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Chancellors of State and the Concept "State" in Excavated Inscriptions of the Warring States Period

ABSTRACT:
This article reexamines the history of the title *xiangbang* 相邦 ("Chancellor of State") and the meaning of *bang* 邦 ("state") in Warring States bronze inscriptions. By comparing transmitted historiography with excavated inscriptions on weapons, measuring devices, vessels, and other objects, it demonstrates that *xiangbang*, rather than *xiangguo* 相國 or simply *xiang* 相, was the contemporaneous designation of the highest nonhereditary administrative office. Inscriptions mentioning Chancellors of State and such institutions as the State Arsenal (*bang ku* 邦庫) and the state supervisor of robbers (*bang sikou* 邦司寇) point to the growing importance of the state as an actor in that epoch's political economy. Further inscriptions reflect ongoing institutionalization, territorialization, and even personification of the state (*bang*). Excavated inscriptions and manuscripts demonstrate that before the Han tabooing of *bang*, the concepts *bang* and *guo* 國 coexisted in the preimperial political vocabulary but were semantically distinct.

KEYWORDS:
Chancellor, state, xiangbang, bang, xiangguo, chengxiang, *taboo, weapons, inscriptions*

The Warring States period (ca. 453–221 BC) was an era of increasing political centralization in early Chinese polities that preceded the formation of the unified empire in 221 BC.[1] Centralization and bureaucratization manifested themselves, in particular, in the creation of the position of a chief administrator, reporting directly to the king. According to the *Shi ji* 史記, the main transmitted source for preimperial

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[1] Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, trans. J. R. Foster (Cambridge and New York: California U.P., 1982); Mark Edward Lewis, "Warring States Political History," in Mi-

history, in most major Warring States (Han 韓, Wei 魏, Zhao 趙, Qi 齊, Yan 燕, Qin 秦, and the old royal Zhou 周), the office-holder was called "Chancellor of State" (*xiangguo* 相國), and even Chu, where the office of the "commanding officer (*lingyin* 令尹) had existed already since the earlier Spring and Autumn period, adapted its traditional nomenclature to the common standard by the mid-third century BC.[2]

Scholars dealing with epigraphic texts are aware that *xiangguo* in transmitted texts corresponds to the official title *xiangbang* 相邦 (Chancellor of State), which was factually in use during the Warring States period.[3] This binomial title is composed of the words *xiang* 相, meaning "watching over," and *bang* 邦, meaning "state." The creation of the new official title, probably around mid-fourth century BC, reflected the increasing significance of the state as a conceptual unit in its own right, to be distinguished from the king's person and the royal kin.

In Western handbooks and dictionaries, however, *xiang* is often considered as the full official title and is alternatively translated either as "prime minister" or "chancellor."[4] Some authors, moreover, suppose

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chael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999), pp. 587–650; Edgar Kiser and Yong Cai, "War and Bureaucratization in Qin China: Exploring an Anomalous Case," *American Sociological Review* 68 (2003), p. 511; Yuri Pines, "Institutional Reforms and Reformers during the Warring States Period," in Elisabeth Childs-Johnson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Early China*, Oxford Handbooks (New York: Oxford U.P., 2020), pp. 614–22.

2 Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–90 BC), *Shi ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959; hereafter cited as *SJ*), indicates that this office existed in Zhou (4, p. 168), Han (4, p. 164); Qin (5, p. 219), Chu (6, p. 227; 15, p. 746; 43, p. 1826), Qi (15, p. 737; 32, p. 1502; 46, p. 1871), Zhao (43, p. 1797), Yan (34, p. 1559; 57, p. 2058), Wei (90, p. 2592), and some smaller states.

3 See Wang Guowei 王國維, "Xiongnu xiangbang yinbo" 匈奴相邦印跋, in Wang Guowei, *Guantang jilin* 觀堂集林 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), pp. 914–15; Anthony F. P. Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law: An Annotated Translation of the Ch'in Legal and Administrative Rules of the 3rd Century B.C. Discovered in Yün-meng Prefecture, Hu-pei Province, in 1975*, Sinica Leidensia 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), p. 208.

4 During the mid-20th c. Western scholars usually translated *xiang* as "prime minister" (see Derk Bodde, "Feudalism in China," in Rushton Coulborn, ed., *Feudalism in History* [Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1956], pp. 49–92, esp. 68; Jacques Gernet, *Le Monde Chinois* [Paris: Armand Colin, 1972], p. 75; Pietro Corradini, "Notes on the Shangshu Departments in the Chinese Central Administration," *MS* 37 (1986–1987), pp. 13–34, esp. 17). These scholars considered *xiang* as a Warring States innovation. Hucker's major work translated *xiang* as simply "minister," assuming that it already existed in high antiquity. At the same time, he distinguished separately the official title *xiangguo*, translating it as "counselor-in-chief," which he placed only in the Qin and Han administrations; Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1985), nos. 2303, 2337. Since the 1980s, "chancellor" gradually replaced "prime minister," as seen in Foster's translation of Gernet, *History of Chinese Civilization*, p. 65. Yates has adopted "chancellor" for *xiang* and "prime minister" for *xiangguo*, presumably assuming that these were two different offices; Robin D. S. Yates,

that the complete title was *chengxiang* 丞相, while others use translated titles avoiding mentioning the Chinese term.[5] This uncertainty regarding preimperial official nomenclature and, possibly, the term for "state" in Warring States political discourse cannot be resolved based on transmitted literature alone.

Excavated texts provide an essential pool of data against which transmitted historiography must be critically assessed. Inscriptions on bronze objects from the Warring States period, excavated in different regions, mention *xiangbang*. Beyond testifying to the institution's historicity, they shed light on these officials' functions and reflect regional differences in administrative structures of various states. Inscriptions employing the term *bang* in other contexts provide additional material for studying preimperial political vocabulary and concepts.

This article begins with an overview of the data related to the origin of the institution of Chancellor in transmitted texts and in Warring States bronze inscriptions in order to address the following questions: when and where did the formal office of Chancellor of State emerge? How was the official title *xiangbang* related to other official titles including the *xiang* element, such as *chengxiang* 丞相, *shouxiang* 守相, and *jiaxiang* 假相? What do inscriptions reveal about regional commonalities and differences in administrative structures of the Warring States? What do inscriptions and manuscripts related or unrelated to Chancellors of State suggest about the Warring States concept of "state"? Finally, what do terminological discrepancies between transmitted and excavated texts imply for the study of pre-Han political institutions and political discourse?

"State Control of Bureaucrats under the Qin: Techniques and Procedures," *EC* 20 (1995), pp. 331–65, esp. 355. However, Meyer translates *xiangbang* as "prime minister"; Andrew Seth Meyer, *To Rule All Under Heaven: A History of Classical China, from Confucius to the First Emperor* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2026), p. 258.

[5] Bodde adopted the translation "chancellor" for *chengxiang*, without discussing how *xiang*, *chengxiang* and *xiangguo* were related; Derk Bodde, "The State and Empire of Ch'in," in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China. Volume I: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1986), pp. 20–102, esp. 38. Lewis mentions "chief ministers" without specifying the Chinese term (Lewis, "Warring States Political History"). In a recently published handbook, authors of different chapters use either "prime minister" or "chancellor" for the same holders of the same office, e.g. Lü Buwei; this amplifies confusion about early Chinese bureaucratic nomenclature; see Paul Rakita Goldin, ed, *Routledge Handbook of Early Chinese History* (Boca Raton, Fl.: Routledge, 2018), pp. 148, 151, 165, 192, 353.

THE ORIGIN OF THE OFFICE OF CHANCELLOR OF STATE ACCORDING TO TRANSMITTED HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the *Shiji* text, the title *xiangguo* appears 154 times.[6] Most persons called simply *xiang* in its "Chronological Table of the Six States" 立國年表 chapter are identified in other *Shiji* chapters as *xiangguo*. This may explain why many authors assume that *xiang* was a stand-alone official title. However, excavated administrative inscriptions use *xiang* only as a part of composite official titles. It is therefore likely that in the "Table" *xiang* was used as an abbreviation for *xiangguo* in Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–90 BC) terms, corresponding to *xiangbang* of excavated documents.

The term *xiang* equally appears in the "Chronological Table of the Twelve Lords" 十二諸侯年表, correlating essential events of the Spring and Autumn period (ca. 770–453/403 BC). Accordingly, the author Sima Qian recognized as *xiang* six political actors active between 743 and 481 BC, including Confucius in Lu (ca. 500 BC).[7] Does this mean that the office of Chancellor of State was already established so early? The *Chunqiu* annals (*Chunqiu* 春秋) do not use the word *xiang* in any context, whereas all persons referred to as *xiang* in the "Table of the Twelve Lords" are mentioned in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 chronicle under other titles. In the latter, the word *xiang* is typically used as a verb "to watch over, to assist," referring to high-ranked nobles accompanying their rulers on outward missions, in many cases for the purpose of making covenants with the rulers of other polities.[8] In a few cases, *xiang* is used in a nominal function, meaning "assistant" to the ruler. The contexts, however, do not imply that *xiang* had become a formal, permanent administrative position comparable to that of the Warring States period.[9] I therefore suppose that Sima Qian retroactively applied Warring States

[6] Word count follows data in Chinese Text Project 中國哲學書電子化計劃, edited by Donald Sturgeon <https://ctext.org>.

[7] *SJ* 14, pp. 543, 555, 586, 600, 668, 679.

[8] For instance, in 559 BC, the nobility of Wei enthroned a relative of the expelled legitimate ruler and installed two nobles, Sun Linfu and Ning Zhi, "to assist him to listen to the commands of regional lords," meaning that they attended covenants that aimed to achieve the ruler's recognition by his peer rulers 衛人立公孫剽, 孫林父、甯殖, 相之, 以聽命於諸侯. See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), p. 1015 (Xiang 24); Stephen W. Durrant, Wai-yee Li and David Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition; Zuozhuan: Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2016), pp. 1022–23.

[9] Some scholars see evidence of a formalization of the title *xiang* in the *Zuo zhuan* entry for 548 BC: "Cui Zhu established [lord Jing as a ruler in Qi] and assisted him; Qing Feng acted as the left assistant 崔杼立而相之, 慶封爲左相"; *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, p. 1099 (Xiang 25). The first sentence uses *xiang* as a verb as in many other cases throughout the chronicle, but *zuo xiang* looks like, but not necessarily is, a formal title. For interpretations pro and contra,

terminology backward to the Spring and Autumn period to emphasize the historical significance of selected political actors, even though this formal office did not yet exist at that time.

The earliest entry mentioning *xiang* in the "Chronological Table of the Six States" states that in 405 BC lord Wen of Wei 魏文侯 "divined about a *xiang* 卜相." This refers to an anecdote included into the "Hereditary House of Wei" 魏世家 chapter, where the famous lawmaker Li Ke 李克, also known as Li Kui 李悝, pronounces "if a family is poor, seek a capable wife; if the state is in chaos, seek a capable Chancellor 家貧則思良妻, 國亂則思良相."[10] The source of this anecdote is unclear and its reliability is questionable. The "Table" further records that in 398 BC Zheng 鄭 killed its own *xiang*, and in 397 BC Zheng killed the Han 韓 *xiang*.[11] Five decades later, the appointment of another Han *xiang*, Shen Buhai 申不害 (d. 337 BC), is mentioned (351 BC), while the lord of Zhongshan 中山君 was said to have become *xiang* in Wei in 342 BC.[12] Shen Buhai had a reputation as a statesman who managed the Han government effectively, and Sima Qian confirmed that he "oversaw Han" (*xiang* Han 相韓, where *xiang* was used as a verb) in the chapter "Hereditary House of Han" 韓世家.[13] The lord of Zhongshan, a White Di 白狄 polity previously dependent on Wei but autonomous by mid-fourth century BC, could be instrumental in disputes between Wei and Zhao, whose relations soured.[14] The "Hereditary House of Wei" chapter states that the Lord of Zhongshan oversaw Wei (*xiang* Wei 相魏).[15] These entries in this "Table" only slightly predate the appointment of Zhang Yi 張儀 (d. 309 BC), a "guest minister" (*ke qing* 客卿) from Wei, as *xiang* in Qin in 328 BC, confirmed by inscriptions on Qin weapons

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see Xie Naihe 謝乃和, "Lüe lun xian Qin zaixiang zhidu de qiyuan" 略論先秦宰相制度的起源, *Dongbei shida xuebao* (*zhexue shehui kexueban*) 東北師大學報 (哲學社會科學版) 2006.3, pp. 81–87, esp. 81–82). Specifically, in assisting the newly enthroned ruler, Cui Zhu and Qing Feng took a covenant with the members of Qi nobility in the ancestral temple of the ruling house. This situation in Qi closely parallels what happened in Wei slightly earlier, in 559 BC.

