CHAPTER 2

Philosophical Foundations:

The Eastern Zhou Period 770–256 BCE

The intellectual foundations of Chinese civilization were established during the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770–256 BCE), a period of political fragmentation and moral crisis. The first half of this era is commonly called the Spring and Autumn period, after the name of a chronicle covering the years 722 to 481 BCE. This was a highly aristocratic period, and the Zhou kings continued to reign in Luoyang during these centuries, but regional lords had much of the power and competed against each other, making and breaking alliances, exchanging hostages, and sporadically taking up arms. Over time, military conflict became more frequent and more deadly, and the second half of this period is conventionally called the Warring States period (403–221 BCE). By then the Zhou king was no longer a major player and one by one the smaller states were conquered and absorbed by the seven largest ones.

KEY DATES

770–256 BCE	Eastern Zhou period
722–481	Spring and Autumn period,
685–643	Reign of Duke Huan of Qi
551–479	Traditional birth and death dates of Confucius
***c.* 470–*c.* 390**	Mozi
433	Tomb of Marquis of Zeng
403–221	Warring States period
***c.* 370–300**	Mencius
362	Shang Yang enters Qin
335	Regional lords begin calling themselves kings
320	Guodian tomb with many texts
***c.* 310–*c.* 220**	Xunzi
272	Li Bing is sent to Shu
256	End of Zhou dynasty
233	Death of Han Feizi

The ruthlessness of the competition among the regional powers, although uniformly lamented, nevertheless served to foster social, technological, and economic advances. These included the introduction of iron casting, infantry armies, coinage, private ownership of land, and social mobility. New ideas also emerged in profusion on topics ranging from the natural order to ethics, war, and government. The ideas of the most reflective thinkers began to be written down, and the circulation of these texts further stimulated intellectual debate. Recently excavated texts both confirm much of what was known about this period from received texts and point us in new directions.

Rival states

The political system of the Western Zhou had from the beginning carried within it the danger of the regional lords becoming so powerful that they would no longer respond to the commands of the king. As generations passed and ties of loyalty and kinship grew more distant, this indeed happened. In 771 BCE, the Zhou king was killed by an alliance of Rong tribesmen and Zhou nobles. One of his sons

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, the number of states slowly declined as one conquered another, which means also that state borders were in constant flux. Only a handful of the historically most important states are shown here.

was put on the throne, and then for safety's sake the capital was moved east out of the Wei River valley to modern Luoyang, located just south of the Yellow River in the central plains. The revived Zhou never fully regained control over its lords, and China entered a prolonged period without a strong central authority. The Zhou kings still had ritual functions as intermediaries with Heaven, but militarily they were inferior to many of their supposed subordinates. During the Spring and Autumn period many regional lords found themselves eclipsed by powerful ministerial families, and the heads of those families might in time find themselves challenged by their own kin or even their stewards.

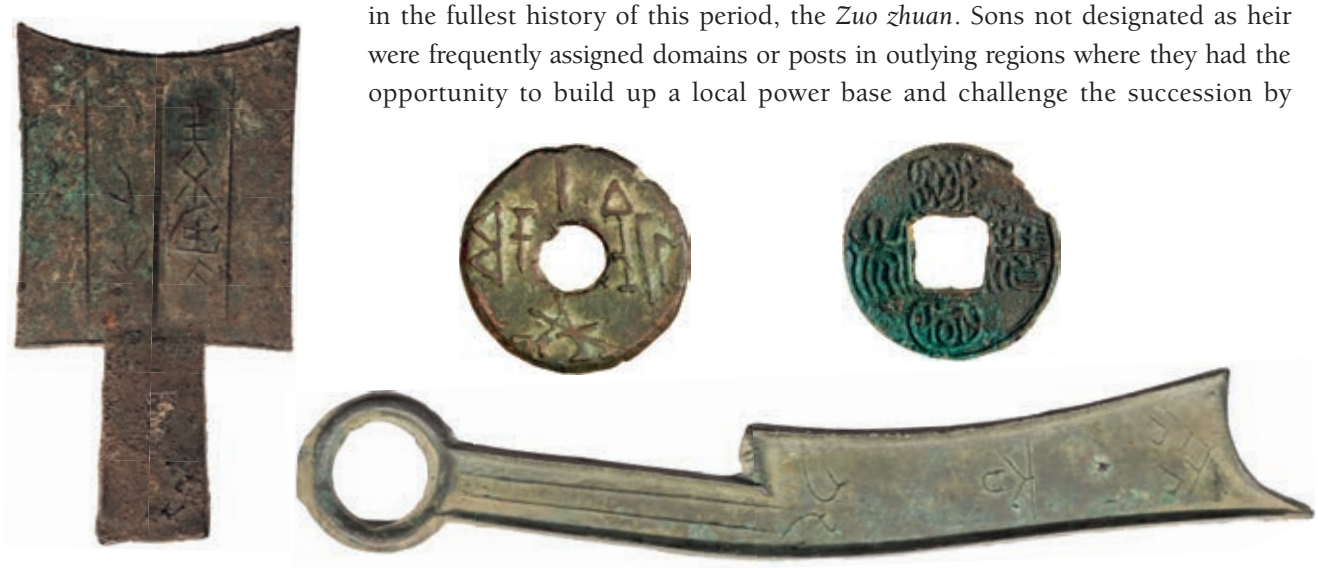
The Eastern Zhou was a violent age, a time when victors presented the severed ears of enemies at their ancestral temples, when the blood of captives was spread on ceremonial drums, when thieves had their feet cut off, and when rulers ran the considerable risk of assassination. At the same time, it was a period when diplomacy was studied earnestly and practised with finesse. During the Spring and Autumn period, a code of chivalrous or sportsmanlike conduct still regulated warfare between the states. For instance, one state would not attack another while it was in mourning for

its ruler, and during battle one side would not attack before the other side had time to line up. Perhaps out of fear of the wrath of the ancestors of defeated rulers, efforts were made not to wipe out ruling houses, but to leave at least one successor to continue the sacrifices.

In the Spring and Autumn period the head of one state was sometimes able to get the others to recognize him as hegemon or overlord, chief of an alliance of states. The most notable of these was Duke Huan of Qi (r. 685–643 BCE). With the help of his able minister Guan Zhong, he built up Qi's economic strength, casting coins, controlling prices, and regulating the production of salt and iron tools. Qi expanded to occupy all of Shandong, effectively eliminating the 'Eastern Yi' barbarians by absorbing them into the Qi population. Qi organized the states in the central plains to resist the expansion of the semi-barbarian state of Chu in the central Yangzi valley. With a mutual-defence pact in place, Duke Huan also organized defence against tribesmen to the north and even got Chu to sign a peace treaty agreeing to send tribute to the Zhou kings.

Because of the need to form alliances, rulers regularly married their sons and daughters into the ruling families of other states. These marriages then gave them stakes in other states' succession disputes, which were extremely common because of the practice of concubinage. Rulers regularly demonstrated their power and wealth by accumulating large numbers of concubines and thus would have children by several women. In theory, succession went to the eldest son of the wife, then younger sons by her, and only in their absence to sons of concubines.

In actual practice, however, the ruler of a state or head of a powerful ministerial family could select the son of a concubine to be his heir if he wished, leading to much scheming for favour among the various sons and their mothers and the common perception that women were incapable of taking a disinterested view of the greater good. Succession disputes of this sort provide much of the narrative interest in the fullest history of this period, the *Zuo zhuan*. Sons not designated as heir were frequently assigned domains or posts in outlying regions where they had the opportunity to build up a local power base and challenge the succession by



Early coins, like these bronze examples of the Zhou period, were made in the shape of knives and spades; circular coins with square central holes for stringing them together later became predominant.

recourse to arms. Even those unswervingly loyal to the legitimate successor might face trumped-up treason charges and have to flee to another state to avoid execution. Such hosts were often happy to help them, quite willing to stir up trouble in nearby states.

