statecraft, but one that is at times necessary. This point is made clear in the opening frame of the story, and even more sharply in the ensuing narrative ascribed to the king. The narrative is defined throughout by a clear moral tone: proper order is gained only through acts of organization undertaken by sages working under the

⁴² This summary makes it clear that the “august god” referred to above is in fact the god on high.

⁴³ *Shangshu zhengyi*, “Lü xing,” 19.13b.

charge of the god on high. The goal of the narrative is to divorce both the rise of disorder and the original establishment of punishments from this moral order. Both are described as outside impositions, created by a rebel and a barbarian people respectively, and both predate the coming of the sages. Thus, neither the people of the central states in general nor the sages in particular are responsible for the emergence of disorder or for the introduction of punishments. The sages appear only later, and are described as properly employing the punishments created by the Miao so as to bring order to humanity. The author thus resolves the moral problem concerning the use of violence by the state through a diachronic model: sages simply appropriated and used correctly the violence that had been created before their arrival.

Overall, the author seems to be resigned to the notion that, at the time of writing, rulers were instituting organized systems of violence. For him, this is clearly not an ideal state of affairs. Nonetheless he argues that, as long as they do so from a moral point of view, true sages can, if necessary, employ such systems of organized violence to maintain order. As we shall see, this diachronic model had a profound influence over the next few centuries, as versions of it were constantly formulated and reformulated.

The Sagely Creators: the Mozi

The story of the creation of punishments is told with different emphases in the earliest chapters of the *Mozi*.⁴⁴ For example, one finds in the “Shangtong, shang,” chapter 11, the following statement: “Therefore the master Mozi said: ‘In ancient times the sage kings made the five punishments.’”⁴⁵ Here, the author explicitly ascribes the making of punishments not to the Miao but to the sage kings of the past.

⁴⁴ The earliest section of the *Mozi* consists of what are referred to as the core chapters. Each chapter in the core had three versions (not all of which are extant), and each of these appears to represent one of the three major divisions within the school. The views that I will be discussing here, however, are shared by all three divisions.

The best analyses of the core chapters are A. C. Graham’s *Divisions in Early Mohism Reflected in the Core Chapters of the Mo-tzu* (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1985) and Erik W. Maeder, “Some Observations on the Composition of the ‘Core Chapters’ of the *Mozi*,” in *Early China*, 17 (1992): 27–82.

⁴⁵ *Mozi*, “Shangtong, shang,” SBBY, 3.2b.

This point is fleshed out in chapter 12:⁴⁶

The people under Heaven now ask: “At the present time,⁴⁷ the rulers of all under Heaven have not been deposed, but then why is all under Heaven in disorder?” The master Mozi said: “At the present time, those who are taken as rulers are fundamentally different from the ancients. Take, for example, the Miao ruler’s use of the five punishments. In ancient times the sage kings formed and made the five punishments so as to put all under Heaven in order. When it came to his own time, the Miao ruler formed the five punishments so as to bring disorder to all under Heaven. If this is the case, how can it be that the punishments are bad? It was how they used the punishments that was bad. This is why a book of the former kings, the ‘Lü xing,’ states: ‘The Miao people did not train [the people]; they humbled and punished them. They only created the punishments of five executions and called them the law.’ This is to say that those who employ punishments well use them to put the people in order; those who employ punishments poorly use them as the five executions. If this is the case, how can it be that the punishments are bad? It was how they used the punishments that was bad.”⁴⁸

The general outline of the narrative given here is explicitly related to the “Lü xing.” As in the “Lü xing,” the story turns on the correct and incorrect utilization of punishments by the sage kings of the past and the Miao, respectively. However, the author has reversed the “Lü xing” narrative: here, it is the sage kings who first make punishments, and the Miao who appropriate and use them incorrectly. The Miao’s creation was not of punishments in general, but of the five forms of execution, a creation that the author later poses as a consequence of the incorrect usage of the punishments made by the sages.

This reversal betokens a larger claim on the author’s part. The “Lü xing” narrative was structured around the problem of the creation of punishments. Assigning the creation of punishments to the Miao served to dissociate the act from the sages: since punishments were granted a secondary place, the sages could be presented as sim-

⁴⁶ For a careful textual analysis of the “Shangtong” triad of the core chapters, see Erik Maeder, “Some Observations on the Composition of the ‘Core Chapters’ of the *Mozi*,” pp. 61–68.

⁴⁷ These opening words (amounting to these first ten graphs) appear a few lines earlier in the received text (3.5b, line 6), where they are incoherent. The text is thus commonly emended so that the words are placed here, where they can then be read as opening this section on punishments. Even if such an emendation were rejected, however, the overall meaning of the passage is not affected.

⁴⁸ *Mozi*, “Shangtong, zhong,” 3.5b–6a.

ply using correctly what neither they nor the divine powers had created. With the *Mozi* passage, however, the normative criteria have shifted: neither punishments nor the act of creation are inherently negative. Indeed, one of the arguments that runs consistently through the *Mozi* chapters is that creation is value-neutral. As Mohists argued in one of their critiques against the Confucians:

Gong Mengzi said: “The superior man does not create but only transmits.”⁴⁹ The master Mozi said: “Not so. The least superior among men neither transmit⁵⁰ the good things of the past nor create good things for the present. The less superior do not transmit⁵¹ the good things of the past but do create when they have something good, desiring that good things come from themselves.⁵² Now, transmitting but not creating is no different from not liking to transmit and instead creating. Desiring for goodness to increase all the more, I believe in transmitting the good things of the past and creating good things for the present.”⁵³

There is nothing, the Mohist author is arguing, inherently problematic about the act of innovation. The basic criterion is whether something is useful: if it useful to create something anew, then sages should indeed create it.⁵⁴ Accordingly, in the narrative under discussion, the author sees no reason to utilize the Miao to divorce the act of creation from the sages. Instead, he simply gives the Miao as an example of how things created by the sages can be used incorrectly.

As with the “Lü xing,” the question of correct usage is rooted directly in the politics of the time. Although the Mohists were highly critical of the rulers of their time, they did not reject the centralizing policies of the rising states. Whereas the author of the “Lü xing” had some reservations about the use of punishments even though he was resigned to them, the Mohists explicitly deny the claim that

⁴⁹ Reading *shu* 術 as *shu* 述. Because of their phonetic similarity, these are commonly interchanged in early texts. Both belong to the same word family; Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1957), p. 136, word family #497.

⁵⁰ Reading *zhu* 誅 as *shu* 述, based again on phonetic similarity.

⁵¹ Reading *sui* 遂 as *shu* 述. The reconstructed pronunciations of the words are again almost identical: /sdjedh/ for *sui* and /djet/ for *shu*. See Axel Schuessler, *A Dictionary of Early Zhou Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), pp. 591 and 565 respectively.

⁵² In other words, they want all good things to be created by themselves, and thus refuse to transmit anything from the past.

⁵³ *Mozi*, “Gengzhu,” 11.12b.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of the early Mohist position on creation, see my article, “Nature and Artifice,” pp. 474–80.

punishments are in themselves problematic. For the Mohists, the problem is not organized violence per se, but rather how such violence is used.

This acceptance of violence if properly used is also clear in another chapter from the *Mozi*, which discusses the creation of weapons. Although the issue of when and how weapons were created is not discussed in the “Lü xing,” the topic will become important among later authors confronting the problem of the use of organized violence by the state, and is therefore worth mentioning here. The following is from the “Jieyong, shang” chapter:⁵⁵

What is the purpose of making armor, shields, and the five weapons? It is done in order to restrain robbers, disorderly elements, bandits, and thieves. If there are such things, those with armor, shields, and the five weapons will win; those without will not. This is the reason that the sages created armor, shields, and the five weapons.⁵⁶

The author of the “Lü xing” justified the use of violence to counteract violence through a lengthy narrative in which the actual creation of punishments was ascribed to barbarians and the correct usage of punishments was tied to divine legitimacy; the author here, in contrast, simply states that it is perfectly acceptable for the state to use violence to control disorder. He thus ascribes the creation of weapons to the sages, an act showing his refusal to see weapons as in themselves problematic.

Overall, the Mohist chapters discussed here reveal a far greater acceptance of the institutions of the rising centralized states of the time than was seen in the “Lü xing.” Although the authors here, like the author of the “Lü xing,” wish to hold out a standard of morality by which to judge the use of such institutions, there is no belief that the creation of the institutions in itself stands in potential conflict with the work of the sages. Accordingly, the device of ascribing acts of creation to rebel-creators is altogether dropped from the narrative.

⁵⁵ Graham has argued convincingly that “Jieyong, shang” was probably misplaced by Han bibliographers into the core chapters. He claims that it is instead one of what he calls the “digest” chapters that serve as “short but complete summaries of the Mohist doctrines.” See his *Divisions in Early Mohism*, p. 4.

⁵⁶ *Mozi*, “Jieyong, shang,” SBBY, 6.1a-1b.

The Sagely Organizers: The Mencius

If the Mohist discussions were written as an attempt to erase the negative connotations toward punishments seen in the “Lü xing,” Mencius attempts to construct narratives from the exact opposite intellectual and political perspective. Whereas the Mohists fully accepted the notion of culture in general, and the specific institutions of statecraft in particular, as having been created by sages, Mencius wishes to root the moral order within a natural, generative process. Even the attempt by the author of the “Lü xing” to bring in disorder and punishments through negative figures would have no interest for Mencius. Disorder for Mencius is simply the result of a failure to cultivate correctly one’s given nature, and punishments are simply the result of a lack of virtue on the part of rulers. Moreover, unlike either the author of the “Lü xing” or the Mohist chapters, Mencius strongly opposes many of the institutions of the rising centralized states of the time and calls for a return to the rituals of the Zhou, which he defines in purely moralized terms. Thus, Mencius begins his narrative at the point of the sages organizing the world and educating the people; he has no interest in positing an earlier period wherein problematic creations were undertaken.

As in the *Analects*, the earliest of the sages that Mencius will discuss is Yao. Prior to Yao’s organizing activities, the world was in chaos:

In the time of Yao, all under Heaven was not yet in order. Flooding waters flowed throughout, inundating all under Heaven. The grasses and trees flourished, the birds and beasts multiplied, the five grains were not yet growing, the birds and beasts pressed in upon man, and the paths made by the hooves of beasts and the tracks of birds crossed throughout the central states. Yao alone was concerned about this.⁵⁷

Only Yao was concerned with this disorder—presumably a reference to Mencius’s argument that the sage is he who first awakens and then awakens others.⁵⁸

Following his awakening, Yao then assigns the actual work of bringing order to the world to his ministers:

He raised Shun to set forth regulations to deal with the situation. Shun put Yi in

⁵⁷ *Mengzi*, 3A/4.