[10] *SJ* 15, p. 709; cf. *SJ* 44, p. 1840.

[11] *SJ* 15, p. 711.

[12] *SJ* 15, pp. 723, 725; cf. *SJ* 45, p. 1869; *SJ* 44, p. 1845. Surprisingly, Gernet recognized that the Chancellor's office was created in Wei, but he ignored Han (Gernet, *History of Chinese Civilization*, p. 65).

[13] *SJ* 45, p. 1869.

[14] Wei and Zhongshan had ambivalent relations. At the end of the 5th c. BC, Wei conquered Zhongshan and temporarily installed there a Wei prince as ruler. However, during the first half of the 4th c. BC, Zhongshan regained autonomy. In 376 BC, Zhongshan was able to withstand an attack by Zhao and built a long wall in 369 BC (*SJ* 44, p. 1799). Since Wei was fighting Zhao during the mid-4th c., Zhongshan was Wei's natural ally.

[15] *SJ* 44, p. 1845.

identifying him as *xiangbang*.[16] Zhang Yi's role was of a diplomatic negotiator, rather than the chief in a bureaucracy.[17] A lengthy inscription on the bronze flask commissioned by king Cuo 𠂤 of Zhongshan (r. 327–309 BC) during his 14th year (314 BC) shows that Zhongshan, having proclaimed itself a kingdom and being recognized as such by its neighbors by 323 BC, also established the office of *xiangbang*.[18] It is therefore likely that the formal title of Chancellor of State, *xiangbang*, was first created in the "Three Jin 三晉" (that is, the states Han, Wei, and Zhao) by the mid-fourth century BC, and that it was borrowed from there by Qin and Zhongshan alike.[19]

INSCRIBED OBJECTS PRODUCED UNDER CHANCELLORS' SUPERVISION

The *Digital Archives of Bronze Images and Inscriptions* 殷周金文及青銅器資料庫 (referred to here and in the notes as *Digital Archives*) curated by Academia Sinica comprises amended transcriptions of the complete *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng* 殷周金文集成, and *Xin Shou Yin Zhou qingtongqi mingwen ji qiying huibian* 新收殷周青銅器銘文暨器影彙編.[20] Currently, it contains 1,995 inscriptions dated to the Warring States period, including 75 inscriptions using the official title *xiangbang*.[21] Not a single case of *xiangguo* is attested, corroborating that this term in transmitted texts was anachronistic.

16 *SJ* 15, p. 729.

17 See Moriya Kazuki 森谷一樹, "Sengoku Shin no sōhō ni tsuite" 戰國秦の相邦について, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究 2001.1, pp. 1–29, esp. p. 11.

18 Zhongshan *wang* Cuo *hu* 中山王𠂤壺; see Zhongguo kexue yanjiuyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國科學研究院考古研究所, *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng* 殷周金文集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984–1994; hereafter JC), JC9735. (These are numbered according to the printed edn.) For the translation and analysis, see Constance A. Cook, "Zhongshan wang Cuo ding," in Constance A. Cook and Paul Rakita Goldin, eds., *A Source Book of Ancient Chinese Bronze Inscriptions* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 2016), pp. 289–95; Xiaolong Wu, *Material Culture, Power, and Identity in Ancient China* (Cambridge U.P., 2017), pp. 104–11.

19 Han Yangmin 韓養民, "Qin zhi xiangbang chengxiang yuanyuan kao" 秦置相邦丞相淵源考, *Renwen zazhi* 人文雜志 1982.2, pp. 30–34, esp. p. 30; Li Yufu 李玉福, "Zhanguo shidai liang zhong xiang zhi jianlun" 戰國時代兩種相制簡論, *Shixue yuekan* 史學月刊 1986.3, pp. 22–26. Notably, the "Zhao shi jia" 趙世家 chap. of *Shi ji* mentions a chancellor who had served as Zhao Lie *hou* 烈侯 (r. 408–400 BC) (*SJ* 43, p. 1798).

20 Zhongguo kexue yanjiuyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國科學研究院考古研究所, *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng shiwen* 殷周金文集成釋文 (Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue, 2001); Jung Bor-sheng 鍾柏生, Ch'en Chao-jung 陳昭容, *Xin shou Yin Zhou qingtongqi mingwen ji qiying huibian* 新收殷周青銅器銘文暨器影彙編 (Taipei: Yiwen, 2006); cited and enumerated as "NA" prefix; for those updated to post-2006, "NB" is cited.

21 Academia Sinica, *Digital Archives of Bronze Images and Inscriptions* 殷周金文及青銅器資料庫; hereafter, *Digital Archives* <http://www.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~bronze/> last visited October 15, 2025.

Only two inscriptions mentioning *xiangbang* appear on ritual bronze vessels, including the already mentioned flask of king Cuo and the 5th Year Chunping *xiangbang* Ge De *ding* 五年春平相邦葛得鼎 cauldron from Zhao. All other inscriptions mentioning *xiangbang* appear on bronze weapons. The data of the *Digital Archives* can be slightly expanded by the inclusion of – very rare – inscriptions on other materials, such as lacquer and stone.

Inscriptions on Warring States bronze weapons are usually carved rather than cast and have a similar format, listing political, military and administrative authorities supervising weapon production down to the foundry workers. The following inscription from the reign of king Huiwen 惠文 of Qin (r. 338/324–311 BC), carved on a dagger-axe, can serve as an example:

> The fourth year of the king [of Qin], this battle [unreadable] halberd [unreadable] has been produced [under the responsibility of] the Chancellor of State Zhang Yi [and] the chief of the multitudes [unreadable] Zao. [Made by] the master of artisans Jian [and] the artisan Mao.[22] 王四年, 相邦張義 (儀)、庶長□操之造□界戟□, 工帀 (師) 賤、工卯.

Such inscriptions were made for the sake of quality control, standardization, and accountability in state-owned workshops.[23] This practice makes a difference when considering the Western Zhou period, when weapons were inscribed very seldom, and the Spring and Autumn period, when inscriptions were mostly cast on weapons for elite use and they identified the names of their owners in carefully calligraphed and sometimes gold- or silver-inlaid characters.[24] Although this aristocratic tradition was widespread also during the Warring States period, no

[22] *Wang* 14th year *xiangbang* Zhang Yi *ge* 王四年相邦張儀戈, NA1412.

[23] See Huang Shengzhang 黃盛璋, "Qin yong keng chutu bingqi mingwen yu xiangguan zhidu fafu" 秦俑坑出土兵器銘文與相關制度發復, *Wenbo* 文博 1990.5, pp. 63–71; Xiuzhen Janice Li, Andrew Bevan, Marcos Martinón-Torres, Thilo Rehren, Cao Wei, Xia Yin and Zhao Kun, "Crossbows and Imperial Craft Organisation: The Bronze Triggers of China's Terracotta Army," *Antiquity* 88 (2014), pp. 126–40; Xiuzhen Li, *Bronze Weapons of the Qin Terracotta Warriors: Standardisation, Craft Specialisation and Labour Organisation* (Oxford: BAR publishing, 2020); Ondřej Škrabal, "Where There is Unity, Order Results: Manufacturers' Labels and the Creation of Standards in the Late Warring States Period," *TP* 108 (2022), pp. 319–68; Xia, "Zhanguo shiqi de 'xiangbang'," pp. 141–56.

[24] In the *Digital Archives*, among the inscriptions of the Western Zhou period, inscribed weapons constitute only about 1% of inscribed objects. During the Spring and Autumn period, their share increased to about 21%, while during the Warring States' period, their share reached to about 36%. I have presented these estimations in an unpublished conference paper "War and Writing in Pre-Imperial China: Inscribed Weapons in Archaeological Context," presented at the workshop "Materialities of Ancient Texts" at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University, April 30–May 1, 2026.

weapons made for *xiangbang*'s own use are known, and the title *xiangbang* appears in weapon inscriptions only in administrative contexts.

Although the high number of inscriptions mentioning *xiangbang* – nearly 4% of all inscriptions from the period – and the vast geographic spread of the finds may prompt an impression that Chancellors typically controlled weapon-making throughout the Warring States, a careful analysis has revealed most *xiangbang* weapons were made either in Qin or in Zhao, with only a few examples, probably, made in Song.[25]

The "Basic Annals of Qin" 秦本紀 chapter of *Shi ji* mentions six Qin Chancellors: Zhang Yi (s. 328-322, 317-313 BC), Yue Yi 樂池 (s. 318-317 BC), Chuli Ji 樗里疾 (s. 306 BC), Xue Wen 薛文 (s. 299–298 BC), Wei Ran 魏冉 (s. 300, 295–271 with interruptions), and Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (s. 249–237).[26] Only Lü Buwei is referred to as *xiangguo*, while five other persons are identified as *xiang*, giving the impression that a change in the nomenclature might have occurred. Besides, this chapter states that when Xue Wen resigned, Lou Huan 樓緩 (s. 297 BC) was appointed as *chengxiang* to replace him.[27] No further *chengxiang* are mentioned.

The "Chronological Table of the Six States" states that the office of *chengxiang* was created in Qin for the first time in 309 BC and that two persons were simultaneously appointed then, one *chengxiang* of the left and one of the right 左右丞相. This "Table" further calls Wei Ran once *xiang* and twice *chengxiang*, producing an impression that *xiang* could be an abbreviation of *chengxiang*.[28] The next and last pair of *chengxiang* mentioned in the "Table" are Li Si 李斯 (s. 221–208 BC) and Feng Quji 馮去疾 (s. 214–208 BC), who served after the foundation of the Qin empire.

The status relationships among *xiang*, *xiangguo* (*xiangbang*), and *chengxiang* in the Qin kingdom and empire can be clarified based on excavated inscriptions. In Qin inscriptions, the term *xiang* was never

[25] The identification of the country of production is not straightforward, as inscriptions do not indicate the states' names. Nevertheless, it is possible based on onomastic information such as surnames, personal names, bestowed titles (*fenghao* 封號), place names, state-specific names of institutions or professional vocabulary, paleography of inscriptions, and material features of the artifacts. For the methodology, see Huang Shengzhang 黃盛璋, "Shi lun San Jin bingqi de guobie he niandai ji qi xiangguan wenti" 試論三晉兵器的國別和年代及其相關問題, *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 1974.1, pp. 13–48. For a recent comprehensive study, see Xu Shihe 許世和, "Zhanguo youming bingqi de zhengli yu yanjiu" 戰國有銘兵器的整理與研究, Ph.D. diss. (Jilin daxue 吉林大學, 2023).

[26] *SJ* 5, pp. 206, 207, 210, 213, 219. Dates here identify periods of service (hereafter designated by "s.") in the respective office according to *Shi ji*.

[27] *SJ* 5, p. 210.

[28] *SJ* 15, pp. 734, 738, 741.

used alone but only as a part of the titles *xiangbang* or *chengxiang*. Although some scholars studying Warring States inscriptions have supposed that *xiangbang* and *chengxiang* were two names for the same office, Nie Xinmin 聶新民 and Liu Yunhui 劉雲輝 were already able to reveal status differences between *xiangbang* and *chengxiang*.[29] The recently published inscription on a lacquer stemmed-platter looted from the Qin-era Dongling 東陵 mausoleum near Xi'an in Shaanxi, dated to 299 BC, confirms that the offices of *xiangbang* and *chengxiang* coexisted, at least at the beginning, and that *chengxiang* was subordinated to *xiangbang*.[30] I therefore follow Chen Zhiguo 陳治國, who interprets *cheng* as "assistant," and translate *chengxiang* as "Assistant Chancellor."[31]

Inscriptions on weapons and one vessel produced in the Qin kingdom between 325 and 238 BC mention six *xiangbang*, who can be identified as the six *xiang* (or, in Lü Buwei's case, *xiangguo*) mentioned in the "Basic Annals of Qin" (see table 1, following). This leaves no doubt that *xiangbang* was the full contemporaneous title for this office, which appears as *xiangguo* in transmitted texts, from the beginning. Hucker's assumption about the evolution of the title from *xiang* to *xiangguo* towards the reign of king Zheng of Qin cannot be confirmed.[32] Wei Ran is identified as *xiangbang* in four inscriptions with three different dates, demonstrating that he was the holder of the highest administrative office and that his identification as merely *chengxiang* in the "Chronological Table" is incorrect. The weapons' dates suggest that the office of *xiangbang* was regularly filled in the period between the appointment of Zhang Yi and the resignation of Wei Ran in 271 BC and was reestablished after a nearly 30-year gap, during the reign of king Zheng, when it was filled by Lü Buwei until his resignation in 238 BC.