The seats of power for each ruler were cities protected by thick earthen walls of the sort that had been built in north China since the late Neolithic period. Within the walls were the palaces and ancestral temples of the ruler and other aristocrats. Sometimes there was also an outer wall that protected the artisans, merchants, and farmers who lived outside the inner wall. Descriptions of military confrontations in this period are filled with accounts of sieges launched against these walled citadels, with scenes of the scaling of walls and storming of gates. The technology of building walls had to be steadily improved because techniques of attacking and laying siege to city walls were steadily perfected. Treatises were written describing siegecraft and other facets of military art and strategy, and many classical texts devoted lengthy sections to these topics.

Constant warfare stimulated advances in military techniques and technology which altered the social relations of warfare and rendered it increasingly deadly. The need for a chariot-riding aristocracy declined with the mastery of cavalry and infantry armies. Cavalry techniques were first perfected by non-Chinese peoples to the north of China proper, who at that time were making the transition to full nomadism. In self-defence, the northern state of Jin developed its own cavalry armies, which it soon used against other Chinese states. Acquiring and pasturing horses became a key component of military preparedness, as it would remain for many centuries.

Well-drilled infantry armies, introduced in this period, also proved potent against chariot-led forces. By 300 BCE, states were sending out armies of hundreds of thousands of drafted foot-soldiers, often accompanied by mounted warriors. With organization, discipline, and sheer size, armies of conscripts with a year or two of training could defeat aristocrats in chariots.

Adding to their effectiveness was the crossbow, invented in Chu in the late Spring and Autumn period. The trigger of a crossbow is an intricate bronze mechanism that could be produced only by skilled craftsmen. It enabled a foot soldier to shoot further than horsemen carrying light bows. To defend against crossbows, soldiers began wearing leather armour and metal helmets. Still, casualties mounted, and could reach more than 10,000 in a single battle. Armies also grew in size. As one general explained, when cities and states were smaller, one could attack a city with an army of 30,000, but in his day, the third century BCE, 200,000 troops were needed to have hope of success.

Since victory went to the ruler who could raise and outfit the largest armies and deploy the largest workforces to build defence walls, ambitious rulers looked for ways to increase their populations and revenues. Serfdom gradually declined, as rulers wanted to reward farmers for their efforts and to have direct access to their labour

Late Zhou iron moulds for casting iron sickles, engraved with the name of the caster. In Europe wrought iron preceded cast iron, but in China iron was cast from the beginning. In Shang times bronze ritual vessels had been cast one at a time, as major works of art. The casting of iron tools, by contrast, constituted a form of mass production.

power. Rulers looked on trade favourably and began casting coins, which quickly supplemented the use of bolts of silk as units of exchange.

To bring new land into cultivation, marshes were drained, irrigation works established, and transportation improved, some projects requiring huge outlays of labour. In 272 BCE, after Qin conquered Shu in Sichuan, it tasked the new governor Li Bing with improving water transport and food production to make the region more valuable to Qin. After studying the local rivers, Li Bing proposed changing the course of the Min River. He and his son led tens of thousands of workers in a fourteen-year effort to redirect the river, in part by filling bamboo cages with rocks, then casting them into the river. Then to bring the Min River into Chengdu, labourers worked for eight years cutting a 65 foot/7.5 m-wide channel through the mountain. This labour-intensive project helped make the Chengdu plain one of China's most productive agricultural regions and thus a great asset for the state of Qin in its wars with the other states.

Along with growth in population came denser settlements – more and larger cities. Economic expansion was also aided by the introduction of iron technology. By the seventh century BCE, iron deposits were being exploited, and within a couple of centuries iron was being widely used for tools such as hoes, sickles, and hammers, and military equipment such as swords, arrowheads, and helmets. By the late Warring States period, great smelters might employ more than 200 workmen, and ironmongers were prominent among the rich entrepreneurs making their appearance in this period.

During the decade 230 to 221, the Qin destroyed its last six rivals in quick succession.

States on the periphery – Jin in the north, Chu in the south, and Qin in the west – had the advantage in these struggles for supremacy because they could expand outward. After they had expanded, they turned inward and soon they were conquering the small states of the central plain between them, each lord aspiring to be the great unifier of All-Under-Heaven. States were becoming territorial states, with more clearly demarcated spatial boundaries. In 335 BCE, regional lords began calling themselves kings, in essence refusing to recognize the sovereignty of the Zhou king, whose line came to an end in 256 BCE. By this point, only seven major states survived, and many thought that strife would not end only until one state eliminated all its rivals.

To expand their control over people and land, rulers also tried new techniques of governing. Law codes were issued and counties established. By 700 BCE, when Chu conquered neighbouring lands, the Chu ruler did not grant them to kinsmen to rule, but made them into counties and appointed magistrates to govern them. Within a

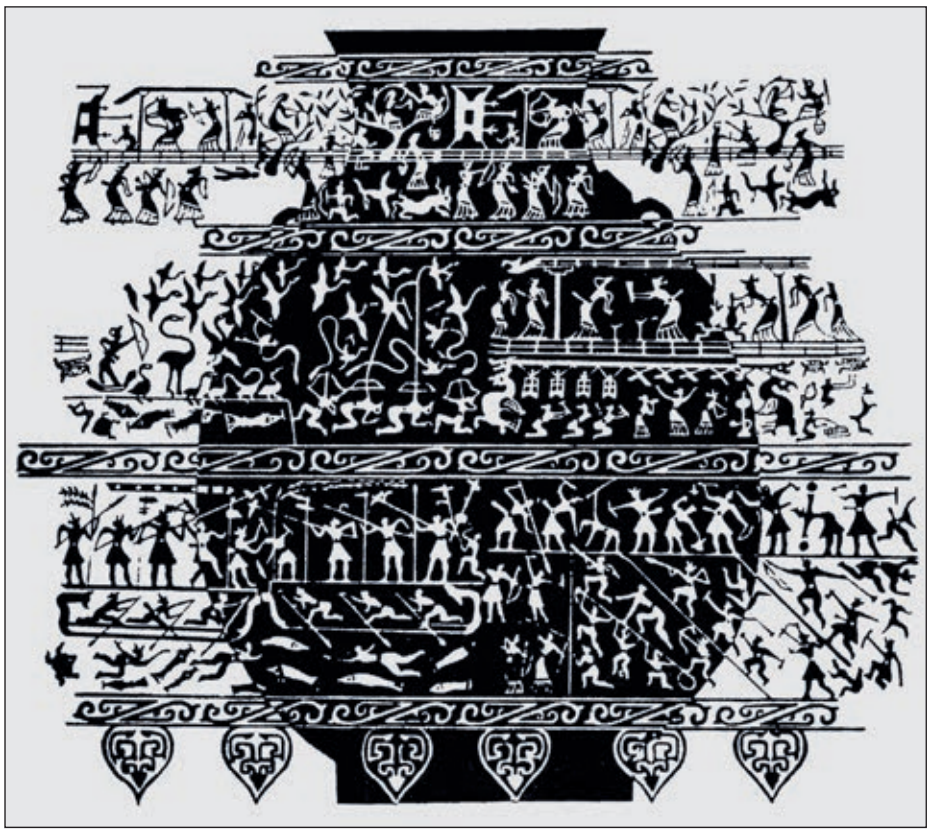
century this had become a common practice in other states as well, so less and less land and population were under hereditary lords. The residents of counties were carefully registered, directly taxed, and subject to military service.

