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Abstract

As a frontier region of the Qin-Han (221BCE-220CE) empire, the northwest was a new territory to the Chinese realm. Until the Later Han (25-220CE) times, some portions of the northwestern region had only been part of imperial soil for one hundred years. Its coalescence into the Chinese empire was a product of long-term expansion and conquest, which arguably defined the region's military nature. Furthermore, in the harsh natural environment of the region, only tough people could survive, and unsurprisingly, the region fostered vigorous warriors. Mixed culture and multi-ethnicity featured prominently in this highly militarized frontier society, which contrasted sharply with the imperial center that promoted unified cultural values and stood in the way of a greater degree of transregional integration. As this project shows, it was the northwesterners who went through a process of political peripheralization during the Later Han times played a harbinger role of the disintegration of the empire and eventually led to the breakdown of the early imperial system in Chinese history.

In this study, the author adopts a regional perspective by focusing on the role of the northwestern frontier region vis-à-vis the imperial center to explain the collapse of the Later Han empire. The author emphasizes the role that regional conflicts played in the decline and fall of the dynasty, and paid particular attention to the incompatibility between the militarized culture of the northwest and the civil values promoted by the imperial center, which was dominated by the eastern-based scholar-officials. Through this analysis, the author provides a case study of the relationship between the imperial center and the regions with different cultures and identities, and the variations of the conception of such a relationship in the period of early imperial China.

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**DYNAMICS OF DISINTEGRATION:
THE LATER HAN EMPIRE (25-220CE) & ITS NORTHWESTERN FRONTIER**

Wai Kit Wicky Tse

A DISSERTATION

in

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DYNAMICS OF DISINTEGRATION:

THE LATER HAN EMPIRE (25-220CE) & ITS NORTHWESTERN FRONTIER

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Wai Kit Wicky Tse

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constant encouragement and help that I received from the late Professor Hok-lam Chan (1938-2011) were of untold value. Since my days of studying at the CUHK until his untimely demise, Professor Chan's guidance and support were never lacking. Late in his life, he was still deeply concerned about my academic progress and spent time on reading my dissertation proposal and other writings. If the completion of dissertation is an accomplishment, it is an achievement that I would like to dedicate to him.

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ABSTRACT

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Wai Kit Wicky Tse

Paul R. Goldin

As a frontier region of the Qin-Han (221BCE-220CE) empire, the northwest was a new territory to the Chinese realm. Until the Later Han (25-220CE) times, some portions of the northwestern region had only been part of imperial soil for one hundred years. Its coalescence into the Chinese empire was a product of long-term expansion and conquest, which arguably defined the region's military nature. Furthermore, in the harsh natural environment of the region, only tough people could survive, and unsurprisingly, the region fostered vigorous warriors. Mixed culture and multi-ethnicity featured prominently in this highly militarized frontier society, which contrasted sharply with the imperial center that promoted unified cultural values and stood in the way of a greater degree of transregional integration. As this project shows, it was the northwesterners who went through a process of political peripheralization during the Later Han times played a harbinger role of the disintegration of the empire and eventually led to the breakdown of

the early imperial system in Chinese history.

In this study, the author adopts a regional perspective by focusing on the role of the northwestern frontier region vis-à-vis the imperial center to explain the collapse of the Later Han empire. The author emphasizes the role that regional conflicts played in the decline and fall of the dynasty, and paid particular attention to the incompatibility between the militarized culture of the northwest and the civil values promoted by the imperial center, which was dominated by the eastern-based scholar-officials. Through this analysis, the author provides a case study of the relationship between the imperial center and the regions with different cultures and identities, and the variations of the conception of such a relationship in the period of early imperial China.

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The EMPERORS OF THE TWO HAN DYNASTIES

Former Han (206BCE-9CE)

<i>Emperor Title</i>	<i>Personal name</i>	<i>Reign</i>
Gao 高	Bang 邦	206 /202-195BCE
Hui 惠	Ying 盈	195-188 BCE
Empress Dowager Lü 呂	Zhi 雉	188-180 BCE
Wen 文	Heng 恆	180-157 BCE
Jing 景	Qi 啟	157-141 BCE
Wu 武	Che 徹	141-87 BCE
Zhao 昭	Fuling 弗陵	87-74 BCE
Xuan 宣	Bingyi 病已	74-49 BCE
Yuan 元	Shi 奭	49-33 BCE
Cheng 成	Ao 鷲	33-7 BCE
Ai 哀	Xin 欣	7-1 BCE
Ping 平	Jizi 箕子	1 BCE -6CE
——	Ying 嬰	6-9CE

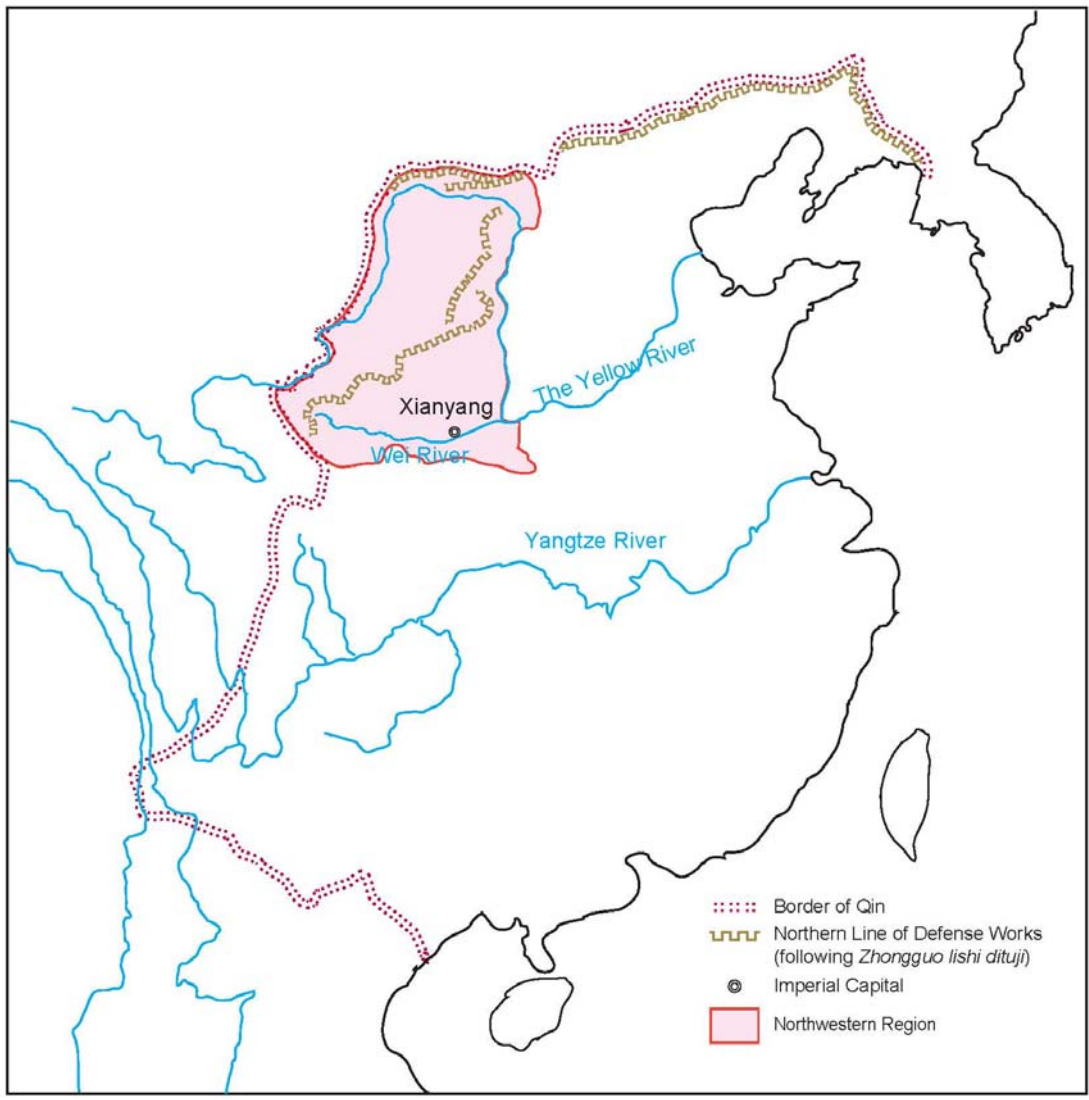
Later Han (25-220CE)

<i>Emperor Title</i>	<i>Personal name</i>	<i>Reign</i>
Guangwu 光武	Xiu 秀	25-57CE
Ming 明	Zhuang 莊	57-75CE
Zhang 章	Da 烜	75-88CE
He 和	Zhao 肇	88-106CE
Shang 殤	Long 隆	106CE
An 安	You 祐	106-125CE
Shun 順	Bao 保	125-144CE
Chong 沖	Bing 炳	144-145CE
Zhi 質	Zuan 纘	145-146CE
Huan 桓	Zhi 志	146-168CE
Ling 靈	Hong 宏	168-189CE
Shao 少	Bian 辯	189CE
Xian 獻	Xie 協	189-220CE

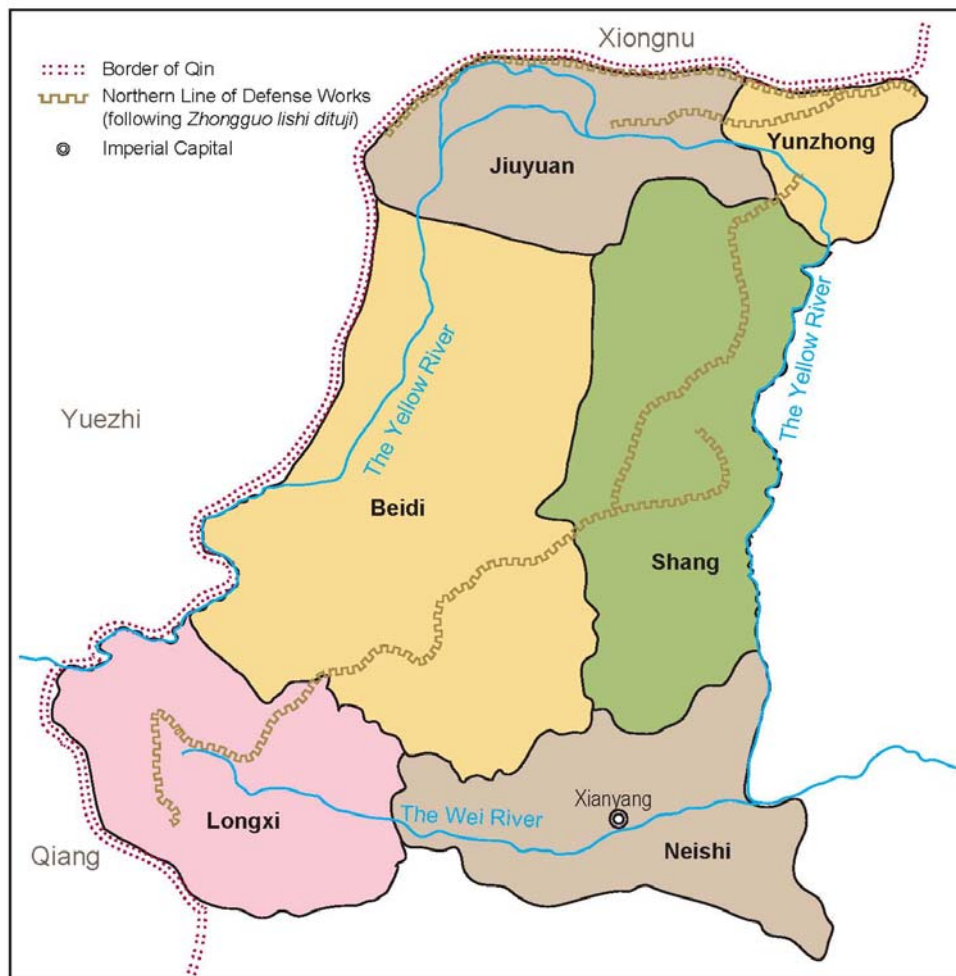
MAPS



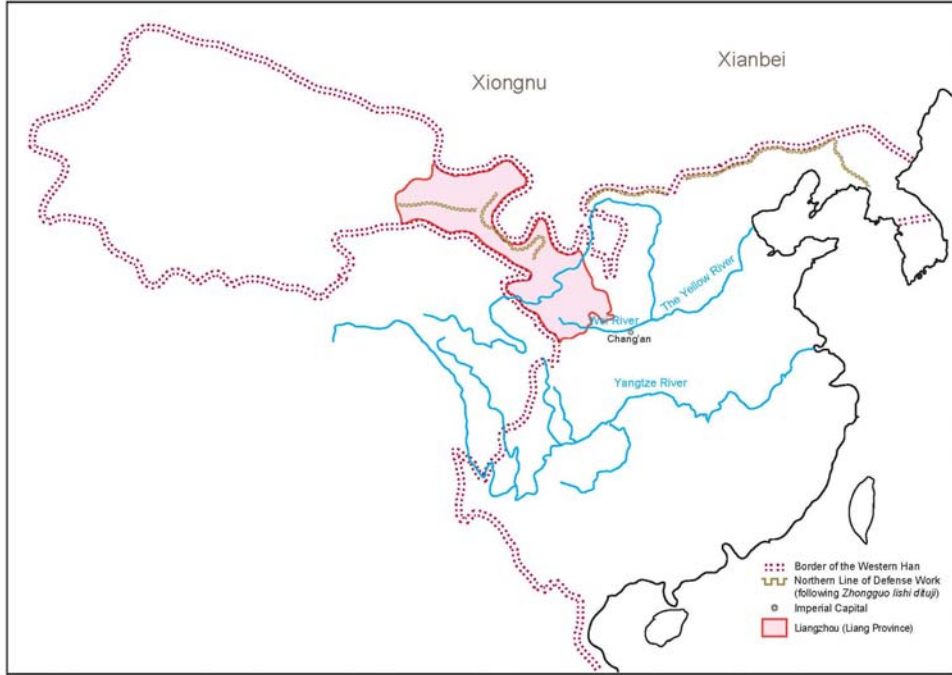
Map 1 China Today



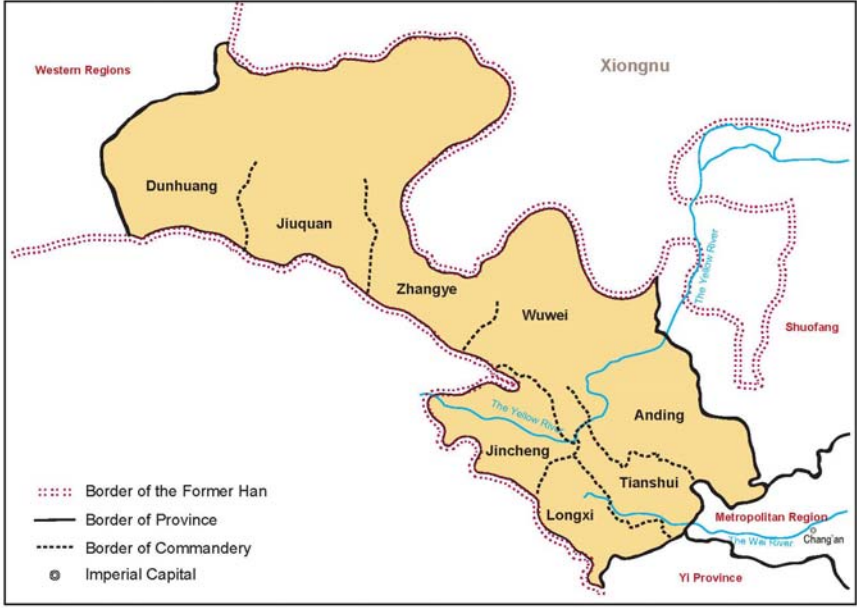
Map 2 The Empire of Qin



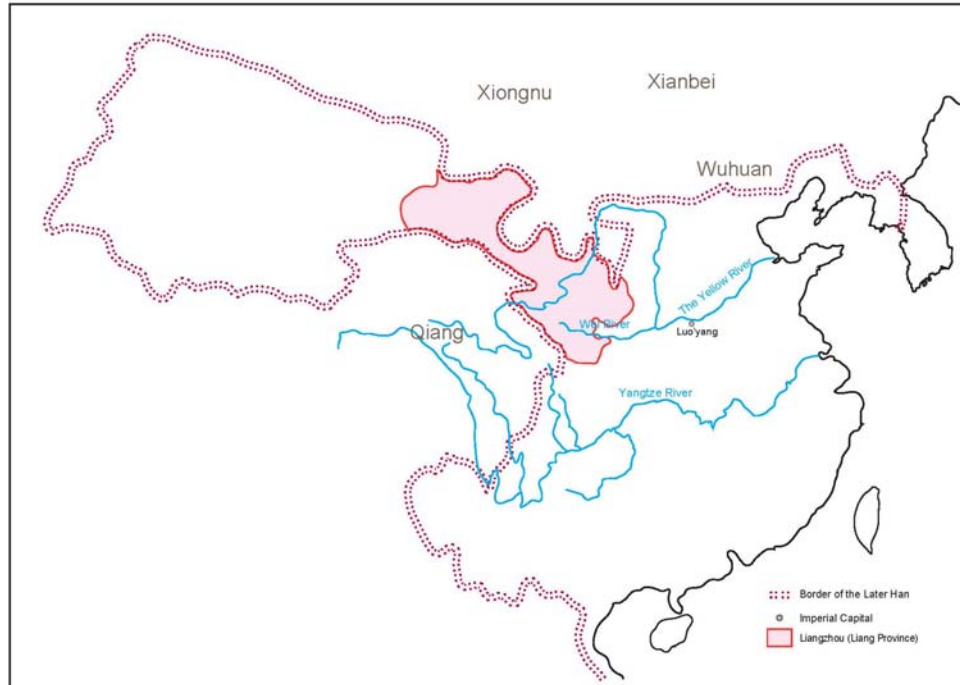
Map 3 The Northwestern Region of the Qin



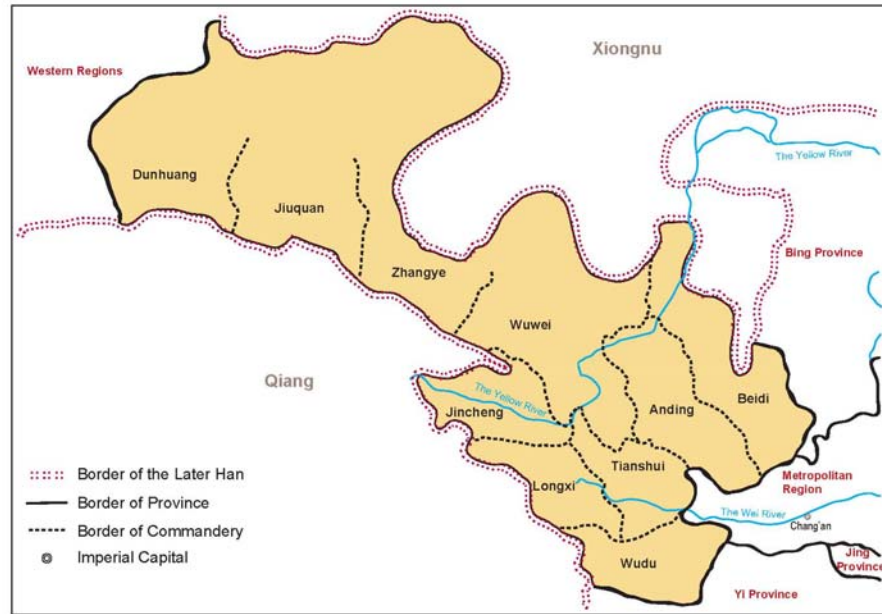
Map 4 Former Han



Map 5 The Northwestern Region of the Former Han



Map 6 The Later Han



Map 7 The Northwestern Region of the Later Han

I

Introductory Orientations:

A Northwestern Frontier in Early Imperial China

In the spring of 190 CE, having taken de facto control of the imperial court and replaced one boy emperor with another, Dong Zhuo 董卓 (d. 192CE), a warlord from the northwestern region, was planning to raise a large army against his opponents, who were mainly heads of regional governments in the eastern part of the empire. When Dong put forward his plan at a court meeting, nobody but one courtier named Zheng Tai 鄭泰 (ca. 152-192CE) held a different opinion. Zheng, as a partisan of the eastern alliance, tried to thwart the warlord's plan of enlarging his military forces and persuaded him that his enemies were not worth sending any troops over. To answer Dong's query, Zheng gave his reasons as follows,

Now, the provinces and commanderies to the east of the mountains have collaborated and formed alliances. Their people have been mobilized. One cannot say that they are not strong. However, since the reign of Emperor Guangwu [founding emperor of the dynasty], there was no military alert in the Central Country, the populace has long been enjoying peaceful lives and has forgotten war-fighting. As Confucius said, "To send the

people to war without prior training is equal to throwing them away.” Even they are numerous, they are unable to cause any harm... Your Excellency is a man from the western province and has been the imperial general since a young age. You have profound knowledge of military affairs and have engaged in battlefield frequently. Your name bangs on the whole realm and everyone is awed by Your reputation. Yuan Benchu [Yuan Shao 袁紹 (d. 202CE)] is a descendent of grand ministers and was born and grew up at the imperial capital; Zhang Mengzhuo [Zhang Miao 張邈 (d.195CE)] is a gentleman from Dongping, who strictly follows the principles of courtesy; Kong Gongxu [Kong Zhou 孔伋 (fl. 160s-190s CE)] is good at pure conversation and abstruse talk that he is able to bring withered things to life and living things to die by his impressive speech. None of them have the ability of commanding armies. They are no match with Your Excellency in terms of wielding arms and facing enemies in decisive moment... It is a commonplace that there is no well-trained and brave soldier in the east of the mountain (Shandong)... Even if they have capable people, however, their ranks are in disorder and without legitimate authority given by the emperor. Each of them will rely on his own strength and end up in a stalemate, in which everyone will just wait for the results of others’ actions and will not agree on coordinating their pace of advance or retreat. [People of] The various commanderies to the west of the pass have been accustomed to military affairs. Since they have long been fighting with the Qiang, even women and girls can carry and use halberds, spears, bows and arrows. How could the ignorant [eastern] people resist the strong and brave soldiers [of the west]? The victory [of the west] is assured... The men of Bing and Liang, as well as [alien people] the Xiongnu, the Tuge, the voluntary followers from the Huangzhong area, and the eight stocks of the Western Qiang are the most vigorous fighters all under Heaven and are feared by the people. They are all under the command of Your Excellency and serve as [your] teeth and claws. It will be like driving tigers and rhinoceros against dogs and sheep... Moreover, Your military officers are as intimate as [your] heart and stomach; they have gotten along with You for a long time and established mutual trust; their loyalty can be counted on and their wisdom can be relied upon. By employing such a solid group against the loose alliance, who oppose them will be swept away like dead leaves before a violent wind...¹

今山東合謀，州郡連結，人庶相動，非不強盛。然光武以來，中國無警，百姓優

¹ Fan Ye 范曄, comp., *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (hereafter *HHS*), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 70: 2258-59.

逸，忘戰日久。仲尼有言：『不教人戰，是謂棄之。』其眾雖多，不能為害...明公出自西州，少為國將，閑習軍事，數踐戰場，名振當世，人懷懾服。袁本初公卿子弟，生處京師。張孟卓東平長者，坐不闕堂。孔公緒清談高論，噓枯吹生。並無軍旅之才，執銳之幹，臨鋒決敵，非公之儔...山東之士，素乏精悍...就有其人，而尊卑無序，王爵不加，若恃眾怙力，將各碁峙，以觀成敗，不肯同心共膽，與齊進退...關西諸郡，頗習兵事，自頃以來，數與羌戰，婦女猶戴戟操矛，挾弓負矢，況其壯勇之士，以當妄戰之人乎！其勝可必...且天下疆勇，百姓所畏者，有并、涼之人，及匈奴、屠各、湟中義從、西羌八種，而明公擁之，以為爪牙，譬驅虎兇以赴犬羊...又明公將帥，皆中表腹心，周旋日久，恩信淳著，忠誠可任，智謀可恃。以膠固之眾，當解合之執，猶以烈風掃彼枯葉...

Zheng then concluded that, with these advantages, Dong Zhuo would easily vanquish his rivals. Unnecessary levying of troops would only frighten the people and force those who were afraid of being conscripted to rebel, which would undermine Dong's prestige. Dong was flattered and thus halted his plan. Shortly afterwards, facing the threat posed by his eastern enemies, Dong transferred the imperial capital westwards from Luoyang 洛陽 to Chang'an 長安. He forced all residents of Luoyang to move, let his troops looted and finally burnt down the city.² The fire not only destroyed the splendid imperial capital but also marked the breakdown of the imperial rule. While the young emperor was held in captivity by Dong, Dong's rivals in the east forcefully turned the situation to their advantage and dismembered the empire into various warlord domains, which unveiled a chaotic period of incessant warfare in Chinese history. Therefore, although the last

² The most detailed English-language survey on the Later Han capital is Hans Bielenstein, "Lo-yang in Later Han Times," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* (hereafter *BMFEA*) 48 (1976): 1-147.

emperor of Later Han dynasty (also known as the Eastern Han dynasty, 25-220CE) formally abdicated in 220CE, the dynasty actually ended with Dong Zhuo's control over the imperial court in 190CE.

Zheng Tai's speech is of critical importance in analyzing the factors contributed to the collapse of the Later Han dynasty. It provides a contemporaneous account of certain people's perception of what befell the empire. Although the speech primarily aimed to flatter (and implicitly obstruct) Dong Zhuo, it should not be merely treated as hyperbole. It must be telling the truth to some degree and was credible to Dong and his followers. Zheng depicted a vivid picture that the empire was divided into two halves: East and West. Dong Zhuo and his men were from the militarized west and represented a coalition of fierce Han and non-Han fighters; on the other hand, people of the east generally feared the westerners and were weak and slack in war preparation, the leaders of the eastern alliance were cultured but military inferior to their western counterparts. There was an obvious regional confrontation existed in the empire.

This is a study aims to describe and explain how and why such an East-West confrontation came into existence in the Later Han period, and to examine the regional confrontation as a dynamics in the process of empire collapse. It is my first step of

understanding the Later Han world as an axial or transitional period between the establishment of the first unified imperial system nominally began in 221BCE and the failure of the system in the late second century which ensued a period of political division for 400 years. Since it was the warlord Dong Zhuo and his men from the northwest who dealt the final blow to the imperial authority by desecrating the throne and the imperial capital, the questions of why the northwesterners but not other groups and what attitudes toward the imperial center they held constitute the main subjects of the present investigation. By adopting a *longue durée* approach, this study will not be confined to the Later Han period but will be extended to the preceding centuries in order to trace the cultural and social development of the northwestern frontier region, which greatly differed from that of the imperial center.

I hope this study as a case will shed some light on the relationship between the imperial center and the regions with different cultures and the variations of the conceptions of such a relationship in Chinese history.

As an introduction, this chapter will be divided into three sections (though they are uneven in length): The first gives my reasons of investigating the Later Han period, provides an overview of the Later Han studies, and situates this project in modern

scholarship; the second sketches the role of the northwestern frontier region in early China and introduces the militarized nature of this frontier society; the third section introduces the main sources used in this work and provides an outline of the chapters.

STUDYING THE LATER HAN³

The original span of time in Chinese history I chose to study was the period from the third through sixth century, which is commonly called “Early Medieval”⁴ (also known as “Six Dynasties”) in English-language literature or *Wei-Jin-Nanbeichao* 魏晉南北朝 (Wei, Jin and the Southern and Northern Dynasties) in Chinese historical tradition. It is a period roughly corresponding to the last years of the Later Han dynasty, which unveiled a long-term political disunion since the beginning of the first centralized empire in 221BCE, and the early years of the Sui dynasty (589-618CE), which marked the re-establishment of a unified and centralized Chinese empire. In the course of my studying of the early medieval Chinese sources, I realized that I could not fully understand the origins and

³ Limited by the space, this section cannot provide detailed narrative of the Later Han political history, for details, see Hans Bielenstein, “Wang Mang, the restoration of the Han dynasty, and Later Han,” in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe eds., *The Cambridge History of China vol. 1: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220*. (hereafter *CHOC v.1*)(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 223-290; Michael Loewe, “The Conduct of Government & the Issues at Stake A.D. 57-167,” in *CHOC v.1*, 291-316; B. J. Mansvelt Beck, “The Fall of Han,” in *CHOC v.1*, 327-330.

⁴ The term “early medieval” is borrowed from European history and is now commonly accepted by historians of Chinese history. For the nature of “medieval” in Chinese history, see Keith Knapp, “Did the Middle Kingdom have a Middle Period? The Problem of ‘Medieval’ in China’s History,” *Education about Asia* 12.3 (2007): 1-32.

trajectory of the period of disunion without reference to the history of the Later Han. My central concern of exploring the dynamics underpinning the drastic changes in early medieval China led me to start on a new front, examining the process of decline and fall of the Later Han, and investigating the factors contributed to the process. Thus began what started as the present study.

Emperor Guangwu 光武 (r. 25-57CE), founder of the Later Han dynasty, and his supporters proudly proclaimed that their empire was Han and that it was the continuation and heir of the Former Han dynasty (also known as the Western Han dynasty, 206BCE-8CE), which was said to be usurped by Wang Mang 王莽 (d. 23CE) whom named his own dynasty Xin 新 (9-23CE). The founding fathers of the Later Han claimed that their victory in the civil war during the 20s and 30s CE and their re-conquest of the realm of the Former Han were divinely ordained.⁵ Therefore, they had achieved a rightful restoration of the Han after the interregnum of Wang Mang.⁶ Historians of the

⁵ For the theories employed by the Later Han rulers to legitimize their succession to the Former Han, see Yang Quan 楊權, *Xin wude lilun yu liang Han zhengzhi: "Yaohou huode" shuo kaolun* 新五德理論與兩漢政治——「堯後火德」說考論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006). A general English-language introduction of those theories can be seen in Hok-lam Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China: Discussions under the Jurchen-Chin Dynasty (1115-1234)* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1984), 30-33.

⁶ A comprehensive study on the reasons for Wang Mang's fall is Homer H. Dubs trans., *The History of the Former Han Dynasty, Volume Three* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1955), 112-124. For detailed research on the revolts against Wang Mang and the civil war between the two Han dynasties, see Hans Bielenstein, "The Restoration of the Han Dynasty: with Prolegomena on the Historiography of the *Hou Han shu*," *BMFEA* 26 (1954): 82-165, and "The Restoration of the Han Dynasty, volume II: the Civil War," *BMFEA* 31 (1959): 11-256. On the background of the civil war contenders and the founding members of the Later

Later Han have commonly accepted this claim and therefore treated the history of Later Han as a sequel to the Former Han. The dynastic title “Han” is usually used as a synecdoche for the two Han dynasties.⁷ However, the two Han regimes do not receive equal treatment in modern scholarship. Academic works under the name of Han history are generally assumed to cover both dynasties but, in fact, a lion’s share is devoted to the Former Han.⁸ As one eminent Japanese scholar on Han history pointed out that,

Han, see Yü Ying-shih 余英時, “Dong Han zhengquan zhi jianli yu shizu daxing zhi guanxi” 東漢政權之建立與士族大姓之關係, in idem, *Zhongguo zhishi jieceng shilun: gudaipian* 中國知識階層史論: 古代篇 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1980), 109-203; Kojima Shigetoshi 小嶋茂稔, *Kandai kokka tōchi no kōzō to tenkai: gokan kokkaron kenkyū josetsu* 漢代国家統治の構造と展開: 後漢国家論研究序説 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2009), 73-123.

⁷ In fact, the role of the Later Han as a continuation or restoration of the Former Han was not beyond any question. Considering the backgrounds of the founding members of the Later Han, they were very different from the ruling elites of the Former Han and lacked direct connection with the Former Han imperial court. When the Former Han was replaced by Wang Mang’s regime, it was both nominally and substantively ended. The very fact that all the plotted *coups d’état* and revolts in the name of the Han against Wang Mang lacked popular support and were easily suppressed reveals that Wang had received significant support to replace the Han. It was only when natural disasters, external warfare, and maladministration, *inter alia*, caused popular unrest that brought down the Xin regime. Meanwhile, certain contenders for imperial power made use of the name of the Han for political propaganda. Among them, Emperor Guangwu was a distant member of the Former Han imperial household, but he was indeed an outsider of the Former Han government. Furthermore, the members who constituted the Later Han ruling cohort were either regional magnates who did not occupy important positions in the Former Han or incumbent regional officials of the Xin dynasty. The case of the Later Han ruling elites was totally different from those of the Eastern Jin 晉 (317-420CE) and the Southern Song 宋 (1127-1279CE) dynasties. These, in turn, are best understood as continuations of their predecessors, namely the Western Jin (265-316CE) and the Northern Song (960-1127CE), respectively.

⁸ To list only a few examples will suffice to show the imbalance of the studies on the two dynasties: Qian Mu 錢穆 ended his work on Qin-Han history in the Xin dynasty, and without any entries of the Later Han, see his *Qin Han Shi* 秦漢史 (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshiye gongsi, 1994); Nishijima Sadao 西嶋定生 spent nearly 300 pages on the Former Han but only less than 100 pages on the Later Han in his *Shikan teikoku* 秦漢帝国 (Tōkyō: kōdansha, 1974); although its title indicates that it is a study on Qin-Han empire, Yoshinami Takashi 好並隆司, *Shikan teikoku shi kenkyū* 秦漢帝国史研究 (Tōkyō: Miraisha, 1978) has no single chapter for the Later Han; in his two-volume work on Han China Chun-shu Chang rarely mentioned the Later Han, see his *The Rise of the Chinese Empire, Volume One: Nation, State, & Imperialism in Early China, ca. 1600 B.C.-A.D. 8.* and *The Rise of the Chinese Empire, Volume Two: Frontier, Immigration, & Empire in Han China, 130 B.C.-157 A.D.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); in his recently published general history of the Qin-Han period, Mark Edward Lewis spilled more ink over the Former Han than the Later Han, see his *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han*

comparatively speaking, studies on Former Han are both quantitatively and qualitatively higher than that of Later Han, which is a rather underexplored field.⁹ Among the studies on the Later Han *per se*, it is the works of Japanese scholars contributed greatly in expanding the field and laying the theoretical framework for further studies. I have no ambition for this section to chart every contour of the Japanese scholarship, as this would need a specific review article; I will only provide an overview of three main themes of Japanese scholarship, as well as relevant Chinese and Western literature.

A Regime of Powerful-families. The nature of the Later Han state and society is a core topic in the field. Ever since the foremost Sinologist Yang Lien-sheng's 楊聯陞 seminal article on the powerful families (*haozu* 豪族 in Chinese and *gōzoku* 豪族 in Japanese)¹⁰ of the Later Han in 1936,¹¹ numerous Chinese and Japanese scholars have

(Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁹ Goi Naohiro 五井直弘, "Gokan ōchō to gōzoku" 後漢王朝と豪族, in idem, *Kandai no gōzoku shakai to kokka* 漢代の豪族社会と国家 (Tōkyō: Meicho Kankōkai, 2001), 228. Although Goi made his comment in 1970 and works on the Later Han has increased thereafter, his comment is still valid today if comparing the studies on the two Han dynasties. Examples can be found in the bibliography on Han studies in Tonami Mamoru 礪波護, Kishimoto Mio 岸本美緒 and Sugiyama Masaaki 杉山正明 eds., *Chūgoku rekishi kenkyū nyūmon* 中国歴史研究入門 (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2006), 371-377.

¹⁰ The "Powerful Families" were never a single and unified group. There are various terms in the Han texts to name those powerful families. Also, different types of powerful families can be seen in the sources. However, for the purpose of simplicity, I will follow the customary usage of most Chinese and Japanese scholars and adopt the term *haozu/gōzoku* 豪族 in a broad and encompassing sense, with "powerful family" as its equivalent in English. On different names and types of powerful families in Han history, see Utsunomiya Kiyoyoshi 宇都宮清吉, "kandai gōzoku kenkyū" 漢代豪族研究, in his *Chūgoku kodai chūseishi kenkyū* 中国古代中世史研究 (Tōkyō: Sōbunsha, 1977), 376-382; Lai Ming-Chui 黎明釗, "Handai haozu daxing de yanjiu huigu" 漢代豪族大姓的研究回顧, in Zhou Liangkai 周樑楷 ed., *Jiewang erbian* 結網二編 (Taipei: Dongda tushu gufenyouxiangongsi, 2003), 93-133; Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "Toward a Better Understanding of the Later Han Upper Class," in Albert E. Dien ed., *State and*

followed Yang's path on studying the development of Later Han powerful families and their relationship with the state.¹² A powerful family, according to Yang's definition, was a strong local based family that commanded numerous dependent households and individuals. Yang's article suggests that the origins of the political elites of the Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties (265-581CE) could be traced back to the powerful families of the two Han dynasties. During the Later Han, the powerful families that sprouted in the Former Han reached their zenith and became the dominant power in both political and social arenas. Emperor Guangwu and most, if not all, of his supporters were from powerful families. In other words, the Later Han was a regime established and dominated by powerful families. Their members occupied central, regional, and local government posts, owned tremendous amounts of landed property, acted as leaders of their own communities, and commanded various kinds of retainers and dependents. Some of them expanded their economic benefits through wielding their political power, while

Society in Early Medieval China (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1990), 49-72.

¹¹ Yang Lien-sheng 楊聯陞, "Donghan de haozu" 東漢的豪族, *Qinghua xuebao* 清華學報 11:4 (1936): 1007-1063; an English version is "Great Families of the Eastern Han," in E-Tu Zen Sun and John de Francis eds., *Chinese Social History: Translations of Selected Studies* (Washington, DC.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1956), 103-136.

¹² The literature on the Han powerful families is vast. For a detailed review of the twentieth century Chinese studies on the topic, see Lai, "Handai haozu daxing de yanjiu huigu," 93-133; for overview of Japanese studies, see Momiyama Akira 籾山明, "kandai gōzokuron he no ichi shikaku" 漢代豪族論への一視角, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究 43.1 (1984): 165-173 and Kojima, *Kandai kokka tōchi no kōzō to tenkai*, 11-15.

others acquired political positions by using their abundant economic resources. They not only constituted the mainstream of the bureaucracy but also acted as leaders of local communities. The development of and struggles among powerful families became the main thread runs through Yang's analysis.¹³

Yang's basic arguments have widely been accepted by academic circles and especially echoed in the writings of his Japanese colleagues. Utsunomiya Kiyoyoshi 宇都宮清吉, albeit questioning Yang's classification of powerful families, held that powerful families constituted the dominant power of the Later Han. His studies greatly advanced scholars' knowledge of powerful families in terms of socio-economic history.¹⁴ Yoshikawa Mitsuo 吉川美都雄 found fault with Yang's view on the relationship between Emperor Guangwu and powerful families in the early years of the dynasty but also agreed that powerful families gradually penetrated into and became important stakeholders of the regime.¹⁵ Japanese scholars even coined the term *Gōzoku rengō seiken* 豪族連合政權 (Powerful-family coalition regime) to characterize the Later Han

¹³ Yang, "Donghan de haozu," 1007-1063 and "Great Families of the Eastern Han," 103-136.

¹⁴ Utsunomiya, "Dōyaku kenkyū" 僮約研究, "Ryōshū to nanyō" 劉秀と南陽, and "Kandai niokeru ka to gōzoku" 漢代における家と豪族, in idem, *Kandai shakai keizai shi kenkyū* 漢代社會經濟史研究 (Tōkyō: Shibundō, 1967), 256-374, 375-404, and 405-472, respectively; also idem, "Kandai gōzoku kenkyū" and "Kandai kenkyū gūkan" 漢代研究偶感, in *Chūgoku kodai chūseishi kenkyū*, 351-388 and 389-401, respectively.

¹⁵ Yoshikawa Mitsuo 吉川美都雄, "Gokan shoki niokeru gōzoku taisaku nitsuite" 後漢初期に於ける豪族対策に就いて, *Rekishigaku kenkyū* 歴史学研究 7.9 (1939): 644-668.

state as a regime constituted and controlled by powerful families. Another term *Gōzoku kyōdōtai* 豪族共同体 (Powerful-family community) was coined to describe the local communities dominated by powerful families.¹⁶

Although the important role played by powerful families is generally recognized, not every Japanese scholar is satisfied with the thesis of *Gōzoku rengō seiken*. Criticisms have been raised against this line of interpretation. Taking a perspective different from his colleagues who emphasize socio-economic factors, Goi Naohiro 五井直弘 has diverted scholars' attention to the political aspect of the relationship between state and powerful families. He stressed that state power was absolutely over the powerful families, whose political positions and social prestige were at the imperial mercy. Hence, the powerful families, albeit resourceful and influential, were not as powerful and equal as the emperor. They were no more than the privileged subjects of the emperor.¹⁷ In a recent study, Kojima Shigetoshi 小嶋茂稔 has challenged the thesis of *Gōzoku rengō seiken* as an overstatement of the influence of powerful families and a serious underestimation of state power. With a meticulous examination of the various participants of the civil war, Kojima

¹⁶ A recent review of Japanese scholarship on these two concepts is Kojima, *Kandai kokka tōchi no kōzō to tenkai*, 6-35. The discussion over the concept of *kyōdōtai* (community) is especially intense among Japanese scholarship on the Six Dynasty period, for a concise English-language overview of the debate till 1970s, see Tanigawa Michio, *Medieval Chinese Society and the Local "Community"* translated, with an introduction by Joshua A. Fogel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), xv-xxix.