29 Han Yangmin, "Qin zhi xiangbang chengxiang yuanyuan kao," p. 34; cf. Liu Xiang 劉翔, "'Xiangguo', 'chengxiang' guancheng kao" '相國', '丞相' 官稱考, *Renwen zazhi* 人文雜志 1987.4, pp. 69–74, esp. 73; Nie Xinmin and Liu Yunhui, "Qin zhi xiangbang chengxiang kao-yi" 秦置相邦丞相考異, *Renwen zazhi* 人文雜志 1984.2, pp. 95–96.

30 Wang Hui 王輝, Yin Xiaqing 尹夏清, and Wang Hong 王宏, "Ba nian xiangbang Xie jun, chengxiang Shu qidou kao" 八年相邦薛君、丞相殳漆豆考, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 考古與文物 2011.2, pp. 63–66.

31 See Chen Zhiguo, "Qin xiangbang yu chengxiang zhi guanxi ji xiangguan wenti bianxi" 秦相邦與丞相之關係及相關問題辨析, *Xianyang shifan xueyuan xuebao* 咸陽師範學院學報 2009.1, pp. 1–6.

32 See n. 4, above.

Table 1. Inscriptions on Objects Commissioned under the Supervision of Chancellors of State and Assistant Chancellors of Qin[33]

COMMISSIONER	IDENTIFICATION IN *BASIC ANNALS OF QIN*	APPOINTED DATE (BC)	YEAR IN REIGN	CALENDAR YEAR (BC)
———Under Lord Huiwen 惠文君/King Hui 惠王, 337–324/310 BC———				
Xiangbang Zhang Yi 相邦張儀, *xiangbang* Yi 相邦儀	Zhang Yi 張儀, *xiang*	328–322, 317–313	13; 2, 4	325, 323, 321
Xiangbang Liao You 相邦繆胥	Yue Yi 樂池, *xiang*	318–317	4	320
———Under King Wu 武王, r. 310–307 BC———				
No inscriptions available	Chuli *zi* 樗里子, *chengxiang* Gan Mao 甘茂, *chengxiang*	309		
———Under King Zhaoxiang 昭襄王, 306–251 BC———				
Xiangbang Ji 相邦疾	Chuli Ji 摚裏疾; Yanjun Ji 嚴君疾, *xiang*	306	1	306
Chengxiang Huan and Shu 丞相奂、殳	n/a		7	300
Chengxiang Chu 丞相觸	n/a		n/a	n/a
Xiangbang Xue *jun* 薛君, *chengxiang* Shu 丞相殳	Xue Wen 薛文 (Mengchang *jun* 孟嘗君); n/a	299–298	8	299
Xiangbang Ran 相邦冉	Rang *hou* Wei Ran 穰侯魏冉/冉, *xiang*	300, 295–292, ?–283, 281–271	20, 21, 32	287, 286, 275
———Under King Xiaowen 孝文王, 250 BC———				
No appointments mentioned, no inscribed objects available.				
———Under King Zhuangxiang 莊襄王, 249–247 BC)———				
No appointments mentioned, no inscribed objects available.				
———Under King Zheng 王政, The First Emperor, 246/221–210 BC———				
Xiangbang Lü Buwei 相邦呂不韋	Lü Buwei 呂不韋, *xiang*, *xiangguo*	249–237	3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9	244–242, 240–238
Chengxiang Qi and Gu 丞相啓、顛	n/a		12	235
Chengxiang Qi and Zhuang 丞相啓、狀	n/a		17	230
Cheng (?) *xiang* Shou X 丞相守□	n/a		26	221
———Under The Second Emperor, 210–207 BC———				
Chengxiang Si 丞相斯	Li Si 李斯, *chengxiang*	214–208	1	209

[33] For the complete list of inscriptions and references, see Xia, "Zhanguo shiqi de 'xiangbang'," pp. 143–45.

Inscriptions mentioning *chengxiang* 丞相 tend to group around 300 BC, on one hand, and between 235 and 209 BC, on the other. Taken together with the data from *Shi ji*, they reflect that during the reigns of the kings Wu and Zhaoxiang, two or more Assistant Chancellors operated, supporting or acting instead of the Chancellor of State. During the chancellorship of Wei Ran, no Assistant Chancellors were possibly appointed or were involved in weapon-making. There are also no mentions in *Shi ji* of *xiangbang* or *chengxiang* between the retirement of Wei Ran in 271 BC and the appointment of Lü Buwei in 249 BC, and equally, there are no inscriptions that used *xiangbang* or *chengxiang* from these two decades. Other inscriptions mentioning *chengxiang*, acting in pairs, date from the reign of king Zheng, after the demise of Lü Buwei. If during the earlier stage, Assistant Chancellors were appointed to support or to temporarily replace the chief administrator, the later decision to split the highest administrative power between two Assistant Chancellors probably aimed at preventing the concentration of power in one person who could challenge royal authority, as happened in Lü Buwei's case. The implied meaning of the title must have been reinterpreted, since the *chengxiang* were no longer assistants of a *xiangbang*, but of the king or, later, emperor. The exclusion of the term "state" from the highest administrative title, probably signified a reduction in the competence of its holders.

Whereas preimperial inscriptions mentioning *chengxiang* appear only on weapons, the texts of the imperial edicts of the first and second emperors of Qin from 221 BC and 209 BC appear on a large number of bronze, iron, and stone hanging weights, bronze measure cups, and bronze tags originally attached to wooden tools.[34] This shows that imperial *chengxiang* supervised the state workshops that produced measurement tools, facilitating the administrative and fiscal control of the empire. Notably, although the imperial edict of the second emperor (r. 209–207 BC) identifies *chengxiang* Li Si and Feng Quji as responsible for the regulation of the measurement system, an inscription on a dagger-axe from the same year suggests that Li Si supervised the arms industry without a counterpart, which could have been a privilege for his status as *zuo chengxiang* (Assistant Chancellor of the Left).[35]

[34] Kin Sum (Sammy) Li, "To Rule by Manufacture: Measurement Regulation and Metal Weight Production in the Qin Empire," *TP* 103 (2017), pp. 1–32.

[35] Cf. *Bei sifu liang* 北私府量, NB819; 1st year *chengxiang* Si *ge* 元年丞相斯戈, NA1404.

Chancellors of State equally supervised the arms industry in Zhao. Forty-four inscriptions dated between 297 and 232 BC feature the title *xiangbang* in combination with twelve different names or bestowed titles. Only for a few of the office-holders can the relevant data be found in the "Hereditary House of Zhao" chapter of *Shi ji*, or elsewhere (table 2).[36] During the reigns of kings Xiaocheng and Daoxiang, two and even three *xiangbang* were active at the same time, probably reflecting the necessity to organize defense in several directions, and, at the same time, suggesting a lower centralization of the Chancellor's administrative power than in Qin. The office of Chancellor was maintained until roughly the time of the conquest of Zhao by Qin. The relatively short intervals between dated inscriptions mentioning a Chancellor suggest that the office was occupied on a fairly regular basis.

The office of *chengxiang* is not attested in Zhao, but six inscriptions mention three different *shouxiang* 守相, who were active during 252-250 BC. This title)probably corresponded to *jia xiangguo* 假相國 or *jia xiang* 假相 (Acting Chancellor), as used in *Shi ji*.[37] Although some scholars suppose that Acting Chancellor took charge when no Chancellor was officially appointed, the dates of inscribed weapons suggest rather that *xiangbang* and *shouxiang* could be appointed simultaneously.[38] Possibly, a *shouxiang*'s function was to stay in the capital when the current *xiangbang* was on a military campaign.[39] *Xiang* did not exist as a stand-alone title in Zhao or anywhere else.

Apart from Qin and Zhao, Chancellors of State probably supervised the weapon-making in Song, as exemplified by two dagger axes.[40] If their attribution to Song is correct, they likely date from the reign of king Yan of Song 宋王偃 (r. 328/318–286 BC), i.e., to 302 and 300 BC respectively.[41]

According to the *Shi ji*, the office of Chancellor of State also existed in Han, Wei, Qi, and Yan, but epigraphic evidence from these

[36] For the complete list of inscriptions and references, see Xia, "Zhanguo shiqi de 'xiangbang'," pp. 145–47.

[37] Ibid., p. 147.

[38] Dong Shan 董珊, "Lun Chunpinghou ji qi xiangguan wenti" 論春平侯及其相關問題, in Beijing daxue kaogu wenbo xueyuan 北京大學考古文博學院, ed., *Kaoguxue yanjiu* 考古學研究 (Beijing: Kexue, 2006) 6, pp. 446–60, esp. 449–50.

[39] Cf. "The First Emperor went on a tour, the Assistant Chancellor of the Left, Li Si, accompanied him, while the Assistant Chancellor of the Right, Feng Quji, remained [in the capital] 始皇出游. 左丞相斯從, 右丞相去疾守." See *SJ*, 6, p. 260.

[40] Xu, *Zhanguo youming bingqi*, pp. 305–6, 675, with further references.

[41] See Xia, "Zhanguo shiqi de 'xiangbang'," p. 150.

Table 2. Inscriptions on Weapons Commissioned under the Supervision of Chancellors of State and Acting Chancellors of Zhao

COMMISSIONER	IDENTIFICATION IN TRANSMITTED TEXTS	APPOINTED DATE (BC)	YEAR IN REIGN	CALENDAR YEAR (BC)
———Under King Wuling 武靈王, 325–299, d. 295 BC———				
Xiangbang Zhao Bao 相邦趙豹	Zhao Bao趙豹, *xiang*. Yangwen *jun* 陽文君, since 272 Pingyang *jun* 平陽君	325	29	297
———Under King Huiwen 惠文, 298–266 BC——				
Xiangbang Yang'an *jun* 相邦陽安君	Li Dui 李兌(?), *Sikou* 司寇		7	292
Wucheng *xianbang* Tian 武城相邦畋	Tian Wen 田文, Mengchang *jun* 孟嘗君		7	292
Xiangbang Lin Xiangru 相邦藺相如	Lin Xiangru 藺相如, *shangqing* 上卿	279	20	279
Bangxiang Mang Pi 邦相邙皮	n/a		23	276
——— Under King Xiaocheng 孝成, r. 265–245——				
Anping *xiangbang situ* Tian *zi* 安平相邦司徒田子	Qi Anping *jun* Tian Dan 齊安平君田單, *xiang*	264	1	265
Chunping *xiang-bang* 春平相邦	See Chunping *hou*		4	261
[Shou?] xiang [Wu] Xiang *jun* [守?] 相 [武] 襄君	Wuxiang *jun* 武襄君 Yue Cheng 樂乘, *da jiang* 大將, *jia xiang* 假相	252	n/a	
Shouxiang Lian Po 守相廉頗	Lian Po 廉頗 *jiangjun* 將軍, *jia xiangguo* 假相國, Xinping *jun* 信平君	251	15	251
Xiangbang Jianxin *jun* 相邦建信君	Jianxin *jun* 建信君		12, 18, 20	254, 248, 246
Xiangbang Pingguo *jun* 相邦平國君	n/a		18	248
Xiangbang Chunping *hou* 相邦春平侯	Chunping *hou* 春平侯		15, 17, 18	251, 249, 248
Shouxiang Chunping *hou* 守相春 (?) 平侯	Chunping *hou* 春平侯		16	250
———Under King Daoxiang 悼襄 (r. 244–236) or King Qian 王遷, r. 236–228——				
Xiangbang Jianxin *jun* 相邦建信君	Jianxin *jun* 建信君		1, 3, 4, 6, 8	244, 242, 241, 239, 237
Xiangbang Chun-ping *hou* 相邦春平侯	Chunping *hou* 春平侯		1, 2, 3, 5	244–242, 240 or 236–234, 232

states is not available. Chu preserved its own nomenclature with the *lingyin* 令尹 (commanding officer, often translated as prime minister) as the highest official, established during the seventh century BC at the latest.[42] The bronze seal with the cast characters "*shang xiangbang xi* 上相邦璽" (The Seal of the Superior Chancellor of State) excavated from the Chu tomb D1M1 at Zhenshan 真山 near Suzhou, Jiangsu province, supports that shortly before the multistate political system broke down, Chu adjusted its system to the "international" standard.[43]

In addition, we have a seal of unclear provenance bearing the inscription "Xiongnu *xiangbang* 匈奴相邦" (Xiongnu Chancellor of State). Supposedly, it was made in Zhao for a leader of an allied or subordinated Xiongnu group.[44]

Different systems of industrial supervision, not requiring the involvement of the highest officials in quality control, may be responsible for the absence of weapons featuring the title *xiangbang* from other major kingdoms.