This trend toward centralized bureaucratic control created opportunities for social advancement for those on the lower end of the old aristocracy, the *shi* stratum, men who might serve as military officers or government officials but who did not have noble titles. As states were destroyed and their former nobles had to look for opportunities elsewhere, ambitious rulers and even high officials were able to gather around them numerous advisors, assistants, teachers, strategists, and clerks. Competition among such men guaranteed rulers a ready supply of able and willing subordinates, and competition among rulers for talent meant that ambitious men could be selective in offering their services, leading to considerable social mobility. Men in search of employment had no compunction against leaving the state where they grew up and taking up service under another ruler, even a rival state, so long as it was part of the Zhou realm of shared elite culture.

Rulers searching for ways to survive or prevail welcomed men of ideas. These men made proposals about what the rulers should do and rebutted each other's ideas, in the process advancing the art of oratory, the science of strategy, and the study of logic. Books recording the teachings of various masters came to be compiled and circulated, a development that fostered the appearance of schools of thought, since the existence of a text tended both to freeze a viewpoint among followers and to elicit refutations from other masters. The traditional label for this period as the time when 'a hundred schools of thought contended' captures the spirit of exuberant intellectual creativity and ideological diversity that proved the most important legacy of the late Zhou.

Below Confucians, Mohists, Daoists, and Legalists are singled out for more extended discussion because of their long-term impact on Chinese civilization. Focusing on them does not, however, fully capture the cultural vitality of the late Zhou. In addition to those masters, there were sophists fascinated by logical puzzles, utopians and hermits who developed rationales for withdrawal from public life, agriculturalists who argued that no one should eat who does not plough. Texts found in a tomb of an official who died in 316 BCE show beliefs that illness was the result of malevolent demons, and that evil spirits that could be dealt with through exorcisms, sacrifices to an astral deity, incantations, and ceremonies performed at places like the gate to a city. Another set of ideas that proved enduring were those connected to yin and yang. Yin is associated with feminine, dark, receptive, yielding, negative, and weak; yang with opposite qualities and forces: masculine, bright, assertive, creative, positive, and strong. Cosmologists viewed the interaction of these complementary poles as integral to the processes that generate the natural order. The rhythmic movement from day to night and from summer to winter results from the interaction of yin and yang. Disturbances and imbalances can disrupt this order, in the way that improper food or inadequate rest disturb the health of the body.

Double-edged swords are not mentioned in Chinese sources until the seventh century BCE. The inscription on this specimen, unearthed at Wangshan in Hubei province, states that it is owned by Gou Jian, the king of Yue (r. 496–465 BCE), a famous connoisseur of fine swords.



Line drawing of the decor on an inlaid bronze wine vessel from the Warring States period. Depictions of people engaged in such activities as warfare, hunting, boating, rituals, music-making, and food preparation were a new feature of the art of the late Zhou period.

Confucius and the Moral Way

The earliest philosopher was Confucius (traditional dates, 551–479 BCE). Confucius' family belonged to the lower ranks of the aristocracy in Lu, a small state in Shandong province that had been the fief of the Duke of Zhou. Confucius identified with the 'learned men' (*ru*), a subgroup of the *shi* who assisted rulers in the performance of rituals and ceremonies, such as sacrifices to ancestors and reception of envoys. These learned men knew about the heavens and could advise on setting the calendar; they performed divinations and interpreted the results; and they kept records and advised on precedents. Aspiring to serve in these ways, Confucius spent some years at the Lu court without gaining much influence, then wandered through neighbouring states with his disciples, in search of a ruler receptive to his advice.

Confucius was apparently an extraordinary teacher and attracted many students. He gained a reputation as a learned man, and people came to consult him, many staying on to study the ancient traditions with him. Nevertheless, he continually hoped to play a greater role in government and he prepared his students for careers in government service. Toward that end he encouraged them to master the venerated traditions, especially the *Book of Songs*, *Book of Documents*, and ritual texts; indeed Confucius was traditionally credited with having compiled several of these texts himself.

From later records of Confucius' conversations with his disciples, we know that they frequently discussed issues of morality. Confucius found much that dismayed him – greed, insincerity, irresponsibility, callous disregard for others' needs and interests – but believed that people could be inspired to do better. In the early Zhou, he believed, the observance of ritual had created an order in which rulers and subjects, nobles and commoners, parents and children, and men and women had wholeheartedly accepted the parts assigned to them and devoted themselves to their responsibilities to others. Thus a better society was possible.

In Confucius' moral vision, intentions and acts toward other men are at least as important as those toward gods or ancestors. He extolled filial piety – the reverent respect of children toward their parents. Filial piety was to him both ritual and attitude; conventional actions needed to be animated by sincere feelings. Moreover, filial piety could be extended outward beyond the family, since society could be seen as the family writ large. People of lower station should respect those of higher, just as children respect their parents, and those of higher station should look over those lower, just as parents do for their children. Still, the highest virtue in Confucius' vocabulary was *ren*, variously translated as 'perfect goodness', 'benevolence', 'humanity', 'human-heartedness', and 'nobility'. It entailed deep concern for the well-being of others, an orientation that makes right action almost effortless. *Ren* extended to everyone and thus was a virtue without the hierarchical dimension of filial piety. A man who cultivated these virtues he termed 'gentleman' or 'noble man' (*junzi*), a term that had meant man of noble birth but which he redefined to mean a person of moral character, one who does the right thing. Confucius often contrasted the gentleman to petty men, remarking, for instance, 'The gentleman aspires to things lofty; the petty person aspires to things base,' or 'The gentleman understands integrity; the petty person knows about profit.'

The decline in human sacrifice and 'accompanying in death' led to substitute representations of attendants being placed in graves, a practice Confucius mentioned approvingly. This painted wooden figure of a woman was unearthed from a fourth- to fifth-century BCE tomb at Changtaiguan, Henan province.

Later Confucians

Confucius' students – and their students – deserve much of the credit for the eventual success of Confucian ideas. The first important successor remembered by history is Mencius (*c.* 370–*c.* 300 BCE), who had studied with Confucius' grandson. In imitation of Confucius, Mencius travelled around offering advice to rulers of nearby states. He reminded rulers of the Mandate of Heaven, telling them to their faces that if they did not rule well, Heaven would bring it about that their people would rebel and oust them. He made it the responsibility of rulers to see to it that their people had enough to eat at every meal in good years and could avoid starvation in bad years.

The opening chapter of the *Mencius* records that during an audience with King Hui of Liang (370–319 BCE) Mencius responded to the king's question about ways to profit his state by asking, 'Why must Your Majesty use the word "profit"? All I am concerned with are the good and the right. If Your Majesty says, "How can I profit my state?" your officials will say, "How can I profit my family?" and officers and

common people will say, "How can I profit myself?" Once superiors and inferiors are competing for profit, the state will be in danger.' In a subsequent conversation, Mencius told this king that if he treated his people well by reducing taxes and lightening punishments, they would be so eager to fight for him that even if armed only with sharpened sticks they could defeat the well-equipped soldiers of the powerful and aggressive states of Qin and Chu.

Mencius' concern with the common people was coupled with a comparable concern for officials who, he felt, should be treated respectfully by the ruler and be given incomes in proportion to their rank. He argued for the superiority of hereditary ministers over ones chosen by the ruler for their merit, wanting ministers to have some independence from the ruler.