¹⁷ Goi, "Ryōkan kōtaiki no hanran" 兩漢交替期の叛乱, in idem, *Kandai no gōzoku shakai to kokka*, 141-160; "Gokan ōchō to gōzoku," 228-281.

has argued that the success of Emperor Guangwu was greatly due to the collaboration of incumbent regional and local officials and Guangwu's capacity for controlling the state machine rather than the cooperation of powerful families.¹⁸ However, both Goi's and Kojima's analyses only explain the relationship between the emperor and powerful families in the formative years of the dynasty; for the situations of the succeeding years, further research is needed.

Among the English-language literature, the Sinologist Hans Bielenstein spent great efforts in studying the saga of the formation of the Later Han and produced a series of book-length papers under the title of "The Restoration of the Han Dynasty,"¹⁹ in which he analyzes the role that powerful families, or what he terms "influential clans," played in the process of toppling the Xin dynasty and establishing the Later Han.²⁰ In *Han Social Structure*, Ch'ü T'ung-tsu 瞿同祖 pieces together from the extant documentary evidence the history of powerful families during the Later Han period and provides detailed translations of the extant sources.²¹ Following the studies by Yang and Utsunomiya, Ch'ü

¹⁸ Kojima, *Kandai kokka tōchi no kōzō to tenkai*, 73-123.

¹⁹ Bielenstein, "The Restoration of the Han Dynasty: with Prolegomena on the Historiography of the *Hou Han shu*"; "The Restoration of the Han Dynasty: volume II, the Civil War"; "The Restoration of the Han Dynasty: volume III, the People," *BMFEA* 39 (1967): 1-198; "The Restoration of the Han Dynasty: volume IV, the Government," *BMFEA* 51 (1979): 1-300.

²⁰ Bielenstein, "The Restoration of the Han Dynasty: with Prolegomena on the Historiography of the *Hou Han shu*," 94-98.

²¹ Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, *Han Social Structure* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1972), 160-247 and 393-506.

also holds that powerful families “dominated the government to such an extent that the history of the Later Han may be seen as the history of powerful families.”²² However, he reminds his readers that the emperor was the only source of political and military power and was able to remove any powerful family from the power hierarchy.²³ Patricia Ebrey has depicted a vivid picture of the development of an “aristocratic family” from the Han times to the Tang dynasty (618-907CE).²⁴ Although her book focuses mainly on the Six Dynasties and the period of Later Han only occupies a small portion, it echoes the conventional theme that the roots of Six Dynasties society should be traced to the Later Han. Furthermore, in an article on the Later Han upper class, Ebrey points out the cultural aspect of the powerful families and the stratification within them.²⁵ The cultural attributes of powerful families will bring us to the next topic.

Confucian State (*Jukyō kokka* 儒教国家).²⁶ As the eighteenth century Chinese

²² Ch'ü, *Han Social Structure*, 202.

²³ *Ibid.*, 212.

²⁴ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China: A Case Study of the Po-ling Ts'ui Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

²⁵ Ebrey, “Toward a Better Understanding of the Later Han Upper Class,” 49-72. Another work focuses on the cultural background of Han powerful family is Chen Chi-yun, *Hsun Yueh (AD 148-209): The Life and Reflections of an Early Medieval Confucian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

²⁶ Here, the term “Confucian State” is an English translation of the Japanese term *Jukyō kokka* 儒教国家, by which the Japanese scholars refer the rubric *Ju* 儒 (*Ru* 儒 in Chinese) to the school of Confucius, his disciples, and later generations of followers, and *Jukyō kokka* is to coin the state which upholds the teachings and classics of the Confucian school as orthodoxy and is also filled up by officials with Confucian educational background. In short, the English terms “Confucian” and “Confucianism” used in this context is in the most conventional way as the self-identified followers of Confucius and the teachings of Confucius, his disciples, and the later thinkers who regarded themselves and/or were regarded by others as followers of this tradition.

scholar Zhao Yi 趙翼 acutely pointed out that many founding members of the Later Han had Confucian educational background,²⁷ modern scholars also pay close attention to the relationship between the Later Han state and Confucianism. Such a relationship is indispensable for understanding the development of powerful families in the Han times.

By the last decades of the Former Han, Confucianism had already its status as a crucial component of the state-sanctioned education curriculum and political orthodoxy. The Later Han inherited and advanced this tradition.²⁸ Training of Confucian education became a key to attain government positions. With their economic and intellectual resources, members of powerful families gained easy access to Confucian education and

Some Western scholars, with Michael Nylan as the foremost proponent, suggest that the rubric “Confucian” is not a suitable English translation of the Chinese term *Ru* 儒 in the context of Han times, as *Ru* was a heterogeneous group with different intellectual orientations in the Han dynasty and there was no necessary connections between *Ru* and Confucius. According to Nylan, *Ru* could refer to three groups of people: classicists, Confucians, and bureaucrats, with distinct intellectual orientations and diverse political views. *Ru* is thus a category broader than “Confucian.” For detailed discussions, see Michael Nylan, “A Problematic Model: The Han ‘Orthodox Synthesis,’ Then and Now,” in Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson eds., *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 17-56, and idem, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2001), 1-41; Nicolas Zuferey, *To the Origin of Confucianism: The Ru in Pre-Qin Times and During the early Han Dynasty* (New York: Peter Lang Pub Inc, 2003); Anne Cheng, “What Did It Mean to Be a *Ru* in Han Times?” *Asia Major* 14.2 (2001): 101-118. For brief review of and questions about the relevant discussions, see Liang Cai, “In the Matrix of Power: A Study of the Social and Political Status of Confucians (*Ru* 儒) in the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE-8 CE).” (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 2007), 7-10; Paul R. Goldin, *Confucianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 4-5.

I agree with Nylan that those people who claimed themselves and were regarded as *Ru* in the Han times were not necessarily Confucians. However, as this section aims mainly to review the works of Japanese scholars, the conventional rubrics “Confucian” and “Confucianism” will be suitable for the translation purpose.

²⁷ Zhao Yi 趙翼, *Nianershi zhaji xiaozheng* 廿二史劄記校證, annotated by Wang Shumin 王樹民 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 90-91.

²⁸ For the growth of Confucian education in the Later Han times, see Higashi Shinji 東晋次, *Gokan jidai no seiji to shakai* 後漢時代の政治と社会 (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 1995), 143-193.

then official posts. Meanwhile, individuals without strong family background would still try to access Confucian education and make themselves eligible for official appointments. Once entered government service, no matter who they were, office-holders would invest their descendants in the required education in order to attain, preserve, and extend political influence, economic privilege, and social status, which would accumulate as invaluable asset to their families.²⁹ Against this backdrop, powerful families gradually monopolized the main source of Han official recruitment system and transformed themselves into hereditary official families.³⁰

It is no doubt that Confucianism played a significant role in shaping Later Han culture and politics and germinating powerful families. Japanese scholar Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡邊義浩 coined the term *Jukyō kokka* 儒教国家 (Confucian state) to characterize the Later Han state as a regime highly integrated with state sanctioned/canonized Confucianism.³¹ According to Watanabe, the Confucian state fully developed during the first two reigns of Later Han when Confucianism was canonized under the imperial

²⁹ For the Later Han official recruitment system and its relation to powerful families, see Higashi Shinji, “Gokan jidai no senkyo to chihō shakai” 後漢時代の選挙と地方社会, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究 46.2 (1987): 33-60.

³⁰ On the relationship between Confucian officials and powerful families, see Higashi, *Gokan jidai no seiji to shakai*, 143-193 and 247-290; Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡邊義浩, *Gokan kokka no shihai to jukyō* 後漢国家の支配と儒教 (Tōkyō: Yūzankaku Shuppan, 1995), 124-142.

³¹ Watanabe’s two books focus on this topic: *Gokan ni okeru Jukyō kokka" no seiritsu* and *Gokan kokka no shihai to jukyō* and *Gokan ni okeru Jukyō kokka" no seiritsu* 後漢における「儒教国家」の成立 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2009).

auspices and was institutionalized as the orthodox ideology; Confucians dominated different levels of government positions and Confucianism permeated down to local communities.³² Although Watanabe's definition of "Confucian state" is not generally accepted by scholars,³³ it fashions another perspective on investigating the relationships between politics and culture as well as state and society in the Later Han times.³⁴

The Collapse of Early Empire. As the short-lived Qin dynasty (221-206BCE) marked the establishment of the first unified empire in Chinese history and the Former Han basically inherited the imperial system and further consolidated it, scholars always examine the two dynasties as a unit for understanding the formation of ancient Chinese empire; on the other hand, the failure of the Later Han showcase the demise of the ancient Chinese empire, and the study on this topic is called *Kodai teikoku hōkai ron* 古代帝国崩壊論 (Thesis of the collapse of the ancient empire) by Japanese scholars.

Following the logic of development of powerful families, scholars suggest that powerful families were the force not only founded the Later Han but also undermined the regime. Yang Lien-sheng asserted in his pioneering survey that the political chaos during the last decades of Later Han was caused by the infighting among great families,

³² Watanabe, *Gokan kokka no shihai to jukyō*, 422-425; *Gokan ni okeru "Jukyō kokka" no seiritsu*, 23-25.

³³ Kojima, *Kandai kokka tōchi no kōzō to tenkai*, 39-44.

³⁴ Miranda Brown, *The Politics of Mourning in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007) also focuses on the relationship between politics and culture in the Later Han times.

including imperial consort families, eunuchs and their dependents, and scholar-officials.³⁵ Vicious political struggles finally resulted in the two Great Proscriptions (*danggu* 黨錮, 166 and 169CE), which Yang called “internal strife among the great families” (*haozu neizheng* 豪族內爭),³⁶ imposed by the eunuch-dominated imperial court in order to purge and proscribe the anti-eunuch officials, scholars, and their followers in the imperial academy to access government office. The Later Han imperial court thus frustrated many scholar-officials, who in turn chose to preserve their power for familial rather than imperial interests. Ch’ü T’ung-tsu held the same point of view.³⁷ Utsunomiya Kiyoyoshi, although criticized Yang for including consort families and eunuchs into the category of powerful family, agreed that powerful families contributed to the downfall of the empire.³⁸ Focusing on the socio-economic aspect, he made the point that the growing strength of powerful families undermined the imperial power as they gradually became autonomous or semi-autonomous forces and encroached upon the economic base of the empire by grabbing taxpayer households from state control.³⁹

Later scholars basically follow the above theses, albeit there is no agreement on

³⁵ Yang, “Donghan de haozu,” 1042-1063; “Great Families of the Eastern Han,” 122-136.

³⁶ Yang, “Donghan de haozu,” 1052 and 1056; “Great Families of the Eastern Han,” 129 and 131.

³⁷ Ch’ü, *Han Social Structure*, 210-229 and 232-243.

³⁸ For Utsunomiya’s critique of Yang’s article, see his “Kandai kenkyū gūkan,” 389-401.

³⁹ Utsunomiya, “Kandai niokeru ka to gōzoku,” 405-472 and “Kandai gōzoku kenkyū,” 395-401.

whether the entire ruling class should be included in the category of powerful families as Yang suggested.⁴⁰ Both Hsu Cho-yun 許倬雲 and Rafe de Crespigny concern the role of powerful families played in the rise of regionalism, which finally caused the fragmentation of the Later Han.⁴¹ Hsu has clearly stated that regionalism was “a significant factor in causing members of the Han elite to place local interest above the imperial interest.”⁴² It was the political and social elites with strong sense of regionalism who gave up their loyalty to the imperial house that brought the dynasty to an end.

Closely related to the attitudes of powerful families toward the imperial center, the two Great Proscriptions especially attracted scholarly attention since they are said to be greatly undermined imperial authority and shattered the scholar-officials’ confidence and loyalty towards the imperial court.⁴³ In addition, being regarded as the struggles between

⁴⁰ For studies on the Later Han consort families and eunuchs, see Ch'ü, *Han Social Structure*, 210-229 and 232-243; Watanabe, *Gokan kokka no shihai to jukyō*, 271-366.

⁴¹ Hsu Cho-yun, “The Roles of the Literati and of Regionalism in the Fall of the Han dynasty,” in Norman Yoffee and George L. Cowgill eds., *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988), 176-195; Rafe de Crespigny, “Provincial Gentry and the End of Later Han,” in Schmidt-Glintzer, hrsg. von Helwig ed., *Das andere China - Festschrift für Wolfgang Bauer zum 65. Geburtstag* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 533-558.

⁴² Hsu, “The Roles of the Literati and of Regionalism in the Fall of the Han dynasty,” 190.

⁴³ For analyses of the two Great Proscriptions, see Masubuchi Tatsuo 増淵龍夫, “Gokan tōko jiken no shihyō ni tsuite” 後漢党錮事件の史評について, in idem, *Chūgoku kodai no shakai to kokka* 中国古代の社会と国家 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1996), 296-317; Watanabe, *Gokan kokka no shihai to jukyō*, 367-418; Higashi, *Gokan jidai no seiji to shakai*, 291-326; Rafe de Crespigny, “Political Protest in Imperial China: The Great Proscription of Later Han, 167-184,” *Papers in Far Eastern History* 11 (1975): 1-36 and “Politics and Philosophy under the Government of Emperor Huan 159-168 A.D.” *T'oung Pao* 66 (1980): 41-83; Mansvelt Beck, “The Fall of Han,” 327-330. Christopher Leigh Connery, however, has questioned to what extent did the two proscriptions contribute to the collapse of the Later Han, see his *The Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 86-92.

corrupted political power and protesters mainly formed by intellectuals, the two incidents generally earn sympathy of historians, ancient and modern. By examining the proscribed scholar-officials, some Japanese scholars argue that a certain number of powerful families survived the two crises and expanded and transformed themselves. Their descendants successfully overcame dynastic changes and kept their positions as leading elites in the successive centuries, which constituted the ruling class of the “Six Dynasties aristocratic society” (*Rikuchō kizokusei shakai* 六朝貴族制社会).⁴⁴

Compared with the two Great Proscriptions, the widespread religious-colored Yellow Turban Rebellion, another significant incident in the late Later Han, has received lesser attention from scholars. The Yellow Turbans rose up in a large-scale revolt in 184CE and once posed a serious threat to the empire, but the rebellion lasted only one year and failed abruptly since the imperial state was still capable of gathering support from the powerful families, whose members contributed great efforts in suppressing the rebels. The Yellow Turbans were therefore a sign of the dynasty’s decline rather than a cause of its collapse.⁴⁵ In fact, it is not the rebellion per se, but its impact of devolution of military

⁴⁴ One of the well-known proponents of this theory was the late Kawakatsu Yoshio 川勝義雄, see his “Kizokuseiji no seiritsu” 貴族政治の成立 and “Kanmatsu no rejisutansu undō” 漢末のレジスタンス運動, in idem, *Rikuchō kizokusei shakai no kenkyū* 六朝貴族制社会の研究 (Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten, 2000), 3-22 and 23-56, respectively.

⁴⁵ Hsu, “The Roles of the Literati and of Regionalism in the Fall of the Han dynasty,” 194.

power during the campaigns of suppression and the message of widespread popular discontent more threatened the existence of the dynasty, and hence deserve scholarly attention.⁴⁶

Apart from internal factors such as political infighting among powerful families and popular rebellions resulted from official corruption, maladministration, and natural disasters, external factors also interest scholarly investigation in the decline of the Later Han. Compared with the Former Han, which was an expansionist empire, the Later Han showed a defensive mode of dealing with its neighbors. In fact, the Later Han faced a much more complicated situation than its predecessor. Beside the Xiongnu 匈奴, which was the prime rival of the Former Han, the Later Han had to spend a vast amount of resource to cope with the Qiang 羌, the Wuhuan 烏桓, and the Xianbei 鮮卑. To what extent did the threats posed by non-Han peoples contribute to the downfall of the Later Han? Rafe de Crespigny has provided the hitherto most detailed study on the subject, suggesting that the failure of the Later Han was greatly due to its inefficient frontier policies that single-mindedly pursued the destruction of the Xiongnu confederacy without

⁴⁶ For an overview of Japanese works on this topic, see Wantanabe Yoshihiro, *Sangokushi Kenkyū nyū mon* 三国志研究入門 (Tōkyō: Nichigai Asoshietsu, 2007), 146. Among Western scholarship, for comprehensive survey of the Yellow Turbans, see Paul Michaud, “The Yellow Turbans,” *Monumenta Serica* XVII (1958): 41-127, also Mansvelt Beck, “The Fall of Han,” 334-340; for the ideological background of the rebellion, see Barbara Hendrichske, *The Scripture on Great Peace: the Taiping Jing and the Beginnings of Daoism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 3-38, especially 16-24.

thorough consideration and well preparation for the ensuing power vacuum along the northern frontier, which finally let other alien peoples took advantage of invading the Chinese realm and left heavy political and financial burden to the Later Han empire.⁴⁷

Benefit from the aforementioned scholarly research, we know that infighting of powerful families, popular rebellions, and warfare with non-Han peoples culminated in serious political, social, and economic malaise and the Later Han empire was in shambles in the second century CE. Against this backdrop, the present study attempts to provide a new perspective in regional context to answer why it is the northwesterners played the role of harbinger of destroying the empire.

Numerous scholars have shown the significant role played by powerful families in the Later Han politics and society; nevertheless, it is not beyond doubt that powerful families could represent all the political elites of the empire. Some scholars have already pointed out that powerful families were largely concentrated in certain areas of the empire. Although local powerful families might exist everywhere in the imperial territories, the ones had empire-wide influences and close connections with the imperial center were

⁴⁷ Rafe de Crespigny, *Northern Frontier: The Policies and Strategy of the Later Han Empire* (Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1984). Yü Ying-shih has three works on the foreign relations of the Han dynasties, see *Trade and Expansion in Han China: A Study in the structure of Sino-barbarian economic relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); "Han Foreign Relations," in *CHOC* v. 1, 377-462; "The Hsiung-nu," in Denis Sinor ed., *Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 118-149.

mainly found in the central and eastern regions where the political, cultural, and economic cores of the empire located. The powerful families appeared in the extant historical sources were mainly from those areas.⁴⁸ Unlike the powerful families rooted in the areas of prosperous and “advanced” economy and culture, Dong Zhuo and his followers were from a frontier society with comparatively “backward” culture and economy in the eyes of the contemporaries. Eastern-based powerful families usually provided well-educated scholar-officials for the imperial state; on the other hand, the northwestern frontier region where Dong and his men came from was a land well-known for breeding warriors, with multi-ethnic background. Dong and his men was a conglomeration of Han and non-Han soldiers and were outsiders of the refined culture prevailing among the eastern elites. The contrast between the east and the northwest marked the conflict between the imperial center and its periphery.

Needless to say, the so-called “Confucian state” was mainly confined in the imperial center and other Confucian cultural prosperous regions but not covered the whole empire.

⁴⁸ For the regional variation of the powerful families, see Utsunomiya, “Kandai gōzoku kenkyū,” 383-388; Masubuchi Tatsuo, “Gokan gunkensei no chiiki betsuteki kōsatsu” 後漢の郡県制の地域別的考察, in idem, *Chūgoku kodai no shakai to kokka*, 537-566; Ueda Sarae 上田早苗, “Gokan makki no sōyō no gōzoku” 後漢末期の襄陽豪族, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究 28.4 (1970): 283-305; Tsuruma Kazuyuki 鶴間和幸, “Kandai gōzoku no chiikiteki seigaku” 漢代豪族の地域的性格, *Shigaku zasshi* 史学雑誌 87.12 (1978): 1-38; Satake Yasuhiko 佐竹靖彦, “Kandai jyūsanshū no chiikisei ni tsuite” 漢代十三州の地域性について, *Rekishi hyōron* 歴史評論, 357 (1980): 37-65 and 79; Tada Kensuke 多田獨介, “Kōkin no ran zenshi” 黄巾の乱前史, in idem, *Kan Gi Shin shi no kenkyū* 漢魏晋史の研究 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 1999), 49-76.

As Chapter Three will show, while the eastern-based elites with Confucian educational background triumphed in the official recruitment system, the “barbarous” and “backward” Northwesterners would have no hope to compete with them on political advancement,⁴⁹ which triggered the estrangement between the two sides.

This work does not aim to study the powerful families and “Confucian state,” but focuses on the group of people who were in the frontier society outside the orbit of the “Confucian state” and were in conflict with the powerful families dominated imperial center. This work can therefore supplement past scholarship by expanding our horizons beyond the powerful families and Confucian scholar-officials, and fashion a different view for understanding the processes and factors of the decline and fall of the Later Han empire. It can be aligned with the theme of *Kodai teikoku hōkai ron*.

Why the relationship between the northwesterners and the imperial center matters in the decline and fall of the Later Han empire? To distinguish the “decline” and “fall” of an empire, Arther Ferrill points out in his book on the fall of the Roman empire that “the reasons for decline need not be the same as the reasons for the fall, which can be sought in a somewhat different and more immediate context.” Hence, “many problems can be

⁴⁹ Higashi, “Gokan jidai no senkyo to chihō shakai,” 33-60; Hsing I-tien 邢義田, “Dong Han xiaolian de shenfen beijing” 東漢孝廉的身分背景, in idem, *Tianxia ijia: Huangdi, guanliao yu shehui* 天下一家：皇帝、官僚與社會 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 285-354.

avoided by keeping the distinction between decline and fall sharp.”⁵⁰ When investigating the collapse of ancient states and civilizations, anthropologist Norman Yoffee draws a concise distinction between the two concepts that “terms such as *decline*, *decay*, and *decadence* on the one hand and, on the other hand, terms such as *fall*, *collapse*, *fragmentation*, and *death* [italics in original]” are different in meanings. “Those in the former group imply changes that are somewhat for the worse, especially morally or aesthetically inferior, but are not necessarily the end of anything. Those in the latter group, however, imply that some meaningful entity ceased to exist.”⁵¹ It is clear that although corrupted government, power struggles at the imperial court, popular rebellions, and foreign invasions all deteriorated the situations, they only marked the decline of the Later Han which was still staggering forward. Here, I adopt Yoffee’s definition of collapse as “a drastic restructuring of social institutions in the absence of a political center,”⁵² and it was after Dong Zhuo and his northwestern fellows controlling the imperial court that various regional power-holders refused to recognize the imperial center and unveiled the disintegration of the empire. Therefore, I will argue that the regional conflict between the

⁵⁰ Arther Ferrill, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: The Military Explanation* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 8.

⁵¹ Norman Yoffee, “Orienting Collapse,” in Norman Yoffee and George L. Cowgill eds., *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations*, 14.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 7.

northwest and the imperial center not only precipitated the decline but, most importantly, brought the empire to an end. This is the reason why the present study focuses on the northwestern region.

STUDYING A MILITARIZED FRONTIER SOCIETY

It is erroneous to look at a map of modern China and then assume that its national boundaries are consistent with that of the ancient times. In fact, the physical space of what we called “China” today is the product of a long and irregular process of conquest and coalescence inherited from an enduring imperial tradition. The boundaries of historical China were ever-changing and China itself resembles a jigsaw puzzle that is formed by different regions (as diverse as the whole of Europe in terms of culture and ethnicity) and took a long time to complete the full picture.

The invention of national boundaries is a modern apparatus comes with the birth of nation-state,⁵³ scholars who are interested in the nation/state-building process of modern China are also obliged to study how different regions at the eastern tip of the Eurasian landmass have coalesced into being China, especially during the last half millennium, and

⁵³ Peter Sahlin, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 2; Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, “Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands,” *Journal of World History*, 8.2 (Fall 1997): 216-217.

how the modern political boundaries have been demarcated.⁵⁴ In recent decades, with frontier studies as a growing field,⁵⁵ there are quite a number of English-language works focus on the period of late imperial or early modern China (roughly from the tenth or fourteenth to the eighteenth century)⁵⁶ and study how have various frontier areas been conquered by and coalesced into the Chinese empires, such as the modern provinces of

⁵⁴ Peter Sahlins has pointed out that the pre-modern European regimes were something less than a territorial one. The rulers envision sovereignty in terms of jurisdiction over subjects, not over a delimited territory. Territorial sovereignty and delimited political boundaries are products owe much to modern political nationalism. See Sahlins, *Boundaries*, 2-6. While Sahlins' conclusion is based on his research on the formation of national boundary between France and Spain, it also provide insight for examining the Chinese case.

During the imperial period, what we call "Chinese empire" refers mainly to the peoples subject to the Chinese imperial state. The empire was not a territorial entity exactly likes modern countries. Within the empire, different levels of administrative units could be geographically well defined as the boundaries delimited jurisdictions. However, the territorial limits of the empire were kind of vague. In the Han empire, although people clearly knew the existence of political boundaries between the Han and its neighbors in certain areas, as the Han texts contain many entries mention the borders (*bian* 邊/*sai* 塞) and areas outside the borders (*saiwai* 塞外), it could in fact hardly define a clear border line surrounded the whole empire. Most of the time, the boundary of the empire is actually the boundary of the people under the imperial rule. It is a very complex and multifaceted problem that I cannot discuss here, but we will return to it in the succeeding chapters. For reference, Nicolas Tackett has a recent case study of the Northern Song's conception of territorial borders, see his "The Great Wall and Conceptualizations of the Border under the Northern Song," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 38(2008): 99-138.

⁵⁵ "Frontier Studies" as a field can be traced back to late nineteenth century when American historian Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his famous article on American western frontier and established what has been until relatively recently the dominant paradigm in frontier studies of the U.S. and even other countries. See Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in idem, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), 1-38. For a brief summary of Turner's influence on the field and later historians' critiques of his theory, see James Reardon-Anderson, *Reluctant Pioneers: China's Expansion Northward, 1644-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 3-6.

For a general overview of the field in Chinese studies, see James A. Millward, "New Perspectives on the Qing Frontier," in Gail Hershatter et al., eds., *Remapping China: Fissures in Historical Terrain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 113-129. For the traditional Chinese political theories on the relationship between the center and frontiers, see Alexander Woodside, "The Center and the Borderlands in Chinese Political Theory," in Diana Lary ed., *The Chinese State at the Borders* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 11-28.

⁵⁶ For example, Peter Lorge's *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900-1795* (London: Routledge, 2005), spans the tenth to the eighteenth century. However, not every historian find the notion of "early modern" appropriate for drawing timeline, for example, see Jack A. Goldstone, "The Problem of the 'Early Modern' World," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41.3 (1988): 249-284.

Yunnan 雲南 and Guizhou 貴州 in the southwest,⁵⁷ Taiwan in the east,⁵⁸ Manchuria in the northeast,⁵⁹ and modern province of Xinjiang 新疆 (officially named Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region) in the northwest.⁶⁰ Most, if not all, of these works study how the frontier areas became Chinese through the processes of territorial expansion, migration, and colonization. They encompass topics including political economy, nation-building, empire-building, and ethnicity.

With scholars' efforts, the scope of Chinese frontier studies have been greatly expanded and have no longer been confined to the "Inner Asian Frontiers" (which refer to Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet) model set by Owen Lattimore, the pioneer of the field. In his work, Lattimore points to differences in topography, climate, economy,

⁵⁷ For example, David G. Atwill, *The Chinese Sultanate: Islam, Ethnicity, and the Panthay Rebellion in Southwest China, 1856-1873* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Laura Hostelter, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Charles Patterson Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China's Yunnan Frontier* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Leo Kwok-yueh Shin, *The Making of the Chinese State: Ethnicity and Expansion on the Ming Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); John Herman, *Amid the Clouds and Mist: China's Colonization of Guizhou, 1200-1700* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007). Two recent works draw attention to the Sichuan-Tibet frontier, see Dai Yingcong *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet: Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2009) and Wang Xiuyu, *China's Last Imperial Frontier: Late Qing Expansion in Sichuan's Tibetan borderlands* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011).

⁵⁸ For example, John Robert Shepherd, *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier, 1600-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Emma Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004); Tonio Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁵⁹ For example, Reardon-Anderson, *Reluctant Pioneers*; Christopher Mills Isett, *State, Peasant, and Merchant in Qing Manchuria, 1644-1862* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

⁶⁰ For example, James A. Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Inner Asia, 1759-1864* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Perdue, Peter C. *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

languages, and ethnicities to argue that what he called “the general line of the Great Wall” was “one of the most absolute frontiers in the world.”⁶¹ Under the influence of Lattimore, it has once been widely accepted that the so-called “Great Wall of China” marked a linear dividing line in Chinese history between the Chinese sedentary peoples and its Inner Asian nomadic neighbors.⁶² However, as recent studies have shown that the frontiers of historical China were not limited to the line along the so-called “Great Wall,” but varied over time and also included other peripheral areas. If we put the temporal factor into consideration, we will have a slightly different picture. In fact, the “Great Wall” was not always the boundary between China and its neighbors.⁶³ For example, during the Qing dynasty (1644-1912CE), the “Great Wall” zone was no longer a political frontier of China as the imperial territories had greatly extended beyond it.

Nevertheless, by considering the temporal (late imperial/early modern China) and

⁶¹ Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 21.

⁶² Millward made a sharp criticism that “most Western historians of China automatically equate the concept of frontier with the Chinese-Inner Asian frontier-the Great Wall line, which as Owen Lattimore argued influentially, demarcated the zone of interaction between steppe and sown.” See his “New Perspectives on the Qing Frontier,” 115.

⁶³ Arthur Waldron has unveiled the myth of the “Great Wall” in Chinese history, see his *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). His critique of Lattimore’s theories and responses to some recent studies can also be seen in “The ‘Great Wall of China’: An Author’s Reflections after Twenty Years,” in Roger Des Forges et al., eds., *Chinese Walls in Time and Space: A Multidisciplinary Perspective* (Ithaca: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2009), 3-36. On the other hand, Tackett has made a point in a recent article that even the Northern Song dynasty did not build long walls along the northern boundaries, the remnants of the “Great Wall” survived were still seen as a natural boundary between the Song and its northern neighbors. See Tackett, “The Great Wall and Conceptualizations of the Border under the Northern Song,” 99-138.

spatial (the frontier areas mentioned above) frameworks of these frontier studies, it is clear that there is a common premise that a “China proper” is at the center, mainly inhabited by the ethnic Han Chinese, and expands outward to the frontier areas. The words of one researcher of modern Chinese frontiers can tell us such kind of understanding,

The core of the empire, or China proper, bounded by oceans on the east and south, the Tibetan Plateau on the west, and the Great Wall on the north, came together more than two millennia ago. Territories of equal size, including Manchuria, Inner and Outer Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan, were attached to this core in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.⁶⁴

Hence, the formation of late imperial Chinese empire is a China proper plus Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet, as well as Taiwan, Yunnan, and Guizhou. This process of conquering and integrating frontier areas is an outward expansion from the center towards the peripheries. Also, it is a process of colonization mainly marked by the ethnic Han presence (or, to a certain degree, a process of Sinification/Sinicization).⁶⁵

It is true that the ethnic Han Chinese people have long held the notion that a Central

⁶⁴ Reardon-Anderson, *Reluctant Pioneers*, 2.

⁶⁵ During the Qing dynasty, it was the Manchu people who brought Manchuria and even Mongolia to China, or more precisely, the Manchu conquered China. However, after the Manchu rulers consolidated their empire and started expanding outward, it was not only the Manchus but also the ethnic Han people participated in the imperial expansion. The Han Chinese were the backbone of the settlements on the frontier regions to take up the colonization function. As Emma Teng has pointed out that “an important aspect of Qing imperialism was the implanting of Han Chinese settlements on distant frontier territories.” See *Taiwan’s Imagined Geography*, 9.

Country/State/Province/Plain was the origin or cradle of Chinese civilization and thus the center of Chinese empires.⁶⁶ Since the notion of centrality has been ingrained in the mind of ethnic Han Chinese by the late imperial period, it is therefore feasible to employ this center-and-periphery model in explaining the process of incorporating new territories into the existing Chinese regimes.⁶⁷

However, the frontiers of Chinese empires advanced and receded, and were not necessarily consistent. For example, neither the area of the modern provinces of Gansu 甘肅 and Ningxia 寧夏 in the northwest nor the northern part of modern Hebei 河北 province in the north was the territories of a centralized ethnic Han Chinese regime

⁶⁶ For the making of the notion of Central Province or so, see Roger V. Des Forges, *Cultural Centrality and Political Change in Chinese History: Northeast Henan in the Fall of the Ming* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1-14. The concept of Central Country itself is changing in Chinese history, for detailed analysis, see Peter Bol, "Middle-Period Discourse on the *Zhong Guo*: The Central Country," on *Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard* <http://www.ceps.com.tw/ec/ecJnlIntro.aspx?Jnlid=3243> (2009): 1-31.

⁶⁷ Did the Mongol rulers of the Yuan dynasty (1271-1386CE) and the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty share the Han notion of centrality? It is a very complicated and multifaceted question that beyond my direct scope of research and cannot be answered here. For a general overview of the question, see Bol, "Middle-Period Discourse on the *Zhong Guo*," 1-30. For the territorial concept of the Mongol Yuan, one can refer to David M. Robinson, *Empire's Twilight: Northeast Asia under the Mongols* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010). The case of the Manchu Qing is also related to the discussions of the "New Qing History" on the ethnicity of the Manchu people. For further information on the topic, see Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) and Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Michael G. Chang, *A Court on Horseback: Imperial Touring & the Construction of Qing Rule, 1680-1785* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007) sheds light on the Manchu emperors' attitudes toward the "China proper." R. Kent Guy's new study on Qing regional administration also provides insight for the Manchu rulers' perception of the imperial territories, see *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644-1796* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

between the tenth and thirteenth century.⁶⁸ They were frontiers between the ethnic Han and non-Han regimes at that time, although being regarded as part of China proper in the Ming (1368-1644CE) and Qing times. Although some parts of modern Sichuan 四川 province have long been regarded as portion of China Proper since its conquest by the Qin state during the first millennium BCE,⁶⁹ still other parts of the province were treated as frontiers in the thirteenth century.⁷⁰

Therefore, if we extend the observation to the early imperial period—the Qin-Han times, the aforementioned center-and-periphery model has to be adjusted. It was a time when the Chinese empire was newly born, the entity of China proper was still under the course of formation and smaller than which recognized by the late imperial Chinese, and the Inner Asian and southwestern frontiers have not yet been or were too remote to be

⁶⁸ During the Song dynasty, the area of northwest was the territory of the Tangut Xi-Xia 西夏 State (1032-1227CE), while the area of the north was under the Khitan Liao (916-1123CE) and Jurchen Jin (1115-1234CE) successively. For a recent study on the frontiers of the Northern Song, see Tackett, “The Great Wall and Conceptualizations of the Border under the Northern Song.” For a general survey of those non-Han regimes, see F. W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 49-71, 168-190, and 193-221. For the specific studies on the questions of the political boundaries and ethnic identity of the Liao and Xia, see Naomi Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossings in Liao China* ((Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007) and Ruth W. Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High: Buddhism and State Formation in Eleventh-Century Xia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996).

⁶⁹ A detailed account of the incorporation of ancient Sichuan into the Chinese regime is Steven F. Sage, *Ancient Sichuan and the Unification of China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

⁷⁰ For Sichuan region during the Song dynasty, see Richard von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes: Expansion, Settlement, and the Civilizing of the Sichuan Frontier in Song Times* (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1987) and Ruth Mostern, “Dividing the Realm in Order to Govern”: *The Spatial Organization of the Song State (960-1276 CE)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011).

part of the Chinese empire. Hence, by considering the temporal factor, there is a two-layer division of the frontier zones of historical China: the Inner Asian Frontiers, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Taiwan are the modern, newer, and outer frontiers, whereas regions like modern Gansu, Ningxia, Sichuan, and certain areas in south China are the ancient, former, and inner frontiers. This classification should not be a strict one as those frontier zones would be overlapped in certain time and space in history; nevertheless, it is basically compatible with the process of imperial territorial expansion and the transition of frontiers in Chinese history.

From the vantage point of the present, we can see how the Chinese empires from the Qin-Han period onwards expanded outward from the center to the inner frontiers and finally conquered the outer frontiers in modern times. We can borrow the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner's words from his seminal article on the frontier in American history to describe the frontier in Chinese history as "a continually advancing frontier line."⁷¹

What is called China proper in Chinese historical tradition is a product of gradual development that was initially based on the realm of the Zhou 周 dynasty (ca. 11th -3th

⁷¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 2.

c.BCE), which largely corresponded to the area from the North China Plain in the east to the Wei 渭 River valley west of the bend of the Yellow River. The Zhou was a political entity very different from the territorial empires of the Qin and Han. Radiating from the dominion of the Zhou king, it is claimed in the ancient texts that there were something like hundreds of regional states (or what some scholars called “City-states”)⁷² widely distributed on the area which is roughly equivalent to the central and eastern parts of modern China. Under the Zhou *Fengjian* 封建 system,⁷³ the regional polities were subjects of the Zhou king (even though some of them were only nominally under the authority of the Zhou royal house), basically shared the same rituals, government structure and other institutions, and surrounded by peoples who did not. With a common cultural background, a new and common identity was gradually forged among the regional states.⁷⁴ This common identity allowed the concept of centrality to emerge and

⁷² See Du Zhengsheng 杜正勝, *Zhoudai chengbang* 周代城邦 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1979); Robin D. S. Yates, “The City-State in Ancient China,” in Deborah L. Nichols and Thomas H. Charlton eds., *The Archaeology of City-States: Cross-Cultural Approaches* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 71-90; also Yates, “Early China,” in Kurt Raflaub and Nathan Rosenstein eds., *War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds: Asia, The Mediterranean, Europe, and Mesoamerica*. (Washington D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 1999), 7-46.

⁷³ The *Fengjian* system has commonly been translated as “Feudalism” and regarded as something resembles the feudal society of medieval Europe. Li Feng has made a detailed comparison between the Zhou *Fengjian* system and the European feudalism and has persuasively shown the differences in nature, concept, and practices of the two institutions. See Feng Li, “‘Feudalism’ and Western Zhou China: A Criticism,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63.1 (Jun, 2003): 115-144.

⁷⁴ For a recent study on the topic with extensive amounts of archaeological evidence, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1000-250 BC): The Archaeological Evidence* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, 2006).

endure, which became the embryonic form of China proper.

While the power of the Zhou king declined and some regional states became much stronger, the king's role vis-à-vis the regional states and the relationships among the regional polities gradually changed. During this process of transformation, a kind of political Darwinism was at work with the politically fit surviving at the expense of the weak, the number of states continuously declined until there were only a handful of them survived in the Warring States period (475-221BCE). The weaker states were being swallowed up by the stronger ones that had undergone successful political and economic reforms and territorial expansion. Among those expanding states, it was the Qin at the westernmost that successfully strengthened itself through drastic reforms and finally overcame all rivals and established the first centralized empire in Chinese history.⁷⁵ The establishment of the Qin empire and the ensuing expansion launched by the Qin and the succeeding Former Han dynasty brought new meaning to what is “China” by basically delimited and demarcated the essential part of the Chinese empire.⁷⁶ The conception of

⁷⁵ For the reforms of the Qin state during the Warring States period and its transformation from a regional state to an empire, see Derk Bodde, “The State and Empire of Ch'in,” in *CHOC* v. 1, 20-102; Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-Huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000); Gideon Shelach and Yuri Pines, “Secondary State Formation and the Development of Local Identity: Change and Continuity in the State of Qin (770-221 B.C.),” in Miriam T. Stark ed., *Archaeology of Asia* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 202-230; Ōta Yukio 太田幸男, *Chūgoku kodai kokka keiseishi ron* 中国古代国家形成史論 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2007), 127-187.

⁷⁶ On the Qin-Han conquest and its consequential formation of the concept of empire, see Kudō Motoo 工

China proper was mostly shaped by the existence of such an integral core area, which became a place that ancient Chinese people believed where empire building began and from which the empire extended its territory.

The Qin state rose to power in stages. It first established itself on the west of the Zhou realm and then gradually penetrated to the east. Not only expanded eastward, the Qin also directed its military might to other directions. In the fourth century BCE, the Qin marched southwards and finally conquered the regions of Ba 巴 and Shu 蜀, in modern Sichuan province.⁷⁷ On its northwestern front, the Qin incessantly struggled with the various Rong 戎 peoples,⁷⁸ who were the western neighbors of the Zhou court and were regarded as barbarians in Chinese historical tradition. In 771BCE, the Rong sacked the Zhou capital, brought down the Zhou rule in the west, and forced the royal court move to the east.⁷⁹ The Qin, initially a small regional polity in the Zhou *Fangjian* hierarchy, filled the vacuum left by the Zhou court, engaged into long-term battles with the Rong, and gradually seized lands from them.⁸⁰ As the next chapter will show, the territories that the

藤元男, *Suikochi Shinkan yorimita Shindai no kokka to shakai* 睡虎地秦簡よりみた秦代の國家と社會 (Tōkyō: Sōbunsha, 1998), 85-118.

⁷⁷ Sage, *Ancient Sichuan and the Unification of China*, 83-119.

⁷⁸ Shelach and Pines, “Secondary State Formation and the Development of Local Identity”, 205-219.

⁷⁹ For the war between the Zhou court and its northwestern enemies, see Li Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China: The Crisis and Fall of the Western Zhou 1045-771 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 141-232.