To compare, during the Warring States period in Chu, commanding officers did not regularly supervise weapon-making, although they might have on special occasions.[45] Chu weapons more likely made for

[42] See Tan Liming 譚黎明, *Chunqiu Zhanguo shiqi Chu guo guanzhi yanjiu* 春秋戰國時期楚國官制研究 (Shanghai: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2017), pp. 18–24. Following Chu, its satellites, such as Xu 徐, introduced the office of *lingyin* in their nomenclatures; see Xu *lingyin lupan* 徐令尹爐盤, JC10391.

[43] Suzhou Bowuguan 蘇州博物館, *Zhenshan Dong Zhou mudi: Wu Chu guizu mudi de fajue yu yanjiu* 真山東周墓地, 吳楚貴族墓地的發掘與研究 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1995), pp. 69–70. *Shiji* states twice that king Kaolie 考烈 (r. 262–238 BC) appointed Huang Xie 黃歇 (Lord Chunshen 春申君) as *xiang*. The entry in the chronological table has the appearance of being copied from an official text: "The first year of King Kaolie of Chu. Qin annexed our Zhou. Huang Xie was created Chancellor 楚考烈王元年. 秦取我州. 黃歇爲相"; *SJ* 15, p. 746; cf. *SJ* 78, p. 2394. Yet *Shi ji*'s "Basic Annals of Chu" states: "King Kaolie made the Assistant of the Left the Commanding Officer, enfeoffed him in Wu, and granted him the title Lord Chunshen 考烈王以左徒爲令尹, 封以吳, 號春申君"; *SJ* 40, p. 1735. It is conceivable that Huang Xie combined both titles, *lingyin* and *xiang[bang]*, to use for internal and external communication.

[44] Wang, "Xiongnu xiangbang yinbo," pp. 914–15; Huang Shengzhang 黃盛璋, "'Xiongnu xiangbang' yin zhi guobie, niandai ji xiangguan wenti" '匈奴相邦'印之國別、年代及相關問題, *WW* 1983.8, pp. 67–72.

[45] The names of two Chu *lingyin* appear on weapons of display made for their own use, purchased by the National Museum of China; *Lingyin ziyong ge* 令尹自用戈, NB1800, and *Lingyin* Xin Zhang *jian* 令尹辛章劍, NB1801. In 2013, an inscription incised on a crossbow trigger from a private collection (the 29th year *nuji* 二十九年弩機, NB1349) was published. See Wu Zhenfeng 吳鎮烽, and Zhu Yanling 朱豔玲, "Er shi jiu nian nuji kao" 二十九年弩機考, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 2013.1, pp. 25–27, 44). The authors were not able to make a rubbing because the incisions were too shallow, thus could produce black-and-white images based on a photograph. They suggest that the inscription refers to a war mentioned in *Shiji* and dates from the 29th year of King Huai of Chu (r. 328–299 BC). It states that Chu gave Qin crossbows and arrows for the return of bronzes, silk textiles, slaves, and other towns plundered by the Qin army. To

use by recruits, as similarly done in various other states, could be eventually inscribed with place names or bear the titles of local authorities and, occasionally, names of the craftsmen.[46] In contrast, in Yan weapons inscribed with the titles and personal names of Yan kings have been excavated from a presumed weapon-making workshop on the site of the Yan capital. This inscribing practice clearly deviates from the norms of the central states, where the kings' personal names were never indicated even in inscriptions on ritual vessels and bells. The considerations of the Yan weapon commissioners are not fully clear, but, possibly, they intended to glorify the royal house and to strengthen the commitment of warriors to their sovereigns. However, not all Yan weapons bore the royal names. Many other weapons were commissioned by military officials, or by local authorities.[47]

Even in Qin and Zhao, not all weapons were produced by central authorities.[48] Probably Chancellors of State, Assistant Chancellors, and Acting Chancellors personally commissioned only the production of certain weapon series. In outlying, recently annexed, regions, where the Chancellors would not be likely to attend in personal, for example, Shu commandery 蜀郡 in Sichuan, and Shang commandery 上郡 in northern Shaanxi, to have inscribed their names could indicate that the center remotely controlled the local administrations.[49]

Although the Chancellor of State not always or not necessarily engaged in weapon-making, the state (*bang*) often acted as a commissioner of weapons. In Zhao, the central authorities supervising the arms in-

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meet this end, "the *lingyin* produced 5,000 bows and 400,000 arrows 令尹作弩五千、矢冊萬." Inscriptions on crossbows are very rare and usually short, ranging between 2 and 19 characters. With its 66 characters, the "29th year crossbow trigger" is outstanding, and still awaits a thorough investigation. If genuine, it was produced to commemorate a unique transaction rather than a routine procedure.

46 See Wu Liangbao 吳良寶, "Xin jian Yangling gongyin ge ji xiangguan wenti yanjiu" 新見羕陵攻尹戈及相關問題研究, *Jilin daxue shehui kexue xuebao* 吉林大學社會科學學報 2015.1, pp. 149–53; Xu, *Zhanguo youming bingqi*, pp. 234–46.

47 Shen Rong 沈融, "Yan bingqi mingwen geshi, neirong ji qi xiangguan wenti" 燕兵器銘文格式、內容及其相關問題, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 考古與文物 1994.3, pp. 91–99.

48 Based on the data collected by Xu Shihe, it can be estimated that from Zhao 43% of inscribed weapons of middle- and late-Warring States period, out of a total of 122 items, were commissioned by central authorities, including *xiangbang*, *shouxiang*, and *bang sikou*. In Qin, from a total of 269, the share of inscribed weapons of the same period and the imperial period commissioned by *xiangbang*, *chengxiang*, *shaofu* 少府, *sigong* 寺工, *shu bang* 屬邦, and *zhaoshi* 詔事, constitutes 39%. The rest was commissioned by various local authorities. See Xu, *Zhanguo youming bingqi*, pp. 642–50, 677–90.

49 Sun Wenbo 孫聞博, *Chu bing tianxia: Qin junzhu jiquan yanjiu* 初並天下, 秦君主集權研究 (Xi'an: Xibei daxue chubanshe, 2021), p. 52.

dustry further included *bang sikou* 邦司寇 (state supervisor of robbers),[50] *bang fu* 邦府 (State Treasury)[51] and *bang ku* 邦庫 (State Arsenal).[52] The office of the *bang sikou* also existed in Wei; it supervised this state's central weapon-making facilities.[53] The State Arsenal (*bang ku*) also existed in Han.[54] This means that in Wei and Han, the term *bang* was also applied to the bureaucratic administrative structure of the state. However, in Han the arsenals 庫 and the supervisor of robbers 司寇 were usually referred to without the *bang* attribute.[55] The Chancellors of State of Wei and Han did not necessarily engage in weapon-making because they were purely civil officials, as, according to some scholars, they ought to have been based on the traditional bifurcation.[56] Among other reasons might be that, for example, there was an efficient system of supervision by prefects (*ling* 令) in the capital and large cities, and the less compact, heterogeneous political-geographical layout of Wei, which was rooted in its historical trajectory, with flourishing local arms industries.[57]

Inscriptions shed little light on chancellors' activities beyond the control of weapon-making and of the systems of metrology. Chancellors' names accidentally appear in inscriptions on vessels made for royal households, such as the lacquer stemmed platter from Qin, or on the bronze flask of king Cuo of Zhongshan informing that the king commanded his Chancellor of State Zhou 賙 to select metal for casting the flask from the war booty captured in Yan.[58] This does not mean that the Chancellor of State regularly supervised lacquer and bronze production in general: Zhou commanded the army in the war against Yan, and, therefore, he was likely responsible for the booty's redistribution. A Zhao inscription on a cauldron from the reign of king Xiaocheng shows that artisans usually involved in weapon-making and supervised

[50] E.g., 12th year *bang sikou* Zhao Xin *jian* 十二年邦司寇趙新劍, JC11676; 7th year *bang sikou* Fu Sheng *mao* 七年邦司寇富勝矛, JC11545; 2d year *bang sikou* Zhao Huo *pi* 二年邦司寇趙或鈹, NB1261.

[51] *Bang shaofu* Zhao Jian *ge* 邦少府趙閒戈, JC11390.

[52] *Shouxiang* Lian Po *pi* 守相廉頗鈹, JC11670; Lin Xiangru *ge* 藺相如戈, NA1416.

[53] Xu Shihe, *Zhanguo youming bingqi*, p. 177.

[54] 18th year *zhongzi* Han Zeng *ge* 十八年冢子韓增戈, JC11376; 6th year *zhongzi* Han Zheng *mao* 六年冢子韓政矛, NB1742.

[55] Škrabal, "Where There is Unity, Order Results," pp. 334–35, 338.

[56] A clear distinction between chancellors as civil officials and generals as military officials was assumed, e.g., in Bodde, "Feudalism in China," p. 68. Yet, Bodde did not claim this in "State and Empire of Ch'in," p. 34.

[57] See Xu, *Zhanguo youming bingqi*, pp. 175–80.

[58] Zhongshan *wang* Cuo *hu*, JC9735.

by the Chancellor of State could be commanded to cast a ritual vessel for the latter's subordinate, but this also was likely a special case.[59] Utilitarian inscriptions on vessels indicating their capacity and weight never mention Chancellors. This suggests that bronze-casting in general was not their regular business.

Although the title Chancellor of State existed in the Three Jin period at a point earlier than in Qin, the subordination of the arms industry to the state's chief administrator was plausibly a Qin, or, more precisely, Shang Yang's 商鞅 (d. 338 BC) innovation. Shang Yang began commissioning weapons in his own name in his capacity as *daliangzao* 大良造 (grand excellent producer) and *shuzhang* 庶長 (chief of the multitudes) no later than from the 13th year (349 BC) of duke Xiao 孝公 of Qin (r. 361–338 BC) onwards.[60] Notably, although Shang Yang is often regarded as the first Qin Chancellor, he never held this title.[61] At the beginning of the reign of lord Huiwen 惠文君, the later King Hui 惠王 (337–324/310), the highest administrative office continued to be defined as *daliangzao shuzhang*.[62] When Zhang Yi, a native of

[59] 5th year Chunping *xiangbang* Ge De *ding* 五年春平相邦葛得鼎, NB1186.

[60] 13th year *daliangzao* Yang *qi* 十三年大良造鞅戟, JC11279; 16th year *daliangzao shuzhang* Yang *dun* 十六年大良造庶長鞅鐓, JC11911; 16th year *daliangzao shuzhang* Yang *pi* 十六年大良造庶長鞅鈹, NB1310; 19th year *daliangzao* Yang *shu zun* 十九年大良造鞅殳鐏, NA0737; [Unreadable] *zao shuzhang* Yang *zun* □造庶長鞅鐏, NA1560. Most authors prefer to transliterate rather than to translate *daliangzao*. Recently, Robert Gassmann has proposed "Great Excellent Achiever"; Robert H. Gassmann, *Menzius: Eine kritische Rekonstruktion mit kommentierter Neuübersetzung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), p. 74, n. 155). For the analogous title *dashangzao* 大上造, the translation "Greater Leader of the Sovereign's Accomplished" was proposed; Anthony J. Barbieri-Low and Robin D. S. Yates, *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China: A Study with Critical Edition and Translation of the Legal Texts from Zhangjiashan Tomb No. 247*, Sinica Leidensia 126 (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 1, p. xxii). It should be noted that *zao* 造 appears only seldom in Warring States literature, but it is a standard term in inscriptions on bronze objects of all kinds produced in state-run workshops. In this context it means "to produce, to manufacture," and, possibly, represents a conscious contrast to *zuo* 作 "to make, to create," used by Zhou elites for commissioning ritual vessels and bells.