The Analects

Confucius' ideas are known to us primarily through the sayings recorded by his disciples in the *Analects* (*Lunyu*). In this short, loosely organized text, Confucius discussed the human world of families and states rather than the world of gods or spirits. The thrust of his thought was thus ethical rather than theoretical or metaphysical. He tried to verify his ideas by discussing concrete situations, not general principles.

The *Analects* provided the foundation for much of Chinese social, political, and ethical thought. In later centuries it became a sacred book, memorized by students, and as a consequence many of its passages became proverbial sayings, unknowingly cited even by illiterate peasants.

The selections below preserve the original order.

The Master said, 'When your father is alive observe his intentions. After he passes away, model yourself on the memory of his behaviour. If in three years after his death you have not deviated from your father's ways, then you may be considered a filial child.' (1.11)

The Master said, 'Lead the people by means of government policies and regulate them through punishments, and they will be evasive and have no sense of shame. Lead them by means of virtue and regulate them through rituals and they will have a sense of shame and moreover have standards.' (2.3)

The Master said, 'By fifteen I was intent on learning; by thirty I was standing straight; by forty I was no longer confused; by fifty I knew Heaven's commands; by sixty I was attuned; and at seventy I could follow my heart's desires without transgressing what is right.' (2.4)

The Master said, 'The gentleman is not a tool.' (2.12)

Zigong wished to get rid of the sacrifice of a sheep at the new moon rite. The Master said, 'Si, you love the lamb. I love the rite.' (3.17)

The Master said, 'When you meet someone wise, think about becoming his equal. When you see someone inferior, reflect on yourself.' (4.17)

The Master said, 'You can be of service to your father and mother by remonstrating with them tactfully. If you perceive that they do not wish to follow your advice, then continue to be reverent toward them without offending or disobeying them; work hard and do not murmur against them.' (4.18)

The Master said, 'I am way past my prime. I have not seen the Duke of Zhou in a dream for a long time.' (7.5)

The Master said, 'I am not someone who was born wise. I am someone who loves the ancients and tries to learn from them.' (7.19)

Zhonggong asked about humanity. The Master said, 'When you go out, treat everyone as if you were welcoming a great guest. Employ people as though you were conducting a great sacrifice. Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you. Then neither in your country nor in your family will there be complaints against you.' (12.2)

Zigong inquired about governing. The Master said,

In conversations with his disciples and fellow philosophers, Mencius showed interests beyond government. He debated abstract issues in moral philosophy, such as human beings' inborn potential and tendencies. Mencius came out strongly on the positive side, stressing human potential for goodness. Proof, he asserted, could be found in people's spontaneous responses to the sufferings of others: 'Anyone today who suddenly sees a baby about to fall into a well feels alarmed and concerned' and automatically reaches out to help, without thought of personal gain. Gaozi, Mencius' philosophical debating partner, had argued that 'Human nature is like whirling water. When an outlet is opened to the east, it flows east; when an outlet is opened to the west, it flows west.' To this Mencius countered, 'Water, it is true, is not inclined to either east or west, but does it have no preference for high or low?

'Make food supplies sufficient, provide an adequate army, and give the people reason to have faith.'

Zigong asked, 'If one had no choice but to dispense with one of these three, which should it be?'

'Eliminate the army.'

Zigong continued, 'If one had no choice but to get rid of one of the two remaining, which should it be?'

'Dispense with food,' the Master said. 'Since ancient times, death has always occurred, but people without faith cannot stand.' (12.7)

When Zhonggong was serving as chief minister to the Ji family, he asked for advice on governing. The Master said, 'Put priority on your subordinate officials. Pardon their minor mistakes and promote those who are worthy and talented.'

'How can I recognize those who are talented and worthy to promote them?'

Confucius replied, 'Promote those you know. Will others neglect those you do not know?' (13.2)

The governor of She said to Confucius, 'In my land there is an upright man. His father stole a sheep, and the man turned him in to the authorities.'

The Master responded, 'The upright men of my land are different. The father will shelter the son and the son will shelter the father. Righteousness lies precisely in this.' (13.18)

Duke Ling of Wei asked the Master about the marshalling of troops. The Master replied, 'The ordering of ritual vessels is something I can comment on, but military matters are a topic I have never studied.' (15.1)

Zigong asked about the virtue of humanity. The Master said, 'The artisan who wants to do his work well must first of all sharpen his tools. When you reside in a given state, enter the service of the best of the officials and make friends with the most humane of the scholars.' (15.9)

The Master said, 'The gentleman feels bad when his capabilities fall short of the task. He does not feel bad when people fail to recognize him.' (15.18)

The Master said, 'I once spent a whole day without eating and a whole night without sleeping in order to think. It was of no use. It is better to study.' (15.30)

The Master said, 'The gentleman must exert caution in three areas. When he is a youth and his blood and spirit have not yet settled down, he must be on his guard lest he fall into lusting. When he reaches the full vigour of his manhood in his thirties and his blood and spirit are strong, he must guard against getting into quarrels. When he reaches old age and his blood and spirit have begun to weaken, he must guard against envy.' (16.7)

Goodness is to human nature like flowing downward is to water.' Just as water can be forced up, people can be led to be bad, but this is not their natural inclinations. In a different conversation Mencius used another analogy from nature. Ox Mountain, he said, had once been covered by vegetation, but farmers had denuded it with their animals and woodcutting, until anyone looking at it would think that it was barren by nature. By implication, the lamentable way most men act is no more natural to them than barrenness is to a mountain.

The book recording Mencius' thought, the *Mencius*, is, like the *Analects*, a collection of the philosopher's conversations, presented in no particular order. Inconsistencies among his ideas are left for readers to resolve. The ideas of the next most influential Confucian thinker, Xunzi, or 'Master Xun' (*c*. 310–*c*. 220 BCE), survive in much more coherent and orderly form because the *Xunzi* is a set of essays that Xunzi wrote himself, by and large.

Xunzi had much more political and administrative experience than either Confucius or Mencius and showed consideration for the difficulties rulers might face in trying to rule through ritual and virtue. At the same time he was a rigorous thinker who extended the philosophical foundations of many ideas merely outlined by Confucius or Mencius. For instance, whereas Confucius had declined to discuss gods, portents, and anomalies, Xunzi explicitly argued for a humanistic and rationalistic view of the cosmos. He argued that Heaven is impartial and human affairs result from human efforts. Praying to Heaven or to gods does not get them to intervene. 'Why does it rain after a prayer for rain? In my opinion, for no reason. It is the same as raining when you had not prayed.'

Xunzi still took great interest in ritual, for he saw both beauty and social benefits in its practice. He believed educated men should continue traditional ritual practices, such as divining before major decisions and praying during droughts, even when they know their actions do not bring about the ostensible goal. He held that rites are valuable because they provide an orderly way to express feelings and satisfy desires while maintaining distinctions of rank, title, and honour. Just as music shapes people's emotions and creates feelings of solidarity, so ritual and etiquette shape people's understanding of duty and create social differentiation. In defending ritual, Xunzi was probably responding to the attacks of the Daoists and Mohists, discussed below.

Xunzi wrote at length on the ideal ruler – the true king who would bring unity to All-under Heaven – something many yearned for in his war-torn times. Ritually reinforced hierarchy coupled with the ruler's moral authority would lead to a society where superiors and inferiors comply in harmonious fashion. This was not, however, because people were by nature good. Xunzi directly attacked Mencius' argument that human nature tends toward goodness, claiming to the contrary that men's inborn tendencies are wayward and require curbing through education. He distinguished between what is inborn in people and what is learned only with effort. 'It is human nature to want to eat one's fill when hungry, to want to warm up when cold, to want to rest when tired.'