⁸⁰ Shelach and Pines, “Secondary State Formation and the Development of Local Identity,” 205-219.

Qin conquered from the Rong constituted the northwestern region of the Han dynasties.⁸¹

Based on the northwestern frontier, the Han empires further projected power to the Western Regions (Xiyu 西域, roughly an equivalent to the present-day Xinjiang).⁸²

Before turning to the historical account of the formation of the northwestern region of the Han dynasties in the next chapter, it behooves us to define the meanings of the terms “border,” “boundary,” “frontier,” and “borderland” used in this study. “Border” is a linear dividing line or line of partition that clearly demarcated boundary between polities or peoples;⁸³ “boundary” is used in the same meaning as a well establish limit or border line of the given political unit.⁸⁴ Therefore, these two terms will be used interchangeably. In

⁸¹ The Qin-Han empire also extended to other directions and explored many new frontiers. For a general survey of the Han frontiers, see Nicola Di Cosmo, “Han Frontiers: Toward an Integrated View,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129.2 (2009): 199-214. On the Han southern frontier, see Sophia-Karin Psarras, “The Han Far South,” *Asiatische Studien Etudes Asiatiques* LI.3 (1997): 757-778; Francis Allard, “Frontiers and Boundaries: The Han Empire from Its Southern Periphery,” in *Archaeology of Asia*, 233-254; John Herman, “The Kingdoms of Nanzhong: China’s Southwest Border Region Prior to the Eighth Century,” *T’oung Pao* 95 (2009): 241-286. On the northern frontier, see Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 161-252; Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire* 2 vols.; de Crespigny, *Northern Frontier*.

⁸² For the Former Han’s enterprise in the Western Regions, see A. F. P. Hulsewé, with an introduction by M. A. N. Loewe, *China in Inner Asia: The Early Stage: 125 B.C.- A.D. 23. An Annotated Translation of Chapters 61 and 96 of the History of the Former Han Dynasty* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979); for the Later Han and the Western Regions, see John E. Hill, *Through the Jade Gate to Rome: A Study of the Silk Routes During the Later Han Dynasty 1st to 2nd Centuries CE* (John E. Hill, 2009).

The Western Regions was in fact a “sphere of influence” of the Han empires and was different from other territories of under direct imperial administration, although some Chinese historians held that it was part of the Han empire. James A. Millward has sharply pointed out that “the impression that all Xinjiang was Chinese territory throughout the Han dynasty is a distortion arising from later historians’ emphasis on certain aspects of this mixed record.” See his *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 24.

⁸³ Michael Khodarkousky, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 47.

⁸⁴ Ladis K. D. Kristof, “The Nature of Frontiers and Boundaries,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 49(1959): 269-282.

contrast, “frontier” differs from boundary and border by virtue of its flexibility and diversity. Frontier refers to a much more loosely defined area, a zone of transition, and “a region that forms the margin of a settled or developed territory, a politico-geographical area lying beyond the integrated region of the political unit.”⁸⁵ Hence, frontier forms an outer edge or peripheral zone of a polity. It is also a zone of interaction as Lattimore pointed out that, in the Chinese case, the Inner Asian frontier was not “fully homogenous with China or the steppe” and could influence or be influenced by both.⁸⁶ As a zone in-between and full of uncertainty, frontier is usually an area in which expansion can take place by either side and through which boundaries are drawn. Both “frontier” and “borderland” has zonal quality,⁸⁷ but slight differences still exist between the usages of the two terms in certain circumstances.⁸⁸ Frontier emphasizes the imperial territorial limit and is usually subject to the imperial military presence, as we will see the Han northwestern frontier advanced and receded depended upon the balance of power with

⁸⁵ Khodarkousky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*, 47.

⁸⁶ Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, 423.

⁸⁷ Sahlins, *Boundaries*, 4; Baud and van Schendel, “Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands,” 213.

⁸⁸ Some scholars of American history suggest that it is necessary to disentangle frontiers from borderlands and reformulate the concept of borderland as frontier is a meeting place of peoples in which geographic and cultural borders were not clearly defined whereas borderlands are the contested boundaries between colonial domains, and there was a process of transition that borderlands turned into clearly defined borders. However, such view mainly resonate well with the history of eighteenth and nineteenth century when the empires were gradually replaced by nation-states. It is a rather recent phenomenon that we have become used to in the modern world but may not suitable for the analysis in this study, since there was hardly case of borderlands transformed into clearly demarcated borders in the Han times. See Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History,” *The American Historical Review* 104.3 (Jun, 1999): 814-841.

neighbors. On the other hand, borderland refers to the newly conquered area with the existence of autochthonous societies after the frontier has pushed forward. Hence, there will be a process of transformation of frontiers into borderlands.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, due to various reasons, frontier customs and cultures would persist even after the region went through such a transformation. The northwestern region in this study, no matter it was a frontier zone or borderland, was distinct from the imperial center in terms of culture and customs. This phenomenon meshes with what a frontier historian pointed out that “each frontier leaves its traces behind it, and when it becomes a settled area the region still partakes of the frontier characteristics.”⁹⁰

When regarding the northwestern frontier zone of the Han dynasties, most studies center on a vast stretch of land called “Hexi 河西 Corridor” in present-day northern Gansu province. Hexi, literally “west of the river,” lies for the most part west of the Yellow River. It is a long shaped area located in the mountainous terrain which connects China proper and the Western Regions. Several points on the Hexi Corridor formed transportation and commercial hubs for pre-modern Inner Asian economic and cultural exchange. With the groundbreaking excavation of Han period wooden and bamboo strips

⁸⁹ Baud and van Schendel have classified different types of borderlands and their different paths of development, see idem, “Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands,” 220-229.

⁹⁰ Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 4.

in the area named Juyan 居延 (also known as the Edsen-gol region) at the northern tip of Hexi Corridor in the early twentieth century and the subsequent decades, which provide new information of the local government functionaries and livelihood of people within the enclave,⁹¹ the role of the region in Han history is highly emphasized. For example, in his two-volume work on the development and expansion of the Han empire, Chang Chun-shu 張春樹 focuses mainly on the Han penetration into and establishment on the Hexi Corridor. In a similar tone of Frederick Jackson Turner, Chang highly praised the achievement of the Han expansion to the “new world”—Hexi region and its contribution to the development of Chinese civilization.⁹²

However, the geographic focus of the present study is the whole northwestern region of the Han dynasties, which is largely commensurate with largely correspond to present-day provinces of Gansu and Ningxia, with the addition of small portions of northeastern Qinghai 青海 province and western and southern Inner Mongolia; the Hexi Corridor in northern Gansu is only a piece of the whole jigsaw. As the subsequent chapters will show, the northwestern region of the Han times went through a process of

⁹¹ The literature on this topic is vast, for general overview, see Momiyama Akira, *Kan teikoku to henkyō shakai: chōjō no fūkei* 漢帝国と辺境社会：長城の風景 (Tōkyō: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 1999); Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire* 2 vols.; Michael Loewe, *Records of Han Administration* 2 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

⁹² Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire* vol. 2, 173-177. For Turner’s view on how the frontier shaped American history, see his “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 1-38.

expansion and coalescence to bring together several areas that sharing common topographical, ethnic, socio-economic, and cultural features but differing considerably from the imperial center; the geographic concept of Han northwest should not be confined to the Hexi Corridor. Focus of this study lies especially in the area corresponds to present-day southern Gansu, where Dong Zhuo and many other northwestern military elites of the two Han dynasties flourished.

To study the relationship between the northwestern region and China proper in the Han times and to investigate how the early Chinese empire dealt with regions with different cultural tradition and ethnic composition, some models for regional studies merit particular emphasis as points of departure for the present study. The most famous and influential regional system for studying China is the one devised by G. William Skinner. Skinner first applied the analytical methods of central place theory to study the marketing system and social interactions of nineteenth-century China.⁹³ Later, he devised a macroregional system in a panoramic survey to explain the socio-economic transformation of late imperial China.⁹⁴ Skinner divided China into nine “macroregions”, namely Northeast China, Northwest China, Upper Yangzi, Middle Yangzi, Lower Yangzi,

⁹³ G. William Skinner, *Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2001).

⁹⁴ G. William Skinner, “Presidential Address: The Structure of Chinese History,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 44.2 (Feb., 1985): 271-292.

Gan Yangzi, Southeast Coast, Lingnan, and Yungui,⁹⁵ and explained that “each macroregional economy took shape in and was wholly contained within a physiographic macroregion that can be defined in terms of drainage basins. Each was characterized by the concentration in a central area of resources of all kinds.”⁹⁶ Skinner focused not only on the macroregions but also on the subregional systems within macroregions and adopted the concept of center and periphery to understand the evolution of a region over time. He pointed out that “the integral wholeness of Chinese history cannot be approached by generalizing across diversity or by striking an average of the various regional systems. Rather, a history of the civilizational whole must rest on comprehension and reconciliation of the distinct but contingently interrelated histories of its component parts.”⁹⁷ Inspired by Skinner’s research, the historian Robert Hartwell also applied the concepts of center-periphery and subregion in producing a very important study on the transformation of various aspects of Chinese society during the 800 years between the ninth and sixteenth century.⁹⁸

To employ regional system in studying the Han period, Hsu Cho-yun has made a

⁹⁵ Ibid., 273.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 280.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 289.

⁹⁸ Robert Hartwell, “Demographic, Political, and Social Transformation of China, 750-1550,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42 (1982): 365-442. For a brief criticism of Skinner’s and Hartwell’s approaches in the perspective of Chinese studies, see Von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes*, 215-216.

significant contribution.⁹⁹ Hsu adopted the concept of core and periphery to construct his network model of the Han empire, in which he divided Han China into the core areas, the peripheries, and the borderlands. He described the network of nodes, routes, markets, and patterns of circulation that channeled the movement of people, goods, and information within the empire and contributed to political unity. However, he also pointed out that the Han exchange network was built upon a fragile balance of regional interdependence, which could be easily upset by disturbances such as war and natural disasters and led to the breakdown of the national network into regional networks.¹⁰⁰

The aforementioned models offer insightful understanding of the processes of empire-building and, even, empire-destroying in ancient China. The diversity of regions shows that the Chinese empire was built on a diverse foundation. Different regions have their own paths of development and serve different functions in the empire.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Japanese scholars such as Satake Yasuhiko also provides a regional model for Han China, see his “Kandai jyūsanshū no chiikisei ni tsuite,” 37-65 and 79.

¹⁰⁰ See Hsu Cho-yun 許倬雲, “Handai Zhongguo tixi de wangluo” 漢代中國體系的網絡, in idem et al., eds., *Zhongguo lishi lunwen ji* 中國歷史論文集. (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), 1-28; *Han Agriculture: The Formation of Early Chinese Agrarian Economy (206 B.C.-A.D. 220)* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1980), in which Chapter 6 supports Skinner’s observation. For a recent evaluation of Hsu’s network model, see Wang Dequan 王德權, “Gudai Zhongguo tixi de tuancheng” 古代中國體系的搏成, *Xin Shixue* 新史學 14.1 (March, 2003): 143-201; for Hsu’s response to Wang, see his “Dui Wang Dequan xiansheng ‘Gudai Zhongguo tixi de tuancheng’ de huiying,” *Xin Shixue* 14.1 (March, 2003): 203-208. For a criticism of Hsu’s interpretation of the Han society and economy in *Han Agriculture*, see Chen Chi-yun, “Han Dynasty China: Economy, Society, and State Power, a Review Article,” *T’oung Pao* 70 (1984): 127-148.

¹⁰¹ For the regional cultural differences in the Warring States-and Qin-Han periods, see Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, “Zhanguo shidai lieguo minfeng yu shengji: jianlun Qin tongyi tianxia zhi beijing” 戰國時代列國民

This study aims to explore how the regional diversity served as a dynamics of disintegration of the empire. Skinner has noticed how the regional diversity badly affected political unity that “in practice policies were often spatially differentiated or regionally specific, and in any case policy implementation varied radically from one region to another. Within regions, moreover, policy differences declined as one moved from inner core to far periphery.”¹⁰² As this study on the northwestern frontier zone will show, not only policies and regulations but also political culture and vision of empire were not always in a uniform manner everywhere in the empire as the imperial center would expect. Compared with the imperial court, perspectives were different in a frontier region and moved at a regional tempo that regional interests and conditions determined. Cohesion was desirable from the center, but loose and slow implementation, delayed responses, discordant practices, and centrifugal inclination were often the realities. Furthermore, the Han northwestern frontier region in our case was mostly incorporated

風與生計——兼論秦統一天下之背景, in idem, *Gengwang shixue lunwen xuanji* 嚴耕望史學論文選集 (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshiye gongsi, 1991), 95-112; Wang Zijin 王子今, “Qin Han wenhua de tongyi fengge yu quyu tese” 秦漢文化的統一風格與區域特色, in idem, *Qin Han quyu wenhua yanjiu* 秦漢區域文化研究 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1998), 1-23; Zhou Zhenhe 周振鶴, “Qin Han fengsu dili quhua” 秦漢風俗地理區劃, in idem ed., *Zhongguo lishi wenhua quyu yanjiu* 中國歷史文化區域研究 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 107-128; Hu Baoguo 胡寶國, “Handai zhengzhi wenhua zhongxin de zhuan yi” 漢代政治文化中心的轉移, in idem, *Han Tang jian shixue de fazhan* 漢唐間史學的發展 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2003), 214-229; Kudō, *Suikochi Shinkan yorimita Shindai no kokka to shakai*; Fujita Katsuhisa 藤田勝久, *Shiki Sengoku shiryō no kenkyū* 史記戰國史料の研究 (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1997).

¹⁰² Skinner, “Presidential Address: The Structure of Chinese History,” 281.

through conquest and, once became part of the empire, was highly militarized to serve military purposes; on the other hand, the central and eastern parts of the empire mainly served as the major sources of fiscal and material supplies. Therefore, they produced distinctive forms of regional culture and spatial organization. To borrow the sociologist Charles Tilly's words, there is a distinction between military and fiscal geographies.¹⁰³

The militarized nature of the northwestern region was commonly recognized by the Han contemporaries. During the Han times, the region was set to be a highly militarized zone to serve three strategic functions. First, for offensive, it was a military base to launch attack against the western sector of the Xiongnu empire; for defensive, it posed a threat to the western flank of the Xiongnu and therefore deterred them from invading the imperial realm from northwest. Second, it served as a bridgehead for supporting the imperial ventures to the Western Regions, which was also a crucial part of the grand strategy against the Xiongnu since the Han statesmen believed that controlling over the Western Regions would "cut off the right arm of the Xiongnu." Third, it acted as a wedge between the Xiongnu and Qiang and hence fended off any possible contact and coalition between the two peoples, which would otherwise threaten the security of the Han.

¹⁰³ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States: AD 990–1992*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 125.

As will be discussed in detail in later chapters, the natural geography and composition of population all ushered militarization of the region. In such a frontier zone, only the tough could survive, and not surprisingly it came to have the largest concentration of men of martial background. The autochthonous population was composed of various groups of non-Han peoples who were regarded by the Han statesmen as natural-born warriors. The ethnic Han people in there were also good at military skill. The northwest was the main source of providing cavalry and military talents in the Han times. Beside garrison soldiers, the majority of Han population in the area was composed of re-settled refugees, convicts, and other people whom were regarded by the officials as would-be social harm. They were sent to the northwest to take up colonization duties and lessen the pressure they would exert on the interior of the empire. The influx of ethnic Han people, on one hand, intensified ethnic conflict and resource competition among different groups and finally led to the outbreak of large-scale armed confrontation; on the other hand, for various reasons, the process of assimilation took place between the Han colonizers and autochthonous peoples and consequently forged a new identity of northwesterner, which finally fostered a military force to challenge the imperial center. No matter it was due to state sponsorship or for the pursuit of survival, people of the northwest were willing and

able to resort to military means to dissolve their problems and hence accelerated the militarization of such a frontier society.

Militarization is in fact not only a military process but also a social phenomenon.¹⁰⁴

In this study, militarization refers to the condition that most institutions and sectors of a society are shaped to support the exigencies of war and the preparation of war and all kinds of resources are appropriated for military purposes. Militarization can be divided into two types: “sanctioned militarization” and “spontaneous militarization.”¹⁰⁵

Sanctioned militarization is a top-down process, which is initiated and controlled by the state to transform society into an efficient military force to serve its military purposes. It represents the strengthening of state authority over society and constitutes a centripetal force. By contrast, spontaneous militarization is a bottom-up process, which is initiated by local armed communities to serve their own purposes and will act as a centrifugal force to undermine the state authority and military monopoly. Both processes can be

¹⁰⁴ In his study of militarism, Emilio Willems has shed light on understanding the process of militarization, see *A Way of Life and Death: Three Centuries of Prussian-German Militarism: An Anthropological Approach* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1986), 1-13. Militarization and militarism are not necessarily the same thing, for the differences between the two concepts, see Michael Szonyi, *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 247-248.

¹⁰⁵ My definition and classification of militarization is benefited from the relevant discussions in Willems, *A Way of Life and Death*; Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), especially 32-35 and 64-65; Szonyi, *Cold War Island*; Huang Jinlin 黃金麟, *Zhanzheng, shenti, xiandaixing : jindai Taiwan de junshi zhili yu shenti, 1895-2005 戰爭、身體、現代性：近代臺灣的軍事治理與身體, 1895-2005* (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gufen youxiangongsi, 2009).

found in Chinese history and the nature of their relationship is in relative terms as strong sanctioned militarization would keep the spontaneous one in bay and vice versa. For instance, the Qin state adopted various political and social measures to militarize its population and finally achieved the conquest of its rival states.¹⁰⁶ In contrast, when the spontaneous militarization of the northwest grew stronger than the sanctioned effort of the Later Han state, it became the harbinger of dismembering the empire.

As a frontier zone, the northwest was doubtlessly being militarized under the imperial sponsorship. However, the mixed demographic composition and the ensuing struggles among the inhabitants unavoidably enhanced locally initiated militarization. Especially after the outbreak of the Qiang wars in the second century CE, most of the northwest turned into battlefield; violence was widely spread and became an integral part of everyday life, which fostered rapid militarization among the northwestern people.¹⁰⁷

Worse still, when the Qiang got the upper hand in the confrontations, the desperate imperial court was tempted to give up the northwest and let the local people to defend

¹⁰⁶ For the militarization initiated by the state in the Warring States period in general and the Qin state in particular, see Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 53-96; Robin McNeal, "Acquiring People: Social Organization, Mobilization, and the Discourse on the Civil and the Martial in Ancient China," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Washington, 2000); Du Zhengsheng 杜正勝, *Bianhu qimin: chuantong zhengzhi shehui jiegou zhi xingcheng* 編戶齊民：傳統政治社會結構之形成 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1990), 49-96 and 373-391.

¹⁰⁷ David M. Robinson has a recent study on spreading violence led to rapid militarization during the transition of the Yuan and Ming dynasties, see his *Empire's Twilight*, 81-82 and 269-271. Diana Lary's work on modern China also discusses the relationship between violence and militarization, see her *Warlord Soldiers: Chinese Common Soldiers 1919-1937*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 4-5.

themselves if they did not evacuate with the local functionaries. While facing the chronic violence without adequate support from the imperial center, local communities could only rely on themselves. As a result, the war-ridden northwest became a hotbed of spontaneous militarization, which in turn de-legitimized the imperial court and gave rise to ambitious men like Dong Zhuo.

SOURCES AND ORGANIZATION

In recent decades, studying archaeological findings, unearthed wooden and bamboo strips in particular, has become the mainstream of Qin-Han scholarship. In many recent studies, the role of new findings even overshadows that of the traditional textual sources. However, in order to have a big picture of the Qin-Han history, both received textual sources and archaeological findings have to be used. For certain topics such as the present study, traditional textual sources still play the primary role while excavated sources only provide supplementary information.

This study depends primarily on received Chinese textual sources, especially three traditional Chinese “standard histories,” namely (1) *Shiji* 史記, compiled by the official historians of the Former Han Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110BCE) and his son Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-86BCE). It spans from the mythical period to the early first century BCE,

covering the reigns of the first five emperors of the Former Han; (2) *Hanshu* 漢書, a work collectively compiled by a famous Later Han literati family of which Ban Gu 班固 (32-92CE) as representative. It records history of the Former Han dynasty; (3) *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, compiled by Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445CE), and contains the treatises by Sima Biao 司馬彪 (240-306CE). It is the history of the Later Han dynasty. Needless to say, *Hou Hanshu* is the most essential one in studying the history of Later Han.¹⁰⁸

Besides, *Sanguozhi* 三國志, a standard history compiled by Chen Shou 陳壽 (233-297CE), which covers the last decades of the Later Han and the ensuing Three Kingdoms period (220-265CE) provides important information of the men who took part in the turmoil happened in the last years of Later Han and witnessed the demise of the empire.

A wide span of other traditional textual sources also serve important function in the present study, to name only a few, such as *Jijiu pian* 急就篇, a primer of the Han times; *Qianfu lun* 潛夫論, a collection of essays written by a Later Han scholars in the midst of the dynasty; *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義, a work compiled by a scholar-official in the last years of the Later Han; and *Dushi Fangyu jiyao* 讀史方輿紀要, a seventeenth century

¹⁰⁸ For the value of *Hou Hanshu* in the field, see Bielenstein, “The Restoration of the Han Dynasty: with Prolegomena on the Historiography of the *Hou Han shu*”; B. J. Mansvelt Beck, *The Treatises of Later Han: Their Author, Sources, Contents and Place in Chinese Historiography* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1990).

geographical work.

Apart from the above received textual sources, epigraphic sources, especially stone steles and epitaphs, are critical body of evidence for studying the Later Han world.¹⁰⁹

Modern collections compiled by Chinese and Japanese scholars such as *Hanbei jishi* 漢碑集釋 and *Kandai sekkoku shūsei* 漢代石刻集成 provide extremely valuable help in using those sources. This study also takes into account relevant archaeological sources from the period and region under question as possible; in certain cases, some unearthed bamboo and wood strips will be used to support my arguments.

This Introduction, as Chapter One, has provided an overview of the themes and lays out the general framework that guides this study.

Chapter Two focuses on the natural and political landscapes of the northwestern region. It adopts a *longue durée* approach of tracing the trajectory of development of the region since the pre-Han period and stretches how the northwestward expansion of Chinese regimes re-structured the region in various aspects.

¹⁰⁹ For using epigraphic sources in the study of Later Han history, see Bielenstein, “Later Han Inscriptions and Dynastic Biographies: a Historiographical Comparison,” in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Sinology: Section on History and Archaeology* (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1981), 571-586; Patricia Ebrey, “Later Han Stone Inscriptions,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40:2 (1980): 325-353; Brown, *The Politics of Mourning in Early China*. On the cultural meaning of stone inscriptions in the Later Han context, see K. E. Brashier, “Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Stelae,” in Martin Kern ed., *Text and Ritual in Early China* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2005), 249-284. For the origins and developments of the Later Han steles, see Tomiya Itaru 冨谷至, *Mokkan, chikukan no kataru Chūgoku kodai: shoki no bunkashi* 木簡・竹簡の語る中国古代：書記の文化史 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 28-56.

While Chapter Two focuses on the land, Chapter Three centers on the people. It analyzes both the elites and common people of the northwest and their political and social status during the two Han dynasties. Special attention is given to the changing status of the northwestern military elites and their deteriorating relationship with the imperial center during the Later Han.

Chapter Four first investigates the background and course of the protracted military confrontation between the Later Han and the so-called Qiang people and its devastating impact on the empire; then analyzes the debates over abandoning the northwestern region and the ensuing forcible withdrawals, which intensified the estrangement and conflict between the northwesterners and the scholar-officials at imperial center.

The final chapter summarizes the main themes of this study, provides a full picture of the role that the northwestern region played in the Later Han empire, and considers the implications of this work to our understanding of early medieval Chinese history.

2

Opening New Territory & Partitioning the Space: Natural and Administrative Geographies of the Han Northwest

When Zhang Qian 張騫 (fl. 140s-110s BCE) first set foot on the soil of Longxi 隴西, then the westernmost commandery (*jun* 郡; one level of Han administrative divisions; the whole empire was divided into dozens of commanderies) of the Former Han dynasty, sometime during the 130s BCE, he must have seen a scenery very different from that of Chang'an, the imperial capital, and Hanzhong 漢中, his native commandery in the southwest. As Zhang traveled northwestward through Longxi, he left the Former Han territory and entered the Xiongnu dominated Hexi region. Zhang was captured by the Xiongnu and detained for over a decade until he was able to flee and continue his journey to Inner Asia.

Zhang Qian was well known in Chinese history as a pioneer and explorer in establishing official diplomatic relationship between the Han empire and various Inner

Asian states. His saga of exploration was set against the backdrop of the Han-Xiongnu confrontation.¹ When Emperor Wu 武 (r. 140-87BCE) of the Former Han learned that the Yuezhi 月氏² people were defeated and expelled by the Xiongnu from the Hexi Corridor, he called for volunteers to take up a mission to the Yuezhi, in the hopes of forming an alliance with them and launching joint attack on the Xiongnu. Zhang, an attendant of the imperial court, responded to the emperor's call with others. By recruiting volunteers instead of appointing officials to lead a formal emissary, it reveals that the mission was a secret diplomacy in its nature. Crossing boundaries to conduct a diplomatic mission without Xiongnu authorization was obviously an act violated contemporary "international" norms, as the Xiongnu Chanyu 單于³ questioned Zhang Qian when the latter was under custody, "The Yuezhi is to our north, how could the Han send mission to there? If I want to send mission to the Yue [the southern neighbor of the Han], would the

¹ For the war and peace between the Han and Xiongnu, see Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, 206-252; Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 1, 161-184; Sophia-Karin Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu: A Reexamination of Cultural and Political Relations (I)," *Monumenta Serica* 51 (2003): 55-236.

² As Sophia-Karin Psarras points out in her article that "Yuezhi" is the uniform Western pronunciation, given in Chinese as "Rouzhi" or "Ruzhi," reading 月 (*Yue*) as 肉 (*Rou*). I follow her practice and adopt Western convention in this work. See Sophia-Karin Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu: A Reexamination of Cultural and Political Relations (I)," 74. Also, for the origins and history of the Yuezhi, see Craig Benjamin, "The Origin of the Yuezhi," in Craig Benjamin and Samuel N. C. Lieu eds., *Walls and Frontiers in Inner Asian History* (Sydney: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 2002), 101-130.

³ "Chanyu" is the transcription for the title of the supreme leader of the Xiongnu confederacy. Most English-language literature adopt the term "Shanyu." In fact, according to the ancient Chinese lexicon *Guangyu* 廣韻, Chanyu is preferable to Shanyu. For the explanation of this title, see E. G. Pulleyblank, "The Hsiung-nu Language," *Asia Major* (New Series) IX.2 (1963): 256; Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu: A Reexamination of Cultural and Political Relations (I)," 127-128.

Han let me to do so?”⁴ 月氏在吾北，漢何以得往使？吾欲使越，漢肯聽我乎？ Also, such a stealth mission only played an auxiliary role in the Han’s grand strategy against the Xiongnu (as Zhang’s long-term detention in the Xiongnu and then his failure of reaching agreement with the Yuezhi did not hinder the Han military campaigns against the Xiongnu); the main thrust that the Han relied on was military forces. Although Zhang Qian failed his mission, the knowledge about Inner Asia that he acquired during the journey contributed valuable information to the Han westward expansionist policy.

Not long afterwards did the situation change. Within two decades after the Chanyu questioned Zhang Qian, the Former Han conquered the Hexi Corridor and the Xiongnu was forced to retreat from the region. When Zhang proceeded to Inner Asia for his second mission in 119BCE, he was safe from the Xiongnu to travel through the Hexi Corridor. The Former Han gradually set up garrisons and administrative units in the Hexi Corridor.

The northwestern region, which included the newly conquered Hexi region and the neighboring commanderies, formed a unit called Liang province (Liangzhou涼州) in the late years of Emperor Wu when the whole empire was divided into thirteen inspectoral jurisdictions called province (*zhou* 州; each includes several commanderies), which

⁴ Sima Qian 司馬遷, comp., *Shiji* 史記 (hereafter *SJ*), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 123:3157.

gradually transformed into full-fledged administrative region equipped with its own military forces in the Later Han times.⁵ The word *Liang* literally means “cool” or “chilly” and the province was designated as “Liang” because “it is located in the west and [its weather] is always severely chilly.”⁶ 地處西方，常寒涼也。 Such a description sheds light on the Han people’s perception of Liang province in terms of its natural geographical characteristics.

Climatic and topographical features provide us a geographical setting for understanding the character and development of this northwestern borderland. Beside the physical landscape, the political landscape of Liang province also constitutes an integral part of our studying of this frontier society. As most geographers and geographical historians would agree, “Administrative geography—the way a state divides space—can also tell us much about conceptions of political community and its modes of inclusion and exclusion.”⁷ Such is the case of Liang province. The establishment and evolution of

⁵ For recently published comprehensive studies on the evolution of the function of province in the Han dynasties, see Kojima, *Kandai kokka tōchi no kōzō to tenkai*, 167-243; Zhou Changshan 周長山, *Handai difang zhengzhishi lun: dui junxian zhidu ruogan wenti de kaocha* 漢代地方政治史論：對郡縣制度若干問題的考察 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006), 76-93; Xin Deyong 辛德勇, “Liang Han zhouzhi xinkao” 兩漢州制新考, in idem, *Qin Han zhengqu yu bianjie dili yanjiu* 秦漢政區與邊界地理研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 93-177. Xin has proposed a new theory that the province system and the inspectoral jurisdictions were two separate institutions and not until the last decades of the Former Han did the two systems merge.

⁶ Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, et al., comp., *Jinshu* 晉書 (hereafter *JS*), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 14:432.

⁷ Justin Tighe, *Constructing Suiyuan: The Politics of Northern Territory and Development in Early*

administrative jurisdictions in the Qin-Han northwest tell us not only the increased penetration or retrenchment of the imperial state in the region but also the imperial conceptions of territory and political community over the region. On the other hand, the creation of administrative space also influenced the identity of the members of local society and their attitudes toward the imperial center. After introducing the natural geography, the remainder of this chapter will provide a chronological account of the formation of political landscape of the northwestern borderlands in a *longue durée* perspective from the pre-Han period to the Later Han times.

PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

In terms of both natural environment and culture, the northwestern borderland is a transitional or intermediate zone linking up China proper and Inner Asia. With such background, the northwestern region was never fully integrated with China proper and was persistently regarded by the Chinese regimes as a perilous area full of uncertainty and potential rivalry. Hence, the northwestern frontier zone had been a prime security concern of the imperial states and an important topic among statecraft writings until the late nineteenth century. However, as a modern Chinese historical geographer has pointed

out, there are minor differences in the definition and delimitation of the northwest in different historical periods, and it is important to study the northwestern region in a contemporary context.⁸ This study focuses on Liang province, which was the northwestern region of the Han dynasties, for which the geographical area is not exactly the same as what is called northwestern provinces in China today.⁹ The territories of Liang province largely correspond to present-day provinces of Gansu and Ningxia, with the addition of small portions of northeastern Qinghai province and western and southern Inner Mongolia. Although it is somewhat anachronistic to call the territories “Liang province” before its formal establishment during the reign of Emperor Wu, this chapter will sometimes employ the term to roughly refer to the whole area for convenient description. Considering the ecology and environment of the region have been changing since antiquity under the influence of natural and human-induced changes, such as desertification and deforestation, the following descriptions can only be in general terms and aim to portray some salient geographical features of the region.

Chinese geographers have generalized four salient features of the natural environment

⁸ Li Xiacong 李孝聰, *Zhongguo quyu lishi dili* 中國區域歷史地理 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004), 10. Tighe has also pointed out that “Exactly what the term Northwest included was imperative. Different writers and users of the term intended different spatial meanings.” See idem, *Constructing Suiyuan*, 92.

⁹ They include Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xingjiang. See Li, *Zhongguo quyu lishi dili*, 10.

in the northwestern region. First, it is an arid area with an average annual precipitation of less than 200 millimeters per year. There are micro-regional variations with the amount of rainfall diminishes from east to west. Second, the terrain is generally flat as most parts of the region are constituted by semi-desert, sand desert, stony desert (specifically referring to the Gobi Desert), mountain desert, and terrene flatland. These areas have been subjected to long term erosions under the arid climate, which in turn contributes to the coarse soil texture of the region. Third, this region has long been suffering from the problem of scarce water resources. Except for the drainage areas of the Yellow River, most areas only have in-ward flowing rivers which lack permanent flow. Streams source from the glacier on the surrounding mountains are quickly absorbed by the arid soil once they reach the flatland below the mountains. Fourth, layers of vegetation in this region are thin and scattered. Except for certain areas of pasture and forest, most areas are covered by desert shrubs.¹⁰

The natural landscape of Liang province can be divided into four sectors, namely southeast, northwest, northeast, and southwest.

1. The southeast sector is roughly equivalent to the southeastern part of present-day

¹⁰ Li, *Zhongguo quyu lishi dili*, 11.

Gansu province. It is on the eastern bank of the Yellow River and is part of the loess plateau of North China. The deepest layer of the loess reaches 400 meters, which is also the thickest in the world. Compared with other sectors, this one enjoys a lower altitude (800-2200 meters in elevation), warmer weather, and larger amount of rainfall.¹¹ According to the archaeological and phytogeographic studies, the loess plateau was more humid and more fertile in ancient times than it is today. During the Qin-Han period, lush forests existed over large areas in this sector. Although the whole sector gradually underwent a process of deforestation from the pre-Qin period onwards, dense forests could still be found in some areas no later than the mid-eleventh century CE.¹² This sector was suitable for both agricultural and pastoral activities. Therefore, conflicts between farmers and pastoralists over land resources in this sector persistently happened in Chinese history.¹³ During the Qin-Han period,

¹¹ Ibid, 13-15.

¹² Shi Nianhai 史念海, "Huangtu gaoyuan jiqi nonglinmu fenbu diqu de bianqian" 黄土高原及其農林牧分佈地區的變遷, in idem, *Huangtu gaoyuan lishi dili yanjiu* 黄土高原歷史地理研究 (Zhengzhou: Huanghe shuili chubanshe, 2001), 386-391.

¹³ The contenders of conflicts over land resources in this sector cannot be easily placed in the conventional and yet questionable dichotomy between Inner Asian pastoral nomads from the steppes and sedentary Chinese farmers. As those pastoralists were not necessarily nomads, nor did they all come from the Inner Asian steppes. In fact, in order to adapt to the natural conditions, most people of this sector practiced mixed economy with various degree of reliance on agriculture and animal breeding. For the pastoralists, pastoralism was the predominant economic activity, but agriculture was still in a secondary and supplementary capacity. On the other hand, farmers also practiced animal husbandry to a certain extent. Conflicts between the two groups were mainly caused by farmers' encroachment, usually under state sponsorship, on the grazing lands and attempted to turn them into arable lands.

For the definitions and classifications of nomadism and pastoralism, see Anatoly M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*. Julia Crookenden trans. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994),

with the help of irrigation works under state sponsorship, this sector was capable of producing a considerable amount of agricultural products. On the other hand, the pastures provided an excellent environment for horse breeding. The Former Han state therefore set up a certain number of horse ranches as a major source of supplying war horses. Needless to say, this sector was an important base of supporting military logistics for Liang province.

2. The northwest sector is the famous Hexi Corridor. As mentioned in Chapter One, it is on the western bank of the Yellow River and therefore corresponds to the western part of present-day Gansu province. Being confined by the mountain ranges on its north and south, Hexi Corridor is a long and narrow stretch of land with east-west distance of around 1000 kilometers and south-north distance varies from several kilometers to a hundred strong kilometers. The average altitude of this sector varying from 1000 to 1500 meters and the altitude increases from south to north and east to west. This sector forms a flat passageway between mountain ranges. Within this passageway, desert and semi-desert areas are studded with oases.¹⁴ Although precipitation rate of this area is low, some rivers flowing down from the mountains sustain the oases,

15-25.

¹⁴ On the natural landscape of this area, see Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, 163-168.

which provide good havens for both human and animals.¹⁵ According to the *Hanshu*, during the Former Han dynasty, the good pastureland there provided the most abundant sources of cattle, sheep, and horses in the empire.¹⁶ This sector was an important land of strategic sources for the Xiongnu and became their great loss when it was captured by the Former Han.

3. The northeast sector corresponds to present-day Ningxia province. This sector is located between desert and loess plateau and its climate is under the joint influence of the monsoon zone to its east and the arid zone to its northwest. The mountainous terrain and the widely scattered basins make the area look like a checkerboard. It is an area of dry weather, little rainfall, high evaporation, and strong sandy wind, with an annual average temperature of 5-9 degrees centigrade. Generally speaking, it is a semi-desert area and not suitable for agricultural activities.¹⁷ However, after conquering this area, the Former Han put great efforts to send labor forces in, digging ditches at certain locations for irrigation and setting up military and farming settlement points; certain parts of this area were therefore capable of providing a

¹⁵ Li, *Zhongguo quyu lishi dili*, 13-15.

¹⁶ Ban Gu 班固, comp. *Hanshu* 漢書 (hereafter *HS*), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 28B:1645.

¹⁷ Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, 163-168.

considerable amount of farm produce.¹⁸

4. The southwest sector occupies the northeastern portion of present-day Qinghai province, where is also the northeastern tip of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. The average annual temperature of this area is between 3-9 degrees centigrade. Under the influence of the easterly monsoon, this area enjoys a relatively warmer temperature and higher amount of rainfall than its environs. As the Yellow River and its tributary Huang River (Huangshui 湟水) pass through this area, the river valleys also provide ideal places for both agricultural and pastoral activities.¹⁹ Therefore, the He-Huang 河湟 (Yellow River and Huang River) region had long been a focal point for resource struggles in Chinese history between autochthonous peoples and Han settlers. In the Han times, as will be shown in Chapter Four, it was the area where military conflicts between the Qiang people and the Han settlers usually broke out.

As we now have a general picture of the natural landscape of the northwestern region, we can turn to the political landscape in the following sections. I will first give a general description of the human geography in the northwest in prehistoric era. Then, it will be followed by a chronological account of the processes of expansion in the northwestern

¹⁸ Li, *Zhongguo quyu lishi dili*, 18-21.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 26-28.

frontier during the Qin-Han period. Based on the division of the four sectors mentioned above, we will start from the southeast sector, which was close to the Jing 涇 River and Wei River valleys where the political centers of the Western Zhou (ca. 1045-771BCE), Qin and Former Han located and was therefore the first northwestern frontier zone during those periods. Then, we will follow the footprints of the Han armies and advance northwestward to the Hexi Corridor. Since the following sections focus mainly on the political landscape of the northwestern borderlands, the cultural and ethnic characteristics will only be briefly mentioned if necessary and we will return to these features in the succeeding chapters.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE BEFORE THE FORMER HAN

Archaeologists have generally accepted that, from the Bronze Age onward, a broad cultural belt in which lifestyle, economic activities, social customs, religious beliefs, and style of bronze tools all distant from the civilization of China proper gradually formed along the northern frontier of China. This distinct cultural region is called the “Northern Zone,” or “Northern Bronzes Complex” of China.²⁰ Geographically speaking, this

²⁰ For general survey of the Northern Zone from the remotest antiquity to the Warring States period, see Nicola Di Cosmo, “The Northern Frontier in Pre-imperial China,” in Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 885-966; idem, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, 44-90.

cultural belt extends from the present-day provinces of Heilongjiang 黑龍江, Jilin 吉林, and Liaoning 遼寧 in the east, through Inner Mongolia, Hebei 河北, northern Henan 河南, Shanxi 山西, Shannxi 陝西, Gansu, Ningxia, and parts of Qinghai, to Xinjiang in the west, comprising various natural landscapes such as forest, steppe, and desert.²¹

Scholars have pointed out that the Northern Zone is a cultural complex in which “different communities shared a similar inventory of bronze objects across a wide area” and “cannot be regarded as a single culture.”²² In fact, it served as a cultural transition zone between the civilization of China proper and bronze cultures of Inner Asia and South Siberia. The socioeconomic systems of this broad cultural belt were mixed in nature and varied from pastoralism and agriculture in different degrees.²³ Liang province was on the Northern Zone and under the influence of the northern cultural complex.²⁴

Archaeological research has clearly demonstrated that traces of human activities and

The most recent and comprehensive English-language archaeological research on the Northern Zone in prehistoric times is Gideon Shelach, *Prehistoric Societies on the Northern Frontiers of China: Archaeological Perspectives on Identity Formation and Economic Change during the First Millennium BCE* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2009). A recent Chinese work on this topic is Yang Jianhua 楊建華, *Chunqiu Zhanguo shiqi Zhongguo beifang wenhuadai de xingcheng* 春秋戰國時期中國北方文化帶的形成 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2004).

²¹ Di Cosmo, “The Northern Frontier in Pre-imperial China,” 885-888. For detailed analysis of the territorial extent of the Northern Zone, see Yang, *Chunqiu Zhanguo shiqi Zhongguo beifang wenhuadai de xingcheng*, 8-95.

²² Di Cosmo, “The Northern Frontier in Pre-imperial China,” 886.

²³ On the different forms of pastoralism, see Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, 17-25.