[61] See Bodde, "State and Empire of Ch'in," p. 34; Charles Sanft, "The Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE)," in Victor Cunrui Xiong and Kenneth J. Hammond, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Imperial Chinese History* (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 12–24, esp. 13. This assumption in the secondary literature is probably due to the misreading of Shang Yang's biography, according to which he oversaw Qin for ten years 商君相秦十年; *SJ* 68, p. 2233. This sentence has been translated as "Lord Shang had been Chancellor of Ch'in for ten years"; see J. J. L. Duyvendak, trans., *The Book of Lord Shang: A Classic of the Chinese School of Law* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1974), p. 23; or "The Lord of Shang was Prime Minister of Ch'in for ten years," in William H. Nienhauser, ed., *The Grand Scribe's Records. Volume VII. The Memoirs of Pre-Han China* (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1994), p. 94. However, neither the "Basic Annals of Qin" nor the "Chronological Table" identify Shang Yang as *xiang*, but only as *daliangzao*; *SJ* 15, p. 722.

[62] This combination of titles is attested in a unique document, the so-called "Qin tile certificate of the bestowal of ancestral settlement" (Qin *feng zong yi washu* 秦封宗邑瓦書), acciden-

Wei, who previously had served in Zhao, arrived to Qin fifteen years after Shang Yang's death, he might have convinced the Qin king to appoint him as a *xiangbang* to match the administrative nomenclature already established in the Three Jin and, perhaps, elsewhere in the east.[63] Following the already established Qin practice, Zhang Yi – as inscriptions reveal – also took charge of supervising weapon-making. All subsequent Qin Chancellors maintained this policy. The right to commission weapons certainly formed an important foundation of the Chancellor's power in Qin.

The chronology of inscriptions available today also suggests that the Qin administrative innovation was adopted in Song and Zhao not immediately: Song weapons commissioned by a Chancellor of State date from 302 and 300 BC, while the earliest Zhao example dates from 297 BC, nearly three decades later than the earliest commission by Chancellor of State Zhang Yi in Qin. The decision to assign the supervision of weapon-making to a chancellor may have resulted from the transfers of administrative practices among Qin, Zhao, and Song, facilitated by guest-officials around 300 BC.[64] With the extinction of Song in 286 BC, the system of supervision of weapon-making by Chancellors of State persisted only in Qin and Zhao.

Weapons were made by craftsmen who were literate enough to write their own names and, probably, to read the rest of the inscriptions. Possibly, some recruits who used these weapons were also literate. The names of the Chancellors of State or of other state institutions in inscriptions on weapons increased the awareness of the state as, in the words of Andrew Meyer, "a public trust and an abstract focus of loyalty" among relatively broad social circles.[65] Even if such inscriptions were initially made for quality control, their potential function in spreading the state ideology should not be underestimated.

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tally discovered in Hu 戶 county near Xi'an in 1948 and presumably dated to Lord Huiwen's 4th year (334 BC). See Shang Zhiru 尙志儒, "Qin feng zongyi washu de ji ge wenti" 秦封宗邑瓦書的幾個問題, *Wenbo* 1986.6, pp. 43–49. The personal name of the *daliangzao shuzhang* mentioned in this text was You 遊. This was probably the same person as *xiangbang* Liao You 相邦樛斿, identified as Yue Yi 樂池 (see table 1). I assume that the 4th year in *xiangbang* Liao You's inscription uses the year-count starting with 324 BC, when the Qin ruler assumed the royal title, since this date only slightly deviates from the dates of Yue Yi's chancellorship, as given in *Shi ji*. I suppose that Yue Yi was appointed with an old Qin title before the arrival and appointment of Zhang Yi and was reappointed with the new title *xiangbang* when Zhang Yi temporarily left Qin.

63 This speculation about Zhang Yi's agency in the adjustment of official nomenclature can be justified partly due to his having renown then as a great political strategist.

64 Xia, "Zhanguo shiqi de 'xiangbang'," p. 155.

65 Meyer, *To Rule All Under Heaven*, p. 545.

THE CONCEPT OF STATE IN WARRING STATES BRONZE INSCRIPTIONS

In the context of the administrative inscriptions discussed in the previous section, *bang* clearly referred to the bureaucratic structure that we can unambiguously recognize as "the state." Inscriptions on weapons of display and sacrificial vessels shed additional light on the Warring States concept of *bang*.

Lengthy bronze inscriptions from this period are very rare, so the number of contexts in which the term *bang* appears is limited. The mausoleum of king Cuo of Zhongshan included a horse-and-chariot pit that has yielded a ceremonial bronze axe, possibly, commissioned by Cuo's ancestor duke Wu 武公 (r. 414–407 BC). It states:

> The Son of Heaven established [our] *bang*. The Lord of Zhongshan personally made this military metal device to make his multitudes respectful.[66] 天子建邦. 中山侯忿(自?)作茲軍鈚, 以儆厥眾.

This inscription probably commemorates the official recognition of the ruler of Zhongshan as one of the *zhuhou* 諸侯 (Regional Lords) by the Zhou king Weilie 威烈王 (r. 425–402 BC) in 414 BC and identifies Zhongshan as a *bang*. In this context, the state represents a territorial unit, which, however, is not fully autonomous, because the Zhongshan leader recognized the superiority of the Zhou king.

Inscriptions on weapons of display commissioned by two kings of the southern, culturally and linguistically distinct, kingdom of Yue 越 for their own use glorify the Yue *bang*.[67] One inscription, probably cast during the first quarter of the fourth century BC, celebrates recent territorial acquisitions and underlines the importance of shifting the royal residence for controlling new frontiers. This highlights territorial aspects of *bang* as a political unit ruled by a king:

> The former kings of the Yue *bang* were not yet able to reside in Suyin, but when Chaxu became the king, he began residing in Suyin. Chaxu therefore cast this dagger-axe for the initial use of recuperating these borderlands.[68] 戊(越)邦之先王未得居乍(蘇)金(陰), 就差徐之爲王, 司(始)得居乍(蘇)金(陰). 差徐以鑄其元用戈, 以攸(修)□邊土.

[66] Zhongshan *hou yue* 中山侯鉞, JC11758. The meaning of 鈚 is unclear. I translate it as "metal device."

[67] Yue *wang* Chaxu *ge* 越王差徐戈, NB1020; Yue *wang* Zhuzhi Buguang *jian* 越王者旨不光劍, NB1221.

[68] Yue *wang* Chaxu *ge*, NB1020. See Dong Shan 董珊, "Yue wang Chaxu ge kao" 越王差徐戈考, *Gugong bowuyuan yuekan* 故宮博物院月刊 2008.4, pp. 24–39.

In Qi 齊, that is, the old Zhou polity established during the mid-eleventh century BC, the ruling lineage surnamed Jiang 姜 had been formally replaced by the ministerial Tian 田 lineage in 391 BC after one century of informal domination.[69] The Qi rulers from the Tian family felt themselves not quite at home there. In inscriptions on their bronze vessels, they called themselves Chen *hou* 陳侯 (lords of Chen), underlining their descent from the ruling house of the defunct Chen 陳 polity, surnamed Gui 嬀, as old and distinguished as the Jiang-surnamed lineage that they ousted from Qi. They requested their ancestors, the former rulers of Chen, to "protect the Qi *bang*" (*bao you Qi bang* 保有齊邦), obviously, referring to the Qi kingdom.[70] A non-ruling member of the Tian lineage boasted in the inscriptions on trophy vessels that he had seized them from Yan 燕 and Bo 亳 *bang*, the latter probably formed by a non-Sinitic northern group.[71] This inscription from the reign of king Xuan 宣 of Qi (r. 319–301 BC) confirms that in the Qi political vocabulary, both their own state and their peer polities, large and small, were referred to as *bang*.

The case of Yan and Bo highlights a situation whereby on the fringes of large, expansive kingdoms, smaller autonomous polities still survived or even emerged with the support of stronger neighbors who sought to instrumentalize them for the protection of their own borders. This could also be the case of a Xiongnu *bang*, mentioned above, which, accepting the *xiangbang* seal from Zhao, might have recognized political subordination to Zhao. Inscriptions on bronze and lacquer artifacts from a late-Warring States-period tomb in Miyang county 泌陽, Henan province, reflect a comparable case of the Ping'an *bang* 平安邦, probably, a satellite of Wei, later annexed by Qin.[72]

69 The usurpation was formally recognized by the Zhou king in 386 BC. See Lewis, "Warring States Political History," pp. 598–99.

70 10th and 14th year Chen *hou* Wu *dui* 十年, 十四年陳侯午敦, Chen *hou* Wu *gui* 陳侯午簋 (391, 387 BC), JC4648, 4646–4647, 4145; Chen *hou* Yinzi *dun* 陳侯因資錞, JC4649. These rulers can be identified as Tian Wu 田午, who ruled as Duke Huan 桓 (r. 375–357) of Qi, and his son Tian Yinqi 田因齊, who ruled as King Wei 威 (r. 356–320).

71 Chen Zhang *hu* 陳璋壺, JC9703, 9975. See Lin Yun 林沄, "'Yan Bo' he 'Yan Bo bang' xiaoyi" '燕亳'和'燕亳'邦小議, *Shixue jikan* 史學集刊 1994.2, pp. 56–59; Shang Youping 尙友萍, "'Yan bo' yu 'Yan bo bang' kaobian" '燕亳'與'燕亳邦'考辨, *Wenwu chunqiu* 文物春秋 2014.5, pp. 3–12.

72 Cf. Li Xueqin 李學勤, "Qin guo wenwu xin renshi" 秦國文物的新認識, *WW* 1980.9, pp. 25–31; He Nu 何弩, "Biyang Ping'an jun fu fu mu suo chu qiwu jinian ji guobie de zaikao" 泌陽平安君夫婦墓所出器物紀年及國別的再考證, *Zhongyuan wenwu* 中原文物 1992.2, pp. 58–62; Xia, "Zhanguo shiqi de 'xiangbang'," p. 151.

Inscriptions demonstrate that no later than 242 BC, Qin established the institution of Dependent States (*shu bang* 屬邦), for which the Chancellor and, later on, Assistant Chancellors commissioned weapons.[73] Even before the formation of the empire, Qin had issued a "Statute on Dependent States" ("Shu bang lü" 屬邦律), whose fragment was excavated from the Qin tomb at Shuihudi, Hubei province. It regulated the establishment of dependencies among submitted polities.[74] So far, all weapons with inscriptions mentioning *shu bang* can be traced to Qin. However, the examples of the Xiongnu *bang* and especially Ping'an *bang*, dated before 242 BC, may suggest that Qin formalized the practice that already existed in the Three Jin.[75] Applied to large and small autonomous, semi-autonomous, or dependent units, the term *bang* reflects the geopolitical aspect of the state.

The tomb of king Cuo of Zhongshan has yielded the already mentioned flask with a 447-character inscription, made upon the king's order by his Chancellor of State. Apart from the title *xiangbang*, the term *bang* appears there three more times. In the 457-character inscription cast on the outer surface of a cauldron also commissioned by king Cuo, the word *bang* appears ten times, referring both to Zhongshan and to neighboring polities. For instance, it quotes the king's speech:

> …Alas! How distant! Heaven has its model for us in this *bang* of his! Therefore, I, the Lone Man, entrusted the responsibility of the *bang* to him [i.e. Chancellor Zhou] and took off to wander about, without thought of fear or alarm. Earlier, our Former Ancestor King Huan and Radiating Deceased Father, King Cheng, personally attended diligently to the Altar of Soil and Millet and traveled the Four Quarters to express concern and to labor for [our] *bang* [and] family. Now, our Old [Chancellor] Zhou personally led the multitudes of the Three Armies in order to punish the unrighteous *bang* [Yan]. Beating drumsticks and ringing bells, they expanded the demarcated boundaries [*feng jiang*] by several hundred square *li* with an array of several tens of cities, making our kingdom match a large *bang*. <…>[76]

[73] See Sun Yancheng 孫言誠, "Qin Han de shu bang he shu guo" 秦漢的屬邦和屬國, *Shixue yuekan* 1987.2, pp. 12–19.

[74] Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu, *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian* 睡虎地秦墓竹简 (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1990), p. 65. See Yuri Pines, "The Question of Interpretation: Qin History in Light of New Epigraphic Sources," *EC* 29 (2004), pp. 1–44, esp. 25, with further references.

[75] Xia Yuting, "Zhanguo shiqi de 'xiangbang'," pp. 151–52.