Much of what is desirable does not come naturally and must be taught. 'When a son yields to his father, or a younger brother yields to his elder brother, or when a son takes on the work for his father or a younger brother for his elder brother, their actions go against their natures and run counter to their feelings. And yet these are the way of the filial son and the principles of ritual and morality.'

Mencius and Xunzi are the two best-known of the hundreds of late Zhou followers of Confucius. Some followers became experts in ritual, others masters of the ancient texts. In terms of historical impact, the strand emphasizing moral self-improvement is worth particular note. Two short treatises, of unknown authorship, the *Great Learning* (*Daxue*) and *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*), expressed these ideas concisely and compellingly. Peace in the realm cannot be achieved without first transforming people. A ruler must perfect his own virtue before he can regulate his family; not until his family is in order can he hope to govern his state effectively; and only on the basis of a well-governed state can he bring peace to the entire realm. In other words, one must change oneself before one can change other people or improve the world.

Painted decoration on a coffin in the tomb of the marquis of Zeng in Hubei province (*c.* 433 BCE). These hybrid, part-human creatures undoubtedly have something to do with early religious beliefs in the Chu area, perhaps representing otherworldly guards, weapons in their hands, ready to fend off evil forces.

Mozi

An important early opponent of Confucius's teachings was Mozi (*c.* 470–*c.* 390 BCE). Only slightly later than Confucius, Mozi agreed with Confucians on the importance of moral action but disagreed on priorities, arguing that one should show equal concern for all, with no favouritism for relatives and neighbours. Mozi loved to debate, and laid out his criteria for judging practices and institutions. Did they work well? Were they beneficial to people? Was there authority for them in the teachings of the sages? Did they correspond to common experience?

In calculating utility, Mozi used the entire population as the yardstick. He argued against aggressive war, saying that territorial gain was not worth loss of life.

In place of contention, he advocated adherence to the views of superiors, up to the ruler, who follows the will of Heaven: 'What the superior considers wrong, all shall consider wrong.'

In contrast to Mencius who favoured hereditary office, Mozi came out strongly in favour of promoting the able and worthy, even if they were peasants, craftsmen, or traders.

Above all, Mozi objected to Confucians' emphasis on traditional ritual practices, especially mourning a father for three years. Since both advocates and opponents of prolonged mourning austerities claimed to be handing down the ways of the ancient

sages, Mozi argued, the only way to choose between them was to analyze the consequences of the practices. His conclusion was that prolonged mourning interrupts work and injures health, thus it impoverishes the people and weakens the state's defences, so should not be practised.

Daoism and the Way beyond the human realm

The followers of both Confucius and Mozi were activists. They believed that government benefited the people and felt called on to do what they could to make the government work well. Those who came to be labelled 'Daoists' did not accept this basic premise. They defended private life and wanted the rulers to leave people alone. Seeking to go beyond everyday concerns, they let their minds wander in the more fanciful aspects of life. They did not place human beings at the centre of the cosmos and were concerned that human contrivance upsets the natural order of things. Rather they affirmed the Way or Dao, the indivisible, indescribable, immaterial force or energy that is the source of all that exists or happens.

Our knowledge of early Daoism is based mostly on two surviving books, the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. The *Laozi*, also called the *Classic of the Way and Its Power* (*Daodejing*), is traditionally ascribed to Lao Dan (sixth century BCE). We now know that it was in circulation by 320 BCE as a copy was found in 1993 in a tomb in Guodian in Hubei province. Poetic and elliptical, this masterpiece can be interpreted many ways. A recurrent theme in it is the mystical preference for the yielding over the assertive and silence over words. The highest good is like water: 'Water benefits all creatures but does not compete. It occupies the places people disdain and thus comes near to the Way.' The interdependence and mutual transformation of all opposites is another common refrain: 'When everyone in the world sees beauty in the beautiful, ugliness is already there. When everyone sees good in the good, bad is already there.' One implication of these ideas is that almost any purposeful action is counterproductive, and the ruler should allow a return to a natural state in which the people are ignorant and content:

> Do not honour the worthy,
> And the people will not compete.
> Do not value rare treasures,
> And the people will not steal.
> Do not display what others want,
> And the people will not have their hearts confused.
> A sage governs this way:
> He empties people's minds and fills their bellies.
> He weakens their wills and strengthens their bones.
> Keep the people always without knowledge and without desires,
> For then the clever will not dare act.
> Engage in no action and order will prevail.

It would be better, the *Laozi* asserts, if people knew less, if they gave up tools and abandoned writing, if they lost their desire to travel or engage in war. They would be satisfied with their own lives and not envy their neighbours.

The other key text of Daoism is the *Zhuangzi*, a portion of which was probably written by the philosopher Zhuangzi (Zhuang Zhou, 369–286 BCE). Zhuangzi shared much of the philosophy found in the *Laozi*, seeing the usefulness of the useless and the relativity of ordinary distinctions. Uninterested in politics, he celebrated spiritual freedom. He told of receiving an envoy from the King of Chu who offered to give him charge of the entire realm. In response he asked the envoy whether a tortoise that had been held as sacred for 3,000 years would prefer to be dead with its bones venerated, or alive with its tail dragging in the mud. On getting the expected response he told the envoy to go away; he wished to drag his tail in the mud.

A masterful writer, Zhuangzi filled his book with flights of fancy, parables, and fictional encounters between historical figures, including delightfully malicious parodies of Confucius and his disciples. Whereas Laozi was concerned with protecting each person's life, Zhuangzi searched for a conception of man's place in the cosmos which would reconcile him to death. How can we be sure life is better than death? People fear what they do not know, but like a captive girl forced to become a king's concubine, they may learn to love what had terrified them. When a friend expressed surprise that Zhuangzi was singing rather than weeping after his wife died, Zhuangzi explained:

> When she first died, how could I have escaped feeling the loss? Then I looked back to the beginning before she had life. Not only before she had life, but before she had form. Not only before she had form, but before she had vital energy. In this confused amorphous realm, something changed and vital energy appeared; when the vital energy was changed, form appeared; with changes in form, life began. Now there is another change bringing death. This is like the progression of the four seasons of spring and autumn, winter and summer. Here she was lying down to sleep in a huge room and I followed her, sobbing and wailing. When I realized my actions showed I hadn't understood destiny, I stopped.

Zhuangzi's views of life and death coloured his views on politics. In one parable he had a wheelwright insolently tell a duke that books were useless since all they contained were the dregs of men long gone. When the duke demanded either an explanation or his life, the wheelwright replied:

> I see things in terms of my own work. When I chisel at a wheel, if I go slow, the chisel slides and does not stay put; if I hurry, it jams and doesn't move properly. When it is neither too slow nor too fast, I can feel it in my hand and respond to it from my heart. My mouth cannot describe it in words, but there is something there. I cannot teach it to my son, and my son cannot learn it

Music

Music played a central role in court life in ancient China. Visitors to the courts of kings and lords could expect to be entertained by troops of dancers and accompanying musicians. Many of the poems in the classic *Book of Songs* were odes or hymns meant to be performed on ritual occasions.

Music was believed by early thinkers to have great moral and emotional power. Confucius distinguished between different sorts of music; the ancient Shao dance, for instance, was considered a positive force, bringing people into harmony, whereas the music of the state of Zheng was dangerous, leading to wanton thoughts. The word 'music' was written with the same character as 'enjoyment', a fact that led Xunzi to posit a connection between the two: 'Music is joy, an emotion which human beings cannot help but feel at times. Unable to resist feeling joy, they must find an outlet through voice and movement.'

