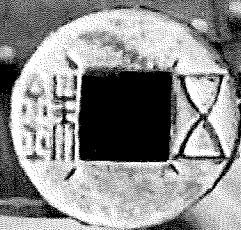


MARK EDWARD LEWIS

THE EARLY
CHINESE
EMPIRES



QIN AND HAN

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ing and provisioning its forces for conquest. Second, through the policies introduced by Fan Sui, Qin alone successfully concentrated power in the person of the ruler. While other states were still dispersing authority and prestige among enfeoffed administrators and royal kin, Qin was largely able to make the ruler the single locus of undivided authority.

Qin Nationality and “All under Heaven”

One major consequence of the reconstruction of the Qin state was the emergence of a distinctive national character. Qin increasingly defined itself, and was defined by others, as a land and a people apart. In the earlier Zhou state, Qin had been one state among others, linked to the rest by a shared elite culture of ritual vessels, music, and verse. Qin's elimination of the nobility and its incorporation of the lower strata of society into military and civil service meant that local or regional traditions became definitive of Qin nationality.⁸

The clearest evidence of a distinctive Qin national culture is the fairly rapid emergence of a new discourse that associated Qin with non-Chinese barbarians and linked barbarian culture to Qin's political reforms. Prior to the middle of the Warring States period, texts such as the *Transmission of Master Zuo* (*Zuo zhuan*), the *Words of the States* (*Guo yu*), the *Analects* (*Lun yu*), the *Master Mo* (*Mozi*), and the *Mencius* (*Mengzi*) seldom mention Qin, and when they do they never indicate Qin's supposed cultural otherness. The archaeological record also shows that the Qin nobility shared a common culture with states of the central plain. In their graphs and bronze bells, the Qin conservatively clung to the older Zhou forms even when more popular revised forms of graphs and bells were introduced in other states.⁹ The Qin clearly did not consider themselves to be cultural outsiders associated with barbarians, as they would be described after 300 B.C., and especially under the Han.

In the late Warring States period several texts began to speak of Qin people as alien or backward in relation to the states of the central plain—a character derived from their intermingling with barbarians whose customs they presumably had absorbed. The *Gongyang Commentary to the Spring-and-Autumn Annals* (*Chun qiu Gongyang zhuan*), a Confucian text compiled sometime between 320 and 233 B.C., was one of the first to emphasize the opposition between “Chinese” and “barbarian,” and it clearly identified Qin with the barbarians: “When the ruler of Qin died, the *Annals* did not record his name. Why is this? Because Qin are barbarians.”¹⁰

Texts from the very end of the Warring States period often refer to Qin's having barbarian customs, either as an original condition or through absorption. The *Stratagems of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce*), a collection of model speeches attributed to historical figures from the Warring States period, asserts: "Qin has the same customs as the [barbarians] Rong and Di. It has the heart of a tiger or wolf; greedy, loving profit, and untrustworthy, knowing nothing of ritual, duty or virtuous conduct." A speaker in the same text describes Qin as "a state of tigers and wolves" that greedily desires "to swallow the whole world," but he goes even further in stating that "Qin is the mortal enemy of 'All under Heaven,'" thus treating it not merely as barbaric but as the antithesis of civilization or humanity.¹¹

In the Han empire, these remarks on Qin's savage nature were conflated with its topography into a general model that accounted for the origins of the coercive laws of Shang Yang, the cruelty of the first emperor, and the fall of Qin. The early Han philosophical compendium, the *Master of Huainan* (*Huainanzi*), said:

The customs of Qin consisted of wolf-like greed and violence. The people lacked a sense of duty and pursued profit. They could be intimidated through punishments, but could not be transformed through goodness. They could be encouraged with rewards, but could not be urged on with reputation. Enveloped in difficult terrain and belted by the Yellow River, they were cut off on all sides and thus secure. The land was profitable and the topography beneficial, so they accumulated great wealth. Lord Xiao wanted to use his tiger-like or wolf-like power to swallow up the feudal lords. The laws of Lord Shang were produced from this situation.¹²