²⁴ The artifacts excavated in Northwest China such as Ningxia and Gansu display the influence from Inner Eurasian steppes, for details, see Emma C. Bunker, *Nomadic Art of the Eastern Eurasian Steppes: The Eugene V. Thaw and Other New York Collections* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), 24-29 and passim; Yang, *Chunqiu Zhanguo shiqi Zhongguo beifang wenhuadai de xingcheng*, passim..

evidence of agriculture had already existed in the northwestern region as early as around 6000BCE. Various sites of two Neolithic cultures, namely the Majiayao 馬家窯 culture (ca. 5800-4000BCE) and the Qijia 齊家 culture (ca. 2100-1800BCE),²⁵ were found broadly scattered over the He-Huang valley, Hexi Corridor, and their environs. They were settled and agrarian-based cultures, with pig raising seems to have played an important role to the Qijia culture.²⁶ Another important feature of the Qijia culture is the presence of domesticated horses.²⁷ Some archaeologists proposed that, based on the metal artifacts discovered, the Qijia culture might have connection with Siberian and Inner Asian cultures.²⁸ The proportion of agriculture found in Qijia sites is lower than that in Majiayao sites; on the other hand, the proportion of pastoral activities in Qijia sites is higher than that in Majiayao's. It shows that the importance of pastoral activities in the region was increasing during the Neolithic Age.²⁹

There are four archaeological cultures found in the northwestern region which dated later than the Qijia culture and roughly corresponds to the period of Shang (ca.

²⁵ For the dates and locations of the archaeological cultures mentioned in this section, see Shelach, *Prehistoric Societies on the Northern Frontiers of China*, 19.

²⁶ Li, *Zhongguo quyu lishi dili*, 59.

²⁷ Di Cosmo, "The Northern Frontier in Pre-imperial China," 901.

²⁸ Di Cosmo, "The Northern Frontier in Pre-imperial China," 901; Yong Jichun 雍際春, *Longyou lishi wenhua yu dili yanjiu* 隴右歷史文化與地理研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2009), 97.

²⁹ Li, *Zhongguo quyu lishi dili*, 59.

1570-1045BCE) and Western Zhou. They are known as Siba 四坝 (ca. 1900-1500BCE) in the western Hexi Corridor; Xindian 辛店 (ca. 1600-600BCE), which spread along the Tao 洮 River, the Huang River, and the upper course of the Yellow River; Siwa 寺窪 (ca. 1300-600BCE), mainly in present-day eastern Gansu province; Kayue 卡约 (ca. 1600-600BCE) in the He-Huang valley. The territorial distribution of these cultural sites is limited when compared with those of the Qijia culture.³⁰ However, the large amount of animal remains, such as dogs, pigs, horses, sheep, and cattle, excavated from human graves reveals the importance of animal husbandry among these cultures. According to archaeological research, for example, the Kayue culture, which lasted from the Shang to Han period, “shows a gradual evolution from a mixed farming and pastoral culture with settled life to a predominantly nomadic economy. This transition is reflected not only in an increased number of animal bones and sacrifices, but also in the composition of the animal stock.”³¹ Scholars proposed that it is probably the climatic change that contributed to the demise of the agrarian-based Qijia culture and the rise of these four pastoral-based cultures, which practiced migration to certain extent and had crop farming played an ancillary role.³² In other words, as the climate turned cold in the late second millennium

³⁰ Li, *Zhongguo qiyu lishi dili*, 59.

³¹ Di Cosmo, “The Northern Frontier in Pre-imperial China,” 918.

³² Yong, *Longyou lishi wenhua yu dili yanjiu*, 97. However, Shelach suggests that climate change as a

BCE, a gradual transition from agrarian-based to pastoral-based economy took place in the region.³³ Through comparisons, some Chinese archaeologists even suggest that the Majiayao and Qijia cultures probably were culturally related to the ethnic Han Chinese while the other four cultures had a very close relationship with the Qiang and other non-Han peoples,³⁴ although further evidence will be needed to prove these hypotheses.

In the Shang times, there were groups of people named Gongfang 工方, Guifang 鬼方, and Tufang 土方³⁵ probably located to the north and northwest of the Shang in the area corresponds to present-day northern Shaanxi and Shanxi, and even extends to the western fringe of Gansu and Ningxia. Qiangfang 羌方, or simply Qiang, on the northwest also consistently posed threat to the Shang. The wars between these peoples and the Shang clearly demonstrate that the Shang was facing a rival northern frontier.

factor contributing to the socio-economic change in the Northern Zone is not as important as past scholarship have led us to believe. See Shelach, *Prehistoric Societies on the Northern Frontiers of China*, 62-68.

³³ Li, *Zhongguo quyu lishi dili*, 60. On the relationship between climate change and the development of pastoralism in ancient North China, see Han Maoli 韓茂莉, “Lun Zhongguo beifang xumuye chansheng yu huanjing de hudong guanxi” 論中國北方畜牧業產生與環境的互動關係, in Hou Renzhi 侯仁之 and Deng hui 鄧輝 eds., *Zhongguo beifang ganhan banganhan diqu lishi shiqi huanjing bianqian yanjiu wenji* 中國北方乾旱半乾旱地區歷史時期環境變遷研究文集 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2006), 294-303.

³⁴ Yong, *Longyou lishi wenhua yu dili yanjiu*, 97.

³⁵ In the Shang oracle bones, rival peoples against the Shang are usually referred to as *fang* 方, which means country or tribe, preceded by a character probably indicating their ethnic name. See Di Cosmo, “The Northern Frontier in Pre-imperial China,” 907-908. These groups of peoples were probably not pastoral nomads but pastorals practiced farming. For a specific study of the mixed economy of the Guifang, see Tang Xiaofeng 唐曉峰, “Guifang: Yin Zhou shidai beifang de nongmu hunhe zuqun” 鬼方：殷周時代北方的農牧混合族群, in *Zhongguo beifang ganhan banganhan diqu lishi shiqi huanjing bianqian yanjiu wenji*, 263-270.

According to the traditional account, it was the Zhou who overthrew the Shang in the eleventh century BCE. As its political center was located in the Wei River valley, which near its western border, the Western Zhou state faced potential threats from its western neighbors such as the Xianyun 玁狁 and/or the Quan Rong 犬戎.³⁶ In the last decades of the Western Zhou, when relations with the Rong quickly deteriorated, military confrontations broke out in the area between the lower reaches of the Jing and Luo 洛 Rivers and the Wei River valley, which was very close to the Zhou capital. The relationship between the two sides was complicated since the Zhou was not always a victim of “barbarian” invasions as later Chinese people believed. In fact, on one hand, the Rong repeatedly launched deep incursions into Zhou territory and it was the Quan Rong, located north of the Wei River valley, who finally toppled the Western Zhou state; on the other hand, the Zhou not only incorporated the Rong within its domain but also expanded northwestward to conquer the Rong and their lands outside the Zhou realm.³⁷

In the process of northwestward expansion, the northwestern frontier of Zhou was

³⁶ The relationship between the Xianyun and Quan Rong has long been a debatable topic among scholars. In a recent research, Li Feng suggested that the name Quan Rong was a term used in the later texts to refer to the same people who were called Xianyun in the Western Zhou sources. In short, Quanrong and Xianyun were the same group of people, and they were also called the Western Rong as they were located to the northwest of the Zhou. The term “Rong” had a much broader meaning as it covered many hostile groups beyond the frontiers of the Western Zhou state. See Li Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China: The Crisis and Fall of the Western Zhou, 1045-771 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 142-145 and 343-346.

³⁷ On the Zhou-Rong relations in war and peace, see Li, *Landscape and Power in Early China*, especially Chapter 3.

actually carved out of the territory of the Siwa culture, which was developed in the upper Wei River and Tao River valleys in eastern Gansu. Archaeologists have pointed out that the Zhou and Siwa cultures “overlapped each other both temporally and spatially as their sites were often located side by side, together forming an important aspect of the landscape in these regions.”³⁸ Also, “although the Zhou culture was predominant during the early Western Zhou as a result of territorial expansion, the Siwa culture constituted another important cultural layer that coexisted with the Zhou culture throughout the entire Western Zhou period. Some non-Zhou elements in the bronze culture of the upper Jing River valley were clearly associated with the northern steppe region. By the late Western Zhou, even tombs with overwhelming northern features began to appear in the region.”³⁹ Although there is no strong link between the Siwa culture and the historical Xianyun, both written sources about the Xianyun and archaeological findings of the Siwa culture clearly depicted a crescent-shaped alien cultural sphere along the northwestern frontier of the Western Zhou.⁴⁰ The war between the Western Zhou and the Xianyun not only showed the conflicting nature of the northwestern frontier but also presaged the

³⁸ Li, *Landscape and Power in Early China*, 176.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁴⁰ Catacomb tombs, a tomb form differed from that of the Zhou, are commonly seen in the Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures of areas to the west of central Shaanxi such as Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai. See von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1000-250 BC)*, 207. These tombs yield the evidence of the existence of alien cultures to the Zhou along its northwestern frontier.

consistent conflicts between the expanding Chinese state and the autochthonous peoples.

In 771BCE, the Quan Rong sacked the Western Zhou capital and killed the Zhou King, a new Zhou King moved to Luoyang and left the former royal domain to competition between the Rong and Qin, the westernmost regional polity in the Zhou *fengjian* hierarchy. In fact, the Qin had a long history of dealing with the western “barbarians.”⁴¹ According to the *Shiji*, the Qin leader had marriage relationship with the Western Rong since the mid-Western Zhou period. Later, King Xuan 宣 (r. 827/25-782BCE) of the Western Zhou appointed a Qin leader named Qinzhong 秦仲 as military commander to attack the Western Rong. However, Qinzhong was killed. With military aid from King Xuan, Qinzhong’s five sons avenged their father and defeated the Western Rong.⁴² Thereafter, military confrontation between the Qin and the Western Rong never ceased.⁴³

With the Zhou royal court retreated from the Wei River basin, the Qin gradually developed into a strong state and assumed a leading position in the region. The new

⁴¹ The ethnic origins and identity of the Qin people have long been a controversial topic among scholars of early Chinese studies. Some scholars traced the origin of Qin to the Western Rong, while others argued that the Qin people were originally from eastern China. For recent studies on the topic, see Li, *Landscape and Power in Early China*, 262-278; von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1000-250 BC)*, 213-243; Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch’in Shih-Huang*, 59-105; Gideon and Pines, “Secondary State Formation and the Development of Local Identity,” 202-230; Teng Mingyu 滕銘予, *Qin wenhua: cong fengguo dao diguo de kaoguxue guan cha* 秦文化：從封國到帝國的考古學觀察 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2002).

⁴² *SJ*, 5:177-178.

⁴³ For details, see *SJ*, 5:173-221.

situation intensified conflicts between the Qin and Rong. On one hand, the collapse of the Western Zhou state stirred up a large-scale migration of the Rong into the erstwhile royal domain and now Qin territory; on the other hand, the Qin launched military campaigns to the north and northwest against the various groups of Rong and annexed their lands, for which the Qin was called as “the hegemon of the Western barbarians.” Both ways resulted in large presence of non-Zhou people in the region. That might have been one of the crucial reasons why the Qin was denigrated as savage “barbarians” by the contemporary politicians in the east.

Over the long course from the eighth century BCE onward, the Qin penetrated into the northwestern area and later constructed long walls to enclose the newly conquered northwestern areas which extended west into Gansu and Ningxia.⁴⁴ With the completion of long walls along the northern and northwestern borders, the Qin possessed “huge areas that had never before been part of the Zhou culture sphere, but had for centuries been

⁴⁴ According to some archaeologists, people of the Xindian culture were forced to retreat to the Huang River valley, where was the sphere of the Kayue culture, when facing the pressure of the aggressive Qin. The consequences were the coalescence of the Xindian and Kayue cultures and intensification of cultural confrontation between the Qin and the Qiang or proto-Qiang people. Archaeologists also suggested that the Qin influence had reached the eastern Hexi Corridor as they have found Zhou-Qin style pottery at the sites of the non-Qin Shajing 沙井 culture, whose chronology is probably later than the Xindian and partly overlapping with the Kayue culture. See Li Shuicheng 李水城, “Huaxia bianyuan yu wenhua hudong: yi changcheng yanxian xiduan de taoge weili” 華夏邊緣與文化互動：以長城沿綫西段的陶鬲為例, in idem *Dongfeng xijian: Zhongguo xibei shiqian wenhua zhi jincheng* 東風西漸：中國西北史前文化之進程 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2009), 176-199.

inhabited by nomadic or semisedentary livestock-raising populations. The original inhabitants were presumably either pushed out or forced under the repressive, revenue-producing agricultural regime of Qin.”⁴⁵

In order to exercise effective administration, the Qin establish counties (*xian* 縣) in the new lands. Commanderies were established later to coordinate the military forces of the counties and to assume the military, mainly defensive, duty.⁴⁶ Many counties established by the Qin had close relationships with the Rong and other non-Qin people, which marked the achievements of the westward conquest.

⁴⁵ von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1000-250 BC)*, 409.

⁴⁶ The Commandery-County system was a product of long-term evolution between the eighth and third century BCE and was practiced by most, if not all, regional states in the Warring States period. When the Qin established the centralized empire in 221 BCE, the system was employed to structure the whole empire. The system was inherited by the Han dynasties with minor adjustments and thereafter became the core format of regional and local government units in imperial China. *Xian* 縣 (county) as a level of local district still exist in present-day China.

Numerous Chinese and Japanese works are on the origins and development of the Commandery and County system from the pre-imperial period to the Qin-Han times, to name only a few will be suffice. The most classic and comprehensive study is still Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, *Zhongguo difang xingzheng zhidu shi: Qin Han difang xingzheng zhidu* 中國地方行政制度史——秦漢地方行政制度 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1961). A detailed study in Japanese is Kimura Masao 木村正雄, *Chūgoku kodai teikoku no keisei: Toku ni sono seiritsu no kiso jō ken* 中国古代帝国の形成：特にその成立の基礎条件 (Tōkyō: Hikaku Bunka Kenkyūjo, 2003), pages 221-244 are especially for the commanderies of Liang province. Both Yan and Kimura based mainly on received texts in their research. For recent studies which take account of new archaeological findings, see Fujita Katsuhiso 藤田勝久, *Chūgoku kodai kokka to gunken shakai* 中国古代国家と郡県社会 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2005), which includes many recently released wooden and bamboo slips, and Shimoda Makoto 下田誠, *Chūgoku kodai kokka no keisei to seidō heiki* 中国古代国家の形成と青銅兵器 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2008), which uses bronze weapons as historical evidence to examine the development of commanderies in some Warring States regimes. There is only a handful of English-language studies on this topic, for a general study, see Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), Chapter 3.

For the most recent examinations on the Qin commanderies and counties, see Hou Xiaorong 后曉榮, *Qindai zhengqu dili* 秦代政區地理 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2009); Xin Deyong, “Qin Shihuang sanshiliu jun xinkao” 秦始皇三十六郡新考, in *Qin Han zhengqu yu bianjie dili yanjiu*, 3-92.

In 688BCE, according to the *Shiji*, Duke Wu 武 (r. 697-678BCE) of the Qin conquered the Gui 邽 Rong and the Ji 冀 Rong and established probably the first two counties in Qin history over the two places.⁴⁷ During the reign of Duke Mu 穆 (r. 659-621BCE), the Qin reached its first peak of westward expansion by launching large-scale expeditions against the Rong and annexing a vast size of new territory.⁴⁸ The reign of King Zhaoxiang 昭襄 (r. 306-251BCE) marked another tide of Qin's westward expansion. In 271BCE, the Qin conquered the territory of Yiqu 義渠, a strong power among the Rong. The newly acquired land was so vast that the Qin divided it into the three commanderies of Beidi 北地, Longxi, and Shang 上.⁴⁹

The historical records leave some traces of the fact that many Qin counties were established at the expense of the “barbarians.” In *Neishi* 內史, the metropolitan area covering the Qin capital and its vicinity,⁵⁰ there were counties set up on the former Rong domain. For example, Linjin 臨晉 county was captured from the Dali 大荔 Rong and Liyi 驪邑 from the Li 驪 Rong.⁵¹ Although there is no clear evidence to show that those former Rong places still included Rong inhabitants (they probably did), it is beyond

⁴⁷ *SJ*, 5:182.

⁴⁸ *SJ*, 5:185-195.

⁴⁹ *SJ*, 110:2885.

⁵⁰ On the establishment and functions of *Neishi*, see Kudō, *Suikochi Shinkan yorimita Shindai no kokka to shakai*, 21-56.

⁵¹ For detailed examination of the history of the two counties, see Hou, *Qindai zhengqu dili*, 133-134 and 137-138.

doubt that the jurisdiction of Didao 翟道 had a dominant “barbarian” population since *dao* 道 was a county-level special district, which was probably invented by the Qin and inherited by the Han, for administrating “barbarians.”⁵² In addition, the character *di* 翟 is probably a variant form of the character *di* 狄, a gross term referred to the northern “barbarians.” In Beidi commandery, there was Yiqu county that was named after the Yiqu Rong and also Wuzhi 烏支 county named after the Wuzhi Rong. In Longxi commandery, besides counties named after the Rong such as Shanggui 上邽, Ji, and Mianzhu 綿諸, there were many *dao*: Didao 狄道, Didao 邸道, Gudao 故道, Yuandao 隴道, Biandao 辨道, Rongdao 戎道, Wududao 武都道, Yudao 予道, and Bodao 薄道.⁵³ Some of their characters such as *Di*, *Yuan*, and *Rong* obviously carry “barbarian” connotations.

As the westernmost commandery, Longxi marked the furthest extent of the westward territorial expansion of the Qin. Long walls were constructed in the commandery during the reign of King Zhaoxiang to delineate the western boundaries.⁵⁴ In 220BCE, the following year of the establishment of Qin empire, the First Emperor (r. 246-221BCE as king; 221-210BCE as emperor) embarked on a tour to the commanderies of Longxi and

⁵² *HS*, 7A:742. For the *dao* system in the Qin-Han period, see Kudō, *Suikochi Shinkan yorimita Shindai no kokka to shakai*, 85-118.

⁵³ For the history of these districts, see Hou, *Qindai zhengqu dili*, 149-177; Wang Shoukuan 汪受寬, *Gansu tongshi: Qin Han juan* 甘肅通史：秦漢卷 (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 2009), 21-27.

⁵⁴ For the history of building long walls in the Warring States period, see Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, 13-29, Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, 138-158.

Beidi, probably for the purposes of imperial aggrandizement and inspection of fortifications in the northwestern frontier.⁵⁵ Later, the First Emperor launched an enterprise of building long walls, pushing the northwestern walls forward to reach the western bank of the Yellow River,⁵⁶ hence enclosing the northwestern territory of the empire.⁵⁷ The completion of the First Emperor's long walls signaled an end of the long-term tide of Qin's westward expansion, and the Chinese empire would not cross the northwestern boundaries set by the Qin until the reign of Emperor Wu of the Former Han.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN THE FORMER HAN PERIOD

In the *Hanshu* chapter on the Western Regions (*Xiyu zhuan* 西域傳), there is a neat account of the advance of the northwestern frontier during the Qin and Former Han times:

Since the decline of the Zhou, the Rong and the Di had lived intermingled in the north of the Jing and Wei rivers. When the First Emperor of the Qin expelled the Rong and

⁵⁵ After this tour, the First Emperor had a series of tours in the eastern part of the empire, which was also the land of the erstwhile rival states. On the First Emperor's easterly tours, see Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-Huang*. For a general survey of the imperial touring in pre-Qin and Qin times, see Chang, *A Court on Horseback*, 34-46.

⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the territory of Beidi commandery also greatly extended northward as the result of expelling the Xiongnu from the Ordos region.

⁵⁷ For the history of the Qin walls, see Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, 13-29; Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, 138-158. For archaeological examination of the Qin walls, see Xu Pingfang 徐蘋芳, Taotao Huang and John Moffett trans., "The Archaeology of the Great Wall of the Qin and Han Dynasties," *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 3:1-2 (2002): 259-281. Xin Deyong adopts a new perspective on locating certain points of the Qin and Han "Great Wall" in his "Yinshan Gaoque yu Yangshan Gaoque bianxi" 陰山高關與陽山高關辨析, in idem, *Qin Han zhengqu yu bianjie dili yanjiu*, 181-255.

Di, [he] built the long walls and demarcated a boundary for the Central State, but did not cross Lintao to the west.

When the Han arose and till the time of the Filial Emperor Wu, [he] launched punitive expeditions against the barbarians in the four directions, extending his mighty power, and Zhang Qian began to open up the tracks of the Western Regions. Thereupon, the General of Rapid Cavalry captured the territory of the Right Sector of Xiongnu, bringing the surrender of the Kings of Hunye and Xiuchu, and emptying [the Xiongnu] out of the land. The construction [of Han fortifications] thus began west from Lingju. At first, Jiuquan commandery was established; later, migrants were gradually sent in to fill it. The land was then divided and established [the commanderies of] Wuwei, Zhangyi, and Dunhuang. The four commanderies were set and two passes were held.⁵⁸ 自周衰，戎狄錯居涇渭之北。及秦始皇攘卻戎狄，築長城，界中國，然西不過臨洮。

漢興至于孝武，事征四夷，廣威德，而張騫始開西域之迹。其後驃騎將軍擊破匈奴右地，降渾邪、休屠王，遂空其地，始築令居以西，初置酒泉郡，後稍發徙民充實之，分置武威、張掖、敦煌，列四郡，據兩關焉。

This quoted passage states the significant events that happened in the process of the Qin-Han northwestward expansion and hence provides a good outline for this section to follow.

As mentioned in the previous section, the Qin expanded its territory at the expense of the “barbarian” neighbors. Under the efforts of King Zhaoxiang and the First Emperor, the Qin pushed territorial boundary greatly westward and then built long walls to enclose the newly conquered lands.⁵⁹ Both monarchs’ long walls ended at Lintao 臨洮 county in

⁵⁸ *HS*, 96A: 3872-3873.

⁵⁹ Xin, “Yinshan Gaoque yu Yangshan Gaoque bianxi,” 181-255; Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, 138-158.

Longxi commandery, which therefore marked the westernmost point of Qin's frontier. In fact, not only the west but also other directions did the First Emperor expand his newly created empire. To the north, in 215 BCE, he dispatched General Meng Tain 蒙恬 with a huge army to expel the Xiongnu from the Ordos region.⁶⁰ The Qin army successfully drove out the Xiongnu and crossed the loop of the Yellow River (*Hetao* 河套). A good number of fortified counties were established and settled with soldiers and convicts. Long walls were also built along the new northern frontier and connected with the western ones. Upon the time of the completion of the First Emperor's long walls, the territorial limit of the Qin empire was clearly defined.⁶¹

Taking advantage of the turmoil between the fall of the Qin and the establishment of the Former Han, the once being expelled Xiongnu fought back. They re-conquered the lost territories in the Ordos region, pushing southward, and thus posed threats to the political center of the Former Han dynasty, which located its capital in the same area as the Qin. Facing such a formidable enemy to the north, the Former Han could only adopt a

⁶⁰ According to some records, the army was numbering as many as 300,000 troops, but 100,000 according to others. For the counting of the numbers, see Xin, "Yinshan Gaoque yu Yangshan Gaoque bianxi," 202. For the strategic importance of the Ordos region, see Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, 61-71.

⁶¹ In fact, it marked not only the physical territorial demarcation of the Qin empire but also the formation of Chinese identity. For further analysis of this point, see Paul R. Goldin, "Steppe Nomads as a Philosophical Problem in Classical China," in Paula L. W. Sabloff ed., *Mapping Mongolia: Situating Mongolia in the World from Geologic Time to the Present* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2011), 220-246.

defensive posture on its northern frontier.⁶² Needless to say, the Former Han would have neither intention nor capability to follow the Qin's path of westward expansion.

From the sources available, it is difficult to reproduce the exact territorial boundaries of the northwestern commanderies in the early years of the Former Han. However, several features of the situations of the region and its environs can still be learned. First, the Han basically retained the Qin administrative divisions of Longxi, Beidi, and Shang commanderies in the northwestern region. Second, after the Xiongnu re-conquest, the boundaries of Beidi and Shang were forced to retreat southward and the sizes of the two commanderies greatly shrank.⁶³ Third, the commanderies of Longxi, Shang and Beidi were facing the Right/Western Sector of the Xiongnu confederacy,⁶⁴ and therefore became a main way through which the Xiongnu made their inroads into the Han territories. According to the historical records, Longxi was heavily devastated by the

⁶² For the Xiongnu invasions and the Han defensive measures in the early years of the Former Han, see Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, 206-227; Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire vol. 1*, 135-159; Jonathan Markley, "Gaozu confronts the Shanyu: The Han Dynasty's First Clash with the Xiongnu," in Craig Benjamin and Samuel N. C. Lieu eds., *Walls and Frontiers in Inner Asian History*, 131-140.

⁶³ According to the *Shiji*, the Xiongnu recaptured the lost territories south of the Yellow River loop and pushed the boundaries back to the old boundaries/fortifications (*gusai* 故塞) of the Qin, see *SJ*, 110: 2887-2888. Xin Deyong suggests that the old fortifications refer to the line of long walls built by King Zhaoxiang. He has also made a detailed examination of several strategic points along the borders between the Xiongnu and the Qin-Han empire, see his "Yinshan Gaoque yu Yangshan Gaoque bianxi," 200-255.

⁶⁴ The Xiongnu divided their confederacy into three sectors: the Chanyu court (Central), the Left King's domain (East), and the Right King's domain (West). See *SJ*, 110: 2891 and *HS*, 94A: 3751. On the Xiongnu political structure, see Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757* (Cambridge, MA. & Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1996), 36-41.

Xiongnu.⁶⁵ Some exact dates of the Xiongnu invasions were marked. For instance, the Right King of the Xiongnu invaded Shang commandery in 177BCE, and the most critical moment came in 166BCE when the Xiongnu Chanyu personally led cavalry invaded Beidi and killed the commandant of the commandery. The contingent of the Xiongnu forces burnt the Huizhong Palace 回中宮 in Beidi and the cavalry scouts even intruded a long way into the Ganquan Palace 甘泉宮 in the vicinity of the Han capital. To respond to the crisis, Emperor Wen 文 (r. 180-157BCE) appointed three officials as General of Shang commandery, General of Beidi, and General of Longxi to station along the northwestern defense line of the metropolitan area. The commanderies of Shang and Beidi would remain the areas subjected to the Xiongnu harrying until Emperor Wu launched large-scale counterattack and the ensuing northwestward expansion.

The Qin and Former Han metropolitan area was located in and formed the core of an area called Guanzhong 關中 or Guannei 關內, literally “within the passes,” which in a strict geographical sense refers mainly to the southern portion of modern Shannxi province, especially the Wei River valley, but in its greatest extent is an area largely corresponds to the whole Shannxi, with the addition of eastern Gansu and Ningxia,

⁶⁵ *HS*, 49: 2278.

northern Sichuan, and the southern portion of Inner Mongolia within the Yellow River loop.⁶⁶ The name Guanzhong tells the special position of the area as it was surrounded by formidable natural barriers of mountains and rivers and could only be accessed through several strategic passes and fords. The *guan* (pass/gate) in the name Guanzhong refers to the Hangu 函谷 Pass, literally the pass at a box-shaped gorge, and Guanzhong was the area west of the pass. Therefore, the area was sometimes called alternatively as Guanxi 關西 (west of the pass). On the other hand, the area east of the pass was called Guandong 關東. The Guanxi area was also known as Shanxi 山西 (west of Mount Yao 嶠山; different from present-day Shanxi province), and Guandong as Shandong 山東 (east of Mount Yao, including but not limited to modern Shandong province). The separation between Guanzhong/Guanxi/Shanxi and Guandong/Shandong constituted a very important pair of geographical concepts of the Qin-Han period.⁶⁷ The relationship between these two halves within the empire and how they situated in the Han politics and society will be an important thread in the next chapter. For here, only brief mention of the relationship between the northwestern borderlands and Guanzhong area will suffice.

⁶⁶ On the geographical definition of Guanzhong area, see Xin, “Liang Han zhouzhi xinkao,” 112-119.

⁶⁷ For the geographical definition of the two areas, see Fu Lecheng 傅樂成, “Handai de Shandong yu Shanxi,” 漢代的山東與山西 in idem, *Han Tang shilunji* 漢唐史論集 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1977), 65-80; Xing Yitian 邢義田, “Shishi Handai de Guandong, Guanshi yu Shandong, Shanxi,” 試釋漢代的關東、關西與山東、山西 in idem, *Zhiguo anbang: fazhi, xing heng yu junshi* 治國安邦：法制、行政與軍事 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 180-210.

Since the founders of both Qin and Former Han depended on Guanzhong as power base and then underwent a west-to-east conquest to accomplish their empires, both dynasties adopted a consistent policy of promoting the prominence of Guanzhong and relying on it to control the whole empire. While numerous kingdoms and fiefs of marquis were established in Shandong to award imperial kinsmen and meritorious aristocrats during the Han dynasties,⁶⁸ it was not the case in Guanzhong.⁶⁹ The whole Guanzhong region, with the metropolitan area as the core, was under direct control of the Han court. The commanderies in Liang province, as the western flank of Guanzhong, were also under direct imperial control. During the reign of Emperor Wu, direct imperial control of the northwest was vital for commanding further northwestward expansion, coordinating territorial defense, and supporting the Han presence in the Western Regions.

Thanks to the frontier nature, the northwestern commanderies of Longxi, Beidi, Tianshui 天水, Anding 安定,⁷⁰ Shang, and Xihe 西河 all had close relationships with the Rong and Di. People of these six commanderies were accustomed to preparing for warfare and fighting against the “barbarians.” They were especially good at archery and

⁶⁸ For the co-existence of commandery-county system and enfeoffed kingdoms and fiefs in the Han times, see Yan, *Zhongguo difang xingzheng zhidu shi: Qin Han difang xingzheng zhidu*, 10-30 and 35-57.

⁶⁹ Goi Naohiro has made a detailed analysis of the geographical distribution of the Former Han kingdoms and fiefs of marquis, see his “Chūgoku kodai teikoku no ichi seikaku” 中国古代帝国の一性格, in idem, *Kandai no gōzoku shakai to kokka*, 51-70.

⁷⁰ Tianshui and Anding were established in 114BCE by extracting some lands from Longxi and Beidi.

hunting. During the Former Han dynasty, therefore, military talents of good family background from these six commanderies were recruited to form the elite corps of the cavalry who held the responsibility of safeguarding the emperor.⁷¹ They were called the *Liujun liangjiazi* 六郡良家子, literally “Good Sons of the Six Commanderies,” and usually had bright career futures. Many of the famous generals of the Former Han were from this group of people.⁷² Moreover, these areas also constituted the main source of cavalry of the Former Han. The details of the martial background of the six commanderies and the role of the *LJJZ* in Han history will be given in the next chapter, and now we should return to the process of northwestward expansion and the ensuing establishment of new administrative regions.

Until the second decade of Emperor Wu’s reign, Longxi and Beidi were the two westernmost commanderies of the dynasty, but the situation changed when the Former Han suddenly captured the Hexi Corridor from the Xiongnu. In fact, it was quite a dramatic incident in the history of Han-Xiongnu confrontation. In 133BCE, the young

⁷¹ Beside martial skill, good family background without criminal record was a crucial criterion of recruiting elite cavalry or even ordinary cavalry in the Han times. Families of agrarian tradition and/or officer background were the most favorable. Physicians, merchants, and artisans were excluded from the list. See *HS*, 28B:1644. A sound financial base was also essential as the cavalry had to be responsible for their own horses and equipment. For detailed analysis of the eligibility of the Han cavalry, see Takamura Takeyuki 高村武幸, *Kandai no chihō kanri to chiiki shakai* 漢代の地方官吏と地域社会 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2008), 57-87.

⁷² *HS*, 28B:1644.

Emperor Wu determined to turn the table on the Xiongnu and thus plotted to ambush the Chanyu in a northern frontier town,⁷³ but he failed as the Chanyu escaped. From 129BCE onward, Emperor Wu launched a series of expeditions against the Xiongnu. In 127BCE, General Wei Qing 衛青 (d. 106BCE) made a great achievement by driving the Xiongnu out of the Ordos region and re-conquering the lost lands of the Qin empire south of the Yellow River loop. As a result, the Former Han basically resumed the northern territories of the Qin dynasty. In 121BCE, Huo Qubing 霍去病 (d. 117BCE), the emperor's most favored general and the General of Rapid Cavalry mentioned in the quotation at the beginning of this section, led a cavalry force, departed from Longxi, and marched northwestward to attack the Xiongnu. He achieved remarkable success. Later, General Huo launched another successful attack from Longxi and Beidi. While General Huo obtained successive victories in the western sector of the Xiongnu domain, the angered Chanyu summoned the King of Hunye 渾邪 and the King of Xiuchu 休屠, the two kings governed the region, to his court. Knowing that they would be executed by the Chanyu, the two kings plotted to surrender to the Han. The Han emperor then sent General Huo to escort the two kings to the Han territory. However, when the King of

⁷³ Hsing I-tien suggests in an article that the emperor personally participated into the operation, see his "Han Wudi zai Mayi zhiyi zhong de juese" 漢武帝在馬邑之役中的角色, in idem, *Tianxia ijia: Huangdi, guanliao yu shehui*, 136-159.

Xiuchu saw the Han forces, he changed his mind. The King of Hunye then killed his peer and surrendered the two tribes to the Han.⁷⁴ Suddenly, the former territories of the two kings—the Hexi Corridor was at the Han’s disposal. In the long term, such a dramatic incident not only tipped the balance of power between the Han and Xiongnu but also profoundly changed the geographical composition of China forever.

However, it seems that the Han court at first had no intention of imposing direct governance on the former territories of the two kings. More precisely, the Han court had no idea what to do with the surprisingly great spoils.⁷⁵ Since the Xiongnu had been expelled from the Ordos region and the Hexi Corridor, the pressure that they could exert on the commanderies of Longxi, Beidi, and Xihe was greatly reduced. Therefore, the Han court moved the paupers from Guandong to fill in the newly restored Ordos region on the one hand, and reduced half of the garrison soldiers from the west of Beidi on the other.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the Han court left the status of Hexi Corridor ambiguous. The different management between the two regions was probably due to their different values in the

⁷⁴ *HS*, 110:2905-2909.

⁷⁵ As Michael Loewe has pointed out that “the stages of the Han advance can hardly be explained as an ordered and systematic process, planned as co-ordinated measures to extend the scope of Han authority. We cannot expect evidence of a scheme for founding commanderies, whose centers were deliberately and logically placed so as to exercise the maximum degree of strategic and administrative considerations. Rather must the process be regarded as one of exploration and improvisation.” See Loewe, *Records of Han Administration vol. 1*, 58.

⁷⁶ *SJ*, 110:2909.

eyes of Han policy makers. The Ordos region was not only a strategic zone of protecting the metropolitan area but also a former territory of the Qin empire that the Han might feel obliged to restore and to strengthen control there. On the contrary, the Hexi Corridor was beyond the Qin boundaries and had never been part of the Chinese realm. It was a virgin land to the Former Han with no precedent for governing.

Although the Han captured the Hexi Corridor in 121BCE, it was only in 112BCE that the Han state established formal administrative units in the region. Shortly after the conquest of the Hexi Corridor, the Former Han basically left the region intact and only constructed fortifications along the west bank of the Yellow River. It shows that the sudden acquisition of a new territory did not arouse immediate interests of the Han policy makers and they had no further intention to the territory beyond the fortified boundaries. The extension of direct administration could only be justified and materialized if the new territory were crucial to the imperial defense strategy or other benefits to the state. During the interlude of nine years, the war with the Xiongnu and Zhang Qian's second mission to Inner Asia were two factors that would influence the formulation of the imperial policy towards the Hexi region.

The conquest of Hexi region was only one stage in the Han-Xiongnu War, and

fighting went on after 121BCE.⁷⁷ Suffering from a series of defeats, the Xiongnu Chanyu was forced to move westward and left the Former Han time and space to consolidate its control over the Ordos region by constructing irrigation facilities, establishing farming colonies, and moving people to fill in.⁷⁸ Since the center of the Xiongnu confederacy had moved west, the focal point for the Han-Xiongnu struggle accordingly moved, and the strategic importance of the Hexi region was realized by the Han policy makers.

Meanwhile, in order to fill in the vacuum left by the Xiongnu in the Hexi region, Zhang Qian submitted his proposal in 119BCE and suggested inviting the Wusun 烏孫 people in the Western Regions to move in to the Hexi Corridor and to form alliance with the Han against the Xiongnu.⁷⁹ With the emperor's permission, Zhang started his second mission to the Western Regions in the same year. Why did Zhang Qian have such an idea? We learn from the Chinese records of the Han period that it was the Yuezhi who were the dominant inhabitants of the Hexi Corridor before the Xiongnu's conquest. Although the origin and identity of the Yuezhi was a great question of ancient Inner Asian history and

⁷⁷ Chun-shu Chang has provided a very detailed account of Emperor Wu's campaign against the Xiongnu in *The Rise of the Chinese Empire vol. 1*, 161-184.

⁷⁸ As the Xiongnu Chanyu moved west, the Xiongnu no longer constituted a serious menace to the Ordos region and the northwestern commanderies and caused an atmosphere of laxity among the local officials. Hence, when Emperor Wu proceeded a tour of inspection to Longxi commandery, the governor killed himself as he had not prepared the meal for the emperor's entourage. Then, when the emperor proceeded north, he found that there was no sentry in the Ordos region. The governor of Beidi commandery and his subordinates were executed for their dereliction of duty. See *SJ*, 30:1438.

⁷⁹ *SJ*, 123:3168; *HS*, 96B:3902.

scholars have different theories about that,⁸⁰ it is basically accepted that by the second century BCE, the Yuezhi people had established themselves in the Hexi Corridor. In the same region, there was a smaller group named Wusun. When the Yuezhi were strong, they killed the Wusun king and captured his land. The Wusun people then fled to the Xiongnu.⁸¹ Between 200s-170sBCE, the Xiongnu launched severe attacks on the Yuezhi and drove them from the Hexi Corridor. The majority of the Yuezhi moved further west to the Amu River valley, where Zhang Qian made his first mission to visit them. Some of the Yuezhi fled south into present-day Qinghai and others dispersed the neighboring areas. As Zhang Qian had failed to secure an alliance with the Yuezhi, this time he turned to the Wusun and tried to bring them back to the Hexi Corridor. If he could succeed, the Wusun would occupy the region and provide the Han an ally on its western flank. In such situation, the Former Han could establish a form of hegemonic control over the Wusun and treat it as a vassal state.⁸² However, the Wusun were too afraid of the Xiongnu and had no intention of going back to the Hexi region.⁸³ When Zhang brought the refusal back to the Han court in 115BCE, it left the Han no choice but to consider the possibility

⁸⁰ Benjamin, "The Origin of the Yuezhi," 101-130; Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 12.

⁸¹ *HS*, 61:2691-2692.

⁸² I borrow the concept of hegemonic control from Edward N. Luttwak's analysis on the Roman empire, see his *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 192-194.

⁸³ *SJ*, 123:3169.

of ruling the Hexi Corridor directly and imposing territorial control.

In 112BCE, two matters helped materialize the formal establishment of administrative units in the Hexi Corridor. In 112BCE, the associates dispatched by Zhang Qian during the second mission returned with delegates of various Inner Asian states and the frequent formal communications between the Han and the Western Regions thereupon started.⁸⁴

The importance of Hexi Corridor serving as the main route connected Inner Asia was recognized by the Han state. In the same year, the Qiang who had dispersed along the western frontier revolted. Emperor Wu dispatched army to suppress them, and sent tens of thousands of labors crossed the Yellow River to build fortified towns on the west bank. The situation now required a more dense military presence, new administrative units had to be created to anchor state activities. According to the *Shiji*, thereafter, the commanderies of Zhangye 張掖 and Jiuquan 酒泉 were established. Large-scale state farms and fortifications were also set up in the frontier commanderies; in total six hundred thousand people were moved in for garrison and farming. Vast amount of resources were delivered from the interior of the empire to support the newly established northwestern frontier.⁸⁵ It is clear that the revolt of the Qiang people enhanced the

⁸⁴ *SJ*, 123:3169-3170.

⁸⁵ *SJ*, 30:1438-1439.

awareness and determination of the Han state to establish formal governance over the Hexi region. One of the purposes of this decision was “to segregate the Qiang from the Xiongnu and cut off the communications between the north and the south.” 隔絕羌胡，使南北不得交關。⁸⁶ The Hexi corridor thus served as a wedge between the Xiongnu to the north and the Qiang to the south and prevented any possibility of collaborative attack against the Han. Furthermore, Liang province as a whole and the Hexi Corridor in particular served as an artery connecting the imperial center and the newly explored Western Regions. For such purpose, Liang province became a vein providing manpower and other resources, whether extracted locally or transferred from other parts of the empire, to support the Han outposts in Inner Asia.

Although the four commanderies of Hexi, namely Wuwei 武威, Zhangye, Jiuquan, and Dunhuang 敦煌 were famous in Chinese history, their exact dates of establishment are still debatable. Standard histories such as *Shiji*, *Hanshu*, and *Hou Hanshu* have no accurate data provided. Before the excavation of the Han bamboo and wooden strips along the northwest from the early twentieth century onward, scholars could only depend on their interpretations on the relevant entries in standard histories to infer the date. With

⁸⁶ *HHS*, 87:2876.

the introduction of the unearthed new sources, historians can re-examine and narrow the time span of founding dates of the four commanderies, although clear-cut answers are still far from obtained. Since the exact dates of establishment is a question beyond the thesis of this study, I will just list some representative views held by Japanese, Chinese, and Western scholars in the following table for reference.