⁵⁸ See *Mengzi*, 5B/1 and 6A/7.

charge of fire. Yi set fire to the mountains and valleys and burned them, and the birds and beasts ran away and hid. Yu dredged the nine rivers, cleaned out the Ji and Ta so that they flowed into the sea, cleared the Ru and Han, and opened the Huai and Si so that they flowed into the Jiang. Only then were the people of the central states able to obtain food. . . . Hou Ji taught the people to farm⁵⁹ and plant the five grains. When the five grains ripened, the people were nourished. As for the way of the people, if they have full stomachs, warm clothes, and dwell in idleness without any education, they become like animals. The sage was concerned about this and charged Xie to become the Supervisor of Education. He taught them using the relationships of man: fathers and sons have affection, rulers and ministers have propriety, husband and wife have differentiation, elder and younger have precedence, friends have trust.⁶⁰

Thus, the sages, having awakened first, taught the people the basic aspects of culture and morality.

It is of interest to note here that, of the sages mentioned, two of them, Yu and Hou Ji, also appear in the “Lü xing,” revealing that the authors are in large part working with a common set of figures. Moreover, the language used to describe the organizational and educational acts of these figures is comparable to that seen in the “Lü xing.” Finally, Mencius, like the author of the “Lü xing,” treats the civilizing process as divinely inspired, with the only difference being that, whereas the “Lü xing” posed the sages as being guided by the god himself, Mencius attempts to root the Heavenly attributes in the minds of the sages.

The crucial point, then, is that for Mencius, as for the author of the “Lü xing,” the sages are teachers and organizers, not creators: they do not innovate but rather put things in order—a point that strongly distinguishes the argument of Mencius from that of the Mohists. Moreover, Mencius is at pains to argue that the organization given by the sages is perfectly natural: the sages were the leaders in the effort not because they created something new but rather because they were the first to awaken to the true hierarchy of nature. Their actions were then undertaken in order to allow this nature to be properly realized. For example, in describing the flood, Mencius claims that the waters went against their natural course, and that Yu fixed the problem not by building walls and dams but

⁵⁹ Literally, to sow and reap.

⁶⁰ *Mengzi*, 3A/4.

rather by digging the earth such that the waters would properly flow into the sea:

In the time of Yao, the waters went against their course and inundated the central states. Snakes and dragons resided there, and there was no place for the people to settle. Those living in lower areas made nests, while those living on higher ground prepared caves. The *Book of Documents* states: "The overflowing waters were a warning to me." The "overflowing waters" were flooding waters. Yu was sent to put it in order. He dug the earth and had the water empty into the seas. He drove away the snakes and dragons and banished them to the marshes. The waters, following the earth, took their proper course: the Jiang, Huai, He, and Han were thus. The obstacles and obstructions were removed, and the harming of the people by the birds and beasts was extinguished. Only then did the people put their land in order and reside there.⁶¹

Elsewhere, Mencius describes Yu's method as one of following the way of the water and preventing it from going contrary to its course:

Bo Gui said: "My method of regulating the water is superior to that of Yu." Mencius said: "You are wrong. Yu's method of regulating the water was based on the way of the water. It is for this reason that Yu used the four seas as the receptacle. But you are using the neighboring states as the receptacle. When water goes contrary to its course, we call it overflowing water. Overflowing water means flooding water, something that a humane man detests. You are wrong."⁶²

An even more blunt assertion of the point appears in another passage: "As for Yu's moving the waters, he moved them without interference."⁶³

And here we can begin to appreciate one of the statements made in the first of these Mencian narratives quoted above. In describing the chaos of the world in the time of Yao, Mencius states that the five grains were not yet growing. His point here, as with his discussion of the flood, is to claim that the period of chaos was unnatural: it was a time when the waters did not follow their natural course, when the proper grains were not being cultivated, when the natural distinction between man and animal was not recognized. The sages'

⁶¹ *Mengzi*, 3B/9.

⁶² *Mengzi*, 6B/11.

⁶³ *Mengzi*, 4B/26. The full passage in which this statement appears has been discussed beautifully by A. C. Graham in his "The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature" (1967), reprinted in Graham, *Studies of Chinese Philosophy* (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), p. 52.

acts of ordering involved not an imposition of culture on nature but rather an allowing of the natural order and hierarchy of the world to be recognized.

Mencius's goal, then, was to present in his narratives a purely non-creationist view of the rise of civilization: the sages do nothing but recognize the natural hierarchy and bring it to its proper fulfillment by organizing the world and educating the populace. Thus, he defines out of existence the problem that motivated the "Lü xing" narrative. For Mencius, there was no reason to construct narratives around the problem of how to account for punishments while still posing the sages as simply organizers and educators, and thus the attempt by the author of the "Lü xing" to account for the creation of punishments as an occurrence preceding and hence divorced from the sages would strike Mencius as unnecessary: there was no history worth talking about prior to the sages, and, if his contemporary rulers were developing centralized states based strongly on organized violence, this reflected the depravity of the current rulers. For Mencius, the growing state practices were something to be rejected, not something to be accounted for through a complex narrative of barbarian-creators.

Section Summary

Thus far, we have seen three separate approaches to the problem of the use of organized violence by the state. In the first, the creations of disorder and punishments were ascribed, respectively, to a rebel and to barbarians, and sages played the role of organizing the punishments correctly under the guidance of divine commands. In the second, creations of the violent aspects of statecraft were openly assigned to sages themselves, and hence any critique of such aspects of statecraft was denied. In the third, both creation and the use of organized violence by the state were denied, and sages, once again, were simply organizers, correctly realizing the order that ought to exist in nature.

These same three models were to be worked and reworked in various narratives throughout the third century B.C. and later. As we shall see, the later narratives concerning Huangdi and Chi You, narratives that have achieved so much attention in the secondary literature, are in many cases simply the product of authors placing those

figures into increasingly complex re-weavings of the narrative structures that we have already encountered. This fact lends further credence to the claim that we should be thinking not of some basic oral myth concerning Huangdi and Chi You that is only being written down in the third century B.C. but rather of a Warring States debate that is being worked out in terms of the use of various narrative structures. As a consequence, the narrative structures are more enduring than specific figures like Huangdi. What differentiates the third-century B.C. narratives from their earlier counterparts, then, is not that the authors were providing ever more truthful accounts of a more basic, oral myth, nor that they were providing ever more fantastic narratives out of individual fancy; the difference, rather, lies in the development of the debate. Accordingly, the solutions posed to the debated problems became increasingly refined in terms of the employment of vocabulary, utilization of specific figures, and reworkings of the narrative structures. It is only by tracing this development, and thus by gaining an understanding of the basic tensions motivating the debate as a whole, that we can begin to recognize the richness of these narratives.

THE SECOND STRATUM

Many of the concerns that we encountered in the texts discussed above continue to dominate the debate in the third century B.C.: the degree to which the centralizing states of the time accord with the institutions of the ancient sages and the consequent issue of how the initial emergence of organized violence should be conceptualized. The narratives thus continued to be structured around the question of what precise roles nature, sages, and outside forces (rebels, barbarians, etc.) played in the rise of the use of violence. However, a largely new set of figures came to be employed in the narratives, and even those that had appeared earlier (such as Chi You) were utilized somewhat differently. Of these new figures, the most important by far in texts about the initial rise of the state is Huangdi. To understand why authors writing these narratives would turn to such a figure, it will be helpful to discuss some of the associations that the figure had at the time.

Huangdi first appears in the fourth century B.C., in writings

unrelated to the genre of narratives of the origin of the state. In fact, his first appearance in early Chinese literature is a passing reference in a bronze inscription, where he is mentioned as an ancestor of the patron of the vessel. The inscription in question is from the “Chenhou Yinzi *dun*” 陳侯因資鐻, the patron of which is Duke Wei of Qi.⁶⁴ The reference in the inscription is of some importance, for the patron is the grandson of Tian He, who in 386 B.C. overthrew the rulers of Qi and established his own line as the ruling family of the state. In the inscription, Duke Wei praises Huangdi as well as the hegemons Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin. Since these latter two were not truly ancestors, the claim here would appear to be paradigmatic rather than lineal: Duke Wei is placing the rise of his line within the paradigms of action defined by these three figures.⁶⁵ It seems reasonable to suspect that this is in reference to the Tian usurpation, and that the implicit claim being made here is that the Tian, like these other figures, used force legitimately to take power. The Tian rulers, in other words, were claiming that there was a history of great figures ruling through force, from Huangdi to the hegemons, and that the Tian themselves were in this line of history. Their usurpation was thus justified not on grounds of descent, not through an attempt to claim that they were in fact the true inheritors of the Zhou mandate to rule Qi, but rather through an alternate claim based in the rule of force. The fact that Huangdi would be invoked in such a context would imply that he, like the hegemons, was associated with such a form of rule.⁶⁶

This association is also apparent in one of the first references to Huangdi in the extant received literature. The passage is from the fourth-century B.C. *Zuozhuan*, which mentions, in passing, that Huangdi fought a battle north of Banquan.⁶⁷ Although it would be

⁶⁴ See Shirakawa Shizuka 白川靜, *Kinbun tsūshaku* 金文通釋 (Kobe: Hakutsuru bijutsukan, 1962-), 38:421. The inscription has been discussed by a number of scholars. See Xu Zhongshu 徐中舒, “Chen Hou si qi kaoshi” 陳侯四器考釋, *Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 3-4 (1934): 479-506; Ding Shan 丁山, “You Chenhou Yinzi dun ming Huangdi lun wudi” 由陳侯因資鐻銘黃帝論五帝, *Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo jikan* 3-4 (1934): 517-35; Yang Kuan, “Zhongguo shang-gushi daolun,” 190-91; and Guo Moruo 郭沫若, *Shi pipan shu* 十批判書 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1966), pp. 152-53.