The Han historian Sima Qian made a similar observation in the preface to his table on the comparative chronology of the Warring States: "Now Qin state mixed in the customs of the Rong and Di barbarians, so it placed violence and cruelty first and treated humanity and duty as secondary. Its position was that of frontier vassal, but it offered suburban sacrifices [like the Son of Heaven]. This terrified the true gentleman." Here, the cruelty of Qin laws and the martial tendencies of its people are explicitly attributed to Qin's being a frontier state located in a region inhabited by non-Chinese people.¹³

Sima Qian also echoes the *Master of Huainan* when he places the fol-

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lowing remarks in Shang Yang's mouth: "Lord Shang said, 'Qin had the teachings of the Rong and Di. There was no distinction between fathers and sons, who dwelt together in the same room. Now I have reformed their teachings, and established for them the division between men and women. I have built the great Jique Palace, and set up a capital like that of Lu or Wei.'" ¹⁴ The theme of Qin barbarism is the same, but here Shang Yang's policies are intended to correct them. The remarks about building a palace and capital like those of the eastern states Lu or Wei indicate Qin's status as a backward state that sought to imitate its cultural betters.

The Han criticism of Qin as a creature of savage custom and of Qin law as an expression of barbaric local practices reached its apogee with the first great Han critic of Qin, Jia Yi, who wrote under Emperor Wen. His most celebrated discussion of Qin, "The Discursive Judgment Censuring Qin," connected Qin's terrain, its customs, and its rulers to one another and to its ultimate downfall. Its account of Qin history begins: "Qin's territory was enveloped by mountains and belted by the Yellow River, so that it was secure. It was a state cut off on all sides." Qin's excellent strategic position was the source of its security and also of its isolation.

This image of isolation reappears in Jia Yi's description of Qin's imperial rulers. "The king of Qin [the first emperor] thought he was sufficient to himself and never asked others, so he committed errors without being corrected. The second emperor inherited this, following his father without changing. Through violence and cruelty he doubled the calamity. Ziying [the third Qin ruler] was completely alone without intimates, imperiled and young he had no assistance." ¹⁵ Jia Yi follows this account of the rulers' isolation with the explanation that the "customs of Qin" placed a taboo on all criticism, so that when the rulers committed errors, no officials remonstrated with them. In contrast with the Zhou dynasty, which had established feudal lords who allowed it to survive even after it lost real power, the Qin relied entirely on "numerous laws and stern punishments" and thus had no supporters at the end. The geographically induced isolation of Qin shaped its customs, which in turn led to the isolation of the rulers and their exclusive reliance on punishments. These alien customs were specifically contrasted with the Zhou practices that had defined the civilization of the Chinese heartland.

Other writings by Jia Yi made the link between custom, law, and the fate of Qin even more explicit. The chapter "The Changing of the Times"

in his *Xin shu* explains the decline of Qin customs in the following manner:

Lord Shang turned against ritual and duty, abandoned proper human relations, and put his whole heart and mind into expansion. After practicing this for two years, Qin's customs grew worse by the day. Whenever Qin people had sons who grew to adulthood, if the family was rich they sent them out as separate households, and if they were poor they sent them out as indentured laborers. If someone lent his father a rake, hoe, staff, or broom, then he put on airs of great generosity. If a mother took a gourd dipper, bowl, dustpan, or broom, then her offspring would immediately upbraid her. Women suckled their infants in the presence of their fathers-in-law, and if the wife and mother-in-law were not on good terms then they snarled and glared at one another. Loving their young children and material gain while holding their parents in contempt and having no proper relations, they were scarcely different from animals.¹⁶

Here Shang Yang's reforms cause families to break up into individual nuclear households, which leads to devaluation of kin ties. The greed and the animal-like nature of the Qin people, which figured in earlier texts as inborn character, appear here as a consequence of culture, specifically Shang Yang's reforms. Jia Yi laments that his own Han dynasty carried on these corrupted Qin customs.¹⁷