	Hibino Takeo 日比野丈夫 ⁸⁷	Chang Chun-shu 張春樹 ⁸⁸	Michael Loewe ⁸⁹
Hexi 河西 ⁹⁰	115BCE	—	—
Jiuquan 酒泉	111BCE	111BCE	104BCE
Zhangye 張掖	108-107BCE	111-109BCE	104BCE
Dunhuang 敦煌	100-97BCE	98 or 94BCE	Certainly before 91BCE
Wuwei 武威	67BCE	78-67BCE (most likely 72BCE)	81-67BCE

Table 1: Founding dates of the four Hexi commanderies

No matter when the four commanderies were set up exactly, their establishments marked the real annexation of the region into the Han empire and the gradual development of the region. In order to implement the imperial policies of development

⁸⁷ Hibino Takeo, “kasei shigun no seiritsu ni tsuite” 河西四郡の成立について, in idem, *Chūgoku rekishi chiri kenkyū* 中国歴史地理研究 (Kyōto: Dōhōsha Shuppanbu, 1988), 69-92. For a Japanese-language review of different theories, see Ikeda Yūichi 池田雄一, *Chūgoku kodai no juraku to chihō gyōsei* 中国古代の聚落と地方行政 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2002), 326-336.

⁸⁸ Chang Chun-shu, *Handai bianjiangshi lunji* 漢代邊疆史論集 (Taipei: Shihuo chubanshe, 1977), 19-122. For a recent summation of the different dates proposed by traditional Chinese sources and modern Chinese scholarship, see Wang Zongwei 王宗維, *Handai sichouzhilu de yanhou: Hexilu* 漢代絲綢之路的咽喉：河西路 (Beijing: Kunlun chubanshe, 2001), 219-221.

⁸⁹ Loewe, *Records of Han Administration Volume 1*, 59-60.

⁹⁰ Hibino believed that a Hexi commandery was established in 115BCE and was later abolished. However, most scholars questioned the existence of the Hexi commandery.

and colonization, the Former Han moved people from Guandong to fill up the Hexi region. The practices of compulsory and recruited migrations and setting farming colonies in the newly conquered frontiers could be traced at least back to the Qin dynasty and were commonly seen in the Former Han times.⁹¹ When the Qin expelled the Xiongnu from the Ordos region, large numbers of people were moved in to sustain the defensive works, new towns, and state farms.⁹² Except for soldiers, most of the people who moved to the new borderlands were the poor, convicts, and other groups of low social status. New counties were established to strengthen the imperial control over the area. With the downfall of the Qin dynasty, however, most newly set up frontier counties were exposed to the Xiongnu attack and most inhabitants fled to the interior. When the Former Han came into power, the reestablishment of the whole northern frontier line became an urgent topic.⁹³ Under the efforts of the first few emperors, the borders between the Xiongnu and the Han were basically delimited. The next step was to strengthen defensive measures. During the reign of Emperor Wen, an official named Chao Cuo 鼂錯 (d. 155BCE) put forward his proposals of founding permanent settlements on the frontier

⁹¹ For detailed analysis on the process of colonization and administrative establishment on the northwestern frontier, see Ikeda, *Chūgoku kodai no juraku to chihō gyōsei*, 272-336 and 381-406.

⁹² *SJ*, 6:253.

⁹³ Wai Kit Wicky Tse 謝偉傑, “Lun Han Gaodi yizhao de beijing dongluan” 論漢高帝一朝的北境動亂, *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 25: 1 (2007.6): 31-58.

with encouraging policy to enhance the migrant families' motivation for staying there.⁹⁴

Chao also suggested employing surrendered "barbarians" to serve on the frontiers since they were good at fighting and had good knowledge of the northern borderlands and the practices of the Xiongnu.⁹⁵ Chao's plans were endorsed by the emperor, though we do not know much about how the measures were put into action.

When the tide of expansion came in Emperor Wu's reign, even larger numbers of people were moved from Guandong to the new frontier zones. Local resources were nevertheless inadequate to support the new migrants, countless labor forces, corps, and other kinds of resources were mobilized from the east to back up the colonization enterprises. A historian of Emperor Wu's court stated that the costs were so huge that the imperial coffers were thus empty.⁹⁶ It might be exaggerated to a certain degree but not completely fictional. Since the newly conquered northwestern borderlands were not productive arable lands that would be able to sustain a large agrarian population, it required enormous investment to set up all the fortifications, farming settlements, local government seats, and other relevant facilities. For example, Emperor Wu once moved 700,000 Guandong people, who suffered from flooding and ensuing famine in their home

⁹⁴ *HS*, 49: 2283-2289.

⁹⁵ *HS*, 49: 2282-2283.

⁹⁶ *SJ*, 30: 1421-1428.

regions, to the Ordos region and the southern part of modern Gansu, and they all relied upon government subsidies.⁹⁷ Although such a large-scale migration would lessen the pressure from which the natural disaster inflicted on Guandong, it still caused huge spending from the state.

In economic terms, the revenue/benefits of the new territories were certainly minimal, if any at all, when compared with the costs of acquisition and control. For the emperor and the officials who supported the expansionist policy, the costs were bearable to serve strategic needs. The pattern of Guandong financially supporting the newly conquered northern and northwestern borderlands reminds us Charles Tilly's classification of financial/fiscal and military geographies and his notion of contradiction between spatial organization for civil and military needs.⁹⁸ In our case, it also implied the possibility that if the imperial policy makers changed concerns, they might have different calculation and perceptions of the costs spent on the northwest, and their attitude toward holding the region might change. It was what happened in the Later Han period, and we will return to this in the succeeding chapters.

⁹⁷ *SJ*, 30: 1425.

⁹⁸ Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States*, 125. For a more recent research on the distinction between civil and military geographies in Chinese history, though focuses mainly on the Northern Song dynasty, see Mostern, "Dividing the Realm in Order to Govern": *The Spatial Organization of the Song State (960-1276 CE)*.

Beside the four Hexi commanderies, a commandery named Jincheng 金城 was set up in 81BCE that straddled the Yellow River by detaching two counties each from the commanderies of Longxi, Tianshui, and Zhangye. The establishment of Jincheng was mainly due to the needs of managing and supervising the Qiang people. Jincheng would be an important area and battlefield in the Han-Qiang relationship, for which details will be given in Chapter Four. Apart from commanderies, Dependent States (*Shuguo* 屬國)⁹⁹ were established along the frontier by Emperor Wu and his successors to settle surrendered “barbarians.”

When Emperor Wu divided the imperial realm into various provinces, the commanderies along the northwestern frontier, including Longxi, Tianshui, Anding, Jincheng, Wuwei, Zhangye, Jiuquan, and Dunhuang,¹⁰⁰ coalesced into Liang province. The whole northwestern frontier zone was thus formed as a single inspectoral, and later administrative, unit. Except for Longxi, a very old administrative unit that could be traced back to the Qin times, all the commanderies in Liang province were new establishments

⁹⁹ Dependent State was an institution that the Han government adopted to settle surrendered alien people. See Liu Pakyuen 廖伯源, “Lun Handai xizhi bianjiang minzu yu saini zhi zhengce” 論漢代徙置邊疆民族於塞內之政策, in Jilindaxue gujiyanjiusuo 吉林大學古籍研究所 ed., “1-6 Shiji Zhongguo beifang bianjiang, minzu, shehui guoji xueshu yantaohui” lunwenji “1-6 世紀中國北方邊疆·民族·社會國際學術研討會”論文集 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2008), 62-85; de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms (23-220 AD)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 1229.

¹⁰⁰ Beidi was under Shuofang 朔方 inspectoral region and would be returned to Liang province during the Later Han times.

by Emperor Wu and his great-grandson Emperor Xuan 宣 (r. 73-49BCE). The territories of Wuwei, Zhangye, Jiuquan, and Dunhuang, as well as a portion of Jincheng were the first time became part of the Chinese empire; their Han population all moved from the interior of the empire. It is also worthwhile to note that the establishment and finalization of the commanderies in Liang province spanning the reigns from Emperor Wu to Emperor Xuan, covering the period when the Former Han experienced both the peak of power and the onset of decay. Expansion ended with Emperor Xuan's demise.¹⁰¹

As the migrant population was the backbone of the imperial control over the borderlands, the management of the population became an important aspect of imperial governance. The “Treatise on Geography” (*Dili zhi* 地理志, literally “Treatise on Terrestrial Organization”) of the *Hanshu* contains figures of the population census carried out in 2CE, which provides data of demographic distribution of the Former Han in its last decade.¹⁰² Based on the data, we can have a general picture of the administrative units of

¹⁰¹ For a detailed study on the transition of expansionist policy between the reigns of the two emperors, see Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China 104 BC to AD 9* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd), 211-251.

¹⁰² *HS*, 28A and B: 1543-1640. For research on the 2CE population census and population of the Former Han, see Hans Bielenstein, “The Census of China during the Period 2-742 A.D.,” *BMFEA* 19 (1947): 125-163, and Lao Kan, “Population and Geography in the Two Han Dynasties,” in E-Tu Zen Sun and John de Francis eds., *Chinese Social History: Translations of Selected Studies*, 83-102. For detailed study in Chinese, see Ge Jianxiong 葛劍雄, *Zhongguo renkoushi* 中國人口史, v.1 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2002), 311-395, 479-493.

Liang province and its population figures as the table below shows.¹⁰³

	Number of Counties	Number of Households	Population
Longxi 隴西	11	53,964	236,824
Tianshui 天水	16	60,370	261,384
Anding 安定	21	42,725	143,294
Jincheng 金城	13	38,470	149,648
Wuwei 武威	10	17,581	76,419
Zhangye 張掖	10	24,352	88,731
Jiuquan 酒泉	9	8,137	76,726
Dunhuang 敦煌	6	11,200	38,335

Table 2: Data of Northwestern Commanderies in 2CE

The above data gives a general picture that the more southern the region, the larger the population and the number of counties, and vice versa. The household and population figures are, of course, only the number of people registered by the state; people who were not on the official register, especially the tribal people, is nowhere to be known. Besides, there were several dependent states established in the jurisdiction of Liang province for settling the surrendered “barbarians,” but no population figure existed. Although the Han histories stated that the Hexi Corridor was empty of the Xiongnu sometime around 112BCE,¹⁰⁴ it might just be the rhetoric of describing the withdrawal of Xiongnu military forces from the area. It would be hard to imagine that the area became a “no-man’s-land”

¹⁰³ *HS*, 28B: 1610-1615.

¹⁰⁴ *SJ*, 110: 1912.

and no single Xiongnu or other autochthonous peoples stayed there. The same situation should be true in the southern commanderies such as Jincheng, Longxi, etc., since those commanderies not only had a long tradition of autochthonous societies but also were permeable to the “barbarians” lived along or beyond the Han political boundaries. On the other hand, most, if not all, of the population registered in the newly established commanderies should be the people who moved from other parts of the empire and responsible for the duties of garrison, farming, and other relevant colonization tasks. The combination of new migrants with lower social status from different parts of the empire, old inhabitants of the area, and autochthonous tribal peoples made Liang province an ethnically complex frontier society, which in turn contributed to the estrangement between the northwestern borderlands and the imperial center in the Later Han period.

The importance of population registration is also showed by another fact in the Treatise and other historical records. Although the Treatise has listed all the number and name of counties under every entry of commandery, it does not clearly indicate the territorial limits of the empire. From both textual and archaeological sources, we know that boundary stones within and/or between commanderies were common all over the empire to serve as markers of the boundaries of jurisdictions and especially the taxable

areas.¹⁰⁵ However, the territorial boundaries of the empire as a whole were mentioned only in a vague manner in the historical records, by describing the farthest extent of a region or referring to some topographical features. When comparing the detailed data of the population census with the vague description of the territorial limits of the empire, it may tell us that the empire might not be thought of as a territorial entity but rather in terms of the peoples that were subject to the imperial rule. Population census and household registration were thus important means of imperial governance as through them the imperial state could control the mobility of its subject and know who the potential soldiers and taxpayers were and where they could be found. Hence, the boundaries of the empire were not the territorial boundaries but the boundaries of the people subject to the state.¹⁰⁶ This might also help to explain why the Later Han state easily inclined to give up the northwestern territories and only to pull the officials and registered households out of the area when the Qiang wars seemed to be uncontrollable.

¹⁰⁵ A case study of boundary stone in the Former Han period, see Satake Yasuhiko 佐竹靖彦, *Chūgoku kodai no densei to yūsei* 中国古代の田制と邑制 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 2006), 417-443.

¹⁰⁶ For the difference between territorial state and jurisdiction state, see Sahlins, *Boundaries*, 6-7.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN THE XIN AND LATER HAN PERIOD

As the tide of northwestward expansion of the Former Han receded with the death of Emperor Xuan, large-scale migration and colonization to the northwest was halted. The establishment of administrative units within Liang province was also finalized, and the province enjoyed a period of prosperity and stability till the end of the dynasty. This was mainly benefited from two achievements made by Emperor Xuan. First, the suppression of the Qiang rebellion in 61BCE temporarily solved the Qiang problem and consolidated the Han control over the province. Secondly, the submission of Xiongnu Chanyu to Emperor Xuan in 51BCE assured the ensuing peace between the two powers and thus greatly reduced the defensive pressure of Liang province, especially along the Hexi Corridor.¹⁰⁷ In the period of relative stability, which lasted nearly five decades, the Han military forces even retreated from some outposts along the northwestern borders and left those fortifications deserted.¹⁰⁸

Liang province as an administrative unit was intact until Wang Mang was in power and launched a series of programs reshaping the administrative geography of the empire.

¹⁰⁷ For recent studies on the submission of the Xiongnu Chanyu, see Ellis Tinios, *“Loose Rein” in Han Relations with Foreign Peoples* (Department of East Asian Studies, University of Leeds, 2000); Sophia-Karin Psarras, “Han and Xiongnu: A Reexamination of Cultural and Political Relations (II),” *Monumenta Serica* 52 (2004): 37-42. For the alleviation of military conflicts between the Former Han and the Xiongnu along the northwestern borders, see Takamura, *Kandai no chihō kanri to chiiki shakai*, 344-379.

¹⁰⁸ Takamura, *Kandai no chihō kanri to chiiki shakai*, 344-379.

In 4CE, Wang Mang divided the whole empire into twelve provinces and renamed some of them according to the records of officially sanctioned canon. Accordingly, Liang province lost its independent status and was coalesced into the metropolitan area and its vicinity to form a Yong 雍 province. In 12CE, Wang Mang adopted the names in the classics to reformulate and rename the provinces into nine.¹⁰⁹ Liang province was still part of Yong province under the new division.¹¹⁰

Wang Mang's foreign policy also went hand in hand with the restructuring of administrative geography. Shortly before his establishment of the twelve provinces, Wang Mang forced some Qiang tribes to surrender their land which contiguous to Liang province. A new commandery called Xihai 西海, literally West Sea, was thus set up. According to the *Hanshu*, Wang was eager to acquire the land and give it the name of Xihai since the Former Han empire had already had the commanderies of Donghai 東海 (East Sea), Nanhai 南海 (South Sea), and Beihai 北海 (North Sea), and Wang was

¹⁰⁹ For Wang Mang's reforms of regional administrative units, see Xin, "Liang Han Zhouzhi Xinkao," 144-161. For general studies on Wang Mang's classics-orientated reforms, see Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty, Volume Three*, 506-536; Rudi Thomsen, *Ambition and Confucianism: A Biography of Wang Mang* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1988); Hans Bielenstein, "Wang Mang, the restoration of the Han dynasty, and Later Han," in *CHOC v. 1*, 223-290; Michael Puett, "Centering the Realm: Wang Mang, the Zhouli, and Early Chinese Statecraft," in Benjamin A. Elman and Martin Kern eds., *Statecraft and Classical Learning: The Rituals of Zhou in East Asian History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 129-154; Higashi Shiji, *Ō Mō: juka no risō ni tsukareta otoko* 王莽: 儒家の理想に憑かれた男 (Tokyo: Hakuteisha, 2003).

¹¹⁰ In fact, Wang was completely obsessed with the nomenclature of administrative unit as an integral part of his classics-orientated blueprint of the ideal world. As a result, not only the names of provinces but also those of most commanderies and counties were subjected to frequent changes, which finally threw the administrative system into chaos. For details, see *HS*, 99B: 4136-4137.

strongly inclined towards the completion of the “Four Seas” commanderies as a proof of his majesty and benevolence covering the whole known world.¹¹¹ The new Xihai commandery was added to Liang province and then became part of Yong province. It also served as a place where Wang exiled tens of thousands of people who committed offenses under his new law code.¹¹² However, the Qiang were in fact reluctant to make the submission and thus tried to retake the land by coercive means.¹¹³ Later, Wang broke the stable relationship with the Xiongnu and deployed numerous soldiers and laborers along the northern and northwestern frontiers in the hope of conquering the northern enemy. Zhangye commandery served as one of the important depots for the campaign.¹¹⁴ Needless to say, military operations stirred up instability within Liang province.

Wang Mang’s Xin dynasty only lasted fifteen years, and the imperial order had already devolved into chaos when its days were numbering. Various regional military powers arose to take advantage of such situation. Among those contenders, Wei Ao 隗囂 (d. 33CE), Dou Rong 竇融 (fl. 5-30sCE), and Lu Fang 盧芳 (fl. 10s-40sCE) were related to Liang province.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ *HS*, 99A: 4077.

¹¹² *HS*, 99A: 4077-4078.

¹¹³ *HS*, 99A: 4087.

¹¹⁴ *HS*, 99B: 4121.

¹¹⁵ For the history of the regimes of Wei Ao, Dou Rong, and Lu Fang during the Wang Mang interregnum and the early Later Han period, see Kano Naosada 狩野直禎, *Gokan seijishi no kenkyū* 後漢政治史の研究.

Wei Ao was from a magnate family in Tianshui commandery and had been serving various government offices since his youth. When the Xin dynasty was in turmoil, a paternal uncle of Wei Ao gathered clansmen and other local strongmen to raise a rebel army. Because of his reputation and knowledge, Wei Ao was elected to be the leader.¹¹⁶ Wei quickly became the strongest power in Liang province. When Emperor Guangwu of the Later Han started to extend power to the west, initially, he tried to pacify Wei and seek his support by showering him with lavish honors and acknowledging him as the supreme commander of the west.¹¹⁷ However, the honeymoon period did not last long. Wei was ambitious to be an independent ruler and would not wholeheartedly endorse the imperial unification project; on the other hand, Emperor Guangwu would not allow any Former Han territory break away from his “restored” Han dynasty. Conflicts between them were unavoidable. To defeat Wei, the emperor would need Dou Rong to be an ally.

During the civil war, Liang province was in fact partitioned between Wei Ao and Dou Rong. While Wei based his power in the southern part, Dou controlled the Hexi Corridor.

(Kyōto: Dōhōsha, 1993), 34-41 and 124-140; Kojima, *Kandai kokka tōchi no kōzō to tenkai*, 101-104; Ukai Masao 鵜飼昌男, “Jianwu chuqi Hexi diqu de zhengzhi dongxiang: ‘Hou Hanshu Dou Rong zhuan’ buyi” 建武初期河西地區的政治動向——《後漢書·竇融傳》補遺, trans. He Shuangquan 何雙全, in *Xibei shifan daxue lishixi* 西北師範大學歷史系 and *Gansusheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo* 甘肅省文物考古研究所 eds., *Jianduxue yanjiu* 簡牘學研究 vol. 2 (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 2009), 227-232.

¹¹⁶ *HHS*, 13: 513-514.

¹¹⁷ *HHS*, 13: 522.

Although a native of Fufeng 扶風 commandery, a part of the Former Han metropolitan area, Dou Rong had a very close relationship with Liang province and had inherited a solid power base in the Hexi Corridor since two of his family members had been grand administrators of commanderies in Laing province and one had been military officer supervising the Qiang. Besides, Dou himself was appointed by the Xin dynasty as Commandant of the Zhangye dependent state (*Zhangye shuguo duwei* 張掖屬國都尉) and was on intimate terms with other prominent officials, local strongmen, and the Qiang tribal leaders along the Hexi Corridor.¹¹⁸ Prestigious family background and social networks enabled Dou easily to assume leadership in the Hexi region during the chaotic period. Dou differed from Wei as he was willing to follow the Later Han emperor. This resulted in different fates for the two men. Dou Rong surrendered to the emperor and contributed greatly in the final conquest of Wei Ao. Dou himself therefore received great honors and held a high position in the imperial court, and his family would become one of the most influential consort families in the Later Han history.

Another Liang province origin contender was Lu Fang, who was a native of Anding commandery.¹¹⁹ According to the official history, which unquestionably took a stand on

¹¹⁸ *HHS*, 23: 795-797.

¹¹⁹ *HHS*, 12: 505.

the Later Han, Lu Fang was an imposter who claimed himself a descendent of Emperor Wu and thus gathered followers around him. Lu established very close relationship with the Xiongnu, the Qiang, and other “barbarian” groups. Later, under the auspices of the Xiongnu, Lu was named Han emperor though in fact acted as a proxy for the Xiongnu by harrying along the Later Han northern and northwestern frontiers.¹²⁰ When Emperor Gunagwu consolidated its governance over the empire, Lu saw there was no hope to challenge the Later Han. He then sought asylum in the Xiongnu and stayed there over a decade until his death.

The death of Wei Ao and Lu Fang and the submission of Dou Rong marked the full incorporation of Liang province into the newly formed Later Han dynasty. In its early years, the Later Han basically followed the regional administrative division of the Former Han. Liang province officially restored its name and status as a top level regional administrative unit.¹²¹ It was during the reign of Emperor Xian 獻 (r. 190-220CE), the young emperor installed by Dong Zhuo and also the last Later Han sovereign, that Liang province as an administrative unit faced another time of abolition. In 194CE, as the southern part of Liang province was occupied by rebels and out of the Later Han control,

¹²⁰ *HHS*, 12: 506.

¹²¹ For the development of province system in the Later Han period, see Xin, “Liang Han Zhouzhi Xinkao,” 162-176; Kojima, *Kandai kokka tōchi no kōzō to tenkai*, 244-271.

the imperial court announced the separation of the Hexi Corridor from Liang province and renamed it as Yong 雍 province, probably for the purpose of separating the Hexi region from the rebellious area. Later, in 213CE, Chancellor Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220CE), who was now the de facto ruler controlled Emperor Xian, launched a program of reformulating the whole empire into nine provinces. Since only the northern part of the nominally existing Later Han was under his control, the effect of Cao's reform was limited. Nevertheless, Liang province was abolished and became part of the reinstated Yong province. Several years later, the last Later Han emperor was deposed by Cao's son, who then proclaimed himself the founding emperor of a new dynasty and the province division would turn over a new leaf.

During the Later Han times, Liang province still served the important military function as it did in the Former Han dynasty. First, in the early years of the Later Han, inherited the worsening foreign relations from Wang Mang, the whole northern and northwestern frontiers, as well as the Western Regions once again became the frontline of military confrontation between the Chinese regime and the Xiongnu. Liang province was a component of the imperial defensive line in general and a depot for launching expedition against the Xiongnu to the northwest in particular. Secondly, it served as an

artery connecting the imperial center and the Western Regions. As the struggles between the Later Han and the Xiongnu over the control of the Western Regions grew fierce, Liang province took up the role of supplying manpower and other resources for the Han presence in Inner Asia. For these reasons, as a usual practice of the Former Han, vast numbers of soldiers, convicts, labors, and their families were voluntarily or involuntarily sent to the northwest. Thirdly, conflicts between the empire and the Qiang became intense from the early years of the Later Han and devastating wars with the Qiang lasted from the middle period to the last years of the dynasty. The southern part of Liang province thus became battlefield. When the Qiang gained the upper hand, the Later Han state even evacuated its officials and people from the war-ridden area and left southern Liang province at the mercy of its enemies. Liang province was consequently devolved into chaos in the last decades of the Later Han and was one of the first regions which resisted the authority of the imperial center. Meanwhile, ambitious military strongman like Dong Zhuo took advantage of the complicated situation, accumulated his power, took control of the imperial court, and finally triggered the disintegration of the Later Han empire.

Comparing with the Former Han times, Liang province was often in turmoil during the Later Han. Its administrative divisions and population also underwent sea changes.

We are fortunate to have data of population census that conducted in 140CE and information of the administrative units in the “Treatise on Commandery and Fief-state” (*Junguo zhi* 郡國志) of the *Hou Hanshu*,¹²² which provide us a general picture of the administrative geography and demography of Liang province in the middle period of Later Han.¹²³

	Number of Counties	Number of Households	Population
Longxi 隴西	11	5,628	29,637
Hanyang 漢陽 (formerly Tianshui, name changed in 74CE)	13	27,423	130,138
Wudu 武都	7	20,102	81,728
Jincheng 金城	10	3,858	8,947
Anding 安定	8	6,094	29,060
Beidi 北地	6	3,122	18,637
Wuwei 武威	14	10,042	34,260
Zhangye 張掖	8	6,552	26,040
Jiuquan 酒泉	9	2,706	----
Dunhuang 敦煌	6	748	29,170
Zhangye Shuguo 張掖屬國	5	4,656	16,952
Zhangye Juyan Shuguo 張掖居延屬國	1	1,560	4,733

Table 3: Data of Northwestern Commanderies in 140CE

¹²² *HHS*, 19-23: 3385-3533. For the Later Han population, see Bielenstein, “The Census of China during the Period 2-742 A.D.,” 125-163; Lao, “Population and Geography in the Two Han Dynasties,” 83-102; Ge, *Zhongguo renkoushi*, v.1, 399-425 and 493-500. For a general survey of the *Junguo zhi* in a historiographical perspective, see Mansvelt Beck, *The Treatises of Later Han*, 175-195.

¹²³ B. J. Mansvelt Beck has pointed out that there is a problem of anachronism in the treatise as it does not reflect the actual situation, for instance, in the northwestern provinces in the 140’s but the situation of the empire at its greatest extent. See B. J. Mansvelt Beck, *The Treatises of Later Han*, 193-194.

According to the Treatise, the Later Han province of Liang consisted of twelve administrative units: ten commanderies and two dependent states. The population and household numbers only refer to those on the government register, as already mentioned in the analysis on the 2CE data; even the numbers of the two dependent states would not contain all of the surrendered “barbarians” in the jurisdictions, not to mention those not registered by the state. Moreover, the treatise does not fully reflect the actual situation in Liang province in 140CE. For example, under the threats of the Qiang, the commanderies of Anding and Beidi were moved inland in 111CE, moved back in 129CE, and moved inland again in 140CE. The Treatise does not mention these administrative changes and only provides “the situation of the empire at its greatest extent—even if it entails anachronisms.”¹²⁴

Nevertheless, if we compare the 140CE data with the 2CE data, we will see the changes over the one century and realize some features of the Later Han Liang province.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Mansvelt Beck, *The Treatises of Later Han*, 194.

¹²⁵ *HHS*, 23: 3516-3521.

	Former Han			Later Han		
	Counties	Households	Population	Counties	Households	Population
Longxi	11	53,964	236,824	11	5,628	29,637
Tianshui/ Hanyang	16	60,370	261,384	13	27,423	130,138
Anding	21	42,725	143,294	8	6,094	29,060
Jincheng	13	38,470	149,648	10	3,858	8,947
Wuwei	10	17,581	76,419	14	10,042	34,260
Zhangye	10	24,352	88,731	8	6,552	26,040
Jiuquan	9	8,137	76,726	9	2,706	----
Dunhuang	6	11,200	38,335	6	748	29,170
Wudu	----	----	----	7	20,102	81,728
Beidi	----	----	----	6	3,122	18,637
Zhangye Shuguo	----	----	----	5	4,656	16,952
Zhangye Juyan Shuguo	----	----	----	1	1,560	4,733
Total	Household		Population	Household		Population
	362,636		1,517,573	92,491		409,302

Table 4: Comparison of the two sets of data

By roughly comparing the total population numbers of the equivalent region between the two Han dynasties, it is very obvious that the population of Later Han Liang province lost more than 1,100,000 registered people.

For the twelve administrative units of the Later Han Liang province, the commanderies of Wudu and Beidi were newly added from the neighboring Yi 益

province and Bing 并 province, respectively, and the two dependent states were newly established along the northwestern-most tip of the province. Therefore, we will focus mainly on the commanderies which already existed in the Former Han period in order to see the changes over the region. Among those “old” commanderies, it is clear that there was a very drastic population drop, especially in the southern portion. The commanderies of Longxi, Tianshu/Hanyang, Anding, and Jincheng suffered tremendous population loss; county numbers of Tianshu/Hanyang, Anding, and Jincheng also dropped, and particularly drastic in Anding. Those once-populated areas became, numerically, sparsely populated. The main reason for these tremendous changes was due to the Qiang wars. As the southern portion of Liang province (i.e. the commanderies of Longxi, Tianshu/Hanyang, Anding, and Jincheng) was the battlefield of the Qiang wars, it went without saying that large numbers of people fleeing the province or taking advantage of the chaotic situation to hide away and erase themselves from the taxpayer roster. Pulling out the commandery seats of Anding and Beidi twice during the Qiang wars, details will be given in Chapter Four, only aggravated the situation. Besides, great casualties could be expected in the incessant chaos. Along with the tremendous loss of registered population was diminishing state control of the affected area. In contrast, a large number of Qiang

people and other “barbarians” who had previously lived along the borders rushed into Liang province, especially the southern portion. The massive influx of non-Han peoples finally resulted in their overwhelming population in Guanzhong and the ensuing chaotic situation of the area in the period after the fall of Later Han.¹²⁶

This chapter has already outlined the salient features of natural geography and development of administrative geography of the region equivalent to Liang province in the Later Han period, and also touched upon the militarized nature and complex ethnic characteristics of the frontier society. With this background knowledge, we shall move to the next chapter to examine how the friction between the northwestern region and the imperial center grew, intensified, and influenced the fate of the empire.

¹²⁶ de Crespigny, *Northern Frontier*, 417-437.

3

Being Peripheralized:

The Northwesterners in the Later Han Empire

In 167CE, General Zhang Huan 張奐 (104-181CE) might be relieved when his request to transfer his registered place of residence from the northwestern frontier to the interior of the empire was granted. Transference of registered residence from a frontier commandery to an inner commandery was prohibited by the Later Han law; it was only Zhang's astonishing military feats that earned him such an unprecedented imperial favor.¹ Known in the Later Han history as one of the three greatest heroes of the Qiang wars, Zhang Huan, whose style name (*zi* 字) was Ranming 然明, was a native of Yuanquan 淵泉 county in Dunhuang commandery; with Huangfu Gui 皇甫規 (104-171CE), whose style name was Weiming 威明, and Duan Jiong 段熲 (d. 179), whose style name was Jiming 紀明, the three men were all from Liang province and were given by their contemporaries the moniker the "Three Brilliants of Liang Province" (*Liangzhou*

¹ *HHS*, 65: 2140.

Sanming 涼州三明).² It was not merely because the word *Ming* 明 in their style names means “brilliance” and “brightness” but also a compliment regarding them as the three brilliant men of Liang province.

As a famous general who had just successfully quelled the Qiang rebels spreading across three provinces, Zhang Huan was undoubtedly an icon of Liang province. However, Zhang was unwilling to have his household registered in his native province and dared to ask for the imperial favor of transferring to Huayin 華陰 county of Hongnong 弘農 commandery near the Later Han capital as a special reward to his military achievements.³ Later, when Duan Jiong assumed the position of superintendent of the metropolitan region and Hongnong was in his jurisdiction, he intended to move Zhang’s household back to Dunhuang as a means to avenge their conflicts during the Qiang wars. Zhang Huan was terrified and promptly wrote a very humble letter to appeal to Duan’s mercy. Duan was deeply moved by the letter and therefore spared the supplicant and his family.⁴

² The three generals’ biographies were in the same chapter of *Hou Hanshu*, see *HHS*, 65: 2129-2154. For a full English translation of the three biographies, see Gregory Young, *Three generals of Later Han* (Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1984). On the three generals in Later Han politics, see Chen Yong 陳勇, “Liangzhou sanming lun” “涼州三明”論, *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 中國史研究 1998.2: 37-48.

³ *HHS*, 65: 2140.

⁴ *HHS*, 65: 2141-2142.

Zhang Huan's story compels us to ask: Why did such an eminent man so detest being registered in a frontier commandery and was so desperate to move to an inner one? What made him eager to move out from his native Liang province? What was the advantage(s) or benefit(s) of being a registered resident of an inner commandery? What was the motivation behind his move? The prohibition of transferring registered residence from the frontiers to the interior of the empire implied that the central authority felt the need to curb any potential movement; otherwise a large amount of transference would be expected. Furthermore, by trying to move Zhang Huan and his family back to Dunhuang, Duan Jiong's means of revenge was intriguing, and Zhang Huan's plea for pardon showed how desperate he was in an attempt to save himself and his family from returning to the frontier. Zhang Huan's success might be a unique case, but his desire to move might not be exceptional and might be shared by some of his compatriots. Zhang Huan's story provides us clues to understand the contemporary perception of the northwestern commanderies and their residents and their status vis-à-vis the Later Han empire. Also, the fact that the three greatest war heroes of the Qiang wars were all from Liang province cannot be treated as a mere coincidence. It is a compelling evidence of the militarized nature of the northwestern borderlands.

Unlike the previous chapter, which focuses on the land, this chapter focuses on the people. In the following sections, I shall first introduce the settlers and their descendants in the northwestern borderlands during the two Han dynasties and the military nature of this frontier society. Then, I shall discuss the factors which influenced the change of political status of the northwest and its military cohort in the Later Han period and analyze how the change affected their relations to the imperial center. Given the limited historical sources for studying the northwestern settlers, I shall focus mainly on the military elite of the region and give a try to depict the lives of those nameless common settlers if possible.

PEOPLING A BORDERLAND

As shown in Chapter Two, most of the territories of Liang province were the spoils of the northwestward expansion of the Qin-Han empire. From the Spring and Autumn period onwards, accompanied with the gradual territorial sprawling, not only were the remaining autochthonous peoples, willingly or unwillingly, subjected to the Qin-Han suzerainty, but also substantial numbers of people were moved from the east to the newly conquered lands to support the territorial control of the state. In this long course of several hundred years, a great variety of migrants, including soldiers, cashiered officials, political exiles,

amnestied convicts,⁵ economic refugees, adventurers, slaves, and their families constituted waves of migrations to the northwestern borderlands and took up the roles of garrison soldiers, pioneers, and colonists. They formed the backbone of the imperial projects of expansion and consolidation of the region. Even after the tide of northwestward expansion ebbed, the Han state still kept sending migrants in. The influx of substantial numbers of Qin-Han settlers into the northwestern borderlands fundamentally changed the political, economic, cultural, and ethnic compositions of the region. Meanwhile, the settlers were also influenced by the environment and neighbors of their new home. Certainly, the origins and social backgrounds of the settlers were extremely complicated as they were from different places with different local cultures, had different social status, and arrived the northwest at different times. However, after several generations, they gradually took root in the region and fostered their own regional identities.

Although extant literary and non-literary sources preserve only small scraps of information about the Qin-Han settlers in the northwest, especially about the period

⁵ Amnesty here does not mean that the state set the convicts free but commutes sentence of death to hard labor or exile. For the punishments, including death penalty, hard labor, and exile, and amnesty of the Former Han, see A. F. P. Hulsewé, *Remnants of Han Law, volume 1: Introductory Studies and Annotated Translation of Chapters 22 and 23 of the History of the Former Han Dynasty* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), 102-134 and 225-250. Although the abundant evidence unearthed in recent decades has made the book a bit dated, Hulsewé's work is still the most comprehensive English-language introductory study of the received textual sources on the topic.

before the large-scale expansion during the reign of Emperor Wu, it is still possible to have a sketch of the settlers by digging into the available sources. Among the settlers, based on the development of their political status and family fortunes in the Qin-Han period, two categories can be roughly distinguished, namely the elite group and the non-elite group. Surely, there was no strict dichotomy between the two groups as in the process of social mobility non-elite men could establish themselves as elites and elite families could lose their status for various reasons. Such a distinction is made on the basis of the sources available. Needless to say, the extant histories provide comparatively detailed stories of the elites and slender information of the non-elite group. I shall introduce the elites first and the non-elite group later; the autochthonous peoples is a topic of the next chapter.

In a land with tough natural environment and plagued by incessant struggle with alien peoples like the northwest, the most common and quickest way of achieving upward social mobility would be through military merit. The Qin-Han state also encouraged and sanctioned militarization of the region as a means to strengthen territorial control, not to mention launching further expansion. Serving both functions of the frontier between the Han and the Xiongnu and the strategic artery connecting the interior of the empire and

the Western Regions, needless to say, the northwestern commanderies were highly militarized as the *Hanshu* describes that the grand administrators of the area “all put military affairs as their top priority.”⁶ 咸以兵馬為務. The Former Han not only repaired and strengthened the Qin long walls in the old commanderies but also extended the walls to and set up dense defense networks in the newly founded Hexi commanderies.⁷ Besides the garrison soldiers, a significant portion of the settlers were potential fighters, the “barbarous” autochthonous peoples notwithstanding. Violence was an everyday life of the settlers and the prevalence of martial spirit became a custom of the region during the two Han dynasties. Remember Zheng Tai’s speech, quoted in Chapter One, that Liang province produced the strongest and fiercest soldiers of the empire and even women and girls there were accustomed to wielding weapons.⁸ A Han primer named *Jijiu pian* 急就篇 also retains the Later Han people’s impression of the northwest as the battlefield against the alien enemies: “The strong crossbows of Jiuquan and Dunhuang, stationed along the frontier and upholding the bastions to guard against the Hu and the Qiang, from near and afar all come to kill the king of the Rong, the realm of the Han will be

⁶ *HS*, 28B: 1645.

⁷ For good summary of the Former Han’s efforts on building defensive works along the northwestern frontier, see Wang, *Gansu tongshi: Qin Han juan*, 116-149. Loewe, *Records of Han Administration*, vol. 1 studies the unearth documents from some spots on the defense line.

⁸ *HHS*, 70: 2258-59.

prosperous and all under Heaven will enjoy peace.” 酒泉彊弩與敦煌，居邊守塞備胡羌，遠近還集殺戎王，漢土興隆天下安。⁹ Liang province, with both old and new commanderies, was designed as a bastion to protect the western flank of the empire.

It went without saying that military value would be particularly prevalent among people of the region. In fact, well before the reign of Emperor Wu, when the power of the Qin-Han empire was still limited to the east bank of the Yellow River, some of the early settlers in the western commanderies, such as Longxi, Tianshui, and Beidi, were already skilled in archery and horsemanship and therefore established themselves as the military elites of the region. Their golden age came with the imperial expansion under Emperor Wu and his successors. Their splendid military prowess enabled them to climb the social and political ladder and establish prosperous military careers. As the “Treatise on Geography” of *Hanshu* describes,

Tianshui, Longxi... as well as Anding, Beidi, Shang commandery, and Xihe, are all closely located to the Rong and the Di, [their people] are in a state of warlike preparedness, admire bravery and martial prowess, and pay utmost attention to the skills of shooting and hunting. Therefore, the *Odes of the Qin* says... “The king

⁹ Si You 史游, *Jijiu pian* 急就篇, in *Siku Quanshu* 四庫全書 vol. 223 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 61. Most contents of the *Jijiu Pian* were written by Si You in the Former Han times, but the last 128 words in the extant version, including the above quotation, were added by anonymous Later Han author(s). For the introduction of the text, see Zeng Zhongsha 曾仲珊 annotated, *Jijiu Pian* 急就篇 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1989). For a recent study of the excavated version of the *Jijiu pian*, see Zhang Nali 張娜麗, *Seiiki shutsudo monjo no kisoteki kenkyū : Chūgoku kodai ni okeru shōgakusho dōmōsho no shosō* 西域出土文書の基礎的研究 : 中国古代における小学書・童蒙書の諸相 (Tōkyō : Kyūko Shoin, 2006), 85-131.

mobilizes the troops, polishes our armors and weapons, and goes for campaigns with the sons [of the region].” When the Han arises, the good sons of the six commanderies are selected and recruited to be [the royal guards of] the Yulin and the Qimen. Their martial prowess makes them officers, and many famous generals come out from among them.¹⁰

天水、隴西……及安定、北地、上郡、西河，皆迫近戎狄，修習戰備，高上氣力，以射獵為先。故《秦詩》曰……「王子興師，修我甲兵，與子偕行」……漢興，六郡良家子選給羽林、期門；以材力為官，名將多出焉。

It is clear that valor and martial prowess were prevalent in the six commanderies which spreading along the north and northwest of the Former Han metropolitan region: Longxi, Beidi, Tianshui, Anding, Shang, and Xihe. Their people were good at fighting. The military elites among them, known as the *Liujun liangjiazi* (Good Sons of the Six Commanderies), briefly mentioned in Chapter Two, were especially recruited by the imperial court to form the royal guards, which produced many famous generals of the Former Han dynasty.