⁶⁵ See the excellent discussion by Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, 308 n. 60.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Duke Xi, twenty-fifth year. The adversary with whom Huangdi fought is not clear here.

dangerous to read too much into a passing statement of this sort, the fact that Huangdi is referred to here in relation to battle (a context in which many of the major sages recognized in the fourth century B.C. would not be likely to appear) furthers the general impression that Huangdi was at the time associated with the use of force.

Another reference possibly related to this theme appears in the *Shiji* concerning the early cults of the state of Qin. According to the work, Duke Ling of Qin, in the latter part of the fifth century B.C., set up two altars, the lower one for Yandi and the upper one for Huangdi.⁶⁸ Without additional evidence, Sima Qian's assertion is of course impossible to verify. It is, however, at least possible that Huangdi was also connected during the Warring States period with Qin, a state that over the course of the mid-fourth to third centuries B.C. became increasingly associated with a centralized and militaristic form of governance.⁶⁹

With this background in mind we can begin to understand the role that Huangdi played in third-century B.C. narratives. Prior to this period, there was no sage who was widely seen as a creator of the use of organized violence by the state. When, for example, the Mohists wanted to claim that punishments and weapons were created by sages, they simply referred to the creators as "sages." By the third century B.C., however, one finds texts (which would later be classified as Legalist) focusing specifically on the use of violence by the state, and thus the authors of such works wanted to pin the creation of such aspects of statecraft on a certain sage who they could then claim embodied their teachings. Because of his associations with warfare and usurpation, Huangdi was the figure chosen. Later authors then attempted to reinterpret the sage to fit their own definitions of the emergence of the state, and it was in this context that

Later texts identify the opponent of Huangdi at Banquan as Yandi (see, for example, the *Shiji*, "Wudi benji," *Zhonghua shuju* edition, 1.3). The *Guoyu*, a text probably written around the same time as the *Zuozhuan*, also mentions a rivalry between Huangdi and Yandi, although it does not mention a battle at Banquan ("Jin yu," 4, SBBY, 10.8a). At any rate, there is no evidence to suggest that Chi You was identified as an adversary of Huangdi at this early a date.

⁶⁸ *Shiji*, "Feng shan shu," *Zhonghua shuju* edition, 28.1364.

⁶⁹ As we will see shortly, Huangdi was an important figure in third-century B.C. texts associated with the state of Qin. So it is also possible that Sima Qian was simply reading this association back to an earlier time period.

figures like Chi You reemerged in the literature. These interpretations and reinterpretations of Huangdi and Chi You will be worth following in some depth.

The Creation of the State: The Shangjunshu

The *Shangjunshu* 商君書 is a highly diverse work, and was almost assuredly written by several different authors during the third century B.C.⁷⁰ It is attributed to the Lord of Shang, the minister of the state of Qin from 359 to 338 B.C. credited with establishing the system of institutions and laws that would ultimately lead to Qin's dominance.⁷¹ Considering that his name is chosen to represent the work, it is not surprising that it is here that the reader meets some of the most strongly asserted support for the growing centralized states of the time. It is also one of the sources where we find the strongly argued notion that the state was a creation of Huangdi.

These points can be seen clearly in "Huace" 畫策, chapter eighteen of the *Shangjunshu*. The basic point of the chapter is that rulers must change their policies with the times, and that, at the time of writing, the correct policy was administration through laws, not moral values. The author exemplifies his argument by means of a narrative of the rise of the state, a narrative based in part on a retelling of elements of the "Lü xing":

In the time of Shennong, the males plowed and the people were fed; the women weaved and the people were clothed. Punishments and administration were not used, but everything was kept in order. Armored soldiers were not raised, but Shennong reigned as king. After Shennong died, people used strength to overcome the weak, and used the many to oppress the few.⁷²

The period of peace prior to the emergence of disorder, relegated in the "Lü xing" to the distant past, is here defined as the reign of the sage Shennong.⁷³ Following this, disorder emerges. As in the

⁷⁰ A good summary of the problems of dating the individual chapters is given by J. J. L. Duyvendak, *The Book of Lord Shang: A Classic of the Chinese School of Law* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1928), pp. 141–59. See also the discussion by Luo Genze, 羅根澤, *Gushibian*, 6: 295–306.

⁷¹ For a good discussion of the various texts that mention Shang Yang's reforms, see Qi Sihe 齊思和, "Shang Yang bian fa kao" 商鞅變法考, reprinted in *Zhongguo shi tan yan* 中國史探研 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju: 1981), pp. 128–43. For a discussion of the reforms themselves, see Yang Kuan, *Shang Yang bian fa* 商鞅變法 (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1955).

⁷² *Shangjunshu*, "Huace," SBBY, 4.9b.

⁷³ For an excellent discussion of some of the uses to which Shennong was put, see A. C.

“Lü xing,” such disorder is not presented as natural: disorder emerged at a certain time, and did not exist before. Intriguingly, however, no explanation is given here for its emergence. For the author of the “Lü xing,” it was crucial to emphasize that disorder was something imposed from the outside, created by the rebel Chi You. The perspective of the “Huace” is different: as time changes, so does behavior. At times, disorder will simply emerge, and the ruler must be prepared to respond.

As seen by the “Huace,” the response to the emergence of disorder was the creation of the state by Huangdi:

Therefore, Huangdi created the rules of propriety for ruler and minister and for superior and inferior, the rites of father and son and of elder and younger brother, and the union between husband and wife. Within he put into practice knives and saws, and outside he used armored soldiers. This is because the times had changed. Looking at it from this perspective, it is not that Shennong is above Huangdi; the reason that his name is honored is that he fit the times.⁷⁴

No mention of divine intervention is given here. In what seems to be a critique of Mencius, the author claims that hierarchy, propriety, and the rites are not natural at all but were rather the conscious creation of Huangdi. Moreover, the author argues that Huangdi created the use of organized violence by the state: the use of knives and saws (presumably referring to mutilating punishments) within and war outside. Huangdi, then, is the creator of everything from hierarchy and rites to punishments and warfare. Thus, the dichotomy that motivated much of the narrative in the “Lü xing” is absent. As we saw, the sages in the “Lü xing” were posed as organizers and teachers operating under moral guidelines; the creation of punishments was something that had to be displaced onto barbarians. The “Huace,” in contrast, treats ritual and hierarchy as created in the

Graham, “The Nung-Chia ‘School of the Tillers’ and the Origins of Peasant Utopianism in China,” reprinted in *Studies of Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), pp. 67–110. Graham’s argument, building upon Gu’s insight into the way that the various sages were categorized, is that Shennong was a sage posited by the School of Tillers, a school that advocated a return to a more egalitarian lifestyle centered around agricultural production. Various other authors, such as the one who composed the chapter under discussion here, then used Shennong to represent a peaceful period prior to the introduction of organized violence during the reign of Huangdi.

⁷⁴ *Shangjunshu*, “Huace,” 4.9b–10a.

same way as punishments and warfare: all of these are the conscious creation of Huangdi. The sage in the “Huace” is neither an organizer nor a teacher, and he does not operate under any divine guidelines (whether located in the commands of the god or the Heaven-given mind of the sage): Huangdi is a creator guided only by the changes of the times.

The author of the “Huace” next turns to address another of the issues dealt with in the “Lü xing,” namely, how to account for the fact that the state uses violence to counteract violence. The “Lü xing” posited a separate creator (the Miao) and thus distinguished the creation of counteractive violence from the sages, who could then be presented as acting solely out of virtue. In contrast, the “Huace” author openly accepts the apparent paradox and justifies it on simple grounds of necessity:

Therefore, if you use war to get rid of war, even war is acceptable; if you use killing to get rid of killing, even killing is acceptable; if you use punishments to get rid of (the need for) punishments, even heavy punishments are acceptable.⁷⁵

Instead of ascribing punishments to barbarians or tying the correct usage of punishments to the divine, the author simply proclaims the legitimacy of the use of violence.

The “Huace” argues that sages are creators, fashioning whatever instruments of governance are necessary for their times. The narrative employed here is thus comparable to that of the *Mozi*, although it is important to note that the “Huace” is far more radical in terms of both its outlook and political stance. Although the *Mozi* chapters revealed a strong interest in propounding a view of culture as a creation of sages, such acts of creation were always explicitly rooted in a larger moral ethic. Indeed, the *Mozi* narrative of the creation of punishments was specifically structured around showing the ill effects of acts of creation that were not so rooted. In contrast, the narrative given here is notable for the complete lack of interest shown in rooting these acts of creation either in the natural world or in any system of morality: the author’s only criterion for evaluating the success of rulers is how well they react to changing times. Unlike the *Mozi*, then, the author here is denying the applicability of any moral criteria to evaluate the centralizing states of

⁷⁵ *Shangjunshu*, “Huace,” 4.10a.

the time. Politically, the chapter is written in strong support of the use of law, punishments, warfare, etc. (in other words, of the institutions of Qin), and the author's method of doing so is to present all of these as a creation of Huangdi.

Nature and the State:

Two Texts Attached to the Mawangdui Laozi B

Support for centralized institutions of statecraft also appears in two of the four texts attached to the Mawangdui 馬王堆 *Laozi B*, the *Jingfa* 經法, and the *Shiliujing* 十六經.⁷⁶ Unlike the *Shangjunshu*, however, one finds in both of these texts a strong opposition to the notion that such institutions were conscious creations of a sage.⁷⁷ In this respect, the works are clearly linked to a large body of late Warring States texts in which one finds explicit claims that the sage ought not create, for such acts are seen as a transgression against the spontaneity of the natural world. For example, one finds in the "Zhibeiyou," chapter 22 of the *Zhuangzi*:

Heaven and earth have great beauty but do not speak; the four seasons have bright laws but do not talk; the myriad things have completed patterns but do not explain. The sage finds his source in the beauty of Heaven and earth and penetrates the principles of the myriad things. It is for this reason that the utmost man does not act consciously (*wuwei* 無為) and the great sage does not create (*zuo*). This is the meaning of observing Heaven and earth.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Tomb three of the Mawangdui site, where the manuscripts were discovered, has been dated to 168 B.C. The *Laozi B*, as well as the attached texts, avoid the taboo character *bang* 邦 from the reign of Liu Bang, but do not avoid the taboo character of his successor. This means that they were copied sometime during the latter's reign, between 194 B.C. to 180 B.C. As to when they were actually composed, numerous hypotheses have been advanced. My own view is that they are most plausibly dated to sometime in the last two or three decades of the Warring States period. See my "Nature and Artifice," p. 496 n. 62.