A version of many of these ideas occurs in the *Gulian Commentary to the Spring-and-Autumn Annals* (*Chun qiu Gulian zhuan*), a work probably written in the Han period and closely related to the *Gongyang*. This text treats Qin's barbarism as something that developed in the span of recorded history, but it does not link barbarism to the reforms of Shang Yang. Instead, it traces it to an unprincipled campaign waged by Lord Mu in 627 B.C. However, it also incorporates Jia Yi's idea that the failure of Qin government manifested itself in the breakdown of proper family relations, particularly the instruction of children and the separation of men and women.¹⁸

These remarks on the barbaric, backward, and alien culture of Qin could be interpreted as simply the emergence of anti-Qin polemics after it became the dominant power in the region. However, scattered evidence from traditional texts, along with newly discovered materials, suggests that, in the same period, the Qin state itself adopted this persona of a

state distinct from and hostile to the culture of the central plain. Thus, the accusation of the *Stratagems* that Qin was the enemy of “All under Heaven” figures also in the opening chapter of the late Warring States philosophical text *Master Han Fei* (*Han Feizi*), but since this is presented as a speech from Han Fei to the king of Qin (later the first emperor), it is clear that the authors felt that Qin accepted and perhaps even prided itself on this adversarial relation.¹⁹

A better-known example of Qin’s sense of its own otherness is Li Si’s account of the music of Qin. Himself an alien statesman who became chief minister in Qin, Li Si, in arguing against a proposal to expel foreigners, offered as precedent a supposed Qin adoption of foreign music: “The true sounds of Qin are to delight the ear by singing *woo-woo* while striking a water jar and banging a pot, strumming the zither and slapping the thigh. The music of Zheng and Wei, the *Sangjian*, *Zhao*, *Yu*, *Wu*, and *Xiang* are the music of alien states. But now you have abandoned striking water jars and banging pots to adopt the music of Zheng and Wei; set aside strumming zithers and slapping thighs to take up the *Zhao* and *Yu*.” Since the comment quoted here was part of a persuasion addressed to the Qin court, this reference to “the music of alien states” was clearly not intended as an insult, as it is depicted in an anecdote from an earlier century. That Li Si and the Qin courtiers both accept the false argument that the music of the central states is a recent importation suggests that Qin had come to pride itself on its presumed cultural distinctiveness. The vulgar nature of the “true” Qin music might also suggest some pride in popular, regional practice, as opposed to the refined music of the court.²⁰

The perceived separation between Qin culture and that of the other states is demonstrated in several Qin documents, both official and private, discovered in tombs. A text found at Shuihudi in the tomb of a local official serving in an area of Chu that had only recently been conquered states:

In ancient times the people each had their local custom, so what they regarded as profitable, liked, or hated were different. This was not beneficial to the people, and it was harmful to the state. Therefore the sage kings made laws and measures in order to correct and rectify the people, to eliminate their deviant boorishness, and to purge their wicked customs . . . Now the legal codes and decrees are complete, but the people do not use them. Dissipated people controlled

3

THE PARADOXES OF EMPIRE

WHEN THE fall of his last rival left the king of Qin master of the civilized world, he and his court were fully aware of the unprecedented nature of their achievement. As one courtier remarked, they had surpassed the greatest feats of the legendary sages of antiquity. And now they would set about enacting visionary programs designed to institutionalize a new era in human history, the era of total unity.¹

Yet as Jia Yi would later observe, the Qin dynasty collapsed within two decades because it did not change enough. Despite its proclamations of making a new start in a world utterly transformed, the Qin carried forward the fundamental institutions of the Warring State era, seeking to rule a unified realm with the techniques they had used to conquer it. The Qin's grandiose visions of transformation failed to confront the extensive changes that the end of permanent warfare had brought about. It fell to the Han, who took over the realm after the Qin dynasty's defeat, to carry out the major institutional programs and cultural innovations that gave form to the vision of world empire.

The scale of the problems that confronted the Qin in creating an imperial order can be seen in the changes they attempted to make during their brief rule.