As shown in the previous chapter, the Qin-Han people commonly held a view on the difference between the areas of Shanxi/Guanxi (the west of Mount Yao or the Hangu Pass) and Shandong/Guandong (the east of Mount Yao or the Hangu Pass) as the former was the area known for martial prowess and producing military men while the latter was

¹⁰ *HS*, 28B: 1644.

known for refined culture and breeding civilians.¹¹ The six commanderies of Longxi, Tianshui, Beidi, Anding, Shang, and Xihe were important components of the region of Shanxi/Guanxi and critical sources of providing military men. Among the six commanderies, Longxi, Tianshui, Beidi, and Anding were all within the jurisdiction of Liang province and played a crucial role in the military history of the Former Han dynasty. Besides the aforementioned “Treatise on Geography,” the compiler of the *Hanshu* also made another comments on the martial atmosphere in these four commanderies,

Since the times of the Qin and Han, [the region of] Shandong produces civil ministers and [the region of] Shanxi produces military generals.... The Han arises, Wang Wei and Gan Yanshou of Yuzhi [county], Gongsun He and Fu Jiezi of Yiqu, Li Guang and Li Cai of Chengji, Su Jian and Su Wu of Tuling, Shangguan Jie and Zhao Chongguo of Shanggui, Lian Bao of Xiangwu, Xin Wuxian and [Xin] Qingji of Didao, were all well known for their valor and martial prowess. The fathers and sons of the Su’s and Xin’s were famous and were thus recorded with praise. However, besides them, there were still innumerable [fathers and sons like them but were not recorded]. Why [were there so many of them]? [The commanderies of] Tianshui, Longxi, Anding, and Beidi of Shanxi region are closely located to the Qiang and the Hu. The people [of these commanderies] get used to be in a state of war preparedness, honor valor and the skills of horsemanship and archery. As the *Odes of the Qin* says, “The king mobilizes the troops, polishes our armors and weapons, and goes for campaigns with the sons [of the region].” It is the traditions and customs since antiquity. As the legacy of such culture, its folk songs are still enthusiastic today.¹²

¹¹ Fu, “Handai de Shandong yu Shanxi,” 65-80; Xing, “Shishi Handai de Guandong, Guanshi yu Shandong, Shanxi,” 180-210.

¹² *HS* 69: 2998-99.

秦漢已來，山東出相，山西出將。……漢興，郁郅王圍、甘延壽，義渠公孫賀、傅介子，成紀李廣、李蔡，杜陵蘇建、蘇武，上邽上官桀、趙充國，襄武廉褒，狄道辛武賢、慶忌，皆以勇武顯聞。蘇、辛父子著節，此其可稱列者也，其餘不可勝數。何則？山西天水、隴西、安定、北地處勢迫近羌胡，民俗修習戰備，高上勇力鞍馬騎射。故《秦詩》曰：「王于興師，修我甲兵，與子皆行。」其風聲氣俗自古而然，今之歌謠慷慨，風流猶存耳。

As the compilation of the *Hanshu* was completed in the reign of the third emperor of the Later Han dynasty, to a certain degree, it shows that the compiler(s) and even the contemporary people held the view that Shanxi region, especially the four commanderies mentioned, was famous for producing military men in the Qin-Former Han period. Furthermore, in the *Hou Hanshu*, it is said that an official named Yu Xu 虞詡 quoted in his memorial an adage, “Guanxi produces military generals and Guandong produces civil ministers,”¹³ 關西出將，關東出相. These all reveal that the civil and military dichotomy between the regions of Shanxi/Guanxi and Shandong/Guandong was commonly held by the Han people and hence forged a stereotype of the two regions.

The names mentioned in the above passage were all those of famous military officials, general officers, and diplomats of the Former Han dynasty. Except for Su Jian and his son Su Wu, who were natives of Tuling county in the Former Han metropolitan region (and yet still part of Shanxi/Guanxi region), all of the people on the list were of northwestern

¹³ *HHS* 58: 1866.

provenance. The following biographical vignettes introduce these and some other military icons and celebrities of Liang province in both Han dynasties, so that we can have a general impression of their military career path and the role that the Liang province military elites played in the period under discussion.

For the men of the Former Han times, I listed them in the order that their names appear in the *Hanshu* passage quoted above.

1. Wang Wei 王圍 was from Yuzhi 郁郅 county in Beidi commandery. Although no details of his life were given in the *Hanshu*, according to the “Treatise on Arts and Letters” (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志, which is basically the catalogue of the imperial library) of *Hanshu*, there was a book called *Shefa* 射法 (The Method of Archery) by a Wang Wei who had the title of General of the Strong Crossbow (*Qiangnu Jiangjun* 強弩將軍).¹⁴ Considering the fact that Wang Wei of Yuzhi was a famous military man and the people of the northwest were good at archery, it is highly possible that he was a master of archery, a commander of crossbowmen, and a writer on archery skills.
2. Gan Yanshou 甘延壽 (d. 24BCE), also from Yuzhi, earned his fame in the Han history because of a remarkable military achievement. Gan was a typical *Liu jun*

¹⁴ *HS*, 30: 1761.

liangjiazi as he started his career by serving in the elite royal guards of the Yulin 羽林 and, later, the Qimen 期門. He was good at archery and horsemanship and had unusual physical strength. In 36BCE, he was appointed Protector General of the Western Regions (*Xiyu Duhu* 西域都護), which was the superintendent of Han forces in the Western Regions.¹⁵ Following the plan designed by his associate Chen Tang 陳湯 (d. 12BCE), Gan mobilized the Han and non-Han troops at his disposal to unleash a pre-emptive strike on Zhizhi 郅支 Chanyu of the Xiongnu, who was staying at a makeshift fortress in Inner Asia after his failure in the power struggle among the leadership of the Xiongnu. After a fierce battle, Gan and Chen killed and beheaded the Chanyu, which was an unprecedented victory over the Xiongnu. Gan was therefore ennobled as a marquis.¹⁶

3. Gongsun He 公孫賀 (d. 91BCE), a native of Yiqu county in Beidi, was a grandson of Gongsun Hunye 公孫昆邪 (fl. 150s-140s BCE), who was a famous general during the reign of Emperor Jing 景 (r. 157-141BCE).¹⁷ As examined in the previous chapter, Yiqu county was named after the Yiqu people of the Western Rong. The

¹⁵ For the establishment of the position of the Protector General of the Western Regions and its duties, see *HS*, 19A: 738 and 70: 3006.

¹⁶ *HS*, 70: 3007-15. For modern studies on the battle against Zhizhi Changyu, see J. J. L. Duyvendak, "An Illustrated Battle-Account in the History of the Former Han Dynasty," *T'oung Pao* xxxiv (1939), 249-64; Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China*, 211-251.

¹⁷ *HS*, 66: 2877.

Gongsun family was good at fighting and horsemanship and the name Hunye was perhaps a transliteration of a non-Han name (given that one of the Xiongnu kings who surrendered the Hexi region was the King of Hunye), the Gongsun family was possibly alien in origin. Gongsun He served with credit as a cavalryman when he was young. He was promoted rapidly during the reign of Emperor Wu and achieved outstanding military merits by taking part in the expeditions against the Xiongnu and was thus ennobled. In his old age, Gongsun He was appointed Chancellor. In a response to the appointment, Gongsun He described himself as “a man who grew up in rustic periphery, and became official because of horsemanship and archery.”¹⁸ 本邊鄙，以鞍馬騎射為官。However, Gongsun He and his son, who was also a senior official, were implicated and executed in the notorious case of witchcraft (*Wugu* 巫蠱), which caused a large-scale purge in the last years of Emperor Wu.¹⁹

4. Fu Jiezi 傅介子 (d. 65BCE), another native of Yiqu, started his career by serving in the military and made his name in two adventurous diplomatic missions. About 77BCE, Fu as the Inspector of the Imperial Stables was sent to the Western Regions

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *HS*, 66: 2877-78. On the case of witchcraft, see Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China*, 37-90; Poo Mu-chou 蒲慕州, “Wuguzhihuo de zhengzhi yiyi” 巫蠱之禍的政治意義, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 57.3 (1987): 511-538.

- as the delegate to interrogate the kings of Qiuzi 龜茲 and Loulan 樓蘭 for the liability of killing the Han envoys. The two kings surrendered and Fu took the advantage of killing the Xiongnu envoys who were visiting Qiuzi. Fu was rewarded and promoted after his return to the imperial capital. He then persuaded the regent Huo Guang 霍光 (d. 68BCE) to have the kings of Qiuzi and Loulan put to death in order to prevent any potential trouble. With Huo's permission, Fu went on his second mission and beheaded the king of Loulan. He was hence ennobled as a marquis.²⁰
5. Li Guang 李廣 (d. 119BCE) was a native of Chengji 成紀 county in Longxi commandery. Well known as the “Flying General” (*Fei Jiangjun* 飛將軍), Li Guang was not only one of the most famous generals of the Former Han dynasty but also a renowned military figure in Chinese history. He was a famous archer grew up in a family with a long military tradition. According to the “Treatise on Arts and Letters,” a work entitled *General Li's Art of Archery* (*Li Jiangjun Shefa* 李將軍射法) was attributed to him.²¹ He served the emperors Wen, Jing, and Wu, and spent nearly his whole life on fighting against the Xiongnu. His three sons were all military officers.²²
6. Li Cai 李蔡 (d. 118BCE), also from Chengji, was a cousin of Li Guang and served

²⁰ *HS*, 70: 3001-3002.

²¹ *HS*, 30:1761.

²² *SJ*, 109: 2867-2876; *HS*, 54: 2439-2450.

the court with him in the same period. Although not as famous as his cousin, Li Cai had a more prosperous career. During Emperor Wu's reign, Li Cai was appointed General of Light Chariots (*Qingju Jiangjun* 輕車將軍) under the command of the Grand General Wei Qing and was granted a marquise as a reward of his achievements. In 121BCE, he was appointed Chancellor.²³

7. Shangguan Jie 上官桀 (d. 80BC), a native of Shanggui 上邽 county of Tianshui commandery, served in the royal guards of the Yulin and the Qimen when he was young. He impressed Emperor Wu with physical strength and was then promoted Director of Palace Stables and later Minister of Transport (*Taipu* 太僕).²⁴ He might have taken part in a large-scale military expedition to the Western Regions.²⁵ When Emperor Wu was on deathbed, he entrusted his eight-year-old successor to Huo Guang, Jin Midi 金日磾 (d. 86BCE), Shangguan Jie, and Sang Hongyang 桑弘羊 (152-80BCE). In order to secure his prominent position, Shangguan Jie even married his granddaughter to the young emperor. However, the fortune of the Shangguan family did not last long. Shangguan Jie and his son lost in the power struggle with

²³ *HS*, 54: 2446.

²⁴ *HS*, 97A: 3957.

²⁵ According to the record, there was a military officer named Shangguan Jie in the campaign. It might be possible a man with the same name. However, if we consider the fact that our Shangguan Jie had a strong martial background and the Shangguan Jie in the campaign commanded cavalymen of Shanggui county, it is highly possible that the two Shangguan Jie were the same person. See *HS*, 61: 2702-2703.

Huo Guang and were both sentenced to death.²⁶

8. Zhao Chongguo 趙充國 (137-51BCE) was from a family of Shanggui provenance and later moved to Lingju 令居 county in Jincheng commandery when it was established in the reign of Emperor Zhao 昭 (r. 87-74BCE). He started his career as a cavalryman and was later recruited to the royal guard of Yulin in the name of *Liujun liangjiazi* with skillful archery and horsemanship.”²⁷ 六郡良家子善騎射. He served successively emperors Wu, Zhao, and Xuan. While still a young military officer, Zhao Chongguo engaged in the war against the Xiongnu and suffered severe wounds in the battle. Being impressed by his bravery and courage, Emperor Wu summoned Zhao to the court to show his wounds and rewarded him with promotion. Thereafter, Zhao gradually rose to be a prominent official and finally reached the top echelon as General of the Rear (*Hou Jiangjun* 後將軍). In 73BCE, Zhao was ennobled for his contribution to the establishment of Emperor Xuan. Even though he was seventy years old, Zhao was still in charge of a campaign against the Qiang rebels, which will be treated in its appropriate place in the next chapter. He died in 51BCE at the age of 86. To commemorate him, Emperor Xuan had Zhao’s portrait in

²⁶ *HS*, 68: 2932-2936.

²⁷ *HS*, 69: 2971.

- the palace and Emperor Cheng 成 (r. 33-7BCE) asked a famous writer to compose a eulogy for his achievements in defeating the Qiang.²⁸
9. Lian Bao 廉褒 (fl. 10sBCE-3CE) was from Xiangwu 襄武 county in Longxi. According to the fragmented records in the *Hanshu*, Lian Bao was once Protector General of the Western Regions and was promoted to be senior official as General of the Right (*You Jiangjun* 右將軍) in 13BCE.²⁹
10. Xin Wuxian 辛武賢 (fl. 60s-50sBCE), a native of Didao 狄道 county in Longxi commandery, was Governor of Jiquan commandery when he was appointed General who Crushes the Qiang (*Po Qiang Jiangjun* 破羌將軍) by Emperor Xuan to collaborate with General Zhao Chongguo in the Qiang campaign.³⁰ Later, Xin led a force to pacify the state of Wusun in the Western Regions which was in turmoil.³¹ His younger brother Xin Tang 辛湯 (fl. 50sBCE) was Colonel Protector of the Qiang (*Hu Qiang Xiaowei* 護羌校尉), which was a position responsible for supervising the Qiang people within and without the Han realm.³² It is clear that the Xin brothers

²⁸ *HS*, 69: 2971-95. For a recent study on Zhao Chongguo, see Edward L. Dreyer, “Zhao Chongguo: A Professional Soldier of China’s Former Han Dynasty,” *The Journal of Military History* 72.3 (2008), 665-725.

²⁹ *HS*, 77: 3252 and 96B: 3908.

³⁰ *HS*, 69: 2977-78.

³¹ *HS*, 96B: 3907.

³² *HS*, 69: 2993. For an outline of the duty of the Colonel Protector of the Qiang in historical sources, see Sun Xingyan 孫星衍, ed., *Hanguan liuzhong* 漢官六種. Annotated by Zhou Tianyou 周天游 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 154. For modern research on the subject, see Gao Rong 高榮, “Handai Hu Qiang

were specialists in the Qiang affairs.

11. Xin Qingji 辛慶忌 (d. 11BCE), the son of Xin Wuxian, was granted his first official position through his privilege as the son of a senior official. While he was serving at a Han colony in the state of Wusun, which his father once pacified, he fought successfully against the enemy and was promoted to colonel. In the reign of Emperor Yuan 元 (r. 48-33BCE), Xin Qingji was widely admired by the court officials for his ability and was promoted to various important posts, including grand administrators of Zhangye and Jiuquan. He also earned a good reputation among the Xiongnu and the Western Regions. At the peak of his career, Xi Qingji was appointed General of the Right. His three sons were all military talents and officials, and the eldest one was appointed Protector General of the Qiang. With the solid foundation laid by Wuxian and Qingji, the Xin clan developed into a strong local magnate in Longxi commandery and even Liang province. However, such a prosperity provided an excuse for Wang Mang, the man who would usurp the Former Han, to charge the Xins and put Qingji's three sons and other important members to death. The Xin

Xiaowei shulun” 漢代護羌校尉述論, *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu* 中國邊疆史地研究 1995.3: 10-16; Liu Pak-yuen, *Shizhe yu guanzhi yanbian: Qin Han huangdi shizhe kaolun* 使者與官制演變：秦漢皇帝使者考論 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 2006), 291-302.

family was thus ruined.³³

Besides the above names, there were still several famous northwesterners recorded in the other places of the *Hanshu*:

12. Li Xi 李息 (fl. 140s-110sBCE), of Yuzhi county in Beidi commandery, started his career by serving Emperor Jing. He was appointed General of Infantry (*Caiguan Jiangjun* 材官將軍) by Emperor Wu and engaged in the war against the Xiongnu.³⁴
13. Gongsun Ao 公孫敖 (fl. 130s-90sBCE), a native of Yiqu county of Beidi, entered service as Palace Attendant at the court of Emperor Jing. During the reign of Emperor Wu, Gongsun Ao was a senior military officer in a series of campaigns against the Xiongnu. He was appointed General for four times. However, it was said that his wife implicated in a case of witchcraft, Gongsun Ao and his family were therefore all sentenced to death.³⁵
14. Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74BCE) was a grandson of the renowned “Flying General” Li Guang. While still in his young age, Li Ling had already been appointed as Palace Attendant and supervisor of the palace cavalry. Like his grandfather, Li Ling was famous for his skillful horsemanship and archery and was highly regarded by

³³ *HS*, 69: 2996-2998.

³⁴ *SJ*, 111: 2942; *HS*, 55: 2491.

³⁵ *SJ*, 111: 2942-43; *HS*, 55: 2491.

Emperor Wu for his prestigious military family background. In the late reign of Emperor Wu, Li Ling was responsible for training archers stationed at the commanderies of Jiuquan and Dunhuang. In 99BCE, Li Ling took part in a large-scale expedition against the Xiongnu but was assigned to lead only 5,000 infantry as an auxiliary force. Nevertheless, Li Ling's small force accidentally encountered the main force led by the Xiongnu Chanyu. After an epic battle, Li Ling surrendered to the Xiongnu. The Chanyu highly respected Li Ling, gave him his daughter to marry and granted him a title of king. Li Ling spent the rest of his life in the Xiongnu. Since Li Ling chose to surrender rather than to die for the imperial honor, which was in contrast to the expectation of Emperor Wu, his family was exterminated by the imperial order. The famous Li family in Longxi commandery was thus ruined and military men of the commandery all felt shame at such a disgrace.³⁶

15. Duan Huizong 段會宗 (d. 3CE?), a native of Shanggui in Tianshui, was promoted from Magistrate of Duling county to Protector General of the Western Regions in the reign of Emperor Cheng. During his tenure, Duan earned great respect from the Inner

³⁶ *SJ*, 109:2877-78; *HS*, 54: 2450-2459. For the legend of Li Ling in Chinese history, see Tomiya Itaru, *Gobi ni ikita otokotachi: Ri Ryō to So Bu* ゴビに生きた男たち：李陵と蘇武 (Tōkyō: Hakuteisha, 1994). Sima Qian, the compiler of the *Shiji*, was castrated as a punishment of his expressing sympathy for Li Ling's surrender during a court meeting with the irate Emperor Wu.

Asian states. After several years of other postings, he was re-appointed the same office as the imperial court's response to the request from those states. Duan was ennobled for his achievement of leading a small force to suppress the rebels in the state of Wusun. When he died in Wusun at the age of 75, some states of the Western Regions built shrines to memorialize him.³⁷

As will be discussed in the next section, although the political and social status of the northwesterners greatly declined in the Later Han, there were still some prominent figures played important roles in the history of the dynasty. Their brief biographies are given below in chronological order.

16. Liang Tong 梁統 (d. 40CE) was from Wushi 烏氏 county in Anding commandery.

His great-grandfather moved from Hedong 河東 commandery to Beidi commandery and then his grandfather moved twice and finally settled in Anding. During the civil war broke out in the last years of Wang Mang, Liang Tong joined Dou Rong, the strongman of the Hexi Corridor, and was appointed Grand Administrator of Wuwei commandery. Liang Tong finally surrendered to Emperor Guangwu and was ennobled.

In the rest of his life, Liang Tong held senior official positions and established

³⁷ *HS*, 70: 3029-31.

prestigious status of his family through marriage with the imperial house. Thereupon, the Liang family gradually developed into one of the influential consort families of the Later Han.³⁸

17. Liang Qin 梁懂 (d. 115CE) was a native of Geju 弋居 county of Beidi commandery. His father was a military officer in the campaign against the Xiongnu in 89CE. Liang Qin himself was renowned for his courage and bravery. He served in the military and was appointed Vice-Colonel of the Western Regions in 106CE. During his military career, Liang Qin played an active role in the Qiang wars and the campaigns against the Southern Xiongnu and the Wuhuan in the northeast.³⁹

18. Huangfu Gui, one of the “Three Brilliants of Liang Province,” grew up from a military family at Chaona 朝那 county in Anding commandery, with his grandfather was a general and father a commandant. Huangfu Gui initially entered the government via civil position, but he quickly showed his military talent and was assigned to suppress local bandits. From 161CE onward, Huangfu Gui served a series of commanding positions in the northwestern and northern frontiers, and was hence remembered as a famous general of the Later Han dynasty.⁴⁰

³⁸ *HHS*, 34: 1165-70.

³⁹ *HHS*, 47: 1591-93.

⁴⁰ *HHS*, 65: 2129-37.

19. Zhang Huan, the protagonist of the story at the beginning of this chapter, was a native of Yuanquan county in Dunhuang commandery. He started with a civil-service position but turned to the military later. During his military career, Zhang Huan mainly served as frontier commander and dealt with alien peoples such as the Qiang, the Wuhuan, and the Xianbi.⁴¹ It was his great achievements in the Qiang wars caused him to be rewarded with the unprecedented permission to transfer his registered residence, as we have already learned.
20. Duan Jiong, one of the “Three Brilliants,” was from Guzang 姑臧 county of Wuwei commandery. His great-great-uncle was claimed to be Duan Huizong of the Former Han. Since his youth, Duan Jiong was a skillful archer and horseman; however, he started his career via civil position and only shifted to the military later. He had been commandant against the invasion of the Xianbi people in the northeast and suppressed local rebels in the eastern commanderies. Later, he was appointed Colonel Protector of the Qiang and had long service in the Qiang Wars. In his later years, Duan Jiong ingratiated himself with the eunuchs who controlled the imperial court and therefore reached the top echelons of the bureaucracy. However, he was forced to

⁴¹ *HHS*, 65: 2138-44.

kill himself when his eunuch patron was defeated by another eunuch clique.⁴²

21. Fu Xie 傅燮 (d. 187CE), a native of Liangzhou 靈州 county in Beidi commandery, entered the government through civil office. Like those aforementioned names, Fu Xie finally established himself in military service. In the last decades of Later Han, Fu took part in the campaigns for suppressing the Yellow Turban rebellion (broke out in 184CE), which spread across the eastern part of the empire. Later, when Liang province was in chaos and fell in the hand of local rebels, prominent officials at the imperial court suggested giving up the province, Fu Xie was the staunchest opponent of such a plan. He was later appointed Grand Administrator of Hanyang commandery in Liang province, and was besieged by the rebels and finally died in battle.⁴³

22. Gai Xun 蓋勳 (140-190CE) was from an old official family in Guangzhi 廣至 county in Dunhuang commandery. Starting his career with a civil assignment, Gai Xun proved himself as a military talent and brave fighter in battles against the rebels in Liang province. When Dong Zhuo controlled the imperial court, Gai Xun was one of the very few officials who dared to criticize the warlord to his face.⁴⁴

23. Huangfu Song 皇甫嵩 (d. 195CE) was a nephew of the great general Huangfu Gui.

⁴² *HHS*, 65: 2144-54.

⁴³ *HHS*, 58: 1873-78.

⁴⁴ *HHS*, 58: 1879-83.

Still a young man, Huangfu Song had already shown interest in both civil and military pursuits. He was good at shooting and horse riding. Huangfu Song really won his fame by commanding the campaign against the Yellow Turbans. Fu Xie, mentioned above, was his aide-de-camp. The successful suppression of the rebels made Huangfu Song the most renowned general and the indisputable military leader of his time. He was later sent to Liang province against the local rebels. At that time, Dong Zhuo was under his command. However, when Dong Zhuo controlled the imperial court, Huangfu Song was unable to stop him and was deprived of his command.⁴⁵

24. Dong Zhuo, the warlord who destroyed the Later Han, was a native of Lintao county in Longxi commandery. When he was still young, he had already been a famed fighter and earned friendship among the tribal leaders of the Qiang. He started his career as military officer of Liang province. Later, he was recruited to the Yulin royal guard in the name of the *Liu jun liangjiazi* and then served as an aide-de-camp of Zhang Huan in a campaign against the Qiang at Hanyang commandery. Dong Zhuo rose quickly and became an important general in the northwestern region, in the last

⁴⁵ *HHS*, 71: 2299-2307.

years of the Later Han. By commanding a multi-ethnic troop from the northwestern borderlands, the ambitious Dong Zhuo made for himself a strong force which could tip the balance of power of the empire.⁴⁶

Needless to say, the aforementioned names were only the notables of Liang province during the two Han dynasties who left traces in historical records and were a very small portion of the northwesterners who entered government services. Since little is known regarding the people of northwestern provenance,⁴⁷ it is not possible to have a full picture of the career patterns of the whole northwestern population based on the available sources. Nevertheless, since the military elites were regarded by their contemporaries and the Han historians as representatives of their countrymen, some general features summarized from their career paths might give us clues to analyze the political status of the northwestern aspirants to government office in the period under discussion.

Of the twenty four men whose biographies are listed above, fifteen lived in the Former Han; one was active during the interval between the two Han dynasties; eight lived in the Later Han.

⁴⁶ *HHS*, 72: 2321-32.

⁴⁷ Fragments of records regarding the garrison soldiers, the cavalry, and the colonists from northwestern counties can be found in the unearthed Juyan wooden strips, but they are too slender to reconstruct a big picture of the life and career pattern of the northwestern people. See Loewe, *Records of Han Administration*, v.1, 99-126.

Several features can be summarized from the biographies of the fifteen Former Han figures. Firstly, they all started their official careers and received promotion on the basis of their military valor, skill, and merits. Some of them were the *Liu jun liangji* and started their careers by serving in the prestigious royal guards of the Yulin and the Qimen, which offered them opportunities to be close to the emperor and therefore advantages to develop illustrious careers. Even those who were not in the royal guard still started as military officers or ordinary cavalryman. At the peak of their careers, Gongsun He and Li Cai were appointed Chancellor, and others like Shangguan Jie, Zhao Chongguo, Lian Bao, and Xin Qingji reached the highest echelon of the government and played important roles in imperial politics. Some of them were also ennobled for their military feats. Secondly, nearly all the offices these men held were on military track, such as royal guards, various positions of military officers, and different ranks of generals. Even when they were not in active military service, their positions were still military related, such as Fu Jiezi's and Shangguan Jie's duties relating to the management of breeding horses and keeping chariots. It is clear that these men were on the military side of the government service, which was different from the civil one. Thirdly, most of them took part in military operations against the Xiongnu, the Qiang, and other Inner Asian peoples. These men

constituted an important corps in the defense and expansion of the Former Han empire.

In contrast, the career pattern of the Later Han northwestern elites listed above shows slight differences from that of their Former Han counterparts. Among the nine men, Liang Tong was born in the Former Han times, took part in the civil war between the two Han dynasties, and served in the Later Han court only after his surrender; therefore, his career was exceptional and should not be simply counted in the Later Han group. The remaining eight men were mainly active in the late period of the Later Han. Liang Qin, like his Former Han predecessors, started his career as a military officer and took part in the campaigns against the alien peoples. However, based on the sources shown above, it seems that there was a change in career pattern of the northwestern elites after the middle period of Later Han. Huangfu Gui, Zhang Huan, Duan Jiong, Fu Xie, Gai Xun, and Huangfu Song, while they were remembered as military talents and famous generals, all entered government services via civil positions and only shifted to military offices later.

Comparatively speaking, the Former Han group started their military career from the bottom rungs of the military hierarchy, no matter whether they were in the royal guards or cavalry or other troops, and had first-hand experiences in combat and as a rank-and-file member of the military; while the Later Han elites started as civil officers and transferred

to the military as middle or high level officers, which deprived them of the combat and rank-and-file experiences. In other words, unlike the Former Han elites who grew up in the military, the Later Han elites were transplanted into the military. It does not necessarily mean that the Later Han elites were not good fighters in themselves but, for some reasons which will be discussed in the next section, the Later Han system did not provide room for them to be pure military men if they wanted to climb the ladder of success. Furthermore, even though the Later Han elites achieved remarkable military exploits, they seldom reached the highest echelons as their Former Han predecessors did (Duan Jiong was able to reach the highest position but only because of his relations with the eunuchs who had great influence in court politics). In addition, while it was common for the Former Han elites to enter government by being the *Liu jun liang jia zi*, the same case was unlikely in the Later Han. None of the above six Later Han men were recorded as *Liu jun liang jia zi* in the historical sources. It might imply the diminishing role of the *Liu jun liang jia zi* in the Later Han.

The only man who was the *Liu jun liang jia zi* on the Later Han list was the warlord Dong Zhou. His career path was different from that of the “Three Brilliant of Liang Province” and others as he grew up among the troops and held consistently to the military

track. But in his early years he had a comparatively inferior career and was treated as an uncouth military man. Therefore, he was a unique case on the list.

Differences between career patterns show that the political environment of the Later Han differed from that of the Former Han, which would directly influence the political and social status of the northwestern military elites and the mutual attitudes between them and the imperial center as we shall see later.

Another point that merits our attention is that, geographically speaking, the Former Han elites, especially those who were known as the *Liu jun liangjiazi*, were from the old commanderies, such as Longxi, Tianshi, Beidi, and Anding; however, during the Later Han times, some of the elites like Zhang Huan, Duan Jiong, and Gai Xun were from the new commanderies of Dunhuang and Wuwei. It tells the fact that the new commanderies in the Hexi region founded by Emperor Wu and his successors had developed to a certain degree and could produce their own elites in the Later Han times.

Before we explore the new career pattern of the elites and the related problems in the next section, we should now focus on the non-elite settlers in the remainder of this section.

Unlike the elites, the non-elite group in this study refers to those who moved to the

northwest during the course of the two Han dynasties but without achieving high political and social status. They constituted the local populace of Liang province and especially the mainstay of pioneers in the new commanderies—Dunhuang, Jiuquan, Zhangye, Wuwei, and Jincheng. Besides the soldiers, according to the *Hanshu*, those settlers who moved to the Hexi region were mainly “the paupers of Guandong area, or those who had committed transgressions in revenge, or the family members of those who had committed betrayal and disobedient.”⁴⁸ 其民或以關東下貧，或以報怨過當，或以諄逆亡道，家屬徙焉。 Simply put, the majority of them were the poor, the amnestied convicts, and the exiles from different parts of the empire. In the absence of willing migrants, the settlement of these settlers was an act of state. Considering their backgrounds, quite a number of them were people who had nothing to lose and had no scruples about using violence to achieve their aims or protect their own interests. They represented the potential rebellious and restive elements of society. It seemed economical for the state to relocate and cluster them together in the newly conquered northwestern frontier, where their labor could be used to serve imperial projects, either defensive or expansionist.

Since the extant historical sources do not permit us to have the exact number and

⁴⁸ *HS*, 28B: 1645.

other details of the multitude of settlers, I can only draw an outline of the sanctioned migrations toward the northwest during the two Han dynasties in the following.

State-sanctioned migration of people to frontiers as a policy of social engineering had a long tradition during the Qin-Han period.⁴⁹ During the war of conquest in the third century BCE, the Qin state would relocate its own population to newly conquered areas and the captured subjects of rival states to the frontier regions or the old Qin domains so that, on the one hand, the Qin could toughen its hold on the newly acquired lands and, on the other hand, it could uproot the local power bases of its new subjects. Later on, when the Qin swept all the rival states and established a vast empire, it continued the policy of sanctioned migration and moved not only the erstwhile rival aristocrats and local magnates but also convicts and poor people as well as those with low social status to the northern and southern frontiers of the nascent empire.⁵⁰ Two specific cases were given in the sources for the Qin moving people to the northwestern frontier: royal members of the defeated Zhao state were moved by the Qin to Tianshui county in Longxi commandery; ancestors of the famous “Flying General” Li Guang of the Former Han were moved to

⁴⁹ For an introduction of the Qin-Han forcible movement of the people and exile of criminals to the frontiers, see Wang Zijin 王子今, *Qin Han jiaotong shigao* 秦漢交通史稿 (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1994), 419-454. For a general survey of state-sanctioned migration in Chinese history, see James Lee, “Migration and Expansion in Chinese History,” in Williams H. McNeill and Ruth S. Adams eds., *Human Migration—Patterns and Policies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 20-47.

⁵⁰ Ge, *Zhongguo renkoushi*, v.1, 517-523; Wang, *Gansu tongshi: Qin Han juan*, 31-34.

Chengji county in Longxi commandery.⁵¹

The Former Han adopted the same policy. During the whole course of the Former Han dynasty, enormous numbers of local magnates and wealthy families were relocated to the metropolitan area under the direct surveillance of the state.⁵² It was called the policy of “strengthening the roots and weakening the branches”⁵³ 強本弱末, which was especially crucial for consolidating state power during the early years of the dynasty. Meanwhile, migration towards the northern frontier was a response to the threat posed by the Xiongnu. During the reign of Emperor Wen, Chao Cuo put forward his proposal of state sponsored migration which encouraged and rewarded people moving to the northern frontier for the purposes of strengthening the imperial defense, turning wild borderlands into arable lands, and lessening the population pressure of the interior regions. The essence of Chao’s plan was the militarization of the people who moved to the frontiers as he anticipated that the migrants, once settled, would transform into tough defenders of the frontiers and totally differ from the rotating garrison soldiers from the interior who were unfamiliar with the frontiers and were afraid of the Xiongnu, not to mention the costs of

⁵¹ Wang, *Gansu tongshi: Qin Han juan*, 33.

⁵² Ibid, 523-526; Ge Jianxiong, *Zhongguo yimin shi* 中國移民史 vol. 1 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1997), 88-116.

⁵³ *HS*, 43: 2123.

sending the soldiers back and forth.⁵⁴ Also, as the historian Hsu Cho-yun puts, the “policy of redistributing the population” was “to make more farmers independent and self-sufficient” as taxpayers, which served the benefit of the state most.⁵⁵

State-sanctioned migration was in addition an emergency measure to settle the refugees when natural disasters struck the empire. The needy of the affected area would be moved to the frontier region in order to lessen the burden of relief in their native places and to utilize their labor in developing the new territories.⁵⁶ In 119BCE, for example, Emperor Wu moved 725,000 poor people who were affected by floods in Guandong to the commanderies of Longxi, Beidi, Xihe, Shang, and Kuaji 會稽.⁵⁷ In other words, many settlers of the northwestern borderlands were immigrants from heavily populated areas in Guandong.

During the reigns of Emperor Wu and his successors, the empire carried out large-scale and yet step-by-step migrations of people to the newly acquired lands. For the northwest that concerns us, as noted in the last chapter, the imperial court initially had no

⁵⁴ *HS*, 49: 2286.

⁵⁵ Hsu, *Han Agriculture*, 28.

⁵⁶ Luo Tonghua 羅彤華, *Handai de liumin wenti* 漢代的流民問題 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1989), 221-227.

⁵⁷ *HS*, 6: 178. Kuaji was a commandery in the southeast with low population density and was treated as a semi-barbarian region. Although we do not have precise information about the distribution of the 725,000 migrants, it is reasonable to assume that large portion of refugees were moved to the northwest and some of those whose native places near Kuaji might be moved there.

long-term plan of developing the Hexi region; therefore, although the state in 118BCE deployed around 5,000 to 6,000 soldiers as pioneers on the farming colonies in the immediate area of the west bank of the Yellow River,⁵⁸ its purpose was just to strengthen the western defense. It was not until the Wusun declined to move back that the Han empire took up the Hexi region in earnest. At first, only military personnel were sent to the new territory; for instance, 600,000 soldiers were deployed as colonists to the Hexi region and the neighboring commanderies of Shang, Shuofang, Xihe in 111BCE.⁵⁹ Although some of the garrison soldiers would return to their native places after completing their duties, quite a few would stay and become residents there. Civilians also gradually moved in and later reached a certain threshold which transformed the Hexi region from a cluster of military colonies into a full-fledged administrative region.⁶⁰ For example, according to the “Treatise on Geography” of *Hanshu*, a garrison station named Yuze 漁澤 in Dunhuang commandery was upgraded as Xiaogu 效穀 (literally, efficient in crop production) county in 105BCE as a result of its flourishing agriculture and,

⁵⁸ *SJ*, 110: 2911.

⁵⁹ *HS*, 24B: 1173.

⁶⁰ On the structure and organization of the civil and military administrations of the Hexi region, see Loewe, *Records of Han Administration vol. 1*; Shao Taixin 邵台新, *Handai Hexi sijun de tuozhan* 漢代河西四郡的拓展 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1988), 103-177; Wang, *Gansu tongshi: Qin Han juan*, 116-149.

needless to say, a large farming population.⁶¹ Although the dates of establishment of the four Hexi commanderies are not exact, as the previous chapter noted, the fact that at least three commanderies were established between 121BCE, the year of the acquisition of the region, and 91BCE, the last possible year that Dunhuang commandery was set up, reveals that local population must have reached certain amount and necessitated setting up new commanderies. As the Hexi region was originally not a place commonly inhabited by the Han people, the sudden and drastic increase of the Han population must be the result of state-sanctioned migration. The *Hanshu* clearly states that in the autumn of 111BCE, the Han state divided the commanderies of Wuwei and Jiuquan into two new commanderies of Zhangye and Dunhuang and had people settle in.⁶² When the Former Han established Jincheng commandery on the former Qiang territory in 81BCE, it went without saying that it was the Han settlers who constituted the mainstay of the registered population. From a recently excavated source, we know that in 28BCE Dunhuang commandery sent officers to commanderies of Donghai 東海 and Taishan 泰山, which were located in the east, to lead the homeless roaming people there to the northwestern frontier.⁶³

⁶¹ *HS*, 28B: 1614-1615.

⁶² *HS*, 6: 189.

⁶³ Hu Pingsheng 胡平生 and Zhang Defang 張德芳, *Dunhuang Xuanquan Hanjian shicui* 敦煌懸泉漢簡釋粹 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001), 44.

The Former Han not only moved refugees and deployed soldiers to the northwest, it also exiled criminals to the northwest. A notorious example was that Emperor Wu exiled a large number of offenders who were implicated in the infamous witchcraft hunting to Dunhuang in 91BCE.⁶⁴ Various examples of discharged officials and their families being exiled to the northwest can also be found in the historical records.⁶⁵

According to the estimation of a Chinese historical geographer, around 1.5 million people had migrated to the northwest by the end of the Former Han dynasty.⁶⁶ Based on the population census of Liang province which recorded in the “Treatise on Geography” of *Hanshu*, migrants made up nearly all of the registered population of the commanderies of Dunhuang, Jiuquan, Zhangye, Wuwei, and Jincheng, half of Beidi, and a sizable portion of Longxi, Tianshu, and Anding.⁶⁷ Of course, besides the Han settlers from various parts of the empire who constituted the mainstay of the registered population, there were also countless autochthonous peoples and other alien peoples whom were captured and settled by the empire, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Because of the limitations of the extant sources, it is hardly possible to go into details about the lives of the northwestern settlers. However, thanks to the discovery of a Later

⁶⁴ *HS*, 66: 2282.

⁶⁵ Examples in *HS*, 66: 2898, 75: 3193-3194, 77: 3261, and 83: 3396.

⁶⁶ Ge, *Zhongguo renkoushi*, v.1, 529.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*; Ge, *Zhongguo yimin shi*, vol. 1, 153-154.

Han stele in 1943, we now have a telling case of the history of migration of an elite family in Liang province, which might shed some light on our understanding of the migration and development of northwestern elites and even common settlers.

The stele dates to 180CE and was dedicated to Zhao Kuan 趙寬 (d. 152CE), who was a local notable⁶⁸ of Haomen 浩亶 county in Jincheng commandery of Later Han and a fifth-generation-grandson of the famous Former Han general Zhao Chongguo. According to the inscription on the stele, which traces the family history of the Zhaos, Zhao Zhongkuang 趙仲況, the great-grandfather of Zhao Chongguo, was the Superintendent of the Privy Treasury (*Shaofu* 少府) sometime in the reigns of Emperor Wen and Jing; his son Sheng 聖 was an Advisory Counselor (*Jianyi Dafu* 諫議大夫). Sheng had two sons: the elder of whom was a magistrate of a county and the younger was a palace attendant and also the father of Chongguo. The Zhaos, however, suffered a setback as Chongguo's father committed a serious offense in the palace and the family was exiled to Shanggui county in Longxi commandery.⁶⁹ That was the beginning of the Zhaos as inhabitants of the northwest. Chongguo was enlisted in the local cavalry in his

⁶⁸ He was appointed by the local government as “Thrice Venerable” (*Sanlao* 三老) whose duties were to serve as intermediary and facilitator between local authorities and common people and as consultant for local officials.