[76] Zhongshan *wang* Cuo *ding* 中山王𥘅鼎, JC2840; Cook, "Zhongshan wang Cuo ding;" Gilbert L. Mattos, "Eastern Zhou Bronze Inscriptions," in Edward L. Shaughnessy, ed., *New*

…於虐, 攸哉, 天其有型, 于哉厥邦, 是以寡人委任之邦, 而去之遊. 亡臼懅惕之呂慮. 昔者, 吾先祖趄王、昭考成王, 身勤社稷, 行四方, 以憂勞邦家, 今吾老賙, 親率參軍之眾, 以征不宜 (義) 之邦, 奮振鐸, 闢啓封疆, 方數百里, 列城數十, 克敵大邦. <…>

This inscription, referring to the war between Zhongshan and Yan in 314 BC, operates with the binomial *bang jia* 邦家 (polity [and] family), referring to the family, or lineage of the ruler, which had already became a stable *topos* since the Western Zhou period.[77] It shows that the narrator understood *bang* as a sovereign territorial unit with "demarcated boundaries 封疆" embracing a space equivalent to a square with the sides of several hundred *li*. This text distinguishes between small and large *bang*, equally using the categories that were also common since the Western Zhou period.[78] What was probably new is that *bang* was now viewed not simply as a territory as such but as an animate body which behaves in either a proper or improper way, for example, the "unrighteous 不宜(義)" state of Yan.

The perception of the state as an animate agent can be already observed in a somewhat earlier inscription. Zheng 鄭, one of the major polities of the Spring and Autumn period, established in the late 9th century BC by a secondary branch of the Zhou royal house, was eliminated in 375 BC. A descendant of its last ruler, duke Kang 康公 (r. 395–375 BC), who found refuge in Luoyang, the capital of the Zhou king, cast a bronze cauldron with the following sorrow-filled inscription:

> In the standard (i.e., first) month, day *geng-wu*, Jia said: "I, the offspring of the Zheng *bang*, left behind my mother and father at a young age. [Now, I] cast this libation vessel, the yellow-[metal] cauldron. My [late] ruler already rests in peace and was not able to obtain it. Jia's [title] is the "Third-Born of the Accomplished Sorrow." The cauldron of the Third-Born of the Accomplished Sorrow will be used eternally for sacrifices. [They will] decay below on earth to serve Kang *gong*, as there is nothing that can be inherited.[79] 正月庚午, 嘉曰: 余鄭邦之產, 少去母父, 作鑄飤器黃鏐, 君

Sources of Early Chinese History: An Introduction to the Reading of Inscritptions and Manuscripts (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1997), pp. 85–123, esp. 104–11, slightly amended by the present author.

77 In Western Zhou inscriptions, *bang* often denotes a geopolitical unit controlled by an aristocratic lineage. For this period, "polity" is therefore a more suitable translation than "state." Cf. Mao *gong ding* 毛公鼎, JC2841; *Shu* Xiangfu Yu *gui* 叔向父禹簋, JC4242.

78 Cf. Zhong *yan* 中甗, JC949; Jufu *xu gai* 駒父盨蓋, JC4464.

79 Ai Cheng *shu ding* 哀成叔鼎, JC2782. See Zhao Zhenhua 趙振華, "Ai Cheng shu ding de mingwen yu niandai" 哀成叔鼎的銘文與年代, *WW* 1981.7, pp. 68–69.

既安 𢍏(惠), 亦弗其獲. 嘉是唯哀成叔, 哀成叔之鼎, 永用禋祀, 朽于下土, 台(以) 事康公, 勿或能嗣.

In this example, *bang* is perhaps represented as an animate body that can give birth (*chan* 產) to people.[80] This suggests a strong self-identification of the protagonist with his home polity as a "motherland," underlined by the references to mother and father in the next passage.

Apart from the *xiangbang*'s seal from Zhenshan, Chu has not so far yielded any other Warring States-period bronze inscriptions featuring the term *bang*. Nevertheless, the inscription of a duke of Chu, dated around 800 BC, calls Chu a large *bang*, while the inscription on the bell of lord Yu of Zeng 曾侯與, dated about 500 BC, mentions Chu Jing *bang* 楚荆邦.[81] This shortage of inscriptions is more than compensated by the wealth of excavated Warring States Chu manuscripts, which became the most important source of comparison for transmitted literature. For instance, *bang* appears in the sense "state" in six manuscripts excavated from the late-fourth century BC Chu tomb in Guodian 郭店, in Jingmen, Hubei province.[82] Among unprovenanced Chu manuscripts in the collection of the Tsing-hua University, the "Xi nian" 繫年 ("Appended Annals") and "Chu ju" 楚居 ("Residences of Chu"), dated from the late-fourth century BC, reflect the Chu perspective on history.[83] "Xi nian" mentions individually Chu, Qin, Jin, Cai 蔡, Chen 陳, and Wu 吳 *bang*.[84] In the text of "Chu ju," which narrates the relocation of

[80] Note that *chan* can mean both "to give birth /to be born" and "to manufacture/to be manufactured" in Warring States literature. In manuscripts, *chan* often means "to be born, to be alive," synonymous with *sheng* 生; Zheng Yifan, "An Examination of the Liye No. 8-461 'Wooden Tablet of Nomenclature Changes' and Its Implications for the Traditional View of the First Emperor's (259–210 BCE) 'Unification of Script'," *AOASH* 77 (2024), pp. 1–25, esp. 12–14.

[81] Chu *gong* Ni *zhong* 楚公逆鐘, NA891; Zeng *hou* Yu *zhong* 曾侯與鐘, NB488.

[82] These include *Laozi* 老子 A (slips 29–30), B (slips 17–18), C (3); "Zi yi" 緇衣 (slips 1, 20), "Wu xing" 五行 (slip 29), "Zun de yi" 尊德義 (slip 24), "Cheng zhi wen zhi" 成之聞之 (slip 30), and "Yu cong" 語叢 D (slips 6, 8, 14, 24). See Liu Gang 劉釗, *Guodian Chu jian jiaoshi* 郭店楚墓竹簡校釋 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin, 2005), pp. 3, 29, 37, 48–49, 71, 124, 138, 223–24.

[83] Qinghua Daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu yu baohu zhongxin 清華大學出土文獻研究與保護中心, ed., *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2010–2023) 1, pp. 180–92, and vol. 2. See Yuri Pines, "Zhou History and Historiography: Introducing the Bamboo Manuscript Xinian," *TP* 100 (2014), pp. 287–324; Yuri Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed: The Bamboo Manuscript Xinian and Early Chinese Historiography* (New York, NY: Columbia U.P., 2020).

[84] See "Xi nian" (slips 39, 83, 104, 108, 136). Chap. 2 in "Xi nian," referring to the events of the political crisis during the reign of king You of Zhou (r. 781–771 BC), mentions *bang jun zhu zheng* 邦君者正 ("rulers of states and all the administrators") who established King You's younger brother as a king, and *bang jun zhu hou* 邦君者侯 ("rulers of states and all the lords") who ceased attending the Zhou court ("Xi nian," slip 8; cf. Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed*, p. 157). The latter expression can be found in an earlier Eastern Zhou transmitted text, namely the ode "Yu wu zheng" 雨無正 in *Shijing*, which, in turn, can be compared to Western Zhou

the Chu royal residences, *bang* without an added proper name always refers to Chu.[85] There is therefore no doubt that in the Warring States-period Chu vocabulary the standard word for "state" was *bang*, while *bang* meant "state" both in territorial and administrative sense.[86]

A reader of transmitted texts, familiar with the concept of a state carried in a different word, *guo* 國, may be surprised to find out that although this word occasionally appears in Warring States inscriptions, it was neither used as a name of an administrative structure, nor combined with a name of a contemporaneous kingdom. Only fourteen Warring States inscriptions in the *Digital Archives* (ca. 0.7% of the total number) feature the character *huo* 或, usually normalized as *guo* 國, or the character *guo* 國 proper. These fourteen inscriptions contain only ten individual texts. In four of them, Guo is the proper name of a lineage or person. In four others, *guo* makes up part of a place name. These are: Shang *guo* 商國, referring to the capital city of Song; Jin *guo* 晉國, referring (twice) to a city in Wei (the former Jin 晉 capital Xintian 新田); and Changguo 昌國, referring to a small territorial domain in Qi. In an inscription on a booty vessel captured by Yan from Qi, *guo* probably means "region," or "territory," while the bestowed honorific title of the Zhao's "Chancellor Lord Pingguo *jun* 平國君" can be translated as "Pacifying the Regions," or "Pacifying the World." Thus, *guo* was polyvalent and referred either to a very large metaphysical entity under the rule of the true king, or to much smaller territorial units making

bronze inscriptions where the term *bang jun* also appears (Yoshimoto Michimasa 吉本道雅, "Shūshitsu tōsen saikō" 周室東遷再考, *Kyōto daigaku bungakubu kenkyū kiyō* 京都大學文學部研究紀要 56 (2017), pp. 1–58, esp. 22–23). The interpretation of *bang jun* in bronze inscriptions as referring to the nobility of the royal domain in contrast to regional lords was proposed by Tang Lan 唐蘭 and was largely accepted until the beginning of the 21st c.; e.g., Chen Yingjie 陳英傑, "Jinwen zhong 'jun' zi zhi yi ji xiangguan wenti tanxi" 金文中'君'字之意義及相關問題探析, *Zhongguo wenzi* 中國文字 33 (2007), pp. 107–52. But it has been challenged lately. Today, many scholars suppose that *bang jun* referred to rulers of various polities in various places who were not officially recognized by the Zhou king as *zhu hou*. See an overview in Sun Wenbo 孫聞博, "Er wang bingli yu Qin wei zhuhou: jian lun Zuo zhuan Shi ji de shiliaoxue, lishi xushi he niandaixue wenti" 二王並立與秦爲諸侯, 兼論左傳史記的史料學、歷史敘事和年代學問題, *Zhongguo gaoxiao shehui* kexue 中國高校社會科學 2025.6, pp. 126–35, esp. 125.

85 See "Chu ju" (slips 14–16).

86 Yuri Pines acknowledges that *guo ren* 國人 corresponds to *bang ren* 邦人 in excavated texts but assumes that *bang* refers both to state and capital. Thus, he calls *guo ren* as mentioned in *Zuo zhuan* "capital-dwellers"; Yuri Pines, *China's Aristocratic Age* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton U.P., 2026), p. 309, n. 3; pp. 320–26. To my knowledge, the only case that justifies the reading of *bang* as "capital" is the expression "Ying *bang* 郢邦" in the 4th c. BC "Yue gong Qi shi" 越公其事 ms. from the collection of Tsing-hua University. There, the word *bang* is used 45 times. In 43 of these, *bang* without the slightest doubt means "state," thus coinciding directly with the meaning of *guo* in the received *Guo yu* or *Zuo zhuan*. It is therefore likely that Ying *bang* metonymically refers to Chu state rather than specifically to Chu's capital, the city of Ying.

parts or subordinated to large states. These meanings can be verified by comparisons both with Western Zhou on up to Spring and Autumn bronze inscriptions and with Warring States Chu manuscripts.[87] In the Warring States political vocabulary, *guo* was not synonymous with *bang*, while *bang* remained – from north to south and from west to east – the standard word for "state" as territorial political-administrative unit in pragmatic sense.

THE HAN TABOO ON *BANG*, THE LANGUAGE REFORM, AND THE REWRITING OF BOOKS

Paleographers studying excavated inscriptions have long realized that the title *xiangguo* in transmitted texts modifies the original Warring States title *xiangbang*.[88] Philologists also have pointed out that the systematic use of *guo* instead of *bang* in the transmitted Warring States historiographic texts of *Zuo zhuan* and *Guo yu* is a Han feature that resulted from the taboo of the personal name of the founder of the Han dynasty, Liu Bang 劉邦 (d. 195 BC).[89]

[87] For a detailed contextual analysis, see Xia Yuting, "Dong Zhou qingtongqi mingwen zhong de 'huo/guo' zi yu 'guo' gainian de yongfa" 東周青銅器銘文中的"或/國"字與"國"概念的用法, in Beijing Daxue chutu wenxian yu gudai wenming yanjiusuo 北京大學出土文獻與古代文明研究所, ed., *Qingtongqi yu jinwen (di shiwu ji)* 青銅器與金文 (第十五輯) (Shanghai: shanghai guji chubanshe, 2026), pp. 98–118. Note that among the Guodian manuscripts, 𢦏, normalized as *guo* 國, appears twice in both *Laozi* A and B. In A (slip 22), the phrase 𢦏有四大安 corresponds to 域中有四大 in the transmitted *Dao de jing* 道德經 (*j.* 25), translated by Legge: "In the universe there are four that are great." See Li, *Guodian Chu jian xiaoshi*, p. 3; Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, *Laozi huixiao xinjie* 老子匯校新解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2016), p. 28; James Legge, trans., *The Texts of Taoism. The Sacred Books of China: The Tao te ching of Lao Tzŭ. The Writings of Chuang Tzŭ* (New York: Dover, 1962), p. 68. In *Laozi* B (2), both 有𢦏 and 𢦏之母 correspond to 有國 and 有國之母 in the transmitted text (Li, *Guodian Chu jian xiaoshi*, p. 28); Lou, *Laozi huixiao xinjie*, p. 65. Although in this passage from the *Dao de jing*, *guo* is usually translated as "state," Scott Cook cautiously translates 𢦏 in the manuscript as "the realm"; Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete Translation* (Ithaca: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2012), p. 286. I suppose that, as similarly seen in *Laozi* A (22), it may refer to the universe, or the world (compare with "mother of ten thousand things 萬物之母" and "mother of the Under-Heaven 天下母" elsewhere in the *Dao de jing*). The analysis of *huo/guo* in other excavated texts goes beyond the scope of the present article.