Centralization under the First Emperor

The first change carried out by the Qin was to create a new title and model for the ruler. Unification required institutions and values that could transcend regional ties, and the ultimate authority for these institutions

and values would be a semi-divinized monarch who ruled as the agent of celestial powers. Imposed from on high, the dynasty of such a ruler must be detached from the regions that made up his realm. To become servants of this celestial monarch, agents of the state would be required to forswear loyalties to family and home. The emperor's officials, though raised above local society, would be servants of the monarch, drawing their authority from him.

The king of Qin claimed for himself the title of *huangdi*, which we inadequately translate as "emperor." *Di* had been the high god of the Shang, the first historical state in China that ruled the central Yellow River valley in the second half of the first millennium B.C. However, by the Warring States period its meaning had changed. The mythic culture-hero sages who had supposedly created human civilization were called *di*, indicating their superhuman power. And the four high gods of Qin religion were known as *di*, corresponding to the points of the compass and thus embodying the cosmos.

In claiming the title *di* for himself, the king of Qin asserted his godlike power, strengthened by the addition of *huang*, which meant "shining" or "splendid" and was most frequently used as an epithet of Heaven. Declaring himself the first *huangdi*, the First Emperor claimed to be the initiator of a new era and, the progenitor of a second, third, and fourth *huangdi*, a dynasty that would reach to the end of time, just as his realm reached to the limits of space. To transcend his human state and become an immortal, the First Emperor initiated the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices in which he ascended Mount Tai to communicate with the highest god.

To ground the cosmic claims of his title, the First Emperor toured his new realm and inscribed his achievements in verse on the peaks of mountains. The texts of six of these inscriptions have been preserved, and in them the emperor spoke of how his blessings had been bestowed upon all within the four seas, "wherever sun and moon shine," "wherever human tracks reach," descending even to the beasts and the plants. The range of his power and beneficence was universal.²

This new vision of the ruler was also articulated in a philosophical work sponsored by the king of Qin's first chief minister, Lü Buwei. This text, the *Springs and Autumns of Master Lü* (*Lü shi chun qiu*), was structured according to the calendar, and it argued that the ruler followed the pattern of Heaven. In a closely associated move, the First Emperor claimed that a cosmic cycle, the so-called Five Phases cycle, brought about his rise to power and made it an inevitable part of the divine plan.

A major building program was undertaken to transform the capital city into a microcosm of the universe. The emperor's new palace was patterned on the North Star and the Big Dipper, the fixed center of the sky. Great statues cast from the confiscated weapons of defeated states represented constellations, and replicas of all the palaces of the conquered states served as a microcosm of the Earth.

These ceremonial and architectural assertions of the emperor's godhead were accompanied by institutional programs that aimed to centralize and unify all aspects of Chinese life. The most important of these lay in the intellectual sphere. Whereas each of the Warring States had its own writing system, the Qin government created a new, simplified non-alphabetic script to be used throughout the empire. It reduced the complex and variable Large Seal script with its curving lines—the kind of writing used on Zhou ritual vessels—into simpler, more rectilinear forms. The Qin writing system may have suppressed as much as twenty-five percent of the pre-Qin graphs.

The new standardized script allowed swifter writing with brush and ink—essential for imperial record keeping. It was propagated across the empire through public displays of graphs on stone inscriptions, on objects manufactured in government workshops, and in official documents. The result was a graphic koine—a language shared by diverse peoples without being the first language of any of them. This artificial written language existed only in texts and was distinct from the mutually unintelligible languages spoken in different parts of the empire. It allowed written communication between people who would not have been able to communicate orally because they would have pronounced the graphs differently. Still in use through most of the Western Han period, this script was eventually replaced by an even simpler variant known as “secretarial” script, which could be written even more quickly.

The development of a pan-imperial writing system led to the founding of an imperial academy intended to control the dissemination of texts and the interpretation of their meanings. In Han and later accounts this event was described as the “burning of the books,” but it was actually a policy of unification rather than destruction. When a scholar argued that the First Emperor should imitate the Zhou founders by enfeoffing his relatives, the chief minister, Li Si, retorted that what the state should do was put an end to such criticism of current institutions through reference to an idealized antiquity.