Xunzi also stressed that music affects people of all social levels and thus the performance of moderate and tranquil or stern and majestic music is an excellent way for a ruler to encourage a sense of harmony and restraint in common people. The more quantifiable aspects of music attracted the attention of cosmological theorists who speculated on the significance of pitch measurement and its relationship to other numerical relationships. Sound as a natural phenomenon was perceived to be paradigmatic of many natural processes, especially those involving remote and imperceptible influence between entities at a distance.

Archaeologists have unearthed sets of instruments used in court performances in Zhou times. Key instruments were stone chimes, bronze drums, zithers, bamboo flutes, and sets of bells, struck from the outside.

The biggest cache of Zhou period musical instruments was discovered in the tomb (*c.*433 BCE) of Marquis Yi of Zeng, ruler of a petty state in modern Hubei just north of the great state of Chu. In the tomb were 124 instruments, including drums, flutes, mouth organs, pan pipes, zithers, a 32-chime lithophone, and a 64-piece bell set (*above*). The zithers have from five to twenty-five strings and vary in details of their construction. The bells, hit from the outside with mallets or poles, bear inscriptions that indicate their pitches. The precision with which the bells were cast, each with two separate tones, indicates that the art of bell-making had reached a very advanced state.

> from me. So I have gone on for seventy years, growing old chiselling wheels. The men of old died in possession of what they could not transmit. So it follows that what you are reading are their dregs.

Truly skilled craftsmen do not analyze or reason or even keep in mind the rules they once learned; they respond to situations spontaneously, a course others should try. In other words, rational discrimination between alternative courses of action did not appeal to Zhuangzi as much as simply knowing, a form of understanding that exists beyond the need to make conscious choices.

Both Laozi and Zhuangzi treat the Dao or Way as a key concept. In contrast to the Confucians who used this word to refer to the ethically correct way for humankind, the way of the sages and the true kings, the Daoists used it to refer to the way of nature, a way beyond the full comprehension of human beings. Confucianism, with its focus on human affairs, is properly labelled a humanistic philosophy. In Daoism, human society is seen as only a small part of the total reality, and to gain freedom and power people must come to see their continuity with the larger cosmos.

Strategists of power

During the fourth and third centuries BCE, as small states one after another were conquered by large ones and the number of surviving states dwindled, those rulers still in contention were receptive to men who claimed to understand power and how to gain it. Among them were specialists in the military arts. Several versions of the *Art of War*, attributed to Confucius' contemporary Sun Wu, have been found in tombs. In them Master Sun not only discussed battle tactics but also the gathering of intelligence and other ways to deceive the enemy. Since warfare is costly in lives and property, it is better to win without fighting. Deceiving the enemy is essential:

> Therefore, when able, seem to be unable; when ready, seem unready; when nearby, seem far away; and when far away, seem near. If the enemy seeks some advantage, entice him with it. If he is in disorder, attack him and take him. If he is formidable, prepare against him. If he is strong, evade him. If he is incensed, provoke him. If he is humble, encourage his arrogance. If he is rested, wear him down. If he is internally harmonious, sow divisiveness in his ranks. Attack where he is not prepared; go by way of places where it would never occur to him you would go. These are the military strategist's calculations for victory – they cannot be settled in advance.

Besides military strategists who concentrated on ways to gain power through military means, there were political strategists who focused on ways rulers could enhance their control over officials and subjects and expand their territories, a group generally termed Legalists. These Legalist advisors argued that strong government depended not on the moral qualities of the ruler and his officials but on the institutional structures they put in place. Their starting point was not what society should

be but what it is. Uninterested in cosmology, epistemology, or personal ethics, these strategists concentrated on proposing political solutions to disorder and techniques for the accumulation of power.

The first of the two lengthy Legalist treatises that survive has traditionally been ascribed to Lord Shang (Gongsun Yang, d. 338 BCE), chief minister of the state of Qin, the state that adopted Legalist policies most fully. In the book ascribed to him, Lord Shang heaped scorn on respect for tradition and urged the ruler not to hesitate to institute changes in his efforts to strengthen his state. The founders of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou had not been afraid to make changes, because 'wise people create laws while ignorant ones are controlled by them; the worthy alter the rites while the unworthy are held fast by them.' Law to him was the sovereign's will, carefully codified and impartially applied. The monarch regulates those under him through rules but he himself remains above the law.

With Lord Shang's guidance, Qin took a series of steps to make itself a more efficient and powerful state. It abolished the hereditary aristocracy, substituting a hierarchy of twenty ranks awarded on merit measured in objective ways, such as the number of enemy heads cut off in battle. Thus merit is the basis for rank and the state alone determined rank and the privileges attached to it. Qin divided newly acquired territory into counties governed by appointed officials who kept up-to-date information on the population through household registers. To attract migrants from other states, new settlers were offered lands and houses, which in time they were able to buy and sell. Ordinary farmers were thus freed from the domination of the local nobility, but in exchange they had the Qin state, with all its power, directly controlling them. The state organized all families into mutual responsibility groups of five families, making them responsible for reporting each other's crimes. Ordinary residents also had heavy obligations to the state for taxes and labour service and could not travel without permits; vagrants and criminals were forced into penal labour service. All of these policies made sense from a Legalist point of view.

The fullest exposition of Legalist thought was written by Han Feizi (d. 233 BCE), who had begun as a student of the Confucian master Xunzi. In his writings, Han Feizi analyzed situations from the perspective of the ruler. Han Feizi supported the merit principle for recruitment to office because it was in the interest of the ruler. He advised rulers to be careful whom they trusted, for 'when the ruler trusts someone, he falls under that person's control'. This includes not only ministers but also wives and concubines, who think of the interests of their sons. Given the propensity of subordinates to pursue their own selfish interests, the ruler cannot afford to be candid or warm toward any of them. Rather, he should keep them in awed ignorance of his intentions and control them by manipulating competition among them.

The Confucian notion that government should be based on virtue and ritual was viewed as unworkable by Han Feizi. Hierarchical relations had to be based on the power to reward and punish; affection or example were not adequate.

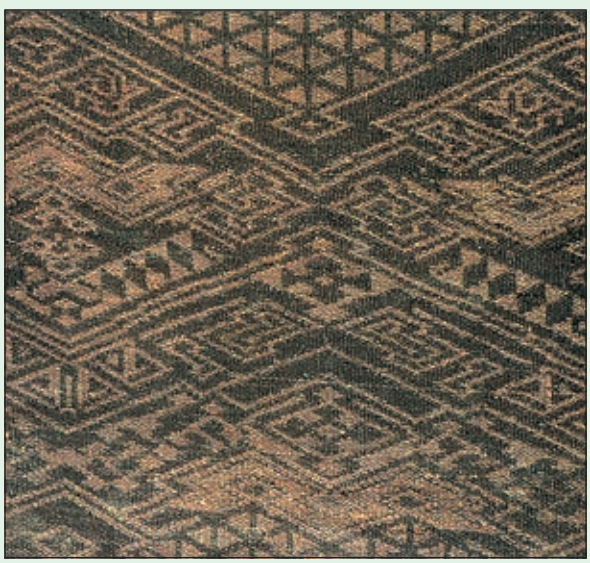
Silk

Silk has a special association with China. By the late Zhou period, to those beyond China's borders, China was the land that produced silk, the most valued of all textiles, a soft, sheer, lightweight, long-lasting fabric that could be dyed brilliant colours. Silk symbolized wealth: not only was it worn by the wealthy, but bolts of silk were used as currency from Zhou times through the Tang dynasty a millennium later.