⁷⁷ Since their discovery in 1973, these texts have been subject to an enormous outpouring of scholarship. Much of this scholarship has focused on the texts as representative of "Huang-Lao," a term used to denote teachings important in the court of the early Han prior to the reign of Emperor Wu. See, for example, R. P. Peerenboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang-Lao* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

Although it is certainly possible that some early Han scholars would have classified these texts as "Huang-Lao," such a term would have been, I would argue, a retrospective labeling. Indeed, since the term "Huang-Lao" does not appear in any pre-Han text, I prefer to avoid using such a label altogether when discussing Warring States issues. I will therefore simply treat these texts as specific responses to the debates of the late Warring States period, and reserve the term "Huang-Lao" for a discussion of early Han terminology.

⁷⁸ *Zhuangzi*, "Zhibeiyou," SBBY, 7.23a-23b.

Similarly, the author of the “Tianze,” chapter 4 of the *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子, states: “Neither fashioning (*chuang*) nor creating (*zuo*), he [the sage] combines his virtue with Heaven and earth.”⁷⁹

Sharing these concerns, the authors of the *Jingfa* and the *Shiliujing* provide narratives to explain how laws and punishments originally emerged. Their attempts to root such institutions in the world of nature, while denying that the institutions were created by sages, leads the authors, in different ways, to rewrite many of the narrative themes that we have been tracing.

The Jingfa. The authors of the *Jingfa* are concerned with connecting a definition of the state comparable to that seen in the *Shangjunshu* with a naturalistic cosmology based on the thought of the *Laozi*.⁸⁰ Their basic move is to define the state as a product of the natural world. The text opens with the claim: “The way generates (*sheng* 生) the laws.”⁸¹ In opposition to narratives (such as those that appear in the *Shangjunshu*) that describe the sages as creating (*zuo*) the laws, the *Jingfa* authors argue that the laws come from the way and that, moreover, the way does not create the laws but rather gives birth (*sheng*) to them. The emergence of the laws is thus explicitly presented as a perfectly natural act, a part, indeed, of the generative process of nature.

The authors, however, do not wish to dispense with the sage. The *Jingfa* continues: “Laws mark gains and losses with a measure and clarify the crooked and the straight. Therefore, the one who holds fast to the way generates (*sheng*) laws and does not dare to violate them.”⁸² The sage is thus also granted the potency to generate laws. Even here, however, the text roots culture in the natural process by stating that such powers exist only if the sage holds fast to the way (through a process that will be detailed below). Moreover, the

⁷⁹ *Heguanzi*, “Tianze,” SBBY, 1.5b.

⁸⁰ For analyses of the vision of statecraft given in the *Jingfa*, see Karen Turner, “The Theory of Law in the *Ching-fa*,” *Early China*, 14 (1989): 55–76 and R. P. Peerenboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China*.

⁸¹ *Jingfa*, in *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu* 馬王堆漢墓帛書, vol. 1 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1980), p. 43, line 1a. All references to the *Jingfa*, as well as to the *Shiliujing* later in this essay, are to the 1980 version of the *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu*, an edition that incorporates a great deal of the textual work that has been done on the manuscripts.

⁸² *Jingfa*, p. 43, line 1a.

authors once again choose the word *sheng*, “to give birth, to generate,” to describe the manner in which the sage brings laws into being. The vocabulary of the opening lines already reveals authors very much opposed to consciously creative action on the part of the sage.

The text then goes on to give a brief cosmogony that presents disorder as a perfectly natural by-product of the generation of the world:

Empty and without form, its [i.e., the way’s] silence⁸³ is dark. It is from this that the myriad things are generated. With generation, there are injuries called desires, called not understanding sufficiency. With generation, there must be movement, and with movement there are injuries called not acting at the right time, called being timely but [graph missing]. If there is movement there will be activities, and if there are activities there will be injuries called disobeying, called lack of balance and not understanding what is useful. If there are activities there must also be speech, and if there is speech there will be injuries called lack of trustworthiness, called not understanding to fear other people, called self-promotion, called empty boasting and taking insufficiency as excess.⁸⁴

Differentiation is achieved when the way gives birth to the myriad things. With such differentiation, however, desires, movement, activities, and language emerge, all of which contain the potentiality for injury. Unlike the “Lü xing,” then, disorder is not an outside imposition, a creation of the rebel Chi You: the potentiality for disorder is rooted in the very act of differentiation.

It is precisely for this reason, the text argues, that the sage becomes necessary; for the sage is he who can avoid acting consciously, hold fast to the undifferentiated way, and thereby understand whence fortune and misfortune arise:

Therefore, [everything] emerges together in darkness. Some thereby die, and some thereby live; some are thereby defeated, and some are thereby completed. Misfortune and fortune come from the same way, but no one knows from whence they were generated. The way to see and know is simply to be empty and have nothing. . . . Therefore, the one who holds fast to the way observes all under Heaven without grasping, without being in a fixed position, without consciously acting, without being selfish.⁸⁵

⁸³ Reading *shu* 襲 as *jì* 寂.

⁸⁴ *Jingfa*, p. 43, lines 1b-2b.

⁸⁵ *Jingfa*, p. 43, lines 2b-3b.

This argument underlies much of the rest of the text: the discerning sage, by holding fast to the way, truly understands the patterns of the differentiated world and hence can model the state upon those patterns:

Heaven has seasons of death and life, the state has policies of death and life. According with the generation of Heaven and thereby nourishing life is called "civility." According with the killing of Heaven and thereby attacking and causing death is called "martialness." If civility and martialness are both put in practice, then all under Heaven will follow.⁸⁶

Violence is not a human creation; it is natural, and the only requirement is that it must be organized according to the patterns of the differentiated world.

The *Jingfa* authors have thus completely denied the narratives of the creation of the state and of organized violence given, for example, in the *Shangjunshu*. Disorder, punishments, warfare, and laws are not created things but rather products of the natural generation of the world, and the purpose of the sage is to organize these natural products correctly. While still supporting a centralized state, then, the authors of the *Jingfa* are able to argue that the sages are organizers, not creators. This distinction is crucial for understanding the narratives given in the *Shiliujing*, the text to which I will now turn.

The Shiliujing. The authors of the *Shiliujing*, the second of these four Mawangdui texts, are operating within a framework similar to that of the *Jingfa*, connecting a call for centralized statecraft with a vocabulary borrowed from the *Laozi*. Unlike the *Jingfa*, however, the authors of the *Shiliujing* attempt to do so in explicit reference to Huangdi as the sage who initially established laws and punishments.⁸⁷ Their consequent attempt to shift the presentation of

⁸⁶ *Jingfa*, p. 47, lines 19a-19b.

⁸⁷ One of the many problems that has afflicted the scholarship on these Mawangdui texts has been a tendency to read the four works as representing a single ideology, if not, in fact, being the product of a single author. A recent example of this can be seen in R. P. Peerenboom's *Law and Morality in Ancient China*. Peerenboom treats the four works as representing a single line of thought and, indeed, quotes indiscriminately from all of the works to support his various claims about "Huang-Lao." I believe this to be mistaken. While it is true that the four texts share a common framework and vocabulary, a fact which certainly accounts for their being placed together, they are, as we shall see, distinctive texts that argue distinctive positions.

Huangdi away from one of a creator and toward one of an organizer along the lines seen in the *Jingfa* also leads them to bring back the figure of Chi You in a narrative role reminiscent of that employed in the “Lü xing.”

The opening chapter of the *Shiliujing* describes Huangdi as follows:

I received the mandate from Heaven, established positions on earth, and completed names among the people. I alone [graph missing] a counterpart to Heaven, instituted kings and the three ministers, established the state, and set up the rulers and the three counselors. I numbered the days, measured the months, and established the years so as to match the phases of the sun and moon.⁸⁸

The passage describes Huangdi as an organizer, as the figure who established positions of authority and instituted the calendar according to the patterns of nature.

The method by which this organization was undertaken is developed at greater length in the second chapter. As in the *Jingfa*, the basis for discussion in the *Shiliujing* is the emergence of the differentiated world:

Huangdi said: “The swarming multitudes [six graphs missing] as one mass,⁸⁹ neither dark nor light, as of yet having neither *yin* nor *yang*. Before the *yin* and *yang* were fixed, I did not yet have that with which to give names. Now, in the beginning it divided and became two, differentiated and became *yin* and *yang*, separated and became the four [seasons].”⁹⁰

Having thus accounted for the growth of the patterned, differentiated world, the text argues that the ruler must organize the people according to these patterns so as to continue the generative growth:

In spring and summer carry out virtue; in autumn and winter carry out punishments. First virtue and then punishments so as to nourish life. . . . When punishments and virtue are august, the sun and moon shine on each other so that each illuminates its counterpart.⁹¹

Punishments are not something that have to be accounted for by positing a barbarian creator; in fact, they are not created at all. On

⁸⁸ *Shiliujing*, in *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1980), p. 61, lines 78b-79a.

⁸⁹ The word *jun* 囷 means a round bin or granary. The sense here is of an enclosure encompassing everything, prior to any differentiation or separation.

⁹⁰ *Shiliujing*, p. 62, lines 82a-83a.

⁹¹ *Shiliujing*, p. 62, lines 85b-86a.

the contrary, punishments complement virtue just as the moon complements the sun. The issue is one of organization, namely, that punishments must be enacted according to the patterns of nature. If properly enacted, virtue and punishments will, like the seasons on which they are based, “nurture life” through the processes of timely growth and killing. Punishments are a part of the larger method by which the sage aids in the generative process.

Thus, according to the *Shiliujing*, the differentiated world emerges through a natural, generative process, and the institutions of the state are modeled on this natural world so as to nourish the life of humanity. Unlike the “Huace” chapter of the *Shangjunshu*, but very much like the *Jingfa*, the state is defined not as a human creation but normatively, as an imitation of the hierarchy found originally in nature.

These themes concerning the nature of the state are taken up as well in a series of sections devoted to the problems of the origins of conflict and the ways that conflict can be correctly regulated. Two of these sections present these issues in terms of a reworking of the narratives given in the “Lü xing” and the “Huace” chapter of the *Shangjunshu*. As in the “Huace” chapter, the text omits mention of the Miao as the evil creator of punishments and, moreover, names Huangdi as the sage who establishes the organized state. Unlike the “Huace” chapter, however, the authors of the *Shiliujing* have no interest in posing Huangdi as a great creator, and they thus bring in the figure Chi You, who was discussed in the “Lü xing.” Here, the story is told in terms of a battle between Chi You and Huangdi, and the narrative becomes an allegory for the emergence of force and the ways that force should be used by the state.