Acting on this principle, he removed all copies of the *Canon of Odes*

the least important a few thousand. As a group they consist of twenty-four great officers, and each of them is called "Ten Thousand Horsemen."⁹ The Xiongnu "kings" were chiefs who held part of the empire as appanages—land from the *chanyu* over which they exercised semi-independent rule. Lesser chiefs were members of the high council. The basic features of this system—appanages, pairing of high posts as left and right (east and west), decimal military structure, and a few top-ranking men in the council—recur in later Central Asian states.

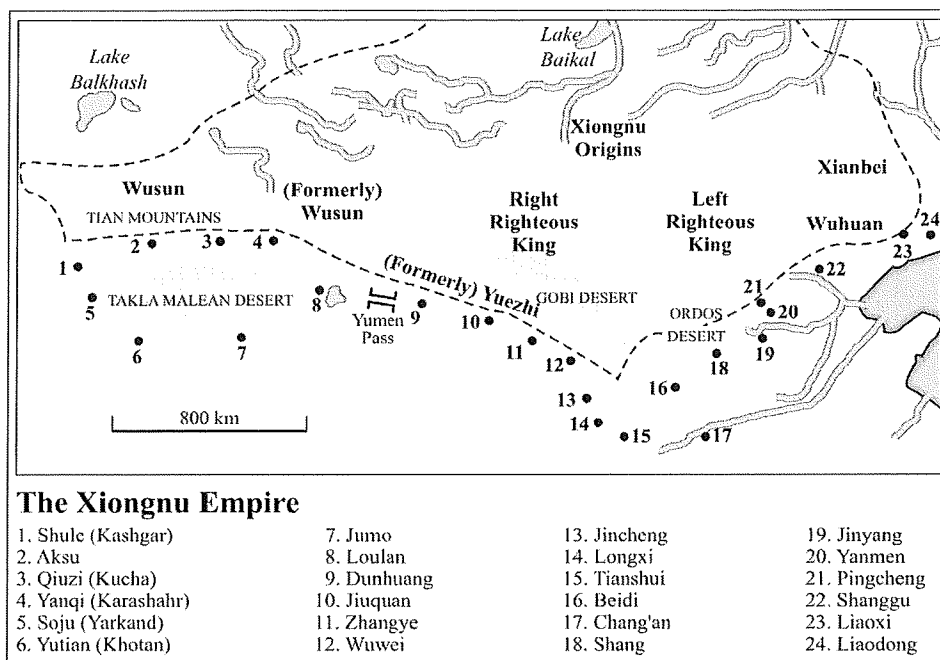
These two models of the Xiongnu state—economic dependence on the Chinese empire, military response to the Chinese empire—are not mutually exclusive. The second describes how a centralized state emerged around the *chanyu*, while the first emphasizes the financial bases of his power. Even advocates of the second model agree that the Xiongnu state used revenues extracted from the states around them to pay for its courts and armies. However, exponents of the first model emphasize China as the exclusive or predominant source of the nomads' income, while exponents of the second note that the Xiongnu extracted tribute from vanquished nomadic states as well as from city-states in the Tarim Basin.¹⁰ Given China's great wealth, there is little doubt that it became the greatest source of wealth for Xiongnu rulers, and the *chanyu*'s ability to extract income from the Chinese empire set him apart from his rival chieftains. Nevertheless, the argument that the Xiongnu state depended on income from China for survival is certainly an overstatement.

Modun's new empire reversed the balance of power between the Chinese and their nomadic neighbors. In preceding centuries, Chinese states had expanded northward at the expense of nomadic peoples. But in 200 B.C., the Han founder suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Xiongnu. Consequently, the Han adopted a policy of "peace and kinship" (*he qin*) in which gold, silk, and grain were annually sent to the *chanyu*, along with the periodic gift of Han princesses for his harem. In exchange, the Xiongnu agreed not to attack China. While this was essentially a form of peacemaking through tribute, some Chinese suggested that in the long-run this policy would weaken the Xiongnu. Tribesmen would be corrupted by their taste for Chinese luxuries, and thus dependent upon China. And when sons of Han princesses became rulers in the Xiongnu state, their chiefs would become junior kin of the Han court. A key assumption of this argument was that the Xiongnu differed from the Chinese only in culture, not in kind, and that the adoption of Chinese traditions would ultimately lead to their assimilation into the empire.¹¹