⁶⁹ The inscription of the “Stele for Zhao Kuan” can be found in Gao Wen 高文, *Hanbei jishi* 漢碑集釋 (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 1985), 432-435; Nagata Hidemasa 永田英正 ed., *Kandai sekkoku shūsei* 漢代石刻集成 (Kyoto: Dohosha, 1994), v.1: 225-229 and v.2: 226-227.

early age and later recruited to the royal guard because he was a *Liujun liangjiazi*. Since Chongguo attained a highly prestigious position in his entire career, his family grew strong and most of his offspring enjoyed successful official career.⁷⁰ Some of them might move out from Liang province for postings in other sectors of the empire, nevertheless, the main branch of the family remained in the northwest. According to his biography of *Hanshu*, probably as a result of military campaign against the Qiang, Chongguo moved to Lingju county in Jincheng commandery, which was set up on the former Qiang domains.⁷¹ It was an example of migration as a measure accompanied territorial expansion and consolidation. However, the stele gives no indication of this migration. On the other hand, the stele states that the protagonist Zhao Kuan moved from Shanggui to Poqiang 破羌 county in Jincheng when he assumed the office of Deputy Major of the Colonel Protector of the Qiang (*Hu Qiang Xiaowei Jia Sima* 護羌校尉假司馬) in the Later Han times. One possible explanation for the two migrations would be that Chongguo moved to Lingju with the troops but left some of his family members in Shanggui; Kuan grew up in the family remaining in Shanggui and only moved to Poqiang for his new posting. Later, Zhao Kuan engaged in a battle against the Qiang, in which the

⁷⁰ The inscription listed the official titles of Chongguo's descendents, but for the purpose of simplicity, I skipped them in the above analysis. See Gao, *Hanbei jishi*, 433; Nagata, *Kandai sekkoku shūsei*, v.1: 225-229 and v.2: 226-227.

⁷¹ *HS*, 69: 2971.

imperial army was defeated and Kuan's four sons were all killed. In the ensuing evacuation, Kuan fled from Liang province with the refugees to the erstwhile Former Han metropolitan area. Several years later, he moved back to Poqiang, then again to Haomen county, where the stele was excavated.⁷²

The history of the Zhao family paints a vivid picture of the experience of some settlers in the northwestern borderlands. For various reasons, the settlers, mostly unwillingly, moved from their native places to the northwest; some of them would settle down but others might need to move again when the imperial power proceeded to further northwest. On the other hand, natural disasters and war would become push factors forcing settlers to move out of the northwest. The Qiang wars in the Later Han times especially triggered waves of outward migration in the northwest, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Like the Zhao family, some northwestern elites in the Later Han also benefited from their ancestors who moved to the northwest during the Former Han times and accumulated their wealth and influence in the region. The aforementioned Liang Tong was a good example of those who greatly benefited from their family background and

⁷² Gao, *Hanbei jishi*, 433; Nagata, *Kandai sekkoku shūsei*, v.1: 225-229 and v.2: 226-227.

thus attained official positions in Liang province and even the Later Han imperial court. According to the historical records, for some reasons, Liang Tong's great grandfather moved from Hedong commandery in the east to Beidi commandery in the northwest. Later, as the Liang family had accumulated a great fortune, they were moved by the Former Han government to the metropolitan area as a means to curb strong local magnates. Not until the last years of the Former Han did the Liangs return to the northwest and settle in Anding commandery.⁷³ With the great fortune and possibly accompanying influence, the Liangs became local leaders. As a result, Liang Tong easily assumed power in the region during the civil war and was highly esteemed by Emperor Guangwu of the Later Han after his surrender.⁷⁴

The early Later Han rulers, on one hand, relied upon local magnates like Liang Tong to help restore order in the northwest in the aftermath of the civil war; on the other hand, they continued the policy of sanctioned migration as a measure to rehabilitate the region. The southern sector of Liang province was especially devastated during the war and many people were dislocated, as the *Hou Hanshu* says, "Although Longxi was pacified,

⁷³ *HHS*, 34: 1165.

⁷⁴ Another Later Han stele named the "Stele for Cao Quan" 曹全碑 (Cao Quan Bei; produced in 185CE) traces the protagonist Cao Quan's family history, saying that the Caos were moved to the northwestern commanderies such as Anding, Wudu, Longxi, and Dunhuang as a result of the expansion under Emperor Wu of the Former Han, and the Caos became local magnates in those commanderies. See Gao, *Hanbei jishi*, 472-476; Nagata, *Kandai sekkoku shūsei*, v.1: 252-259 and v.2: 246-247. For English translation and analysis of the inscription of this stele, see Ebrey, "Later Han Stone Inscriptions," 339-353.

people were starving and many of them were roaming.”⁷⁵ 隴西雖平，而人飢，流者相望。 Besides providing relief to the roaming population, the Later Han state also moved those who fled the war back to their home towns. For example, Emperor Guangwu once ordered the Grand Administrator of Wuwei commandery to send 3,000 refugees in his jurisdiction back to Jincheng commandery.⁷⁶ Moreover, the emperor issued an edict to emancipate those who were forced to be slaves in Liang province as a means to increase the taxable population of the region.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, in order to strengthen the defensive efforts of the northwestern frontier zone, the Later Han resumed farming colonies in the northwest, settling soldiers, commoners, amnestied convicts, surrendered Qiang people, and their families there. Especially from the middle period of the dynasty on, when the northwest was beset by the intermittent Qiang revolts, commoners were recruited to serve in garrisons in the region. Furthermore, the state frequently commuted death sentence into exile and sent convicts to the frontiers with their families. According to the records in *Hou Hanshu*, examples can be seen in the following years (all in CE): 73, 74, 82, 84, 87, 96, 124, 126, 130, 144, 147, 150, 153, and 154. The practice lasted until the final years

⁷⁵ *HHS*, 15: 588.

⁷⁶ *HHS*, 24: 836. In 50CE, Emperor Guangwu issued another edict ordering all those who fled to the interior returned to the frontiers, see *HHS*, 1B: 78.

⁷⁷ *HHS*, 1B: 64. For slaves in the Han period, see C. Martin Wilbur, *Slavery in China during the Former Han Dynasty 206 B.C.-A.D. 25* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1943); Ch'ü, *Han Social Structure*, 135-159.

when the Later Han lost control of the northwest.⁷⁸ Needless to say, the use or threat of violence played a key role in a region keeping criminals, whether in the way that the convicts against each other or the authorities imposed order or discipline on them.⁷⁹ This would no doubt contribute to the prevalence of martial spirit in the region.

Compared to the Former Han, sending convicts to the northwest became a routine practice throughout the Later Han. Liang province was in general a land of exile, Dunhuang commandery was in particular infamous for being a destination for amnestied convicts. It might partly explain why Zhang Huan was so desperate to move out from Dunhuang. Certainly, there were deeper reasons, which will be the subject of the next section.

PERIPHERALIZATION OF THE NORTHWESTERN BORDERLANDS

Despite of his fame in the northwest, Zhang Huan seems uncomfortable being a northwesterner. Was it Dunhuang commandery's bad reputation of hosting amnestied convicts that aroused his dislike? It was possible, but not completely. If Zhang Huan merely detested the commandery, he could have requested to move to another part of

⁷⁸ *HHS*, 2: 121, 122; 3: 143, 147, 156, 157, 158; 4: 182; 5: 240; 6: 253, 257, 276; 7:291, 296, 298, 300.

⁷⁹ Julius R. Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 73-116.

Liang province but not necessarily the interior of the empire. Also, during the Qin and Former Han dynasties, the northwest had long been a region for settling convicts, cashiered officials, refugees, paupers, and so forth, but for many settlers the region provided opportunities to start new life, the military elites were especially proud of being the *Liu jun liang jia zi*, which enabled them to set up social ladder. Elite families like the Zhaos mentioned in the preceding section even took the initiative of moving to new commanderies as a means to serve the imperial project. The contrast between Zhang Huan and the Former Han elites in fact reflects that something about the importance of the northwest vis-à-vis the empire and the status and self-perception of its elites changed between the two Han dynasties. Furthermore, the Later Han prohibition of transferring one's registered residence from frontiers to the interior implied that there were always frontier inhabitants who wanted to move inward and the state had to use legislative means to prevent it. The prohibition itself was not only a preventive measure but also a sign of restriction and discrimination against the frontiersmen.

In the whole course of Qin-Han history, as noted in the previous chapter, the northwest was a periphery of the empire in the geographic sense. Nevertheless, the region was not necessarily always peripheral to imperial politics. In the Former Han, especially

during the reigns of emperors Wu and Xuan, the northwest was a particular target of imperial concern and its military elites reached the apogee of their prestige. It was not a periphery but a core in terms of politics and military. However, the northwest underwent a gradual change of political status from the Former Han to the Later Han, in which the confidence, glory, prestige, and privilege of the northwestern military elites were undermined and the resources injected into the region by the imperial state were deprived. The confidence of the northwestern military elites in the Former Han times was rooted in the honor by the imperial state for their military service, which was a mark of their success and value. The sense of honor was essential for the military elites, as “[h]onor embraces the value one places on oneself, but even more importantly it also represents the esteem in which society holds one.”⁸⁰ Remembering that when the famous Li family of Longxi commandery was dishonored after Li Ling’s surrender to the Xiongnu, all the military men of the commandery were ashamed of their relationship with the Li family.⁸¹ It may give us a clue as to how the northwestern military elites regarded their honor.

While the Later Han northwestern military elites still upheld the tradition of pursuing honor, however, the chance of receiving honor was remote to them now. For quite a

⁸⁰ Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe 1500-1800*, 75.

⁸¹ *SJ*, 109: 2878.

number of them, the loss of honor not only meant that their chance of upward social mobility was diminishing but also implied that their political and social status was tarnished. As this section will show, the lackluster role of the northwest and the low self-esteem of its military elites during the Later Han were caused by the change of contemporary political and social perception towards the region and its people. As the Later Han dynasty progressed, the northwest became not only a geographical periphery but also a political one. In what follows, I shall trace the track of change and factors contributed to the full-fledged “peripheralization” of Liang province in the Later Han times, in which three interrelated aspects will be under examination, namely the declining significance of Liang province as an imperial defense priority; the impact of the eastward shift of political center; and the ascendancy of scholar-officials.

The declining significance of Liang province as an imperial defense priority

The relative lowering of political and social status of the Later Han northwestern military elites was a consequence of the region’s relative decline in importance in the new strategic situation facing the empire. Although both Han dynasties were born on battlefield, their perceptions of strategic circumstances were very different. A brief comparison between the *zeitgeist* of the two Han dynasties will lay a background for

understanding the change of strategic concerns in the Later Han, which consequently affected the significance of the northwest in the imperial security.

The Former Han, which was built on the debris of the short-lived Qin—the first empire on the Chinese landmass, was in essence a nascent empire continuing its predecessor’s experiment in empire-building. This backdrop gave opportunities for various kinds of political philosophy and theory to be put into practice and for people from all walks of life to play a role on the political stage. The general ethos of the epoch was adventurous, aggressive, creative, and vigorous. The Later Han, on the other hand, rooted its legitimacy in the self-proclaimed “restoration” of the Han dynasty and was an empire that fashioned itself on the model of the “mature” Former Han. The political, social, and cultural circumstances of the later Former Han and Wang Mang’s Xin dynasties therefore cast a huge shadow over the Later Han and resulted in dogmatism in political culture and restricted opportunities for certain social groups’ advancement in the political arena. The general posture of the Later Han was conservative, defensive, retrenching, and restrained.⁸²

⁸² Qian Mu has made a lucid comparison between the strengths of the two Han dynasties, see his *Guoshi dagang* 國史大綱 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1994), 215-224. Sophia-Karin Psarras, “The Political Climate of the Later Han,” *Journal of Asian History* 27.1 (1993): 16-29 and Brown, *The Politics of Mourning in Early China*, 61-63 also compare the politics and society of the two Han dynasties.

Different attitudes of political elites of the two Han dynasties towards the decadence of their empires were also compelling. When the Former Han were declining in the last decades of the first century BCE, the political elites were still active and ambitious to try to overcome the decline by showing dogged determination and persistence in the attempts of various reforms, and even hailing and supporting Wang Mang as a means of reorienting the world. On the contrary, when the Later Han showed the signs of decadence, its political elites were rather pessimistic about the future of the empire and some of them even gave up any hope of saving the existing world.⁸³ Though some of the outspoken Later Han literati, particularly the juniors, did sacrifice themselves in fierce factional struggle in the vain hope that their actions could refresh the imperial court,⁸⁴ most political elites, especially those in power, chose to stay aside and seize chances to accumulate their own resources while welcoming the final breakdown of the empire.⁸⁵ Such a contrast may partly explain why the Later Han was able to establish itself after the Former Han but no solid empire could be rebuilt after the collapse of the Later Han.

The reflection of different *zeitgeist* on the imperial grand strategy was the different

⁸³ For some Later Han intellectuals' sense of decline, see Mark Laurent Asselin, *A Significant Season: Cai Yong (ca. 133-192) and His Contemporaries* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2010), 1-38; Asselin suggests that 159CE "might well be regarded as the beginning of the end of Han rule," see p.1 of his book.

⁸⁴ This refers to the two Great Proscriptions in 166 and 169CE, see de Crespigny, "Political Protest in Imperial China," 1-36 and Psarras, "The Political Climate of the Later Han," 16-29.

⁸⁵ Hsu, "The Roles of the Literati and of Regionalism in the Fall of the Han dynasty," 176-195; de Crespigny, "Provincial Gentry and the End of Later Han," 533-558.

perceptions of strategic circumstances and hence different strategic settings. As a young empire in its developing stage during the reign of Emperor, the Former Han adopted an expansionist strategy. The acquisition and consolidation of the new northwestern territories was a product during the most intense phase of empire-building. For two main reasons, the Former Han paid serious attention to and put great effort in constructing and consolidating its rule over the northwestern region.

Firstly, since the capital of the Former Han was located in Guanzhong, the northwestern region which next to it therefore played a crucial role in defending the western flank of the metropolitan region. However, when the Later Han set its capital in Luoyang, the political center henceforth shifted from the western to the eastern sector of the empire. It went without saying that the importance of the northwest as a western flank of the empire diminished.

Secondly, the importance of Liang province in the imperial defense priority was directly linked to the empire's engagement in Inner Asia. In order to deepen the defense of the western flank of the empire, to project the imperial power into the Western Regions, and to keep the connection with the Western Regions smooth and secure, particularly in the contest with the Xiongnu for the hegemony over the Inner Asian states, Liang

province was crucial to the imperial strategic blueprint. Well before the conquest of the Hexi Corridor, as noted in the preceding chapter, the Former Han had already tried to make an alliance with the Yuezhi and established diplomatic relations with other Inner Asian states. After acquiring the Hexi Corridor from the Xiongnu, the Former Han obtained an easier access to the Western Regions and hence an opportunity to further undermines the Xiongnu's power base in the region. The two great powers thus engaged in a fierce tug of war in the region. The Former Han rulers such as emperors Wu and Xuan, and even the usurper Wang Mang, were willing to engage in battles with the Xiongnu or other Inner Asian states for the sake of retaining Han influence and power in the region. Liang province therefore acted as a crucial artery and depot of material supply to the expeditions; its military elites and even commoners, undoubtedly, played active roles in military operations; soldiers and settlers in Liang province were further deployed in the colonial spots in the Western Regions as pioneers and colonists. When the imperial government emphasized the value of the Western Regions, Liang province would naturally deserve serious attention.

During the Later Han, as a direct result of the change of strategic value of the Western Regions in the eyes of the Later Han policy makers, the strategic importance of Liang

province changed. Compared with their Former Han predecessors' enthusiasm for engaging in the Western Regions, the Later Han rulers adopted a carefully-restrained attitude from the very beginning and would not allow themselves to become deeply involved in the region; any proponent of active interference in the region would usually meet with a lukewarm response. The Later Han's retrenchment in the Western Regions consequently undermined the role of Liang province as a bridgehead or springboard for advancing into Inner Asia and reduced the resources that the state would be willing to invest in the northwest.

The "Tradition of the Western Regions" (*Xiyu chuan* 西域傳) of *Hou Hanshu* provides us chronological account of diplomatic relations between the Later Han and the Western Regions.⁸⁶ Based on this text, with complementary sources, a vivid picture of the Later Han's retrenchment policy towards the region can thus be painted.

Although the Former Han had never completely wiped out the Xiongnu's influence in the Western Regions, a fragile balance between the two powers was maintained over the region till the end of the dynasty.⁸⁷ Those Inner Asian states located in between generally

⁸⁶ *HHS*, 88: 2909-2934. A recently published book-length study and annotated English-language translation of this text is Hill, *Through the Jade Gate to Rome*. On the relations between the Western Regions and the Later Han, see Rafe de Crespigny, "Some Notes on the Western Regions in Later Han," *Journal of Asian History* 40:1 (2006): 1-30.

⁸⁷ It is beyond the scope of this study to account all of the activities of the Former Han as well as the Xin dynasties in the Western Regions. For modern studies on this topic, see the introduction written by Michael

adopted an opportunistic approach to serve their own interests. During Wang Mang's Xin dynasty, bilateral relations between the Chinese regime and the Western Regions were damaged by Wang's foreign policy and official relations were finally cut off.⁸⁸ The Xiongnu took advantage and imposed their control over the region. In 45CE, two decades after the establishment of the Later Han, some states in the Western Regions, overburdened by the Xiongnu economic exploitation, sent delegates to ask Emperor Guangwu to reinstate the Protector General of the Western Regions as a means to offset the Xiongnu influence in the region. However, the emperor set internal recovery as his top priority and refrained from engaging in adventures abroad.⁸⁹ The emperor sent the delegates back and took no further action, which meant that he was unwilling to return to the Western Regions. Consequently, the area was left at the mercy of the Xiongnu and was open to competition among some ambitious local states. As the area could no longer serve as a buffer between the Xiongnu and the Han, the Hexi region was exposed to frequent raids by the Xiongnu and their Inner Asian satellite states. During the reign of Emperor Ming (明) (r. 58-75CE), it was reported that the towns of the Hexi region had to

Loewe in Hulsewé, *China in Inner Asia*; Yü, "Han Foreign Relations," 405-422.

⁸⁸ *HS*, 99B: 4133.

⁸⁹ *HHS*, 1B: 73 and 88: 2909. For Emperor Guangwu's attitude towards the Western Regions, see Bielenstein, "The Restoration of the Han Dynasty: volume III," 131-134; Bielenstein also has an overview of Guangwu's foreign policies, especially towards the north, in his *Emperor Kuang-wu, 25-57, and the Northern Barbarians* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1956).

shut their gates even in daytime to avert havoc.⁹⁰

It was not until 73CE when it launched an expedition against the Northern Xiongnu⁹¹ that the Later Han reopened official relations with the Western Regions as an auxiliary means for weakening the northern foe.⁹² The Protector General was reinstated. It was but a temporary success. Two years later, when Emperor Ming died, the anti-Han forces of the Western Regions turned the table and killed the Protector General and his men; other Han troops in the region were besieged. Although a rescuing force from Jiuquan commandery defeated the enemy in the Western Regions, the newly-enthroned Emperor Zhang 章 (r. 76-88CE) still decided to abandon the region to save resources. Only a major named Ban Chao 班超 (32-102CE) voluntarily stayed in the region with his handful followers; Ban would spend the following thirty years upholding the Han influence over some of the states.⁹³ The pinnacle of the Later Han's enterprise in the Western Regions was under Emperor He 和 (r. 89-105CE), when the Han soundly

⁹⁰ *HHS*, 88: 2909.

⁹¹ During the reign of Emperor Guangwu, concomitantly, the Xiongnu broke out fierce struggle over leadership. As a result, the Xiongnu was split into two halves, the Southern Chanyu allied with the Later Han and moved in to the northern frontier, whereas the Northern Chanyu remained in the steppe and was in conflict with his southern counterpart and the Later Han. For the relevant historical records, see *HHS*, 89: 2940-2948. For modern scholarship on the division of the Xiongnu, see Yü, "Han Foreign Relations," 398-405; de Crespigny, *Northern Frontier*, 219-275; Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu: A Reexamination of Cultural and Political Relations (II)," 49-64.

⁹² *HHS*, 88: 2909.

⁹³ *HHS*, 47: 1571-1582.

defeated the Northern Xiongnu and Ban Chao was appointed Protector General.⁹⁴

Nevertheless, the Later Han never established stable control over the Western Regions. Anti-Han forces rose up again shortly after the retirement of Ban Chao and the death of Emperor He. The Later Han once again left the region. In 119CE, the Grand Administrator of Dunhuang commandery put forward a proposal of recapturing the Western Regions but was rejected by the imperial court. As the Northern Xiongnu and its Inner Asian satellite states frequently invaded the Hexi region, some officials even discussed the possibility of shutting the Yumen 玉門 and Yang 陽 passes at the westernmost frontier to prevent invasion,⁹⁵ which implied the abandonment of the Western Regions. In 123CE, another Grand Administrator of Dunhuang suggested a plan of dealing with the situation in the Western Regions and was supported by the Imperial Secretariat Chen Zhong 陳忠 (d. 125). Chen then submitted a memorial in which he traces the history of Han's involvement in the Western Regions and reminds the ruler that the establishment of the Hexi commanderies by Emperor Wu was to disrupt the connection between the Xiongnu and the Qiang and to further Han's influence on the Western Regions in order to cut off the "right arm" of the Xiongnu. The effort that

⁹⁴ *HHS*, 88: 2909-2910.

⁹⁵ *HHS*, 88: 2911.

ancestors spent on the Western Regions should be respected and not be given up easily.⁹⁶ Chen warns that if the Xiongnu controlled the Western Regions, it would be easy for them to form alliance with the Qiang and then the Hexi Corridor would be subjected to the united attack from both sides. The cost of defending the Hexi commanderies would be very high if without the Western Regions as a cover.⁹⁷ In short, the Hexi Corridor and the Western Regions should be treated as an integral whole in the defense agenda. The chain effect of losing the Western Regions described by Chen Zhong finally persuaded the emperor to take action. Ban Yong 班勇 (fl. 120sCE), Ban Chao's son, was sent to the Western Regions but with only five hundred convicts. Although he worked very hard, Ban Yong was unable to fully restore Later Han's influence over the region.⁹⁸ Neither his tenure nor his achievement lasted long. From 130sCE on, the authority of Later Han over the region diminished with time, the imperial state was neither willing nor able to make any commitment to the region; it could only let its presence in the region fade out.

The Later Han was not enthusiastic about getting involved in the Western Regions. In order to save resources for rehabilitating his new regime, Emperor Guangwu refused to restore the Han presence in the region; the comeback made under Emperor Ming was

⁹⁶ *HHS*, 88: 2911-2912. The complete translation of Chen Zhong's memorial can be seen in Hill, *Through the Jade Gate to Rome*, 8-11.

⁹⁷ *HHS*, 88: 2912.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*; *HHS*, 47: 1587-1590.

merely a by-product of the expedition against the Xiongnu;⁹⁹ Emperor Zhang quickly resorted to retrenchment policy when facing difficulty in the region. Ban Chao's heroic venture, though it earned him everlasting fame in Chinese history, was in fact largely a self-motivated adventure and not a plan of the state. Needless to say, he did not have strong support from the state and his successor easily lost control of the region. Although Ban Yong was commissioned by the imperial court to the Western Regions, he had scant resources at his disposal; what he really depended upon was the fame of his father. The Later Han's disinterest in the Western Regions is also reflected by the fact that every time when crises emerged in the region, central officials generally inclined to avert troubles and suggested closing the frontier passes and abandoning the region.¹⁰⁰ Some Grand Administrators of northwestern commanderies such as Jiuquan and Dunhuang would champion the cause of retaking and protecting the Western Regions, which was crucial to the security of their territories, the central government seldom sympathized with their views. Courtiers like Chen Zhong, who supported the restorative campaign in the region, were rare. Obviously, the general attitude of the imperial court was to avoid spending on such a remote region. For the Later Han rulers, the costs of maintaining the Han presence

⁹⁹ de Crespigny, "Some Notes on the Western Regions in Later Han," 23.

¹⁰⁰ de Crespigny, "Some Notes on the Western Regions in Later Han," 24-25.

in the Western Regions largely outweighed any benefit or revenue that could be derived from controlling the region.

The Later Han's reluctance to get involved in the Western Regions revealed that the region no longer held the same strategic value to the Later Han as it did to the Former Han. As Rafe de Crespigny points out that "the Western Regions presented the imperial regime of Later Han with potential for some strategic advantage against the Xiongnu, and it was naturally desirable that trade across central Asia should be maintained. The territory, however, was not considered critically important, and the great days of ambition had passed."¹⁰¹ I agree with de Crespigny and would take one step further to ask why the Western Regions became less important to the Later Han and why the empire lost its ambition in the region. A simple explanation would be that due to their internal problems and the expeditions launched by the coalition forces of the Later Han and the Southern Xiongnu in 73CE and 88CE, the Northern Xiongnu had been greatly weakened and was no longer a threat to the Later Han; the Western Regions as well as the northwestern frontier zone thus lost their strategic positions in the Han-Xiongnu contest. Meanwhile, the Later Han had to shift its attention and resource to deal with the Southern Xiongnu

¹⁰¹ de Crespigny, "Some Notes on the Western Regions in Later Han," 6.

along the northern frontier and the newly emerging Xianbei in the northeast. In other words, the Later Han had to deal with threats from elsewhere. However, it only partially answered my questions but did not explain why the Later Han staunchly continued retrenchment policy when facing challenges in the Western Regions and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, even chose to withdraw from Liang province when facing serious threats from the Qiang. Obviously, the Later Han did not treat the threats from the west as seriously as those from the east or did not adopt the same policy to deal with threats from different regions. In fact, it all depended on what was defined as a threat, how serious and urgent was it being identified, and what was accepted as an appropriate way to deal with it. The logic lay behind was the Later Han policy makers' perception of threat, recognition of strategic circumstances, and setting of strategic priority, which were all determined by the political and cultural contexts they encountered. These will be the subjects of the following analysis.

The eastward shift of political center

Different attitudes toward the west not only show the different regional concerns between the two Han dynasties but also reveal their respective visions of empire. As mentioned before, the triumph of the Qin dynasty made Guanzhong the political center of the new

empire. Such a prestigious position of Guanzhong was intact and even strengthened in the Former Han dynasty as the geographical and strategic advantages of the region made the Former Han founding emperor finally decide to build the imperial capital in the region;¹⁰² the founders of the Former Han also shifted their regional concerns and interests from east to west.¹⁰³ Accordingly, the Former Han inherited the Qin pattern of the West overwhelming the East, which consequently deepened the divergence between Guanzhong and Guandong.¹⁰⁴

As the foundation on which the Former Han exercise its rule over the empire, Guanzhong became a magnet for aspirants to official careers, who tried any means to access the area and to seek imperial favors or official advancement. Even well established officials wanted to be included in the area as a mark of prestigious position. Here is a vivid example: in 114BCE, the General of Towered Warship (*Louchuan Jiangjun* 樓船將軍) Yang Pu 楊僕 (fl. 120s-100sBCE), who had achieved successful military exploits, was ashamed of being a resident outside Guanzhong (*Guanwai min* 關外民) and thus

¹⁰² *SJ*, 55: 2043-2044, 99: 2715-2717.

¹⁰³ Tse, “Lun Han Gaodi yizhao de beijing dongluan,” 31-58.

¹⁰⁴ The recently released “Ordinances of the Fords and Passes” (津關令) of the “Statutes of the Second Year” (二年律令) unearthed from the Han tomb at Zhangjiashan 張家山 states the discriminatory policies between Guanzhong and Guandong and the limitations imposed on travelling between the two regions, see Zhangjiashan ersiqi hao Hanmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 張家山二四七號漢墓竹簡整理小組, *Zhangjiashan Hanmu zhujian (ersiqi hao mu) : shiwen xiudingben* 張家山漢墓竹簡(二四七號墓)：釋文修訂本 (Beijing : Wenwu chubanshe, 2006), 83-88.

persuaded Emperor Wu to move the boundary of the Hangu Pass, which was the dividing line between the west and the east, slightly eastward, so that the area of Guanzhong would expand and include Yang's home town.¹⁰⁵ Emperor Wu did move the Pass eastward. Certainly, the movement should not be a result of satisfying a general's desire but was Emperor Wu's strategic consideration of redrawing the defense line of Guanzhong.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the anecdote tells us that the Han idea of being a resident of Guanzhong promised prestige and higher social status. It is easy to understand as even today, aspirants to prosperous official careers would like to move to the political center.

Serving as the western flank of Guanzhong, the northwest was also regarded as part of the greater Guanzhong, as noted in the previous chapter, and had a long history of under direct supervision and governance of the imperial state. While the Former Han dynasty divided the eastern part of the empire into large numbers of fief-states with various sizes, the whole Guanzhong region, including the metropolitan area and the northwest as its backyard, was never granted as fiefs to princes and marquis.¹⁰⁷ This policy was strictly followed in the whole course of the Former Han. The Later Han also

¹⁰⁵ *HS*, 6: 183.

¹⁰⁶ Xin, "Liang Han Zhouzhi Xinkao," 114-116.

¹⁰⁷ Goi, "Chūgoku kodai teikoku no ichi seikaku," 51-70.

adhered closely to the policy, although its capital was in the east.¹⁰⁸ During its last years when facing widespread revolts, the Later Han appointed several senior officials as Regional Commissioner (*Zhou mu* 州牧, literally Provincial Shepherd), the highest executive and military official of a province and was given plenary authority in his jurisdiction; however, Guanzhong, including Liang province, was not on the list and still, at least nominally, under the direct central control.

Needless to say, when the political and military core of the empire was in Guanzhong, the northwest not only enjoyed the geographical convenience to access the imperial center but also played an important role in protecting the western flank of the metropolitan area and serving for further northwestward expansion. The northwestern military elites, particularly those who were the *Liu jun liang ji zi*, were settled advantageously in the greater Guanzhong region, which enabled them to easily engage in the imperial politics and share the glory of being “people within the pass.”

While Guanzhong played the role of political and military center during the Qin-Former Han period, Guandong/Shandong served as the key economic and cultural region. With its fertile soil, dense population and other natural advantages, Guandong had

¹⁰⁸ Kojima, *Kandai kokka tōchi no kōzō to tenkai*, 323-332.

enjoyed economic prosperity centuries before the founding of the Qin-Han empire, and its economic development, particularly in terms of commerce, had already outpaced the Guanzhong region.¹⁰⁹ Its economic importance was never underrated by the Qin-Han imperial state. One of the reasons of the Qin and Former Han imperial states forcibly moved substantial number of wealthy families from the east to Guanzhong was to break up the natural concentrations of economic power in the east. As the Former Han dynasty progressed, the economic growth of Guandong greatly benefited from the peace and prosperity brought by the unified empire, it became the central region of finance, commerce, and manufacturing of the empire. The Former Han set up offices of manufacturing in eight commanderies: Henei 河內, Henan 河南, Yingchuan 潁川, Nanyang 南陽, Taishan, Jinan 濟南, Guanghan 廣漢, and Shu.¹¹⁰ The first six were all in Guandong, and the remaining two in Yi province of the southwest.¹¹¹ There were also three textile manufacturing offices in Qi 齊 commandery and others in Chenliu 陳留 commandery, all located in Guandong.¹¹² Agricultural production of Guandong was also flourishing as the region was known as the breadbasket of the empire and provided

¹⁰⁹ For the economic abundance of the Shandong area in early China, see the relevant discussion in Hsu, *Han Agriculture*, especially chapters 2, 4, and 6.

¹¹⁰ Hsu, *Han Agriculture*, 133.

¹¹¹ Yi province in the Han times largely corresponds to modern Sichuan province, where is famous for its affluence of natural resources since antiquity and was entitled the “heaven’s storehouse.” For Han people’s depiction of the economic prosperity of Yi province, see *HS*, 28B: 1645.

¹¹² Hsu, *Han Agriculture*, 133.

substantial amount of agricultural products to Guanzhong (the agrarian surpluses of the area were not enough to support the imperial court, government apparatus, and troops; besides, the submission of grains was a form of taxation).¹¹³ According to a memorial by an official in mid-50sBCE, a large amount of grain was shipped annually from Guandong to the metropolitan area and 60,000 labors were deployed for the task.¹¹⁴ The metropolitan area's reliance upon the grain supply from Guandong was so great that when an imperial advisor tried to persuade Emperor Yuan to move the capital to the east, one of his points was the guaranteed abundant storage of grains.¹¹⁵

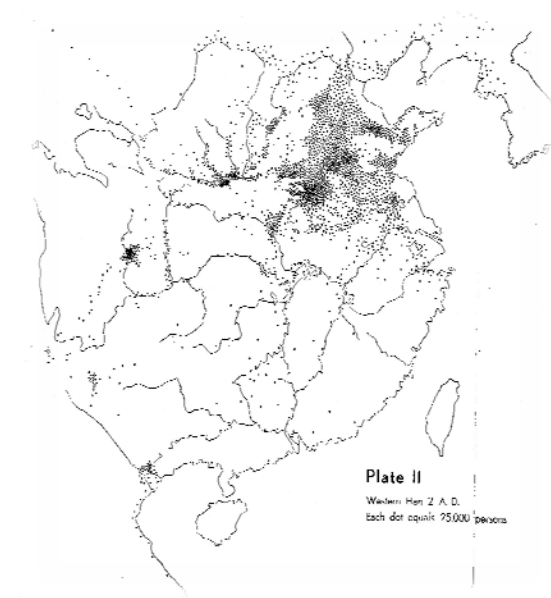
As a key economic region in an agrarian society which practiced intensive farming, Guandong needed large input of farming labor; at the same time, the flourishing development of commerce sector provided opportunities for making fortunes, all of these factors encouraged the concentration of population in the region. In fact, a great portion of the overall population was living in Guandong and the population density of the area was extremely high. Based on the data of population census recorded in the two Han dynastic histories, which have been cited in the last chapter, Hans Bielenstien drew two

¹¹³ For the recent research on the agricultural development in Qin-Han *Guanzhong* area, see Wang Yong 王勇, *Dong Zhou Qin Han Guanzhong nongye bianqian yanjiu* 東周秦漢關中農業變遷研究 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2004).

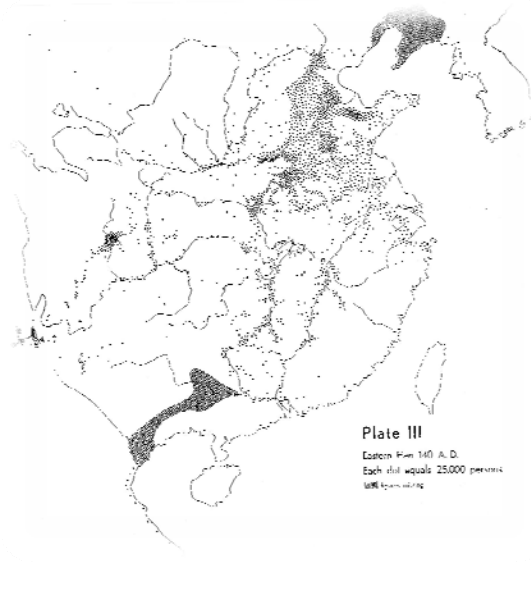
¹¹⁴ *HS*, 24A: 1141.

¹¹⁵ *HS*, 75: 3176.

maps to show the population distribution of the two Han dynasties as follows:¹¹⁶



Map 8: Population of the Former Han in 2 CE
(Each dot represents 25,000 persons)



Map 9: Population of the Later Han in 140 CE
(Each dot represents 25,000 persons; the grey area is where the population figure are missing)

Comparing the two maps, it is crystal clear that during the two Han dynasties a large proportion of the registered population clustered together in Guandong or the mid-eastern part of the empire. Even though the overall recorded population of the Later Han was less than that of the Former Han, the overwhelming concentration of population in the east still clearly shows on the map. In contrast, the population of Guanzhong area was much lower and distributed sparser. Only when the Former Han located its capital in the region

¹¹⁶ The two maps are adapted from Bielenstein, “The Census of China during the Period 2-742 A.D.”

did a relatively large population be found in the metropolitan area; when the capital was in the east during the Later Han, however, the population around the Former Han metropolitan area experienced a drastic drop. It evidently shows that the dense population in the Former Han metropolitan area was a product of political force which differed from the natural concentration in Guandong.

Guandong not only provided the economic underpinning for the Qin-Han empire but also played the role of cultural and intellectual center long before the imperial age. During the sixth to third century BCE, the era of “hundred schools of thoughts” called by modern historians and is remembered as the golden age in Chinese intellectual history, most, if not all, of the philosophers, scholars, and their schools originated and flourished in Guandong. The Qin state, although residing in the erstwhile Western Zhou domain, was despised by the eastern states for being cultural backward and barbarous.¹¹⁷ Even in the Qin-Former Han period the establishment of political core of a unitary empire in Guanzhong could not alter the leading role of Guandong in intellectual and academic development. As the Former Han dynasty progressed, the peace and stability of the empire further enhanced the intellectual prosperity of Guandong; at the same time, to

¹¹⁷ For the Warring States period derogatory remarks on the Qin and the modern assessment based on archaeological findings, see von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius*, 233-243.

meet the needs of civil governance, increasing number of eastern origins scholar-officials held government offices and finally constituted the mainstay of imperial bureaucracy by the last decades of the dynasty. The setting up of the Later Han capital in Luoyang located in Guandong, was in part a result of the consideration of being close to the main sources of scholar-officials and many local strong families; meanwhile, it also strengthened the dominant cultural position of the east.¹¹⁸ It was in such a situation that Guandong achieved an unchallengeable position in fashioning the political culture of Later Han, which will be mentioned under the next heading. For now, I would like to focus on the Later Han founders' decision of establishing capital in the east and its influence on their vision of empire.

Although the founders of the two Han dynasties both arose in the east, they had very different considerations on locating their capitals, which were related to their experience of regime-building and the strategic circumstances facing them.

The founding emperor of the Former Han and his core followers were initially roaming armed forces without strong local base; not until they entered Guanzhong area and won the local support did they have solid footing, which ensured their final victory in

¹¹⁸ For the leading cultural role of Guandong in the Later Han period, see Martin J. Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), chapter III.

the civil war after the fall of the Qin.¹¹⁹ Based on the support of Guanzhong, the Former Han actually repeated the Qin's conquest of the east and maintained the West over the East ruling pattern. Part of the political legitimacy of the Former Han was even based on the notion of succeeding to the Qin.¹²⁰ Also, Guanzhong could provide the strategic and geographic advantages which enabled the Former Han state to safeguard itself and project its power to the east.¹²¹ Needless to say, since the capital was located in Guanzhong, the northwest would be recognized as a region with key strategic value.

In contrast, the Later Han followed an entirely different trajectory of regime-building. Unlike their predecessors who were of plebian origins and generally less educated, the founding members of the Later Han were generally from better-off backgrounds. Emperor Guangwu, a distant imperial kinsman of the Former Han, was from a wealthy landlord family. He was well educated and a student of the Imperial Academy during Wang Mang's reign. As a response to the chaotic situation, Emperor Guangwu and his elder brother assembled their clan members and retainers and allied with other local

¹¹⁹ For the composition of the Former Han founders, see Li kaiyuan 李開元, *Handiguo de jianli yu Liu Bang jiduan : jungong shouyi jieceng yanjiu* 漢帝國的建立與劉邦集團：軍功受益階層研究 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2000), 119-179; Wang Aihe, "Creators of an Emperor: The Political Group Behind the Founding of the Han Empire", *Asia Major* 14.1 (2001): 19-50.

¹²⁰ Tian Yuqing 田餘慶, "Shu Zhang Chu: Guanyu wang Qin bi Chu wenti de tantao" 說張楚——關於「亡秦必楚」問題的探討, in idem, *Qin Han Wei Jin shi tanwei* 秦漢魏晉史探微 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 1-27; Li, *Handiguo de jianli yu Liu Bang jiduan*, 124-146; Tse, "Lun Han Gaodi yichao de beijing dongluan," 31-58.

¹²¹ *SJ*, 55: 2043-2044, 99: 2715-2717.

strong families to form their first troops. In the process of establishing regime, Emperor Gunagwu was greatly benefited from kinship networks and aided by various strong local families like his. After Emperor Guangwu died, his son Emperor Ming ordered the portraiture of twenty-eight generals who assisted his father in building the dynasty to be shown at the Cloud Terrace (Yuntai 雲臺) of the palace. They were well known as the “Twenty Eight Generals of the Cloud Terrace” (*Yuntai ershiba jiang* 雲臺二十八將)¹²² in Chinese history and folklore, which resembles King Arthur’s knights of round table. They were Deng Yu 鄧禹,¹²³ Ma Cheng 馬成,¹²⁴ Wu Han 吳漢,¹²⁵ Wang Liang 王梁,¹²⁶ Jia Fu 賈復,¹²⁷ Chen Jun 陳俊,¹²⁸ Geng Yan 耿弇,¹²⁹ Du Mao 杜茂,¹³⁰ Kou Xun 寇恂,¹³¹ Fu Jun 傅俊,¹³² Cen Peng 岑彭,¹³³ Jian Tan 堅鐔,¹³⁴ Feng Yi 馮異,¹³⁵ Wang Ba 王霸,¹³⁶ Zhu You 朱佑,¹³⁷ Ren Guang 任光,¹³⁸ Zhai Zun 祭遵,¹³⁹ Li Zhong

¹²² *HHS*, 22: 789-791.

¹²³ *HHS*, 16: 599-605.

¹²⁴ *HHS*, 22: 778-779.

¹²⁵ *HHS*, 18: 675-684.

¹²⁶ *HHS*, 12: 774-775.

¹²⁷ *HHS*, 17:664-667.

¹²⁸ *HHS*, 18: 689-691.

¹²⁹ *HHS*, 19: 703-713.

¹³⁰ *HHS*, 22: 776-778.

¹³¹ *HHS*, 16: 620-626.

¹³² *HHS*, 22: 782.

¹³³ *HHS*, 17: 653-662.

¹³⁴ *HHS*, 22: 783.

¹³⁵ *HHS*, 17: 639-652.