The first chapter in which the *Shiliujing* presents this narrative is the “Wuzheng.” The authors describe the minister Yan Ran as explaining to Huangdi that the rectification of the world must begin with the rectification of the self. He then declares that, although there is great conflict, Huangdi must first cultivate himself before becoming involved. Following the advice, “Huangdi thereupon took leave of his state’s officers and ascended a mountain from which he could watch all around him. He calmly⁹² rested for three years in

⁹² Reading *tan* 談 as *dan* 淡.

order to find himself.”⁹³ After this self-cultivation, his minister intervenes to tell Huangdi that it is time to enter into the conflict:

The war was raging. Yan Ran thereupon aroused Huangdi, saying: “It is acceptable (to engage in the conflict). To create conflict is inauspicious, but not to conflict means that you cannot complete your tasks. How could it not be acceptable (to engage in the conflict)?”⁹⁴

Conflict itself is not inherently wrong, and it is therefore acceptable for Huangdi to enter into battle. It is rather the act of initiating conflict that is inauspicious, and the act is thus described in terms of the verb *zuo*, a vocabulary-choice that emphasizes the non-spontaneous, non-natural aspect of the act. This is, of course, the same term used in the “Lü xing” to describe Chi You’s transgressive introduction of disorder, and the authors of the *Shiliujing* are making a comparable point: once conflict has been created, the sage can and must engage in the conflict to restore order.

The text next turns to the battle between Chi You and Huangdi:

Huangdi thereupon took out his axe and halberd, grasped his weapons of war, and himself raised the drum and beat it. He met Chi You and captured him. The thearch set forth a covenant, which read: “Whoever goes against propriety and acts contrary to the seasons, his punishment will be equal to that of Chi You. Whoever goes against propriety and opposes the ancestors, the law will be death and destruction to extinction.”⁹⁵

The authors thus recast the “Lü xing” narrative in order to flesh out the paradox given in Yan Ran’s statement: while it is inauspicious to create conflict, it is impossible for the ruler to accomplish his tasks without using conflict. The point is given in the form of a narrative of a battle between Huangdi and Chi You: Huangdi engages in conflict just as Chi You does, but he does not initiate the conflict and acts only after he has corrected himself. Like the “Lü xing” chapter, then, the story given here is a narrative of the proper use of force: once conflict has been created, the sage uses it correctly so as to establish order. Organized violence will thereafter be used to stop those who act contrary to propriety, the order of the seasons, and the ancestors.

⁹³ *Shiliujing*, p. 65, lines 93b–94a.

⁹⁴ *Shiliujing*, p. 65, lines 94a–94b.

⁹⁵ *Shiliujing*, p. 65, lines 94b–95a.

The authors have chosen the sort of narrative framework given in the “Lü xing” because it provides them with a means of ascribing the creation of conflict to a negative figure, and thus allows them to present the sage as the one who brings order to the world. Unlike the “Huace” narrative, in which Huangdi is a creator, here he takes over the conflict created by another and organizes it for the sake of propriety.

However, the differences between the account of the establishment of the prohibitions in the “Lü xing” and that in the *Shiliujing* are equally important. In the “Lü xing” chapter, the author’s primary concern was to recognize that punishments were necessary and yet of secondary importance to the rule of the state. Thus, his narrative grants the Miao the negative role of evil creator of punishments and uses Chi You simply to introduce the disorder that necessitates the existence of punishments. In contrast, the authors of the *Shiliujing* want to claim that punishments are part of the natural order. Their fundamental concern is not to account for the existence of negatively valued punishments but rather to present a rebel to whom they can ascribe the creation of conflict. Consequently, they dispense with the Miao. Moreover, the authors treat Huangdi as the one who initially established the state and name him the sage of the tale. The narrative then unfolds between Chi You and Huangdi, with Huangdi’s appropriation of violence for use by the state being narrated in terms of Huangdi capturing and killing the rebel.

This narrative use of Chi You appears again in the chapter “Zhengluan”:

The war was growing. The Commissioner of Tai Shan⁹⁶ said: “It is acceptable.” (Huangdi) thereupon took out his axe and halberd and grasped his weapons of war. Huangdi himself met Chi You and captured him. He peeled off Chi You’s [graph missing] skin in order to make a target. He made men shoot at it, and the one with the most hits was rewarded. He cut Chi You’s hair and placed it in the sky, calling it the “Banner of Chi You.”⁹⁷ He stuffed Chi You’s stomach in order to make a

⁹⁶ The Commissioner of Tai Shan appears here as one of Huangdi’s ministers. This accords with other works as well. For example, one finds the following statement in the “Lanming xun,” chapter 6 of the *Huainanzi*: “In ancient times Huangdi put all under Heaven in order. Li Mu and the Commissioner of Tai Shan assisted him,” (SBBY, 6.6b).

⁹⁷ The “Banner of Chi You” is a comet, mentioned in the *Lüshi chungiu*, “Mingli,” SBBY, 6.9b.

ball. He made people catch⁹⁸ it, and the one who caught it the most was rewarded. He fermented Chi You's bones and flesh, threw them in with bitter pickled meat, and made all under Heaven eat them. In this way, the great thearch established prohibitions.⁹⁹

The narrative opens with a great war, but, once again, Huangdi enters only after his minister gives approval. Huangdi is then explicitly described as establishing prohibitions through his sacrifice of Chi You. As in the previous narrative, Huangdi appropriates the violence created by Chi You in order to bring it into accord with the proper order. In this narrative, even more explicitly than in the other story given in the *Shiliujing*, Chi You is treated as a sacrifice that enables Huangdi to organize violence for the state.

The Rebel-Creators

The narrative attempt to use Chi You, as well as other rebels, as the figures to whom negative creations would be assigned was also common in a number of other works from the second half of the third century B.C. and later. In particular, one finds a set of texts devoted to ascribing to rebels the creation of implements of statecraft associated with warfare and the use of force. It will be useful to detail a few of these texts, beginning with those involving Chi You.

Chi You. As we have seen, Chi You was treated in the “Lü xing” as the first rebel, the one who had “created disorder.” It was, no doubt, with this association in mind that the authors of the *Shiliujing* employed the figure and paired him with a Huangdi defined in non-creationist terms. Other works from the mid-third century B.C. and

⁹⁸ Reading *zhi* 執 as *zhi* 摯. The editors read *zhi* 執 as *ta* , “to kick,” but there is not a sufficient phonetic link here to warrant the emendation. I assume that the reason for making such an emendation is that the editors hoped to connect the passage with other received texts that discuss Huangdi as the creator of the game of kickball. See Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, p. 148, for an attempt to argue that this passage is a reference to such a creation. Here again, however, I would caution against assuming that there is a single Huangdi-Chi You myth that is being referred to in all the various texts that mention the figures, and I would therefore caution against making textual emendations in order to try to achieve some sort of unity in this sense. As with the common attempt to emend “huang Di” in the “Lü xing” chapter, I find the emendation proposed here unconvincing and based upon questionable premises as to the nature of early Chinese myths.

⁹⁹ *Shiliujing*, p. 67, lines 104a-5a.

later also appropriated the figure from the “Lü xing” and ascribed to him the creation of weapons. The goal here was the same one that led the author of the “Lü xing” to ascribe the creation of punishments to the Miao: the creation of an important yet problematic aspect of state rule was ascribed to a rebel in order to remove the transgressive implications of the creation from the sage.

One such ascription to Chi You appears in the “Zuopian” chapter of the *Shiben*:¹⁰⁰ “Chi You created (*zuo*) weapons with metal.”¹⁰¹ Since most weapons of significance in use during the late Warring States period were made of metal, this statement is of some import: the author here is claiming that the most common weapons used in the warfare of the time were created by the rebel Chi You. The argument is intriguing, for it serves as a denial of the claim given in the “Jieyong, shang” chapter of the *Mozi*, wherein the creation of weapons was explicitly ascribed to sages.

¹⁰⁰ The text of the *Shiben* is no longer extant, and only fragments of the work survive. From these, however, a few points concerning the text can be made. The work appears to have been written as an attempt to pull together into one text all that had been said about a few sets of topics concerning figures of antiquity. For example, one of the chapters, entitled “Jupian,” is simply a listing of the places that various figures from the past were said to have lived. Another, entitled “Xingpian,” is a listing of the lineages of the early sages. The chapter that is of the most interest to the present study is the “Zuopian,” which is a listing of the various creations attributed to figures of the past. The text appears to be little more than a compendium of such attributions, a characteristic that makes the work invaluable for discovering which figures were being credited with what creations at the time.

As to when the text was compiled, Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 dates it to the late Warring States period, and, more specifically, to the reign of King Qian of Zhao. His primary evidence for this is a fragment quoted in Pei Yin’s commentary to the *Shiji*, a fragment that refers to the birth of the “present King Qian” (*Liu guo jinian* 六國記年 (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin chubanshe, 1956), p. 138; the reference is to be found in the *Shiji*, “Zhao shijia,” *jijie*, 43.1832 n.1). Based upon the kings of other states mentioned in various other fragments, Chen argues that the work could only date from between 234 to 228 B.C. (*Liu guo jinian*, pp. 137–39).

In support of Chen’s periodization, I would mention that the generic features of the text would also suggest a late Warring States date. As I argue in my article, “Nature and Artifice: Debates in Late Warring States China concerning the Creation of Culture,” it was during this time that attributions of various innovations to figures of the past were extremely common. Moreover, it is easy, through corroboration with other works, to show that many of these attributions date from the late Warring States period. For example, we know from the “Dangbing” chapter of the *Lüshi chunqiu* (which will be discussed below) that the attribution of the creation of weapons to Chi You is dateable to this period. Chen’s argument thus seems quite plausible.

¹⁰¹ *Shiben*, “Zuopian,” *Congshu jicheng* 1.3.

Another work, the *Shizi* 尸子, dating from roughly the same period,¹⁰² makes a related claim: “The one who first created (*zao* 造) smelting was Chi You.”¹⁰³ The author here goes a step further, ascribing the creation of metallurgy in general to Chi You. The sense here, I suspect, is that metallurgy is associated not only with weapons but also with forms of control over nature: the initial creation of the activity is therefore assigned to a rebel.