In addition to the payment of tribute and gift of women, the *he qin* system entailed the recognition of diplomatic equality between China and the Xiongnu. The Xiongnu chief was given the right to refer to his family name in addressing the Chinese emperor, unlike the Chinese themselves, who, being slaves of the emperor, used only their personal names. In addition, the title *chanyu* was recognized as equal to the Chinese *huangdi*, and the two rulers were described as “brothers.” In 162 B.C. the Chinese Emperor Wen wrote: “I and the *chanyu* are the parents of the people. Problems that emerged in the past from the misdeeds of our subordinates should not ruin our brotherly happiness. I have heard that Heaven does not cover just one side, and Earth is not partial to anyone. I and the *chanyu* should cast aside the trivial problems of the past and together follow the great Way.”¹² Not only were the two rulers equals in fictive kinship, but the reference to Heaven and Earth suggests that each state comprised one part of an all-encompassing whole.

A similar vision of the world was articulated in a diplomatic communication from the *chanyu* to Emperor Wen: “With the aid of Heaven, the talent of our officers and soldiers, and the strength of our horses, the Wise King of the Right has destroyed the Yuezhi [the nomads who had dominated the north prior to the Xiongnu] and mercilessly slain them to make them submit. Loulan, the Wusun, the Hujie, and the other twenty-six neighboring states are now part of the Xiongnu state. All people who draw the bow have become one family and the northern region has been pacified.” A treaty signed a few years later in 162 B.C. adopted this principle: the *chanyu* should rule over all the archers who lived to the north of the great wall, while the settled people to its south, who “wore hats and sashes,” were to be governed by the Chinese emperor.¹³ This divided the world into two great cultural zones—the realm of the nomads and that of the Chinese—each forming its own empire. It also entailed the rulers’ recognition of each other’s domination of the lesser states within their respective spheres (Map 10).

This vision of a bipolar world divided between two cultural spheres manifested itself in Chinese thought. Under Emperor Jing, Chao Cuo systematically compared the Xiongnu and the Chinese, portraying the former as an inversion or negation of the latter. The nomads ate meat and drank milk; the Chinese ate grain. The Xiongnu wore skins and furs; the Chinese wore hemp and silk. The Chinese had walled towns, fields, and houses; the Xiongnu, according to Chao Cuo, had none (not in fact true, but it demonstrates how he imagined the two sides as complete inver-



MAP 10

sions). Finally, the nomads were like flying birds or running beasts that moved constantly until they found good grass and fresh water; the Chinese were rooted in fields and towns. Chao Cuo extended these cultural oppositions to explain the strategic and tactical balance of forces between the two.¹⁴

Some decades later the *Shi ji*, in a more accurate proto-ethnographic account of Xiongnu customs, described the animals they reared, their techniques of divination, their major state sacrifices and burial customs, their use of verbal agreements instead of writing, and a number of Xiongnu words. But this work is still embedded in a definition of the Xiongnu as the polar opposite of the Chinese. It begins with the conventional reference to their mobility and dependence on their herds. Discussion of the Xiongnu's diet of meat and wardrobe of furs is followed immediately by a conventional attack on the nomads for honoring only youth and strength while treating the aged with contempt. The *Shi ji*'s author, Sima Qian, also offers a standard piece of Chinese moralizing by stating that the Xiongnu sons marry their widowed stepmothers and that brothers marry the widows of deceased siblings. Echoing earlier accounts of nomadic combat, he remarks that the Xiongnu did not find it shameful to

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retreat when a battle went badly. Sima Qian turns this empirical observation into a moral contrast between the Chinese, who are bound by their sense of duty, and the nomads, who recognize only self-interest.¹⁵

Defining the two peoples by mutual oppositions is not invariably at the expense of the Xiongnu, however. Sima Qian cites arguments attributed to Zhonghang Yue, a Chinese who went over to the Xiongnu and assisted them against the Han. He showed the necessity of the Xiongnu's honoring youth over age and marrying the widows of kin, and also noted the relaxed relations between the Xiongnu ruler and his subjects, in contrast with the rigid hierarchies of the Chinese court. In this way, accounts of nomadic customs became a method of criticizing some Chinese practices.