[88] Wang Guowei expressed this hypothesis in "Xiongnu xiangbang yinbo," pp. 914–15. During the 1980s, historians reappraised his insight. See Han, "Qin zhi xiangbang chengxiang yuanyuan kao," p. 32; Li, "Zhanguo shidai liang zhong xiang zhi jianlun," p. 24; Liu, "'Xiangguo', 'chengxiang' guancheng kao," p. 72; and Han Lianqi 韓連琪, "Chunqiu Zhanguo shidai de zhongyang guanzhi ji qi yanbian" 春秋戰國時代的中央官制及其演變, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲 1985.1, pp. 3–12, esp. 8.

[89] Hong Ye 洪業 (William Hung), "Chunqiu Zuo zhuan yinde xu" 春秋經傳引得序, in *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan yinde* 春秋經傳引得, ed. Hong Ye 洪業, Nie Chongqi 聶崇岐, Li Shuchun 李書春, and Ma Xiyong 馬錫用 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), pp. i–cxxvi, esp. xcii; Yoshimoto Michimasa 吉本道雅, "Guoyu shōkō" 國語小考, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究 48.3,

It is understood that *bang* was Liu Bang's *ming* 名 (personal name).[90] Yet, it is useful to ask how he came by the name. Because of the taboo, both the *Shi ji* and *Han shu* state that his adult name (*zi* 字) was Ji 季.[91] Obviously, *Ji* 季 (Junior) was not a name but a birth rank, indicating that the future emperor was the youngest son of his father.[92] The *Suoyin* 索引 commentary to *Shi ji* quotes the Eastern Han scholar Xiang Dai 項岱 as stating that the founder of Han adopted the name Bang only after he had ascended to the throne.[93] Considering that following the transition from the Western Zhou and Spring and Autumn political order of "ten thousand *bang*" to the Warring States world of strong centralized *bang*, and then to the creation of the unified empire, this act of self-naming reminds one of the declaration by Louis XIV, "L'État, c'est moi."

If Xiang Dai's remark is true, the founder of Han should have anticipated the political consequences of his choosing "the state" as his post-anointment name. In fact, *Zuo zhuan* and *Li ji* 禮記 already had expressed warnings against selecting such commonly used words as *ming*, including, in particular, names of states. This would demonstrate that the practice of tabooing rulers' personal names had existed before the Han.[94] As the "wooden tablet of nomenclature changes" from Liye informs, after the foundation of the Qin empire, people were forced to change their personal names if they contained the word Qin.[95] Therefore, Liu Bang could have consciously created a situation where his descendants had no choice but to withdraw the well-established term for "state" in order to comply with ritual protocols.

What happened next, was comparable to Qin Shihuang's recent reform of political vocabulary, which had promoted such neologisms as *huangdi* 皇帝 ("emperor," in use until 1911) instead of *wang* 王 ("king," reintroduced under the Han for the highest noble rank below that of emperor) and *qianshou* 黔首 ("the black-headed-ones," out of use after

pp. 421–51, esp. pp. 442–43. Note the more natural mix in *Yue jue shu* 越絕書, thought to be a later-Han compilation of historical anecdotes that was not collected in the Han imperial library: it contains 102 *bang*, obviously still being the typical word for "state," and 36 *guo*, used as an alternative term for the same meaning.

90 See Michael Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods, 221* BC–*AD 24* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2000), p. 254.

91 His name Bang can be found only in *Qian Han ji* 前漢記, by Xun Yue 荀悅 (Sibu congkan chubian suoben 四部叢刊初編縮本 027), *j.* 1, p. 2.

92 See Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), sect. 8.7.1.

93 *SJ* 8, p. 341.

94 Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual*, sect. 8.13.

95 Zheng, "Examination of the Liye No. 8-461," p. 16.

the fall of the Qin) instead of *min* 民 ("people," restored under the Han, tabooed under the Tang).[96] In 196 BC, during Liu Bang's lifetime, the office of the Assistant Chancellor *chengxiang* was renamed *xiangguo*.[97] Since the difference between *bang* and *guo* was still apprehendible, this title could be understood as "Chancellor of the [Imperial] Domain" or "Chancellor of the Empire."[98] Furthermore, the newly created feudal units were defined as *wang guo* 王國 and *hou guo* 侯國 (the "domains" of kings and marquises).[99]

The taboo on *bang* had dramatic consequences not only for the contemporaneous official political vocabulary, but equally for handling pre-Han historical and literary legacies. The discovery of two versions of the *Laozi* 老子 in the Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb in Hubei province, dated 186 BC – one using *bang*, and the other using *guo* for "state" – made clear that this taboo was extended to older texts not only in the imperial library but also in private possession.[100] The fragments of the *Lun yu* 論語 that were excavated from the Western Han tomb in Ding county 定, Hebei province, show that *bang* was systematically replaced with *guo* in manuscripts throughout the empire.[101] Even the most venerated old texts, later recognized as classics, were not spared. As the "Kongzi shi lun" 孔子詩論 manuscript held in the collection of the Shanghai Museum has revealed, the "Airs of the States" section of the *Shi jing* known to us as "Guo feng" 國風 was previously called "Bang

96 Ibid., pp. 16–19; see Tian Wei 田煒, "Lun Qin Shihuang 'shu tong wenzi' zhengce de neihan ji yingxiang: jian lun panduan chutu Qin wenxian wenben niandai de zhongyao biaochi" 論秦始皇"書同文字"政策的內涵及影響, 兼論判斷出土秦文獻文本年代的重要標尺, *BIHP* 2018.3, pp. 403–50.

97 See Anthony Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China*, p. 529 (n. 78).

98 In excavated manuscripts, sage rulers of the three dynasties (Xia, Shang, and Zhou) are sometimes distinguished as *you huo/guo zhi* 有或 (國)之 ("those who possessed the world"). This is close to the idea of empire as "the Under-Heaven forming a single unity 天下爲一." See Xia, "Dong Zhou qingtongqi mingwen zhong de 'huo/guo'," p. 102.

99 This corresponds to another Eastern Zhou reading of *huo/guo* as a small territorial domain, as, e.g., Chang *guo* 昌國, subordinated to the Qi state. See Xia, "Dong Zhou qingtongqi mingwen zhong de 'huo/guo'," pp. 103–6.

100 Cf. Tang Lan, "Mawangdui chutu *Laozi* yi ben juan qian gu yishu de yanjiu: jian lun qi yu Hanchu Rufa douzheng de guanxi" 馬王堆出土老子乙本卷前古佚書的研究, 兼論其與漢初儒法鬥爭的關係, *Kaogu xuebao* 1975.1, pp. 7–38; William G. Boltz, "Manuscripts with Transmitted Counterparts," in Shaughnessy, ed., *New Sources of Early Chinese History*, pp. 253–85.

101 This ms. systematically uses *guo* everywhere that *bang* was used in the classical version, while *bang* does not occur at all. See, e.g., *Lun yu* 3/22 and 8:13, in *Lunyu yi zhu* 論語譯注, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), pp. 31, 82; and Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiusuo Dingzhou Han mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 河北省文物研究所定州漢墓竹簡整理小組, ed., *Dingzhou Han mu zhujian Lunyu* 定州漢墓竹簡論語 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1997), pp. 17, 40.

feng" 邦風.[102] However, in the *Shi jing* that we know now, as well as in the *Shang shu*, both *bang* and *guo* are used. Were the Han editors able to protect such texts from being forced to change verbiage? Or are the received versions the result of post-Han reconstructions of the earlier, Warring States, wording based on still-available private manuscripts or oral transmission? The fragments of the Warring States period manuscript of the *Shi jing* "Airs" acquired by Anhui University in 2019 contain very few relevant passages, which, however, already manifest some discrepancies with the transmitted version.[103] The example of the *Lun yu*, in which the standard version has *bang* where the manuscript from Ding county has *guo*, points to the option that the text that reached to our own time is a late-Han or post-Han reconstruction. Hopefully, the expected publication of manuscripts from the tomb of Marquis Haihun 海昏侯 (92–59 BC) near Nanchang 南昌, Hunan, will shed more light on the process of redacting *Shi jing*, *Lun yu*, and other texts.

We find more evidence of this terminological evolution in the collection of Warring States-period anecdotes titled *Zhan guo ce* (*Plots of the Warring States* 戰國策). It was compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BC) based on various writings stored in the imperial library, some of which had already been used as sources for Sima Qian's *Shi ji*.[104] A manuscript in twenty-seven chapters excavated from the Mawangdui tomb and labeled by the excavators *Zhan guo zonghengjia shu* 戰國縱橫

[102] Martin Kern, "The Odes in Excavated Manuscripts," in idem, ed., *Text and Ritual in Early China* (Seattle and London: U. Washington P., 2005), pp. 149–93, esp. 153.

[103] The word *bang* appears in those fragments only once – in the "Junzi xie lao" 君子偕老 verse, and it is identical with the transmitted version, glorifying a woman as a "beauty of the state 邦之媛." The word *guo* appears there twice. The received text of the "Yuan you tao" 園有桃 verse has 心之憂矣, 聊以行國 (trans. by Legge as "my heart is grieved and I think I must travel about through the state"), but the manuscript has 心之憂矣, 聊行四國 ("…I have to roam through the Four Regions"). This is the most classic use of *guo*, referring to one part of the world or all parts of the world but not to the state as a political unit. The second instance is in the second strophe of the "Shuo shu" 碩鼠 verse. The "*le huo* 樂或" (transmitted as "*le guo* 樂國"; trans. as "happy state" by Legge) is juxtaposed there to "*le tu* 樂土" on one hand and "*le jiao* 樂郊" on the other; trans. as "happy land" and "happy borders" by Legge. It is not obvious that *guo* refers here to a political unit, as in other excavated texts: *guo* may mean "region," "territory," or "capital city." Especially, because *jiao* 郊 usually refers not to the borders of a state, normally called *jiang* 疆, but to the suburbs of the capital, the reading of *guo* as "capital city" is probable. See Huang Dekuan 黃德寬 and Xu Zaiguo 徐在國, eds., *Anhui daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian* 安徽大學藏戰國竹簡 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2019), slips 89, 76, 81; James Legge, *The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, prolegomena, and Copious Indexes by James Legge*. Vol. 3. *The She King, or The Book of Poetry* (rpt. Taipei: SMC, 1991), pp. 77, 166, 172.

[104] Tsien Tsuen-hsiun 錢存訓, "Chan kuo ts'e" 戰國策, in Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), pp. 1–13.