The *Shizi* also states: “Huangdi killed Chi You at Zhongji.”¹⁰⁴ As in the *Shiliujing*, Chi You is paired with Huangdi, and, again as in the *Shiliujing*, Huangdi appears as the sage who kills Chi You.

In the “Dishu,” chapter 77 of the *Guanzi* 管子,¹⁰⁵ the ascription of the creation of metal weapons to Chi You and the story of a battle between Huangdi and Chi You are developed into a full narrative. The chapter, written in the form of a conversation between Duke Huan of Qi and his minister Guan Zhong, discusses the appropriation of nature. In response to a question by the Duke, Guan Zhong describes the history of the use of natural resources by the sages of the past. Guan Zhong argues that Huangdi was the sage who sought to achieve political unity: “Huangdi asked Bo Gao: ‘I wish to mold all under Heaven into one family. Is there a way to do this?’”¹⁰⁶ Bo Gao, convinced that political unity would be achievable only when the state controls all natural resources, describes how Huangdi must locate the resources existing in the mountains and set up prohibitions, punishable by death, against people appropriating such materials for themselves. The narrative concerning Chi You then follows:

¹⁰² The *Shizi* is another miscellany probably dating from the third or second century B.C. It contains several stories concerning the sages, as well as a few ascriptions of creations to specific figures. The editor (or collator) of the collection does not appear to have made an attempt to put the stories into a coherent framework of any type. As a consequence, the work is best read as simply a collection of stories.

¹⁰³ *Shizi*, SBBY, 2.13b.

¹⁰⁴ *Shizi*, 2.14a.

¹⁰⁵ The chapter belongs to the “Qing zhong” series of chapters in the *Guanzi*. Luo Genze 羅根澤 has argued convincingly that these probably belong to the Western Han period, when the economic questions posed in the chapters were issues of imperial policy. See his *Guanzi tanyuan* 管子探原 (Shanghai, Zhonghua shuju, 1931), pp. 122–42. A Western Han date for the “Dishu” in particular seems plausible, considering the overt concerns voiced in the chapter over such topics as state control over resources and means of maintaining unity.

¹⁰⁶ *Guanzi*, “Dishu,” SBBY, 23.1b.

(Huangdi) cultivated this teaching for ten years, but then the Gelu mountain gushed forth water with metals. Chi You took them and worked them, using them to make swords, armor, lances, and halberds. That year, those who united together numbered nine lords of the state. Then the Yonghu mountain gushed forth water with metals. Chi You took them and worked them, using them to make the halberds, shield thongs, and spears of Yonghu. That year, those who united together numbered twelve lords of the state. Therefore, the ruler of all under Heaven pounded a halberd and in one rage the fallen corpses filled the fields. This reveals the origin of spears.¹⁰⁷

Huangdi's attempt to achieve unity is broken when Chi You starts appropriating metal to make weapons, and Huangdi, in order to regain control of the state, is thus forced to use a halberd himself to destroy the rebels.

A related narrative is given in the "Da huang jing" section of the *Shanhaijing*¹⁰⁸:

Chi You created weapons and attacked Huangdi. Huangdi thereupon ordered Ying Long to subdue him in the fields of Jizhou. Ying Long held back the waters, and so Chi You asked Fengbo¹⁰⁹ and Yushi¹¹⁰ to let loose great winds and rain. Huangdi then sent down the Heavenly female called Ba, and the rain stopped. He thereupon killed Chi You.¹¹¹

Although this is a later elaboration, incorporating motifs of rain and drought,¹¹² the basis of the story is the same: Chi You creates weapons, rebels against the rule of Huangdi, and is finally killed.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ *Guanzi*, "Dishu," 23.2a.

¹⁰⁸ The problem of dating the various sections of the *Shanhaijing* has attracted a great deal of attention. Most scholars agree that the "Da huang jing" section is probably a Han text, although assigning a more precise date has thus far proven impossible. See the convenient summary by Riccardo Fracasso, "Shan hai ching," in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, 1993), pp. 359-61.

¹⁰⁹ Fengbo literally means "baron of the wind."

¹¹⁰ Yushi literally means "director of the rains."

¹¹¹ *Shanhaijing jianshu*, "Da huang bei jing," SBBY, 17.5a-5b.

¹¹² Some of the Han background to understanding these later motifs is provided by Michael Loewe in his excellent "The Cult of the Dragon and Invocation for Rain," in *Chinese Ideas About Nature and Society: Studies in Honor of Derk Bodde*, ed. Charles Le Blanc and Susan Blader (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University, 1987).

¹¹³ Despite the late date of the "Da huang jing" section of the *Shanhaijing*, it is precisely this narrative that many scholars have used as the basis for reconstructing an earlier Huangdi-Chi You myth. I believe this effort to be entirely mistaken. The narrative provided here is clearly a later version, and should be understood as an attempt to place the earlier versions of the story into a tale about rainmaking and drought. It certainly ought not be read as an earlier version of the myth as a whole.

The model employed throughout these works is similar to that utilized in the “Lü xing” and *Shiliujing*: when an author wants to claim that a certain element of statecraft associated with conflict or warfare is necessary yet separate from either nature or the sages, he attributes its creation to a rebel. The sage (usually Huangdi for third and second century B.C. texts) can then be presented as appropriating the creation of such an element for proper use by the state. Thus, these narratives should be understood as claims within the larger debates at the time concerning creation and centralized statecraft.

Gun. Another figure that came to be seen as a rebel-creator in the third century B.C. is Gun. Gun appears frequently in earlier Warring States narratives in contexts concerning the flood. In the “Yaodian” chapter of the *Shangshu*, for example, he is a minister who fails to stop the flooding waters, and is thus replaced by Yu, who successfully controls them.¹¹⁴ Later in the chapter, the sage Shun banishes Gun, along with the Miao and two other rebels, in his establishment of order.¹¹⁵ The reason for his banishment is not given, although it is presumably related to his failure to control the floods. The exact crime of Gun is then elaborated in the “Hongfan” chapter of the *Shangshu*, which argues that the reason for Gun’s failure was that he, unlike the ultimately successful Yu, attempted to dam up the waters, an act that disrupted the natural process¹¹⁶:

Jizi thereupon said: “I have heard that in ancient times Gun dammed up the inundating waters. . . . The god was thereupon startled and enraged . . . and Gun was executed. Yu then arose, and Heaven bestowed upon him the Great Plan and the Nine Divisions by which the constant relationships were put in order.”¹¹⁷

It is precisely because of this association of Gun with damming up the waters, and hence disrupting the natural process, that he was, in an ingenious move, also credited with the creation of city walls, as in the *Shiben*, “Zuopian” chapter: “Gun created (*zuo*) city

¹¹⁴ *Shangshu zhengyi*, “Yaodian,” SBBY, 2.11b-12a.

¹¹⁵ *Shangshu zhengyi*, “Yaodian,” 3.8b-9a.

¹¹⁶ It is relevant here to refer to the related Mencius passages, discussed above, in which Yu controlled the floods not by damming them up but rather by dredging out the river beds and thus allowing them to flow in their natural courses.

¹¹⁷ *Shangshu zhengyi*, “Hongfan,” 12.2a.

walls.”¹¹⁸ Since walls are associated with obstruction, and, indeed, are in existence because of warfare, their creation was ascribed to a rebel instead of a sage.

Thus, a number of authors in the third century B.C. and later employed Gun and (more commonly) Chi You in the same way, structurally, as the Miao were employed in the “Lü xing”: as rebellious, outside forces to whom are ascribed the creation of instruments of force. Just as punishments were ascribed to the Miao, so are weapons, metallurgy in general, and city walls ascribed to Chi You and Gun. In the narratives articulated in terms of the interplay of Chi You and Huangdi, the latter is, like the sages presented in the “Lü xing,” posed as appropriating such instruments for use in the correct methods of statecraft. Unlike the “Huace” chapter of the *Shangjunshu*, the creation of problematic instruments of statecraft is explicitly associated with rebellion and disjunction from nature, and the sage is disassociated from their emergence, serving only to domesticate such instruments and bring them into the proper order.¹¹⁹

The Conflict of Nature

In two works of the late Warring States period, the attempt to articulate the emergence of weapons by claiming that they were created by the rebel Chi You falls under attack. The authors of these two works turn to a model similar to that seen above in the *Jingfa*: both attempt to root conflict in nature and thus explicitly deny that weapons were created by anyone, let alone a rebel. In both works, the sage is once again defined as an organizer, and creation is altogether denied. Nonetheless, despite this common framework, the

¹¹⁸ *Shiben*, “Zuopian,” *Congshu jicheng*, 1.3.

¹¹⁹ This attempt to divorce acts of creation from the age is seen in other late Warring States texts as well. In two chapters from the *Lüshi chungiu*, the “Junshou” and the “Wugong,” the creation of cultural implements is explicitly attributed to ministers, on the grounds that such acts of creation are inappropriate for the way of the ruler. (See *Lüshi chungiu*, “Junshou,” SBBY, 17.5b–6a, and “Wugong,” 17.8b–9a.) In the texts at hand, however, the position of creator is granted to rebels as opposed to ministers, presumably because the implements that are said to have been created in these frameworks are presented as more problematic. For a full discussion of these *Lüshi chungiu* chapters, see my “Nature and Artifice: Debates in Late Warring States China concerning the Creation of Culture,” in *HJAS* 57.2 (1997), pp. 506–11.

two works are written from distinct political viewpoints, revealing once again the tendency among writers of the time to redefine frameworks constantly for their own purposes.

The “Dangbing” Chapter of the Lüshi chungiu. The “Dangbing” chapter of the *Lüshi chungiu* opens as follows:¹²⁰

In ancient times, the sage kings had weapons of propriety, and none ceased using the weapons. Weapons arose long ago, at the same time as the beginning of mankind. Weapons are awesome, and awesomeness is strength. For man to have awesomeness and strength is his nature (*xing* 性). Human nature is received from Heaven; it is not something that man can make (*wei* 為). Warriors cannot change it, and artisans cannot alter it.¹²¹

Weapons are perfectly natural: they are a product of man’s search for awesomeness and strength, and, as such, they are a part of man’s natural endowment. Man’s nature, the author underlines, is simply received from Heaven; it cannot be consciously made (*wei*). As a consequence, weapons are as old as mankind, and the sages have always used them. The text continues:

Weapons arose long ago. Huangdi and Yandi in ancient times used water and fire, and, after that, Gonggong created disturbances. The five *di* struggled amongst themselves, and, by alternation, some arose and some were destroyed. Those who were victorious put into practice their affairs. People say: “Chi You created weapons.” Chi You did not create weapons; he only sharpened the implements.¹²²

The author thus denies the claim that weapons were created by a rebel at a particular time: since weapons have always been used, Chi You cannot be said to have created them. Only disturbances, in this case ascribed to the rebel Gonggong, had a beginning. Even here, however, the author limits the claim: instead of presenting this as an outside imposition on an earlier peaceful populace, the rise of disturbances is simply another step in the history of conflict, a history that can be traced to the beginning of mankind.