Sima Qian adopted a similar stance in discussing Xiongnu law: "Those who in ordinary times draw a sword a foot from the scabbard are condemned to death; those convicted of theft have their property confiscated; those guilty of minor offences are flogged; and those guilty of major ones are executed. No one is kept in jail awaiting sentence longer than ten days, and the number of imprisoned men in the whole country does not exceed a handful."¹⁶ Here the simple principles and equitable punishments of Xiongnu law echo the simplified code imposed by the Han founder, and stand in sharp contrast with the complexities and brutalities of the legal practice of Sima Qian's own day.

According to Chao Cuo, the territory of the Xiongnu was "a place of accumulated *yin* [shade and cold]. The tree bark is three inches thick, and the thickness of ice reaches as many as six feet. The people eat meat and drink kumiss [a yogurt-like drink]. They have a thick skin, and the animals have much fur, so the nature of people and animals is adapted to the cold."¹⁷ This analysis—part of an implied triad with the south as extreme *yang* and China as the balanced middle—traces differences among peoples to cosmic laws.

By the Warring States period some constellations were associated with certain states. Sima Qian's treatise extends this practice to the nomads, who became the earthly equivalents of specified constellations. The bipolar division of the world on the basis of culture and politics reappeared in the structure of the Heavens, with the dividing line of the Heavenly Route matching the frontier between Chinese and nomads. Based on this principle, Sima Qian read many astronomical events in the stipulated regions as signs of the fate in battle of the two competing powers.¹⁸

In contrast with the Warring States period, when regional cultures constituted the primary divisions in the Chinese sphere, the imagining of a

world divided between nomads and Chinese marked a major step. It posited the fundamental unity of a single Chinese civilization defined by what was not nomadic, and it reduced regional divisions to secondary status. China first emerged as a unity through the invention of a Chinese/nomad dichotomy, and this bipolar concept remained central to Chinese civilization in later periods.

It is ironic, then, that the political partition of the world into two spheres lasted only a few decades. In spite of increasing payments, Xiongnu incursions did not cease. Each agreement lasted a few years, only to be broken by a new invasion, which was followed in turn by demands for a resumption of peaceful relations based on an increase in payments. The Chinese attributed this to barbarian perfidy, but it reflected the nature of the Xiongnu state. While the Chinese emperor was unchallenged as chief lawgiver, judge, and administrator, power within the Xiongnu state was constrained and divided by kin bonds, customary practice, and horizontal segmentation between clans or tribes. The *chanyu* maintained control over his subordinate chiefs only by constant negotiations in which he was first among equals rather than an absolute authority. Consensus on his power hinged on his success in battle and distribution of booty.

In such a system, the *chanyu* could not refrain from military action indefinitely. Nor could he stop his subordinates from attacking on their own, for the power and prestige of chiefs likewise depended on their success in battle and distribution of booty. Sometimes they invaded because of tensions with local Chinese officials, sometimes because of resentment of the *chanyu*. The *he qin* policy failed because it relied on a structure of authority that did not exist among the Xiongnu.¹⁹

As treaty after treaty was violated, debates at the Chinese court were increasingly dominated by calls for war. Decades of peace had given the Chinese time to develop a new style of army based on cavalry and crossbows that could successfully engage the Xiongnu in the field. In 134 B.C. Emperor Wu finally undertook to destroy the Xiongnu through military action. Although his attempted ambush of the *chanyu* failed, in the decades that followed, Chinese armies pushed deep into Central Asia and inflicted substantial losses of both men and flocks on the Xiongnu.

However, Han losses were also considerable, and repeated campaigns drained the treasury without achieving any decisive result. Difficulties in transporting supplies and harsh weather meant that no army could spend even as much as one hundred days in the field, so victories could not be