家書 contains two chapters that are partly identical to and nine comparable with the transmitted *Zhan guo ce*. In the transmitted *Zhan guo ce*, the word *guo* appears 966 times, referring to that period's kingdoms as geopolitical units that had administrative structures.[105] The term *bang* is used there only once in the letter of Su Qin 蘇秦 (d. 284 BC) to the king of Zhao.[106] In the Mawangdui manuscript, the word *guo* appears in twenty-one chapters, whereas the word *bang* is conspicuously absent. Notably, the manuscript version of Su Qin's letter has *wang* (king) instead of *bang*. Another chapter features the title *xiangguo*, which, as the analysis above makes clear, did not exist before Han.[107] Therefore, the *bang*-free Mawangdui precursor to *Zhan guo ce*, like the *Laozi* B manuscript, did not simply survive from the Warring States and Qin periods, but it represents an early-Han redacted copy of an earlier text. These examples suggest that the systematic rewriting of most Warring States period texts was already accomplished during the second decade of Western Han. Accordingly, we should not blame Sima Qian for the anachronistic use of terminology: even if he occasionally used the word *bang* in quotations from early texts, notwithstanding the still valid taboo, most other sources, including historiographic texts reflecting on earlier periods, were probably available to him in a thorough Han redaction.[108]

A reader of transmitted pre-Han texts must be aware that whereas all *bang* have been systematically changed to *guo*, *guo* have often been left in their places rather than replaced by, for example, *yu* 域 (region) or *du* 都 (capital). As a result, the difference between *guo* and *bang* be-

[105] Word count as given in <https://ctext.org.>

[106] "Once Qin has put an end to Han's and Wei's [control of] Shangdang, then [Qin's] territory will come into contact with [your, i.e, Zhao's] state's capital and [your] state's dependencies, and the borderline between your lands will be 700 *li* long 秦盡韓、魏之上黨, 則地與國都邦屬而壤犂 (界) 者七百里"; Wang Yunwu 王雲五, ed., *Zhan guo ce* 戰國策 (Guoxue jiben congshu, vol. 30: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1956), p. 49; on this sentence, see Wang Yandong 王延棟 et al., 戰國策全譯 *Zhan guo ce quanshi* (Guizhou: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1996), p. 504-5. Also see, Min Wenyuan 繆文遠, ed., *Zhan guo ce xin jiaozhu* 戰國策新校注 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1987), pp. 612, 614 (n. 10); He Jiazhang 何建章, ed., *Zhan guo ce zhushi* 戰國策注釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990), pp. 628, 632 (n. 30). Cf. the perhaps imprecise transl. of James Crump, *Chan-Kuo Ts'e; Translated by J. I. Crump, Jr*, The Oxford Library of East Asian Literatures (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 324. In the quoted passage from Su Qin's letter, *guo* and *bang* are used together. The ms. version of this text from Mawangdui is slightly shorter and does not contain the "國都邦" combination: 秦盡韓, 魏之上黨, 則地與王布屬壤芥者七百里; Mawangdui Han mu boshu zhengli xiaozu 馬王堆漢墓帛書整理小組, *Mawangdui Han mu boshu: Zhan guo zong heng jia shu* 馬王堆漢墓帛書, 戰國縱橫家書 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1976), p. 92.

[107] Ibid., p. 81.

[108] The character *bang* appears in *Shi ji* only twelve times (word count as given in <https://ctext.org.>)

came obscured. Commentators often, but not always, pointed out that in specific sentences *guo* means "capital of the state," or "region," rather than "state," but those who read only the original – and, especially, rely on digital databases – may not realize this. Discrepancies between transmitted and excavated texts should make a reader ponder each time, whether *guo* was likely used in the pre-Han version of the extant transmitted text, and, in this case, which of its multiple meanings it has, or if it is simply a substitute for *bang*. Vice versa every time, when the character *huo* 或 or *guo* 國 appears in an inscription or manuscript, the reader must consider the complete context to identify in which sense this word is most likely being used.

CONCLUSIONS

Bronze inscriptions from the Warring States period provide valuable data for the study of that epoch's political and administrative structures and official nomenclatures. They corroborate that the official position of Chancellor of State, or *xiangbang*, was created by the last quarter of the fourth century BC at the latest and existed in many Warring States, especially in Qin, Zhao, Song, Zhongshan, and Chu. The large number of Zhao and Qin inscriptions referring to *xiangbang* highlights similarities in the way those states pursued the administrative supervision of arms industries. The absence of comparable references in administrative inscriptions from the other states suggests that their chancellors did not engage in weapon-making.[109]

The establishment of high administrative positions, including *xiangbang* and *bang sikou*, and other state institutions, such as the Treasury and the Arsenal of the *bang*, reflects the fact that Warring States administrative structures became transformed from lineage-ruled establishments into bureaucratic logistical processes in which officials were responsible for the implementation of decisions. Apart from reflecting the institutional aspects of *bang*, as manifested by the rise of various state offices, Warring States inscriptions also reflect the territorial aspects of the state, and in addition show a tendency for it to be something of a personified moral actor.

Frequent references to a *bang*'s land (*tu* 土, *di* 地) and borders (*bian* 邊, *jiang* 疆) reflect the territorialization of states as geopolitical units. The relation between *bang* and land was seldom articulated in inscriptions from the Western Zhou and early Spring and Autumn periods,

[109] Cf. Xia, "Zhanguo shiqi de 'xiangbang'," p. 153.

probably because at that time *bang* were seen as social entities centered on ruling lineages that controlled territorially dispersed networks of allotments, and moreover could shift their locations.[110] During the Warring States period, known as an epoch of major territorial conflicts, the focus on territorial control is understandable. The issuance of a *xiangbang* seal to a Xiongnu leader, or the establishment of the Dependent States office reflect the attempts of various Warring States to formalize their relationship with and to strengthen the territorial control over sociopolitical units in frontier areas.

The personification of *bang* is another remarkable new trend. In the terms of the political anthropologist Alexander Wendt, states can be imagined as persons: as "intentional" or purposive actors; as organisms or forms of life; and as having collective consciousness, understood as subjective experience.[111] We can observe that Warring States writers were perceiving their *bang* as conscious, intentional actors that behaved righteously or unrighteously. The description/perception of a *bang* as a birth-giving animate entity suggests a view of states as living bodies.

The conspicuous presence of Qin and Zhao *xiangbang* in Warring States inscriptions has led us to reconsider the meaning and uses of the concept *bang* in excavated texts, which have of course not been affected by later redaction processes. *Bang* was indeed the standard concept for polities since the Western Zhou period.[112] The inscriptions and manuscripts considered above confirm that *bang* remained the standard, officially-employed word for autonomous territorial polities during the Warring States period as well. Rulers, nobles, and officials both in the Central States and in culturally distinct Qin, Chu, and Yue used it to

[110] See Li Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China: The Crisis and Fall of the Western Zhou, 1045–771 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2006); idem, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China: Governing the Western Zhou* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2008); Pines, *China's Aristocratic Age*, pp. 26–28.

[111] Alexander Wendt, "The State as Person in International Theory," *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004), pp. 289–316; cf. Kathleen M. McGraw and Thomas M. Dolan, "Personifying the State: Consequences for Attitude Formation," *Political Psychology* 28 (2007), pp. 299–327; Robert Oprisko and Kristopher Kaliher, "The State as a Person?: Anthropomorphic Personification vs. Concrete Durational Being," *Journal of International and Global Studies* 2014.6, pp. 30–49.

[112] Zhang Hai 張海, "'Bang', 'guo' zhi bie: jian tan Liang Zhou tongqi mingwen suoshi Xi Zhou wangchao zhi guojia jiegou" '邦'、'國'之別, 兼談兩周銅器銘文所示西周王朝之國家結構, *Qingtongqi yu jinwen* 青銅器與金文 1 (2017), pp. 560–84; Maria Khayutina, "Reflections and Uses of the Past in Chinese Bronze Inscriptions from the Eleventh to Fifth Centuries BC: The Memory of the Conquest of Shang and the First Kings of Zhou," in John Baines, Henriette van der Blom, Y. S. Chen, and Tim Rood, eds., *Historical Consciousness and the Use of the Past in the Ancient World* (Sheffield, U.K., Bristol, Conn.: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2019), pp. 157–80.

refer to their own polities as well as to the polities of their allies or foes. After the rulers of former dukedoms declared themselves kings, they did not rename their old *bang* into *guo*, as a reader of transmitted texts from the Warring States period might expect, and they did not haphazardly used *bang* and *guo* to denote the same thing. The substitution of *bang* by *guo* under the Han dynasty's ritual taboo was deliberate and it flattened the semantic complexity that had arisen from the coexistence of these two terms in the preimperial political vocabulary.

Comparisons with excavated manuscripts and inscriptions raise questions regarding political concepts that have roots in the preimperial period and make up part of today's political vocabulary. For instance, was the concept *zhong guo* 中國 (the blueprint for the modern word "China") used in Warring States texts to refer to the "central states"? Or were the central states instead called z*hong bang* 中邦? [113] Neither concept can be found in excavated Warring States manuscripts. However, one chapter in *Shang shu* has preserved the term *zhong bang* ("central states"), while another one uses *zhong guo* ("central region," or "in the center of the region").[114] If these two chapters hold reconstructed pre-Han contents, this may suggest that these concepts coexisted before Han but had different meanings.

The binomial *guo jia* 國家 in transmitted texts seems to be the blueprint for the modern term "state." There is no doubt that it corresponds to *bang jia* in inscriptions and manuscripts.[115] Some scholars argue that in the context of the Spring and Autumn politics as reflected in the stories given both in *Zuo zhuan* and *Guo yu*, *guo* and *jia* referred to two kinds of political and territorial organization: *guo* under the control of the polities' rulers, and *jia* 家 as patrimonies of hereditary ministers.[116] In Warring States transmitted texts that reflect contemporary politics, such as *Mengzi* 孟子, *Xunzi* 荀子, or *Zhan guo ce*, *guo jia* refers rather to the political and kin-based aspects of a single hereditarily-ruled structure. This concept of *bang jia* can be traced back to the late-Western Zhou period, and this is also how *bang jia* is used in the inscription of king Cuo of Zhongshan.

113 See Paul Goldin, "Introduction: What Is Early Chinese History?", in Goldin, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Early Chinese History*, pp. 1–11, esp. 11.

114 In the following chapters of *Shang shu*: for *zhong bang*, see "Yu gong" 禹貢 ("Tributes of Yu"); for *zhong guo* as "central region," see "Zi cai" 梓材 ("Timber of the Rottlera").

115 Goldin, "Introduction: What Is Early Chinese History?", p. 3.

116 See Mark Edward Lewis, *The Construction of Space in Early China* (Albany: SUNY P., 2006), p. 80; Robert H. Gassmann, *Verwandtschaft und Gesellschaft im alten China: Begriffe, Strukturen und Prozesse* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 235–66; Durrant et al., *Zuo Tradition*, pp. 43 ff.

Importantly, the use of *bang* in the sense of "state" and of *guo* in the senses of "region, territory, domain, [and] capital city" in Eastern Zhou bronze inscriptions from various states correlates well with what we see in Chu bamboo manuscripts, which make up for the absence of manuscripts from the other Warring States.[117]

The glaring absence of *bang* clearly signals that all transmitted pre-Han texts where this word is systematically missing underwent thorough editing under the Han dynasty, while the elimination of tabooed words could be just one of many changes that can be eventually revealed by comparison with excavated counterparts.

The complete recopying of old books with the sole aim to replace *guo* with *bang* already during the first decade after the founding of the Han dynasty must have engaged countless skilled scribes over the whole empire – a project whose dimensions we can only adumbrate in the light of excavated texts. For nobles who commissioned new, rectified copies, this may have been an exercise in self-discipline, internalizing their loyalty towards the new dynasty. For the designers of the empire, it was a good opportunity to verify the effectiveness of its executive agencies and to train local staff. Researchers and translators must therefore consider the systematic character of the *bang*/*guo* switch and carefully ponder their interpretations. The deliberate replacement of *bang* with *guo* in preimperial texts, redacted under the Han, flattened the semantic complexity arising from the original coexistence of the two terms.

117 The use of *bang* everywhere where transmitted texts would normally use *guo* has been cited as an argument against the authenticity of unprovenanced Chu manuscripts, possibly in the expectation that a "genuine" Warring States text would contain a more balanced mix of the synonymous terms *bang* and *guo* (see Hans van Ess, "A Textual Approach to the Problem of the Authenticity of the Historical Text Xinian from the Tsing-hua Collection of Manuscripts," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 45 (2023), pp. 185–213, esp. 213). For a rebuttal, see Edward Shaughnessy, "Once Again on the Authenticity of the Tsinghua University Bamboo-Slip Manuscripts: A Response to Professor Hans van Ess," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 46 (2024), pp. 171–85. The consistency of the manuscripts' wording with that of contemporaneous bronze inscriptions supports the deduction that they are genuine.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Digital Archives	Academia Sinica, *Digital Archives of Bronze Images and Inscriptions* 殷周金文及青銅器資料庫
JC	Zhongguo kexue yanjiuyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國科學研究院考古研究所, *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng* 殷周金文集成
NA	Jung Bor-sheng 鍾柏生, Ch'en Chao-jung 陳昭容, *Xin shou Yin Zhou qingtongqi mingwen ji qiying huibian* 新收殷周青銅器銘文暨器影彙編
NB	Same as the above *(Xin shou Yin Zhou qingtongqi mingwen ji qiying huibian)*, but only those texts collected after 2006
SJ	Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–90 BC), *Shi ji* 史記