The author then goes on to provide a narrative of the rise of ruler-ship:

¹²⁰ The *Lüshi chungiu* was a work commissioned by Lü Buwei, the chief minister of the state of Qin from 247 to 237 B.C. The chapters contained therein were written around 240 B.C.

¹²¹ *Lüshi chungiu*, “Dangbing,” SBBY, 7.2b–3a.

¹²² *Lüshi chungiu*, “Dangbing,” 7.3a.

Before the time of Chi You, the people formerly stripped down the forests to wage war. He who was victorious became the leader. Although there was a leader, he was still insufficient to put things in order. Therefore they instituted a ruler. But the ruler was also insufficient to put things in order, and so they therefore instituted the Son of Heaven. The institution of the Son of Heaven was produced from the ruler; the institution of the ruler was produced from the leader; the institution of the leader was produced from conflict. Conflict and struggle emerged long ago. They cannot be prohibited, they cannot be stopped. Therefore the worthy kings of antiquity had weapons of propriety, and none ceased using the weapons.¹²³

Conflict and struggle are an inherent part of the life of mankind. The first leader was simply the first to be victorious, and the subsequent growth of rulership, culminating in the position of the Son of Heaven, was a process of increasing consolidation.

Overall, the author has defined conflict as natural, and has thus denied that either weapons or conflict itself were created at specific points in time; he therefore has no need for the rebel-creator Chi You. Moreover, he has posed the progressive growth of rulership as the product of the inherently conflictual nature of mankind, and he therefore denies the claim that the state was a conscious creation of sages. Thus, what the author of the “Huace” attributed to Huangdi and what other authors attributed to Chi You the author here assigns to nature. The text can in this respect be characterized as an attempt to make a generally Mohist argument for the legitimacy of the use of organized violence by the state, but it does so not by ascribing the creation of the state to sages but rather by using a model reminiscent of that seen in the *Jingfa*, namely, by rooting the emergence of violence in nature itself.

The “Yongbing” Chapter of the Da Dai Liji. The “Yongbing” chapter of the *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記 likewise roots the emergence of violence in nature but does so in more explicitly moral terms, ascribing it to Confucius himself. The chapter is narrated in terms of a discussion between Duke Ai of Lu and Confucius:

The Duke said: “Does the use of weapons proceed from inauspiciousness?”

The master said: “How could it be inauspicious? The sages used weapons in order to prohibit cruelty and to put a stop to oppression throughout all under Heaven. But when one comes to the use of weapons by the greedy ones of the more recent

¹²³ *Lüshi chungiu*, “Dangbing,” 7.3a–3b.

generations, it was in order to cut down the people and bring peril to the states and families.’¹²⁴

Like the Mohists, the author denies the claim that weapons are inherently negative and focuses instead on how they are used. If one uses them for moral purposes, as, the author claims, the ancient sages did, there is no ethical problem.

Since the author rejects the view that weapons are morally ambivalent, he also opposes the attempt to ascribe the creation of weapons to the rebel Chi You. However, unlike the Mohists, who ascribed their creation to the sages, he does so in a move quite similar to that seen in the “Dangbing” chapter of the *Lüshi chunqiu*, namely, by arguing that weapons are natural:

The Duke said: “As for the weapons of war in ancient times, in what generation and in what way did they arise?”

The master said: “The birth of injuring others and doing people harm occurred long ago. In fact, these were born together with humans themselves.”

The Duke said: “But did Chi You create weapons?”

The master said: “No! Chi You was simply a greedy commoner. He reached for profit without concern for propriety, never looked after his relatives, and thereby died. Chi You desired things chaotically and without satiation. What implements would he have been able to create? Wasps and scorpions are born attacking and stinging; when they see potential harm, they respond in order to protect themselves. Humans were born possessing both happiness and anger, and for this reason weapons were created; weapons were born together with the people themselves. While sages utilized them beneficially to make prohibitions, chaotic men raised them and destroyed themselves.”¹²⁵

Where the Mohists ascribed the creation of weapons to sages, and various other 齊 authors ascribed it to Chi You, the author here explicitly ties the emergence of weapons to the birth of humanity, and sees it as a consequence of the natural emotions of man.¹²⁶

The argument of the “Yongbing” chapter is thus a blend of a number of positions: a concern with propriety; a Mohist concern with claiming the value-neutrality of weapons themselves and the

¹²⁴ *Da Dai Liji*, “Yongbing,” *Sibu congkan* edition, 11.3a–3b.

¹²⁵ *Da Dai Liji*, “Yongbing,” 11.3b.

¹²⁶ Qi Sihe 齊思和 argues that this passage is an example of a wide-spread belief in early China that only sages can create. Thus, claims Qi, the author of the passage is arguing that Chi You, since he is not a sage, could not have created weapons. See his “Huangdi zhi zhiqi gushi” 黃帝之制器故事, reprinted in *Zhongguo shi tan yan* 中國史探研 (Beijing: Zhonghua

consequent need to focus on how weapons are used; and a concern, similar to that seen in the “Dangbing” chapter of the *Lüshi chungüü*, with posing the use of weapons as natural. Here again, neither sages nor Chi You are creators of weapons; sages simply organize that which was originally found in nature.

*Chi You as Minister, Huangdi as Creator:
The “Wuxing” Chapter of the Guanzi*

These various themes concerning nature and creation and the role played in the emergence of the state by Huangdi and Chi You are given yet another twist in chapter 41 of the *Guanzi*, the “Wuxing.”¹²⁷ Although the narrative of the creation of order given in the text is not concerned with the introduction and organization of violence, it nonetheless deals with many of the issues that we have been discussing. The author’s goal is to emphasize the importance of harmonizing with nature while also maintaining the view of Huangdi as a creator. To underline the fact that it is the sage, rather than a rebel, who creates, the author presents Chi You not as a rebel-creator but rather as the chief minister of Huangdi. He states:

In ancient times Huangdi obtained Chi You and illuminated the way of Heaven; obtained Da Chang and arranged the resources of the earth; obtained She Long and arranged the eastern regions; obtained Zhu Rong and arranged the southern

shuju: 1981), p. 201.

In fact, however, the motivating issue is not that only sages can create; the motivating issue is to deny that weapons, and, indeed, violence in general, were created at all. No one, neither sages nor the rebel Chi You, created weapons: they are so all-pervasive that they can only be natural, not created. The issue, then, is how these natural weapons are to be used: will they be organized into use for the sake of righteousness (as sages did) or will they be used to tyrannize the people?

¹²⁷ The “Wuxing” is one of a series of chapters from the *Guanzi*, along with chapters 8 (“You guan”), 9 (“You guan tu”), 41 (“Sishi”), and 85 (“Qing zhong ji”), based upon calendrical systems. For an excellent discussion of these systems, see W. Allyn Rickett, *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 148–69. Because many of these chapters, including the “Wuxing,” offer calendars distinct from those that were later to become predominant, Graham has argued that they should be seen as relatively early, probably formulated in the late Warring States period. See his *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking* (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), pp. 84–89. Such a dating would also seem likely from the debates that we have been discussing: as we will see, the text would appear to be a reaction to some of the claims made about Huangdi and Chi You in late Warring States texts.

regions; obtained Da Feng and arranged the western regions; obtained Hou Tu and arranged the northern regions. When Huangdi obtained these six ministers, Heaven and earth were put in order and spiritual illumination was achieved.¹²⁸

The author then lists the positions granted to each of these six ministers and mentions that, “Chi You illuminated the way of Heaven and was therefore charged to become the sequencer of the seasons.”¹²⁹ Far from being an evil rebel, Chi You is a minister who understands the seasons of Heaven.

Having thus demonstrated that he does not require Chi You to be a rebel-creator in his system, the author emphasizes the creative powers of Huangdi:

In ancient times, Huangdi, using the lower and higher registers, created the five sounds and thereby rectified the five bells. . . . After the five tones were harmonized, he created and instituted the five phases to rectify the seasons of Heaven, and the five officials to rectify the positions of humanity. After humanity and Heaven were harmonized, the beauty of Heaven and earth was generated.¹³⁰

Huangdi thus created the five sounds, the five officials, and the five phases. The latter claim is of particular interest, for the five phases were generally posed as natural phenomena to which humans ought to relate their activities. They were commonly mentioned in texts committed to claiming that human activity should base itself upon the movements of nature. Here, however, the author goes so far as to claim that the five phases were created by the sage Huangdi. It is not that human activity ought to correspond to a pre-existent nature; on the contrary, it was Huangdi who rectified the seasons through his creations. Indeed, Huangdi’s creations brought harmony to Heaven and man and generated the beauty of Heaven and earth.

The contrast of the framework of the “Wuxing” chapter with that of the *Shiliujing* is instructive here. The *Shiliujing* was written to argue that the sage should reject conscious activity and accord with the seasons, and the author thus used Chi You as a rebel to account for the creation of violence. In contrast, the “Wuxing” author, while accepting the naturalistic view that the sage sought harmony

¹²⁸ *Guanzi*, “Wuxing,” SBBY, 14.10a-10b.

¹²⁹ *Guanzi*, “Wuxing,” 14.10b.

¹³⁰ *Guanzi*, “Wuxing,” 14.10b-11a.

between man and Heaven, claims that such harmony is not a consequence of rejecting conscious activity and according with nature; on the contrary, only the conscious creations of the sages can bring order to both nature and man, and thus make such a harmony possible. In this system, Chi You is not a rebel-creator but rather the most important minister to the creator Huangdi.