Archaeological remains reveal that already in Shang times Chinese were making fine silk damasks (single colour fabrics with woven-in designs) and elaborate silk embroideries. Substantial pieces of silk fabrics have been unearthed from late Zhou tombs in central China (the Chu area), showing that an extremely high level of technical skill had been reached by this time. Finds include multicoloured brocades, beautifully designed embroideries, and open-work gauzes. Designs include human figures, animals, dragons, phoenixes, and geometric patterns.

The production of silk requires the cultivation of mulberry trees and the tending of silkworms (a kind of caterpillar), which feed on the leaves of these trees. Silkworms do not spin cocoons on demand; timing and temperature have to be handled carefully, and during the month between hatching and spinning the cocoons they have to be fed every few hours, day and night. If properly coddled, the worms eventually spin cocoons for several days, each cocoon made up of a strand of silk several thousand feet long. Still over 2,000 silkworms are needed to produce 1 pound (450 g) of silk. In order to make textiles from these cocoons, they have to be boiled, then the separate strands reeled off, then a number of strands twisted together to make stronger threads. Only then come dyeing and weaving.

Women were traditionally associated with all stages of sericulture from the tending of silkworms to the reeling, spinning, and weaving needed to transform the cocoons into silk fabric. The gender division of labour was commonly summarized by the phrase, 'Men plough and women weave'.



Above
Detail of a three-colour patterned silk found in a fourth-century BCE tomb at Mashan, Hubei province. The material is densely woven with about 330 warp and 100 weft threads per inch (2.5 cm).

Left
Detail of an embroidered silk gauze ritual garment from the same tomb. The flowing, curvilinear design incorporates dragons, phoenixes, and tigers. Rows of even, round chain-stitches are used both for outline and to fill in colour.

> Think of parents' relations to their children. They congratulate each other when a son is born, but complain to each other when a daughter is born. Why do parents have these divergent responses when both are equally their offspring? It is because they calculate their long-term advantage. Since even parents deal with their children in this calculating way, what can one expect where there is no parent-child bond? When present-day scholars counsel rulers, they all tell them to rid themselves of thoughts of profit and follow the path of mutual love. This is expecting rulers to go further than parents.

Han Feizi urged rulers to be firm but consistent, to make the requirements and prohibitions clear and the rewards and punishments automatic. This would make the officials and common people obedient so 'the state will get rich and the army will be strong. Then it will be possible to succeed in establishing hegemony over other states.'

Confucians often likened the state to the family and the good ruler to a good parent. Han Feizi drew different conclusions from his observations of family life: 'A mother loves her son twice as much as a father does, but a father's orders are ten times more effective than a mother's.' Moreover, he thought the common people had about as much understanding of what is good for them as infants.

> If an infant's head is not shaved, his sores will not heal; if his boils are not lanced, his illness will worsen. Even when someone holds him and his loving mother does the shaving or lancing, he will howl without stop, for a baby cannot see that a small discomfort will result in a major improvement. Now the ruler wants people to till land and maintain pastures to increase their production, but they think he is cruel. He imposes heavy penalties to prevent wickedness, but they think he is harsh. He levies taxes in cash and grain to fill the storehouses and thus relieve them in time of famine and have funds for the army, but they consider him greedy. He imposes military training on everyone in the land and makes his forces fight hard in order to capture the enemy, but they consider him violent. In all four cases, he uses means that will lead to peace, but the people are not happy.

Han Feizi and other Legalists had a highly authoritarian vision of order. There was no room for private conceptions of right and wrong because diversity leads to weakness and disorder. Law is something rulers decree for the interests of the state. If well publicized and enforced unwaveringly, it gets people to do things they would not otherwise be inclined to do, such as work hard and enter battle. Order and predictability result, bringing benefit to all. The opinions of people other than the rulers thus had no place in this system, any more than ancient privileges or traditional customs. In Legalist thought, there was no law above and independent of the wishes of the rulers, no law that might set limits on their actions in the way that the divine law of Heaven did in Mohist thought (or natural or divine law did in Greek thought).

Regional cultures and ethnic identities

Perhaps because the late Zhou was a time of division into separate states, it was also a key period in the development of ideas about cultural and ethnic identity. In other words, the weakness of the Zhou dynasty as a political force unifying the known civilized world encouraged people to give more thought to issues of who belonged together, who could be considered one of 'us'.

Each of the major states came to have a distinct identity, tied to its own history and to distinctive features of its culture. In most late Zhou literature, individuals are identified by the state from which they came. Still, loyalties were not narrowly focused on states. People moved from one state to another frequently, and technological innovations and art motifs spread readily from one region to another. To advance diplomatic alliances, the ruling houses of the various states intermarried, so rulers regularly had grandmothers, mothers, and wives from other states.

The idea of a broader realm on one central axis counterbalanced identification with home states. This broader realm could be referred to as 'All-Under-Heaven' (*tianxia*) or 'the Central States' (*zhongguo*). The Zhou king, as Son of Heaven, properly ruled over All-Under-Heaven. In late Zhou, when it was apparent to all that the Zhou king did not actually rule the entire realm, the term 'All-Under-Heaven' continued to be used to refer to the civilized world, the collection of states and people that belonged together. Mencius, for instance, spoke of how a ruler who instituted good policies would please the farmers, merchants, and gentlemen of All-Under-Heaven; thus the people of neighbouring states would migrate to him, he would have no enemies in All-Under-Heaven, and could reign as a true king. But All-Under-Heaven was not an undifferentiated space or population; it was focused on the true king – the Son of Heaven. A notion of geographical centrality is also implicit in the term 'the Central States', referring to the states along the Yellow River which had been central to the Xia and Shang and that continued through the Eastern Zhou to set the standard against which outsiders could be judged deficient.

The distinction between Zhou subjects and those who did not submit to the Zhou tended to be merged with the distinction between Hua or Xia people (which by this period can be taken as ethnic terms for Chinese) and barbarians, of whom there were several broad categories (Yi, Man, Di, Rong) and a great many particular names for specific tribes or cultures, such as the Yue of the south, who tattooed their bodies. Recent archaeological excavations have confirmed that many Rong, Di, Yi, and Man polities were interspersed among states ruled by Zhou lords. For instance, archaeologists have found the site of the Luhun Rong state, which the states of Qin and Jin had forced to relocate near Luoyang in 638 BCE. But even if geographically close, cultural differences could persist. A Rong lord allied with the state of Jin was reported to have said in 599 BCE, 'Our Rong drink, our food, our clothes are all different from those of the Hua. We do not exchange presents with them. Our languages are mutually incomprehensible.' This does not mean that 'barbarians' were considered so different that they could not learn Zhou ways. When someone asked

Confucius how he could consider moving to live among uncouth barbarians, he responded, 'If a gentleman lived among them, what uncouthness would there be?'

For the late Zhou, there is considerable evidence, both textual and archaeological, of the process by which the Chinese world was extended and groups that had once been considered barbarian or quasi-barbarian came to participate in the Chinese world as full members. The Eastern Yi in Shandong were largely absorbed by the state of Qi in the Spring and Autumn period. In early Zhou the southern half of modern China was considered barbarian or semi-barbarian. In the Yangzi valley the state of Chu expanded rapidly, defeating and absorbing fifty or more small states as it extended its reach north to the heartland of Zhou. To the east it absorbed the state of Yue and some of the people labelled as Yue – although others still lived further south. By this point Chu controlled a territory as extensive as the Shang or Western Zhou dynasties at their heights. The tremendous material wealth of Chu can be gauged by the large number of late Zhou tombs found within its sphere. In art it borrowed and elaborated styles from further north and added distinctive elements not present elsewhere, such as antlered cranes, motifs which may have connections to distinctive religious ideas.