And here it is possible to explicate my disagreement with Lewis's argument, mentioned in the introduction. According to Lewis, the basic Warring States myth of Huangdi and Chi You posed the two in an adversarial relationship, while the view that Chi You was a minister of Huangdi had its origins in Shang ritual practice. I would instead argue that both presentations of the relationship between these two figures are responses to the debates of the Warring States period concerning creation and the proper nature of the state. This debate accounts for the basic structure shared by these differing narratives: Huangdi appears as a creator only in those narratives where Chi You appears as a minister; conversely, Huangdi never appears as a creator in those narratives where Chi You appears as a rebel-creator. In both cases, the underlying issue is the author's argument concerning the nature of statecraft and the proper ways that new forms of governance can be introduced.

Section Summary

In texts from the third century B.C. and later, many of the narratives concerning the creation of the state came to center around Huangdi, as well as his rival (or, in other texts, minister) Chi You. The only exceptions to this were the more strongly naturalistic texts, like the *Jingfa*, as well as texts dealing with Gun, a figure who, in the context discussed here, served the same narrative function as did Chi You.

The authors of the various narratives discussed employed these figures to approach the problem of how to account for the emergence of those aspects of statecraft seen as most problematic: laws, weapons, punishments, warfare, city walls—those aspects, in other words, involving organized violence. The narratives were then structured around the question of whether or not such aspects were humanly created, and, if humanly created, whether they were done so by a sage or a rebel. This debate defined the characteristics and

acts that were attributed in each narrative to Huangdi and Chi You: depending on the viewpoint of the author, Huangdi could be posed as an inventor of the use of state violence, as a follower of the patterns of nature, as a sage involved in appropriating the weapons created by the rebel Chi You, or even as a creator of the five phases. Similarly, Chi You, who was frequently defined in relationship to Huangdi, could be posed as a rebel introducing disorder against the reign of Huangdi, as a rebellious creator inventing weapons for use against Huangdi, or as Huangdi's most valued minister. Any attempt to reconstruct a unified, earlier body of mythology from such narratives would be doomed to failure: the narrative utilization of these figures is defined by the debate, and the figures are employed in differing ways because of that debate. As such, the narratives can only be understood in terms of discovering the reasons that individual authors have presented these figures in such opposing ways. Having thus discussed the historical development of these narratives, it will now be possible to analyze the basic issues and tensions motivating the overall debate.

CONCLUSION

The narratives discussed above have variously attempted to ascribe the creation of disorder and punishments to a rebel and to barbarians respectively, claimed that all aspects of statecraft are the creations of sages, attempted to deny all aspects of creation and root everything in nature (variously conceived), and attempted to ascribe the creation of weapons to rebels. The debate over precisely who did what in the ancient past appears as a seemingly endless series of ascriptions involving attempts to attribute or deny creation to humanity or nature.

In the first stratum of texts discussed, punishments were said to be, in turn, created by barbarians, created by sages, or deemed irrelevant for a society that should, normatively, be based on nature. In the second stratum of texts, the debate concerning the emergence of violent aspects of statecraft (including not just punishments but also weapons, obstructing walls, laws, and the state in general) focused much more forcefully (although by no means exclusively) on the figures of Huangdi and Chi You, and came to emphasize such

issues as whether Huangdi was a creator or an imitator of nature, and whether Chi You was his minister or an adversarial rebel-creator. Although based in a stock set of themes and figures, the narratives turned constantly on the issue of what precisely should be ascribed to nature, sages, or rebels.

For all of the complexity that we have noted in these narratives, however, there were only three models utilized. The first model, employed in different ways in the “Lü xing,” *Shiliujing*, and various works attributing the creation of weapons to rebels, was a dualistic framework, wherein negative creations were assigned to rebels or barbarians, while sages were then posed as simply appropriating and putting to proper use that which the evil figure had created. In this framework, violence is acceptable and non-arbitrary insofar as it has been taken over and organized correctly by the state.

The two other models employed opposed such a dualistic framework, in the one case by denying creation altogether, in the other by openly proclaiming the sages as creators. In the first of these, the argument that sages were organizers rather than creators was maintained, but acts of creation by rebels were denied. This claim took two forms. The most idealistic formulation was seen in Mencius, wherein organized violence in general on the part of the state was questioned. Nature was defined in moral terms, and anything created was thus, by definition, arbitrary and artificial. A similar model was used in the *Jingfa*, the “Dangbing” chapter of the *Lüshi chunqiu*, and the “Yongbing” chapter of the *Da Dai Liji*. In these three texts, conflict was defined as being a part of nature itself, and sages as those who, in the first case, organized violence according to the correct patterns of nature, or, in the second, used conflict the most effectively, or, in the third, organized violence according to the principles of propriety. Despite the many differences between these texts, they all share an attempt to develop a framework wherein creation is denied altogether, and sages serve simply to organize correctly that which was found originally in nature.

The final model, used in distinct ways in the *Mozi*, the *Shangjunshu*, and the “Wuxing” chapter of the *Guanzi*, explicitly posed the sages as creators of the state. In the first two of these texts, this was used to claim that the use of organized violence is a perfectly acceptable creation of the sages, and thus that such violence is not in itself

morally ambiguous. In the latter of these, the model was used to suggest that the harmony of man and nature was to be achieved not through the denial of creation but rather precisely through the creations of the sages. The arguments in all of these texts were that the state was formed through creation, not organization, and that such creations were undertaken by sages, not rebels.

The fact that these narrative structures were employed over a span of roughly two centuries, while the figures employed for each of these positions changed a great deal over the same span of time, serves to confirm one of the basic theses of this essay, namely, that the texts cannot be explicated through methods of reconstructing the myths of particular figures. As I have tried to argue in this paper, Huangdi was placed into earlier narrative structures and later paired with Chi You for specific historical reasons, and the stories of Huangdi and Chi You thus reflect a later stage of a debate that began over a century earlier. In other words, the important historical antecedents to the Huangdi-Chi You narratives of the origins of statecraft lie not in a now-lost oral mythological tradition but rather in the fourth-century B.C. narratives of the origins of the state found in the “Lü xing,” *Mozi*, and *Mencius*—texts that do not even mention Huangdi.

In short, there is no unified myth or symbolism underlying these narratives. Instead, the various narratives were constructed during the Warring States period out of responses to a set of tensions and concerns centered around the issues of creation, transgression, and discontinuity, and specifically on the problem of whether the emergence of various aspects of organized violence in statecraft (punishments, warfare, weapons) should be seen as arbitrary and hence discontinuous from the natural world or whether such a discontinuity could in some way be denied. The production of these opposing narratives can thus be understood as a lengthy process of working through this problem. At stake in the debate was the degree to which one supported the growing centralized states of the time, or, put in the terms of the debate itself, whether one thought of such states as being disjunct from the natural world and whether one believed such a disjunction to be negative.

It is only in terms of this debate, then, rather than through reference to an archaic mythological tradition, that these narratives can

be explicated. This is not, of course, to suggest that there is anything at all wrong with speculating about earlier ritual and mythological traditions concerning the figures discussed; as mentioned above, future archaeological discoveries may well shed considerable new light on these issues, and they may well prove, for example, that Yang Kuan was correct in his speculations about Huangdi having been a Bronze Age god. But such speculations should not be used as explanatory principles for understanding the narratives given in Warring States texts.

With this point in mind, let me return to my earlier discussion of Yuan Ke's efforts at mythological reconstruction. It is clear from Yuan Ke's presentation that much of his concern for such work comes out of a desire to recover in early China a mythology as rich as that in early Greece. But it is important to keep in mind, as Yuan Ke himself does, that what we now think of as Greek mythology is very much a construction, a product of authors—and, more recently, modern scholars—creating a unified body of stories from a plethora of not only different but in fact explicitly opposed narratives. Indeed, this attempt to build a single, coherent body myths from diverse narratives was a distinct literary genre in early Greece. The earliest extant text in this tradition is that ascribed to Apollodorus, followed by, among others, Ovid. The modern collections of Greek mythology, such as those by Thomas Bulfinch and Robert Graves, are largely built upon these early attempts at constructing a unified body of stories. Whatever the aesthetic value of these constructed myths, however, we should not be led astray into thinking this to be the nature of the narratives as they actually appear in early Greek texts.¹³¹ Indeed, it is precisely for this reason that such handbooks for Greek mythology can be so misleading. As Timothy Gantz has recently remarked, they give the false impression that “ancient Greeks by and large knew and retold the same myths over and over again in much the same form throughout their history as a culture.”¹³²

¹³¹ As Marcel Detienne has remarked: “Mythology would not be itself without this perpetual reworking of one version by another. . . . In Greece no less than elsewhere, myths are perpetually retouched, rearranged, revised, and corrected.” See his *Dionysus Slain*, trans. Mireille Muellner and Leonard Muellner (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 6.

¹³² Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore: Johns

As far as we know, no such genre of organizing diverse narratives into a single, unified body of stories existed in early China. Yuan Ke, as I mentioned in the first section of this paper, thus concludes that the stories “have not suffered a complete reworking at the hands of literary authors and others.” But, for Yuan Ke, this means that the narratives we possess give us a better, unmediated access to the “pristine condition” of “a primitive and archaic oral tradition in the world of myth.”¹³³ The goal of the analyst, then, is to use these narratives to reconstruct a primitive, oral mythology. But does this not simply put the analyst in the position of doing for early China what Bulfinch did for early Greece, with the only difference being that, instead of working from a precursor like Apollodorus, he or she would be working from the diverse stories given in the early texts themselves? The model of Bulfinch, in other words, is still that from which Yuan Ke is working.

This paper argues for a different approach. Any attempt to search for ritual or oral precursors to the figures utilized in the Warring States narratives will have to be based upon alternate sources of material—primarily archaeological. But the narratives themselves are not traces of an oral mythology; they are part of a Warring States debate, and can only be explicated as such. Instead of trying to discover a unified, oral, ahistorical mythology behind the conflicting narratives, one should attempt to understand the historical debates within which these conflicting narratives themselves were produced.¹³⁴ And, yes, the narratives thus produced are certainly as rich in early China as in early Greece.

Hopkins University Press, 1993), 1:xvi.

¹³³ Yuan Ke, “Foreward,” xii.

¹³⁴ Indeed, I suspect that, even if we did have access to oral mythological traditions from early Greece and early China, we would find there not a set body of myths from which the authors of our texts were working but rather a process very much akin to what we have seen in the textual record: a constant formation of different and opposing narratives around a set of felt tensions.