The Chu ruling elite was certainly conversant with both the material and intellectual culture of the Central States, and by late Zhou was contributing to that culture in major ways. Chu, for example, proved an innovator both in bureaucratic methods of government and in the use of infantry armies. Zhuangzi spent some time in Chu, and many scholars associate Daoism with Chu. The fantastical poems in *Songs of Chu* (*Chuci*) are worlds apart from the earth-bound poems of the *Books of Songs* of the early Zhou. The principal poem is presented as the lament of Qu Yuan, a minister whose loyalty to his ruler is not appreciated and who ends up throwing himself into a river. In the poem Qu Yuan imagines himself wandering on the clouds and looking down on the earth. There are also poems in which shamans and shamanesses court elusive deities or fly through the spirit world.

Processes of absorbing indigenous states continued through the Warring States period but certainly was far from complete. The state of Qin conquered one of the Rong states to its northwest and built a wall to defend its new border. It also conquered the indigenous states of Ba and Shu in Sichuan in the late fourth century BCE. Qin moved some 10,000 families from its home region into the new territory, contributing to the gradual assimilation of the indigenous population.

Some of the Di in the north also were drawn into the Chinese world. The rulers of a minor state in the northeast, Zhongshan, were recognized to be White Di, who in the sixth century BCE had been driven by other tribes from Shaanxi into Hebei, where the local Chinese states were unable to expel them. By the early fifth century, these Di had gained the help of the state of Wei and had established a city, from which they ruled for about a century before being defeated by the state of Yan, further north. Excavations of two tombs of kings of Zhongshan show acculturation to the taste and values of the Chinese amongst whom they lived. The figurines found

in the graves are dressed in clothes more typically Chinese than northern. The ninety-odd inscribed bronzes buried there give detailed accounts of historical events in typically Confucian language. At the same time the royal tombs also contained artefacts needed for life on the steppe, such as hardware for tents. Shortly before the downfall of the state of Zhongshan, the king of a neighbouring state sent someone to assess Zhongshan, and this spy reported on his return that the king of Zhongshan loved learning, his people sought fame, but his soldiers were cowardly.

The closer a small 'barbarian' polity was to the Central States in physical distance, the more likely it was to be absorbed during the Eastern Zhou, and some Warring States texts imagine five concentric circles, with people less civilized the further away they were. Archaeology has confirmed some significant cultural differences outside the Zhou core. The region stretching from Gansu through northern Shaanxi, northern Hebei, into Liaoning is now often called China's Northern Zone. From 600 to 300 BCE evidence of horses and nomadic pastoralism becomes more common in this region. From metal artefacts found at these sites, we know these peoples were in contact with both Chinese states and pastoral cultures of the Eurasian steppe. In the early imperial period, discussed in the next chapter, they enter Chinese history in a major way.

From the tomb of the king of Zhongshan who died in about 310 BCE, this bronze wine vessel, 25 inches (63.5 cm) tall, has four lively dragons attached to the four edges of its body. The four sides are inscribed with a long account of the history of the Zhongshan kings.

The ideas expounded in the late Zhou originated in specific geographical and temporal circumstances. The preference of the Daoists for private life and the earnest wish of the Confucians and Mohists for a moral transformation of humankind can be seen as responses to the brutality of the era. Moreover, late Zhou schools of thought had strong ties to particular regions of the country where they were first propounded and where followers found adherents.

Still, because the ideas of these thinkers were recorded in 'books' – actually, rolls of bamboo strips or silk – the ideas expressed in them were in time detached from their historical and geographical context. In this detached form, they came to play an enormous role in shaping the development of Chinese culture. They articulated many basic political, social, and ethical orientations. Chinese who in later centuries read these texts were always capable of disagreeing with each other on how to interpret and apply what they learned from ancient books, and were certainly capable of learning of very different ways of looking at the world (the success of Buddhism is proof enough of that), but it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of these books in providing a common set of

understandings about the world and the people who live in it. This influence was of course greatest on the educated, but as education spread over time and the educated interacted in more varied ways with ordinary illiterate farmers, the most basic elements in these cultural orientations came to be widely shared and thus to constitute a large part of what is meant by 'Chinese' culture.

China was not the only place where key philosophical ideas were elaborated in the first millennium BCE. In the India of the Upanishads and the Buddha, in the Greece of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, as in the China of the Hundred Schools of Thought, intellectual breakthroughs occurred as cultural or religious experts ceased to limit themselves to expounding the rules of their culture and began to stand back and look beyond, to question and reflect on established conventions. In all these places, creative individuals began to propose new visions and perspectives. But the visions offered by thinkers of each region were rather different, with the result that the outpouring of reflective thought in this era marks a major step in the divergence of civilizations. When late Zhou philosophers are compared to Indian or Greek thinkers, their disagreements fade a bit and what all Chinese thinkers had in common becomes more striking.

At the cosmological level all the major philosophical schools in China shared ideas related to ancestors and Heaven discussed in the last chapter. They also shared an underlying assumption that the cosmos came into being on its own, without a creator of the sort so important in most Western thinking. Instead of focusing on mechanisms that set things into motion, which are important where there is an assumption of a creator, these thinkers emphasized the organismic interconnections among all the constituent parts, stressing relationships and concurrences much more than causes. Seeing the cosmos as an integrated whole, Chinese thinkers were not inclined to organize their world in terms of opposites that exclude the other, such as natural and supernatural, life and death, or mind and body. Rather, they saw all oppositions as complementary polarities, on the order of night and day, yin and yang, and knowledge and action. Moreover, they thought in terms of processes and phases more than discrete things.

At the level of social and political order, differences between Chinese assumptions or basic cultural orientations and those of other major civilizations are also telling. Particularly important here is the unchallenged conviction that the family is both natural and good. Unlike Greece, for instance, where the 'private' realm of the family was not given the positive evaluation of the public realm of the *polis*, China considered that devotion to family was an obvious good. Laozi's utopia is not one that liberates the individual from the family, but one that lets families operate with little or no pressure from social or political units much larger than the village. Not only did Chinese thinkers assume that the family is essential to society, they also did not question that it is patrilineal and patriarchal. The family thus also provided for many a model for the ideal political order, one centred on an authoritarian ruler who would make hierarchical cooperation as natural as it seemed to them in the family.

Political visions also show considerable agreement. Among all Chinese thinkers of the period, order was viewed as inextricably connected to monarchy, indeed to cosmically based universal kings. Few thought the multistate system of their day was the ideal order. There should instead be a single universal king who embodies political order and possesses the power to transform the society below him for good or ill. Only the Mohists saw law very positively. Whether from a Confucian, a Legalist, or even a Daoist perspective, law was viewed as an expedient, not as something noble or inviolable, above and beyond the ruler. To most Confucians the solution to the problem of an inadequate ruler was not laws or institutional structures but the promotion of the most talented and upright to the post of chancellor to steer the ruler in the right direction.

Another widespread conviction in Chinese thought, one that contrasts especially with early Indian thought, is the belief that life in this world can be improved, both for society and the individual. Most major schools of thought, with the important exception of the Legalists, looked to the early Zhou or even earlier to ancient rulers like Yao, Shun, and Yu for a better world. This belief in a golden age also meant that Chinese thinkers, lamenting the failings of their own age, did not conclude that reality or goodness lay in some other, unworldly realm. Achieving a golden age in this world was possible.