¹³⁶ *HHS*, 20: 734-737.

¹³⁷ *HHS*, 22: 769-771.

¹³⁸ *HHS*, 21: 751-752.

¹³⁹ *HHS*, 20: 738-742.

李忠,¹⁴⁰ Jing Dan 景丹,¹⁴¹ Wan Xiu 萬脩,¹⁴² Gai Yan 蓋延,¹⁴³ Pei Tong 邳彤,¹⁴⁴ Yao Qi 姚期,¹⁴⁵ Liu Zhi 劉植,¹⁴⁶ Geng Chun 耿純,¹⁴⁷ Zang Gong 臧宮,¹⁴⁸ Ma Wu 馬武,¹⁴⁹ and Liu Long 劉隆.¹⁵⁰ These 28 generals plus four other men, Wang Chang 王常,¹⁵¹ Li Tong 李通,¹⁵² Dou Rong,¹⁵³ and Zhuo Mao 卓茂¹⁵⁴ were regarded as the 32 meritorious officials of the founding of Later Han dynasty.¹⁵⁵

Of the thirty two men, most, if not all, of them were well educated.¹⁵⁶ To name only a few, Zhuo Mao was a famous scholar of his time; Deng Yu, Zhu You, and Jing Dan all studied at the Imperial Academy; Deng and Zhu were even classmates of Emperor Guangwu. In economic terms, many of them were members of well-off or powerful families like Emperor Guangwu, and had strong kinship networks and large landholdings

¹⁴⁰ *HHS*, 21: 754-756.

¹⁴¹ *HHS*, 22: 772-773.

¹⁴² *HHS*, 21:757.

¹⁴³ *HHS*, 18: 686-689.

¹⁴⁴ *HHS*, 21: 757-759.

¹⁴⁵ *HHS*, 20: 731-733.

¹⁴⁶ *HHS*, 21: 760.

¹⁴⁷ *HHS*, 21: 761-765.

¹⁴⁸ *HHS*, 18: 692-696.

¹⁴⁹ *HHS*, 22: 784-786.

¹⁵⁰ *HHS*, 22: 780-781.

¹⁵¹ *HHS*, 15: 578-581.

¹⁵² *HHS*, 15: 573-576.

¹⁵³ *HHS*, 23: 795-808.

¹⁵⁴ *HHS*, 25: 869-871.

¹⁵⁵ Besides these thirty two meritorious officials, there were still others who made great achievements on building the Later Han, such as Ma Yuan 馬援 and Lai Xi 來歙. Ma was one of the famous generals of the Later Han and was from Guanzhong. According to the official explanation, in order to avoid any suspicion of consort family intervening in court politics, Ma Yuan, who was the father-in-law of Emperor Guangwu and grandfather of Emperor Ming, was excluded from the list of Cloud Terrace meritorious generals. For a similar reason, Lai was absent from the list because he was a cousin of Emperor Guangwu.

¹⁵⁶ Zhao, *Nianershi zhaji xiaozheng*, 90-91.

with a certain number of retainers and tenants, which enabled them easily to gather their military forces in the civil war. Many of them had official background when they joined Emperor Guangwu; they were either from official families or (senior or junior) local officials themselves.¹⁵⁷ Most importantly, except for one case, all the above meritorious officials were deeply rooted in Guandong area and would prefer to stay close to their power bases. The only exception was Dou Rong, as mentioned before, who was from an official family in the Former Han metropolitan area which enjoyed great influence in the Hexi Corridor due to taking successive postings in the region. With such a background, Dou became the supreme leader of the Hexi Corridor during the civil war. What made him become a meritorious official of the founding of the Later Han dynasty was his surrender to Emperor Guangwu. The Later Han capital had already been set at Luoyang before Dou's surrender. Even when there were voices asking the imperial court to move back to the Former Han capital Chang'an, Dou did not dare to express his opinion. With his recent history of being a warlord, Dou was very cautious about committing himself to anything after entering the Later Han court. In fact, he was honored by the emperor but was not given any real power. In such an easterner-dominated court, strong local power

¹⁵⁷ For the composition of the founding members of the Later Han, see Bielenstein, "The Restoration of the Han Dynasty," 82-165 and "The Restoration of the Han Dynasty, volume II," 11-256; Yü, "Dong Han zhengquan zhi jianli yu shizu daxing zhi guanxi," 109-203; Utsunomiya, "Ryōshū to nanyō," 375-404; Kojima, *Kandai kokka tōchi no kōzō to tenkai*, 73-123.

bases, vested regional interests, and sense of attachment would lead the Later Han founders incline to stay in the east.

Besides, there were strategic considerations that made the Later Han locate its seat of authority in Guanzhong impossible. During the civil war and the initial years of the Later Han, the whole Guanzhong region was divided into domains of contending powers, and it took the Later Han some years to conquer and pacify the region.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, during the fighting between, the Former Han capital city Chang'an was devastated. Therefore, locating the capital in Luoyang represented the Later Han founders' interests and response to the new strategic realities. The Later Han was based in the east and launched its campaign of conquest to the west, which was in a reverse direction compared with the Former Han's and made the eastern-centric attitude inevitable.

In addition, Luoyang indeed had its own merits to win the position as the capital. The importance of Luoyang had been recognized by the Former Han rulers.¹⁵⁹ For

¹⁵⁸ Guanzhong was at first where Wang Mang ruled until his downfall in 23CE. Then the area was in the hands of Liu Xuan 劉玄 (d. 25CE), who was the leader of an anti-Wang Mang army and was proclaimed emperor because of his distant relationship with the Former Han imperial house. Liu Xuan's domination in Guanzhong was quickly replaced by another rebel group called the "Red Eyebrows," by whom another distant member of the Former Han imperial house was enthroned. It was in 27CE that Emperor Guangwu defeated the Red Eyebrows and in 30CE that the Later Han finally controlled the Former Han metropolitan area. However, the area was still not secure as Liang province was divided between Wei Ao and Dou Rong, and Gongsun Shu 公孫述 (d. 36CE) proclaimed emperor in Yi province, which next to Liang province. Wei and Gongsun even allied to against Emperor Guangwu and therefore posed great threats to Guanzhong area. Emperor Guangwu once intended to set aside Wei and Gongsun temporarily so that he could focus on the consolidation of his control in the east (*HHS*, 13: 526).

¹⁵⁹ The area where Luoyang situated had long been regarded by Chinese people dated back to Zhou times

example, Emperor Wu once rejected his concubine's request of enfeoffing her son at Luoyang because of its crucial military and economic value.¹⁶⁰ When Wang Mang was in power, he initiated a plan for building Luoyang as the second capital. Besides military and economic considerations, Wang had his ideological reason to do that. As a usurper who entertained his Confucian conviction to win popular support, Wang found Luoyang was important in his project of establishing political legitimacy. According to the classics, Luoyang was a city first founded by the Duke of Zhou, a cultural hero of antiquity and also a model of emulation for Wang Mang. By building Luoyang a capital, Wang could fabricate and strengthen his image as a "Duke of Zhou" of his time—a living sage.¹⁶¹ Wang's plan therefore deepened the relationship between Luoyang and Classicism, which enjoyed a dominant position in the east. Although the Later Han was built on the failure of Wang Mang, it actually inherited and continued the political culture fostered in the last decades of Former Han and flourished under Wang Mang.¹⁶² Wang's building of Luoyang had prefigured Luoyang's role as capital in the Later Han times.¹⁶³

Many westerners, however, especially the residents of the erstwhile Former Han

as the core of the central state, which was the center of the known world. For an overview of such a cultural centrality, see Des Forges, *Cultural Centrality and Political Change in Chinese History*, 1-4.

¹⁶⁰ *SJ*, 126: 3209.

¹⁶¹ Thomsen, *Ambition and Confucianism*, 151-153.

¹⁶² For Emperor Guangwu's and his successors' dependence on the classics, see Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China*, Chapter IV.

¹⁶³ For a detailed study of the Later Han Luoyang, see Bielenstein, "Lo-yang in Later Han Times," 1-147.

metropolitan area were unwilling to accept the new situation. Since the day the Later Han captured Guanzhong, they had strongly advocated the restoration of the seat of authority in their area. One famous example was Du Du 杜篤 (d. 78CE), a scion of a renowned family in the erstwhile Former Han metropolitan area and a celebrated writer of his day, composed the “Rhapsody on the Capitals” (*Lundu fu* 論都賦), urging that the capital be moved back to Chang’an.¹⁶⁴ Although no action was taken by the Later Han state, the westerners’ nostalgia for the old capital persisted at least until the reign of the third Later Han emperor.

In such an eastern-based regime with its easterner-dominated imperial court, the strategic, economic, and cultural importance of Luoyang provided an arguably ideal seat for the state. A deep-rooted nexus gradually unfolded between Luoyang and the whole Guandong which made the movement of capital impossible. Luoyang became a magnet which attracted all the aspirants to official career. The northwesterners who had once enjoyed easy access to the central authority during the Former Han times thus lost their geographical advantage. Moreover, the northwesterners found themselves facing a foreign political environment in which they were forced to adapt for the sake of

¹⁶⁴ *HHS*, 70A: 2595-2609.

advancement, which is the last point I want to examine in this chapter.

The ascendancy of scholar-officials

The declining strategic significance of Liang province as the western flank of the political center and as the forward base for northwestward expansion did deprive the northwestern elites' geographical advantage of accessing to the imperial court. However, these were secondary factors as the northwestern elites could still rely on their talent to overcome geographical barriers and enter government service. In fact, what really lay behind the estrangement between them and the political center and hampered their career was a new political culture which emerged in the later years of the Former Han and matured in the Later Han. This new political culture fostered a new political environment of the empire, in which the northwestern elites faced a dilemma: whether to adapt themselves to the new rules for advancement or to uphold their traditional way, though which might lead to an inferior position. The new political culture, as a result of the ascendancy of scholar-official, was a product of the prevalence of eastern based civil culture, which deeply influenced the vision of empire and the official recruitment criteria in the Later Han times. To examine this, we shall start with the civil-military relations of the time.

As the Sinologist Derk Bodde noted that *Wen* 文 (the civil side of life) and *Wu* 武

(the martial side) constituted a notable dichotomy in pre-modern Chinese society;¹⁶⁵ putting this dichotomy in political context, the relative strength between civil and military provides a perspective on understanding the empire-building process and political development of early China.

Although the Western Zhou nobility was regarded as the embodiment of both civil and military qualities, a distinction between civil and military positions within the government had already begun to be drawn at the time.¹⁶⁶ In the centuries after the fall of the Western Zhou, with the decadence of the old nobility, the various regional states hired outsiders of ruling lineages for their talent to serve the administrations. Professional specialization between civil and military sectors also became a desideratum for governmental effectiveness and efficiency. Particularly in such a period of contending states, military affairs were highly regarded by rulers as an essential means of protecting their own state from invasion or invading others for expansion. Professional soldiers and military experts, therefore, played important roles in the political arena.¹⁶⁷ Compared

¹⁶⁵ Derk Bodde, "What and Why in Chinese Civilization," In Willard J. Peterson, Andrew H. Plaks, and Ying-shih Yü eds., *The Power of Culture: Studies in Chinese Cultural History* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1994), 352-353.

¹⁶⁶ Hsu Cho-yun 許倬雲, *Xi Zhou shi* 西周史 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1994), 206-230. For recent study on the Western Zhou governmental organization, see Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China: Governing the Western Zhou* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁶⁷ On the emergence of professional military expertise in the Warring States period, see Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, Chapter 3; for the tendency of militarization in terms of conscription system in the period, see Du, *Bianhu qimin*, Chapter 2.

with the civil side, the military profession was highly specialized. Most military knowledge and skills could not be solely learned from books but, most importantly, had to be passed on at first hand, requiring persistent demonstration and practice and specific drills (here I refer to those who really engaged in battle, and not armchair strategists who were mainly literati). Military men's experience on the battlefield and in the barracks was in addition sharply different from what their civil colleagues obtained from academy and government office buildings. Different training and experience thus fashioned different mindsets, languages, and worldviews,¹⁶⁸ not surprisingly, the relations between civil and military officials would not be harmonious and tensions have existed from very early times. A sophisticated ruler would know how to maintain the balance between the two sides and how to make them serve the interests of him or the state. The relative emphasis on the two sides would also change in accordance with the need of the state.

In the process of building empire, the Qin state launched large-scale militarization program which transformed itself into an effective war machine. Agricultural production and military feat were both promoted as the top priority of the state. A new system of ranks of merit or "meritorious military ranks" (*Jungong Jue* 軍功爵) was promulgated.

¹⁶⁸ For the cultural differences between the civil and military officials in early China, see David A. Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300-900* (London: Routledge, 2002), 24-26.

Under this system, every man who served in the army and rendered meritorious service would be granted a meritorious military rank which accompanied by material rewards, economic benefits, and qualification for official positions. Not only did the rank holder enjoy various privileges but one's heir could also inherit certain ranks. The system of meritorious military ranks was an effort of the state-sanctioned militarization policy, through which martial spirit was promoted and military discipline was indoctrinated to the people so that they were easily mobilized for military operations. As the rank holder was respected and honored by the state, political and social status of military men was held in high esteem which in turn enticed people to pursue such careers. The ranks of merit system thus reshaped the Qin social structure.¹⁶⁹ As the system was inherited and practiced by the Former Han, a Japanese scholar Nishijima Sadao 西嶋定生 even

¹⁶⁹ For details of the rank system and its effect on the Qin-Han society, see Du, *Bianhu qimin*, Chapter 8; Zhu Shaohou 朱紹侯, *Jungong juezhi kaolun* 軍功爵制考論 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2008); Nishijima Sadao, *Chūgoku kodai teikoku no keisei to kōzō: nijittō shakusei no kenkyū* 中國古代帝國の形成と構造：二十等爵制の研究 (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1961); Tatemi Satoshi 楯身智志, “Zen Kan ni okeru ‘Teishi’ no kōzō to hensen—nijittō shakusei no kinō wo megutte—” 前漢における「帝賜」の構造と変遷—二十等爵制の機能をめぐって—, in Kudō Motoo 工藤元男 and Ri Sonshi 李成市 eds., *Higashi Ajia kodai shutsudo moji shiryō no kenkyū* 東アジア古代出土文字資料の研究 (Tōkyō: Yūzankaku, 2009), 82-110; Michael Loewe, “The Orders of Aristocratic Rank of Han China,” *T'oung Pao* Second Series, vol. 48, Livr. 1/3 (1960): 97-174; Loewe, “Social Distinctions, Groups and Privileges,” in Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe eds., *China's Early Empires: A Re-appraisal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 296-299; Mark Edward Lewis, “Gift Circulation and Charity in the Han and Roman Empires,” in Walter Scheidel ed., *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 122-124. For other aspects of the militarization promoted by the Qin state, see Robin D. S. Yates, “Law and the Military in Early China,” in Nicola Di Cosmo ed., *Military Culture in Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 38-42.

asserted that such a system was the underpinning for the Qin- Han society.¹⁷⁰

In addition to the ranks of merit system (with minor variations), the early Former Han also inherited the martial spirit and respect for military feat. Emperor Gao (r. 206-187BCE), the first emperor of Former Han was very proud of himself for “holding a three-foot sword to win the realm under Heaven”¹⁷¹ 提三尺劍取天下 and winning his empire on horseback 居馬上而得之.¹⁷² Most of the senior positions, whether civil or military, of the early Former Han were occupied by military men who assisted the future Han emperor in founding the dynasty. The position of Chancellor, the head of the government, was monopolized by those military founding members.¹⁷³ Even during the reign of Emperor Jing, the fourth generation emperor, Shentu Jia 申屠嘉 (d. 155BCE), merely a captain of a crossbowmen team following Emperor Gao, was appointed chancellor, for he was possibly the last man alive who had served the founder of the dynasty.¹⁷⁴ Such a period was also the time that the *Liujun liangjiazi* emerged.

As the dynasty progressed, the tendency of militarization reached its high tide during Emperor Wu’s time: Military affairs became a top priority of the state; the *Liujun*

¹⁷⁰ Nishijima, *Chūgoku kodai teikoku no keisei to kōzō*; Tatemi, “Zen Kan ni okeru ‘Teishi’ no kōzō to henshen,” 82-110.

¹⁷¹ *SJ*, 8: 391. The three-foot sword was in Han measurement; one Han foot is equivalent to 23.1cm.

¹⁷² *SJ*, 97: 2699.

¹⁷³ See *SJ*, 18 and 22.

¹⁷⁴ *HS*, 42: 2100.

liangjiazi became a backbone of the imperial expansionist project; the officials who were close to and entrusted by the emperor was military generals like Wei Qing and Huo Qubing.¹⁷⁵ Emperor Wu himself was very interested in military affairs and paid serious attention to who attained military achievements. There was a telling story that when Emperor Wu learned that the young Zhao Chongguo was heavily injured in a battle, he summoned Zhao to the court to show him the wounds. The emperor was overwhelmed by that and therefore promoted Zhao as a reward for his courage and service.¹⁷⁶ During those days, the military men's ascent reflected the emphasis on military heritage that was a tenet of the imperial definition of empire. The northwestern military elites, needless to say, were the champions of the time.

However, after the reign of Emperor Xuan, the great-grandson of Emperor Wu, the importance of military culture was gradually taken over by the civil one. The ranks of merit, as a symbol, lost its military meaning and degenerated into a superficial system. Military men in general and the northwestern military elites in particular entered a period of gradual decline. Their loss of significance in politics went hand in hand with the

¹⁷⁵ Fu Lecheng pointed out the conflicts between the military talents from the northwestern commanderies and the generals with marital relations with Emperor Wu, such as Wei Qing and Huo Qubing, see his “Xi Han de jige zhengzhi jituan” 西漢的幾個政治集團, in idem, *Han Tang shilunji*, 20-26.

¹⁷⁶ *HS*, 69: 2971.

empire's increased use of scholar-officials.

As the advisor Lu Jia 陸賈 (fl. 220s-130sBCE) questioned Emperor Gao that “(Although Your Majesty) won the empire on horseback, can it be governed on horseback?”¹⁷⁷ 居馬上得之，寧可以馬上治之乎？ and suggested employing both civil and military personnel was the method for the regime to last longer (文武並用，長久之術也), the emperor realized that he could not rule his empire solely by military might once the chaotic period was over and the people were hoping for a return to normalcy. In order to put his realm on the track of stability, the emperor needed the aid of men of letters.¹⁷⁸ Since the founding members of the dynasty were generally less educated, the emperor needed to recruit educated men from outside his caucus and these men, like Lu Jia and the famous classics scholar and ritual expert Shusun Tong 叔孫通 (fl. 200s-180sBCE), were mostly from Guandong, the breeding ground of men of letters. Those educated men did make great contributions to the long-term development of the Han empire. For example, it was Shusun Tong and his disciples who established and formulated the court etiquette, ceremonial rites, and other relevant procedures which lay the foundation of imperial rites of the Han empire. Shusun was even called by the Han intellectual as a

¹⁷⁷ *SJ*, 97: 2699.

¹⁷⁸ For the development of men of letters in the Han dynasties, a comprehensive treatment is Yu Yingchun 于迎春, *Qin Han shishi* 秦漢士史 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000).

saint of his day and the progenitor of Han classical studies.¹⁷⁹ Shusun Tong's success revealed the value of men of letters to the imperial rulers and also presaged the flowering of scholar-officials in the following centuries.

Before expounding on how the official-scholars gradually formed the mainstay of the imperial bureaucracy and its effect on the relations between the civil and military sectors, it should be remarked that the dichotomy between civil and military presented in this study is deliberately simplistic for the convenience of analyzing and showing the changing relative strength between the two sectors and the tendency to preponderance of the scholar-officials. In fact, each sector was not homogeneous within. The military side had military men from different origins and with competing interests, and the northwestern military elite was only a group among them (they did not always share the same concerns); so did the civil side.¹⁸⁰ From its very beginning, the civil sector of the Han bureaucracy contained not only men of letters and classics students like Lu Jia and Shusun Tong but also a large team of clerical officers who were familiar with administrative routines, procedures, and legal practices. In Chinese tradition, the former

¹⁷⁹ *SJ*, 99: 2721-2726. The original text called Shusun Tong “Hanjia ruzong” 漢家儒宗, literally the progenitor of Han *Ru*. As discussed in Chapter One, the term *Ru* was not necessarily Confucian in the Han context, therefore, I try to use other neutral terms like classics scholars, men of letters, scholar-official, literati, intellectuals and so forth to describe those who called themselves *Ru* in the Han times.

¹⁸⁰ See Fu, “Xi Han de jige zhengzhi jituan,” 9-35.

group was usually called *Rusheng* 儒生 (Confucian) and the latter *Wenli* 文吏 (Clerical officer).¹⁸¹ The clerical officer was a legacy of the Qin, which was famous for its meticulous clerical system,¹⁸² and played an extremely important role in the early years of Former Han. The first chancellor of the Former Han dynasty, Xiao He 蕭何 (d. 193BCE), was himself a consummate clerical officer of a local government office during the Qin times and finally played a leading role in shaping the legal and administrative framework of the Han dynasty.¹⁸³ Benefiting from the historian Yan Buke's meticulous studies on the *Rusheng* and *Wenli*, we now have a clear picture of the development and relations of the two groups during the Han times.¹⁸⁴ I shall not repeat the details here as it is beyond the scope of this study; therefore, a brief summary will suffice.

In the early years of Former Han, although the rulers decried the harsh governance and strict clerical practice of the Qin dynasty and promoted superficially more lenient or laissez-faire policy, the clerical officers still constituted the backbone of the civil service

¹⁸¹ The most comprehensive survey on the two groups and their relationship during the Han times is Yan Buke 閻步克, *Shidaifu zhengzhi yansheng shigao* 士大夫政治演生史稿 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1996).

¹⁸² Thanks to the archaeological findings in recent decades, we now have quite a number of Qin legal statutes and relevant documents which shed light on how the clerical system operated in the Qin times. The literature on this topic is enormous and still growing, a comprehensive study in English on the earlier excavated texts is A. F. P. Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in law: An Annotated Translation of the Ch'in Legal and Administrative Rules of the 3rd Century B.C., Discovered in Yün-meng Prefecture, Hu-pei Province, in 1975* (Leiden : E.J. Brill, 1985).

¹⁸³ *SJ*, 53: 2013-2020; *HS*, 39: 2005-2012.

¹⁸⁴ Yan, *Shidaifu zhengzhi yansheng shigao*, especially Chapter 6-10.

system. As the dynasty progressed, however, increasing number of men of letters emerged in government offices. During the reign of Emperor Wu, literary writing and classical studies were recognized as criteria for entering civil service. The importance of classical studies was growing rapidly and finally outpaced other criteria from the time of Emperor Xuan on. Thereafter, more and more classical students entered the bureaucracy and even reached senior official positions.¹⁸⁵ Since the classics which the scholar-officials and aspirants to office studied were closely related to Confucian teachings, the success of official-scholars was hailed as a victory of Confucianism.¹⁸⁶ The usurpation of Wang Mang was also a product of the prevailing Confucianism as promoting Confucian conviction was an important means by which Wang used to gain popular support within and without the government.

Facing the growing prosperity of scholar-officials, the relative importance of the clerical officers declined. Since classical studies became desiderata for the success of officialdom, most aspirants who sought to advance their careers within the bureaucracy did so by studying the classics. Possession of culture was therefore seen and valued by

¹⁸⁵ Qian Mu has a lucid analysis on this development in his *Guoshi dagang*, 160-167.

¹⁸⁶ On the victory of Han Confucianism, see Homer H. Dubs translated and annotated, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty, volume II* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1955), 196-198, 285-286, and 341-353. Recently, Liang Cai has a detailed treatment of the success of Confucians in the Former Han bureaucracy; see her doctoral dissertation "In the Matrix of Power."

the elite as a criterion of political and social superiority. On the other hand, the administrative and legal knowledge that distinguished the clerical officers from others was gradually disdained by scholar-officials as routine and trivial matters which should be left to the minor functionaries. From the viewpoint of scholar-officials, they deserved high positions since they studied the teachings passed on from the sages whereas clerical officers should be content with junior positions as what they were doing was secular and repetitive paperwork. Certainly, it did not necessarily mean that scholar-officials thought the knowledge of clerical officers was useless as it was still crucial for daily operation of the administration but just was not the prime knowledge that a scholar-official should pursue. Some scholar-officials studied legal and administrative knowledge to enable themselves handle government affairs more effectively and efficiently. Meanwhile, there were clerical officers who received classical training in order to qualify themselves for senior positions. As a result, a tendency of combination of the two groups emerged in the last years of Former Han. Such a combination was encouraged in the Later Han since Emperor Guangwu and his meritorious generals were classical students, as noted above, and also interested in legal and administrative skills, which were essential for the

rebuilding of empire.¹⁸⁷ Needless to say, classical knowledge was primary and clerical knowledge was secondary.

The preponderance of scholar-officials not only squeezed the space of clerical officers but also hindered the advancement of military officials. In theory, civil and military officials had their own career trajectories. In reality, however, the predominance of scholar-officials transformed the political culture of the empire into a civilized one which honored civil officials with classical training and enhanced their comparative advantage in bureaucratic recruitment. Although the historian Hsing I-tien 邢義田 points out in his research that equipping oneself with both civil and military knowledge and skills was the embodiment of ideal official in the Han times,¹⁸⁸ it was just an ideal type indeed. With the growing prosperity of scholar-officials, in fact, military knowledge and skill were not being treated on equal footing with their civil counterparts. In another article, Hsing cites examples which show tellingly that a principle of recruitment based on appearance gradually developed in the last years of Former Han and was practiced by the Later Han. In order to reach a certain level of official position, according to the principle, candidate

¹⁸⁷ Yan, *Shidaifu zhengzhi yansheng shigao*, Chapter 10. On the changing status of legal knowledge in the Han bureaucracy, also see Hsing I-tien, “Qin Han de luling xue” 秦漢的律令學, in idem, *Zhiguo anbang*, 1-61. See also Higashi, *Gokan jidai no seiji to shakai*, 43-49.

¹⁸⁸ Hsing I-tien, “Yunwen yunwu: Handai guanli de yizhong dianxing” 允文允武：漢代官吏的一種典型, in idem, *Tianxia ijia*, 224-284.

could not bear wounds made by weapons.¹⁸⁹ But who would have such wounds? Generally speaking, it was mostly the military men. Hence, such a recruitment principle implied a hindrance to military men's advancement, and contradicted the ideal type. Comparing with the story of Emperor Wu's appreciation of Zhao Chongguo's wounds and Zhao's ensuing promotion, mentioned before, the times had drastically changed.

While recruitment based on appearance discriminated against military men, civil officials even invaded the privilege of their military counterparts. One salient example was the transformation of the title and duty of the position of military general. By the time of Emperor Wu, the various titles of General (*Jiangjun* 將軍) were granted to those who took charge of military operations as commanders of an army. The person who was entitled General was usually a military man.¹⁹⁰ The situation gradually changed after Emperor Wu. During Emperor Xuan's reign, civil officials started to take up the title of General. For example, the famous classics scholar Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 (d. 47BCE) was appointed General of the Van (*Qian Jiangjun* 前將軍) in 49BCE,¹⁹¹ but no matter whether before or after his assumption of the position Xiao had nothing to do with

¹⁸⁹ Hsing I-tien, "Lun Handai de yimao churen" 論漢代的以貌取人, in idem, *Tianxia ijia*, 377-395.

¹⁹⁰ On the institution of General in the Former Han, see Liu Pakyuen, "Shilun Xi Han zhu jiangjun zhi zhidu jiqi zhengzhi diwei" 試論西漢諸將軍之制度及其政治地位, in idem, *Lishi yu zhidu: Handai zhengzhi zhidu shishi* 歷史與制度：漢代政治制度試釋 (Hong Kong: Xianggang jiaoyu tushu gongsi, 1997), 138-203.

¹⁹¹ *HS*, 78: 3283.

military affairs. Certainly, Xiao and other civil officials' appointments of the position of General were due to a variety of political reasons, but the predominance of civil officials in bureaucracy was arguably an important factor.

During the Later Han, it was more common that many Generals were civil officials and were not necessarily related to military affairs.¹⁹² More than that, the men who really took charge of military operations and commanding troops were not necessarily entitled General but appointed as General of the Gentlemen-of-the-Household (*Zhonglang Jiang* 中郎將, a modern equivalent would be Lieutenant General), which was subordinate to General. Hence, civil officials would occupy the position of General and not take part in military affairs, whereas military men who were intimately engaged with military operations might only reach the second rank of the military hierarchy.

A recruitment system named *Chaju* 察舉,¹⁹³ literally “observation and recommendation,” and usually called “Recommendation System” in modern Western scholarship, adopted by the two Han dynasties contributed greatly to the expansion of scholar-officials in the imperial bureaucracy. During the early years of Former Han, the

¹⁹² On the institution of General in the Later Han, see Liu Pakyuen, “Dong Han jiangjun zhidu zhi yanbian” 東漢將軍制度之演變, in *Lishi yu zhidu*, 204-308.

¹⁹³ For detailed studies on the system, see Huang Liuzhu 黃留珠, *Qin Han shijin zhidu* 秦漢仕進制度 (Xi'an: Xibei daxue chubanshe, 1985); Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, *Kandai kanri tōyō seido no kenkyū* 漢代官吏登用制度の研究 (Tōkyō: Sōbunsha, 1988); Yan Buke, *Chaju zhidu bianqian shigao* 察舉制度變遷史稿 (Shenyang : Liaoning daxue chubanshe, 1997), especially Chapters 1-4.

founding members and their descendants had hereditary advantages of accessing official positions, although other ways of entering government service existed.¹⁹⁴ As the dynasty progressed, however, the need for acquiring talents from society became urgent and a new method of recruitment was produced. In 178BCE and 165BCE, Emperor Wen issued decrees ordering nobles and officials to recommend “worthy and upright persons and persons who are outspoken and not afraid to criticize” 賢良方正能直言極諫者; in 134BCE, Emperor Wu promulgated a new law which ordered every commandery and fief-states to recommend “filial and incorrupt” (*Xiaolain* 孝廉) persons. These marked the incipient phase of the Recommendation System.¹⁹⁵ The system at first contained a wide variety of recruitment subjects, besides the two mentioned above, there were “understanding the classics” (*Mingjing* 明經), “understanding the law” (*Mingfa* 明法), “capable of managing the river” (*nengzhihe* 能治河), “courageous and knowledgeable about the art of war” (*Yongmeng zhibingfa* 勇猛知兵法), “incorruptible official” (*Lianli* 廉吏), “abundant talent” (*Maocai* 茂才), “extraordinary excellence” (*Youyi* 尤異).¹⁹⁶

However, the system gradually concentrated on the subject of “filial and incorrupt.”

Provinces and commanderies were required to recommend candidates of “filial and

¹⁹⁴ For the recruitment methods of the early Former Han, see Huang, *Qin Han shijin zhidu*; Yan, *Chaju zhidu bianqian shigao*, 22-27.

¹⁹⁵ Yan, *Chaju zhidu bianqian shigao*, 3.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 4.

incorrupt” to the central government annually. In theory, “filial and incorrupt” were virtues that everybody could develop; in reality, such a title was interpreted as derived from Confucian ethics and gradually slipped into the hands of the men of letters who asserted themselves as followers of Confucian teachings. Moreover, the rights of recommendation were in the hands of senior officials who were always scholar-officials. As a result, men of letters gradually controlled the system and gained greater presence in the government officialdom. The scholar-officials, once they attained vested interests, further strengthened such a system as the chief way of recruitment. Local powerful families which were rooted mainly in Guandong and had resources to provide classical education to their members took advantage to become the main source of scholar-officials in the Later Han.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, they established a rather exclusive system based on their own ties and networks and helped their candidates entered the government while excluding others from advancing in the bureaucracy.¹⁹⁸ As a result, a handful of families got the lion’s share of bureaucratic positions. Japanese scholars such

¹⁹⁷ As Hsing I-tien points out sharply that the chance of a man from humble origins to become a candidate of the “filial and corrupt” is very limited if not impossible. See Hsing, “Dong Han xiaolian de shenfen beijing,” 285-254.

¹⁹⁸ On the ties and networks established among the scholar-officials which influenced the recommendation system, see Yan Buke, “Xiaolian tongsui yu Hanmo xuanguan” 孝廉「同歲」與漢末選官, in idem, *Yueshi yu shiguan: chuantong zhengzhi wenhua yu zhengzhi zhidu lunji* 樂師與史官：傳統政治文化與政治制度論集 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2001), 209-225.

as Watanabe Yoshihiro and Higashi Shinji have presented detailed studies on the composition of the Later Han bureaucracy, which show arguably the dominance of Guandong based scholar-officials,¹⁹⁹ and I shall not repeat their findings here.

As a modern Han historian has stated sharply, “Confucianism was but a veneer that made the local power alignment respectable and acceptable in the eyes of the court.”²⁰⁰ Indeed, after the state opened the door of officialdom to the powerful families, the “Confucianization” championed by the scholar-officials was largely self-directed and became a tool for vested interests to enhance their status, wealth and power under the auspices of imperial authority.²⁰¹ Hence, scholar-officials reached their predominance at the expense of the advancement of other groups, including the military men.

Under such an eastern scholar-official dominated and growingly “Confucianized” recommendation system, aspirants to official position in the frontier regions found themselves in a disadvantaged situation. The elites of Liang province in particular suffered from a “relative deprivation.”²⁰² They were famous for military ability and thus

¹⁹⁹ Watanabe, *Gokan kokka no shihai to jukyō*, 99-191, especially 115-124; Higashi, *Gokan jidai no seiji to shakai*, 337-339.

²⁰⁰ Chen, “Han Dynasty China,” 144.

²⁰¹ “Confucianization” was a multi-faceted phenomenon during the Han dynasties, especially in the Later Han times, the system of recruitment but only one facet of it. In a newly published article, Paul Goldin provides an example of “Confucianization” of law of the time, see his “Han Law and the Regulation of Interpersonal Relations: ‘The Confucianization of the Law’ Revisited,” *Asia Major* XXV. Part I (2012): 1-32.

²⁰² Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 13.

enjoyed privileges on official career paths during the first half of the Former Han dynasty; however, as the recommendation system gradually put absolute emphasis on civil value than the martial one, the northwestern military elites lost their traditional advantages in the competition of advancement. As analyzed before, a large proportion of the registered population of Liang province was composed of paupers and convicts from the east; they were the scum of the society and their general level of education would not be high. In response to the environment and practical needs of such a frontier society, the settlers and their descendants would prefer military training to classical studies, especially when the state relied heavily on their military contributions. The situation did not improve much even after the empire had transformed its posture from aggressive to defensive. In the last years of the Later Han, Liang province was still treated by scholar-officials as a land of backwardness. In 184CE, when rebels rose up in Liang province, an official named Song Xiao 宋巢 (fl. 180sCE) told Gai Xun (no. 22 on the list of northwestern elites) his views on the cause of and solution to the revolt and said, “Liang province lacked for education, therefore, revolts always happened. Now, I intend to produce more copies of the *Classics of Filial Piety* and let every household study it. It may lead the people to know

righteousness.”²⁰³ 涼州寡於學術，故屢致反暴。今欲多寫《孝經》，令家家習之，庶或使人知義。 The *Classics of Filial Piety* was a primer for children in the Later Han,²⁰⁴ Song’s intention of teaching the people of Liang province the text showed clearly how poor he thought the education level of the province was. Song’s words might be hyperbolic but might still reveal how some scholar-officials despised Liang province. After hearing Song’s opinion, Gai Xun, as a Liang province military elite himself, warned Song that his words would only arouse the hatred of the entire province (結怨一州).²⁰⁵ The people of Liang province were discontented with being treated as cultural backward, or more precisely, detested the cultural arrogance of the scholar-officials.

Some Han rulers understood the disadvantaged positions of the frontier regions in producing civil talents and tried to maintain a balanced recruitment. In 12BCE, when Emperor Cheng asked all interior commanderies and fief-states to recommend “upright and outspoken persons” to the court, he treated the frontiers separately by asking twenty two commanderies on the northern frontier to recommend “persons who are courageous and knowledgeable about the art of war.”²⁰⁶ The emperor understood the interior and

²⁰³ *HHS*, 58: 1880.

²⁰⁴ Emperor Ming especially emphasized the moral teachings of the *Classics of Filial Piety*, see Powers, *Arts and Political Expression in Early China*, 161.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *HS*, 10: 326.

frontier commanderies produced different kinds of talents and made an attempt to provide the militarized frontier commanderies an opportunity to recommend their own candidates.

However, the predominance of scholar-officials and the increasing importance of “filial and incorrupt” in the recommendation system were too strong to be altered. In 101CE, Emperor He of Later Han addressed clearly that the frontier provinces such as You 幽 (in the northeast), Bing, and Liang had a low population and the official path of their elites were narrow; the emperor thus assigned the frontier commanderies quotas of recommendation in proportionate to their population. Accordingly, frontier commanderies which had 100,000 or more people could recommend one “filial and incorrupt” annually; those with populations below 100,000 could recommend one biennially; those with populations below 50,000 could recommend one triennially.²⁰⁷ Although the emperor aimed to guarantee the rights of recommendation of the frontier commanderies, the population of frontier regions was absolutely overwhelmed by that of Guandong and was quantitatively too weak to compete with the interior commanderies.

Since military ability was no longer a guarantee to a bright career future as it once

²⁰⁷ *HHS*, 4: 189.

was, some Later Han northwestern elites realized that they had to adapt to the new rules of the game in order to move upward in the bureaucracy of the “Confucian State.”²⁰⁸ In other words, they have to transform themselves into scholar-official or, at least, to seek recognition from the scholar-officials. Such a tendency explains why the “Three Brilliants of Liang province”: Huangfu Gui, Zhang Huan, and Duan Jiong all started their official career with civil positions. Although they all transferred to the military trajectories later in life, the experience of civil office might enable them to have a similar career experience with their civil colleagues and communicate with the latter. When the first Great Proscription (166CE) happened and many renowned scholar-officials and literati were arrested,²⁰⁹ Huangfu Gui was ashamed of himself for not being included though he was an outstanding man of the western province (自以西州豪傑，恥不得豫). Therefore, he submitted a memorial and claimed his relations with the proscribed parties. His efforts of being implicated were in vain but he still worked to help the accused.²¹⁰ The reason for Huangfu Gui’s attitude might be complicated, but his eagerness to be recognized by the scholar-officials was probably a crucial consideration. Duan Jiong, albeit a tough warrior, studied classics when he was mature and was recommended as a

²⁰⁸ For the Later Han as a “Confucian State,” see Watanabe, *Gokan kokka no shihai to jukyō* and *Gokan ni okeru Jukyō kokka no seiritsu*.

²⁰⁹ For the Great Proscription, see de Crespigny, “Political Protest in Imperial China,” 1-36.

²¹⁰ *HHS*, 65: 2136.

“filial and incorrupt” to enter government service.²¹¹ Among the three men, Zhang Huan was the most “Confucianized” one. He studied classics with famous scholar-officials, editing classical texts that his edition was later kept by the imperial library, teaching a thousand students, and being an author of many literary works including an exegesis of a Confucian canon. He even brought his students with him and lectured calmly to them in the midst of a battle.²¹² This might particularly remind his contemporaries that Emperor Guangwu and his meritorious generals were well-known for their promotion of classical studies and rituals during their time in the battlefield.²¹³ Probably because of his “Confucian” background, Zhang Huan was desperate to move out from Liang province, which lay beyond the realm of the “Confucian State.”

Nevertheless, although Liang province produced the “Three Brilliants,” the northwestern elites were still too insignificant to tip the balance to favor themselves. According to Hsing I-tien’s statistical research on the 324 Later Han “filial and incorrupt” whose names were recorded in historical sources, only 2 among the 265 people whose origins were known were from Liang province; the remainder all distributed in the middle, eastern, southeastern part of the empire and Yi province in the southwest. Among

²¹¹ *HHS*, 65: 2145.

²¹² *HHS*, 65: 2138-2144.

²¹³ For example, Zhai Zun of the “Twenty-eight Generals of the Cloud Terrace,” see *HHS*, 20: 742.

them, the majority was in the commanderies of Guandong such as Runan 汝南, Nanyang, Yingchuan, Henan, and Chenliu 陳留, all were traditional power-bases of powerful families.²¹⁴ Although the sample size is small and the textual records were left by scholar-officials, the numbers still give a clue to how tiny the role Liang province played in the recommendation system.

Besides, even though the “Three Brilliants” tried very hard, their successes were limited. Duan Jiong seemed to be the most successful one as he was twice appointed Grand Commandant (*Taiwei* 太尉), which was equal to Chancellor. However, it was due to the patronage of eunuchs, and Duan was despised by most scholar-officials for his collaboration with eunuchs. Duan was forced to commit suicide and his family was exiled to frontier when his patron lost in a factional struggle among the eunuchs.²¹⁵ During the second Great Proscription (168CE), Zhang Huan was used by the eunuchs to suppress their rivals—the leaders of scholar-officials and students of the Imperial Academy, who had established a very strong patron-client relations. In the aftermath, Zhang Huan bitterly regretted being deceived by the eunuchs.²¹⁶ This episode compellingly tells that Zhang Huan lacked connections with the leading scholar-officials and was not accepted

²¹⁴ Hsing, “Dong Han xiaolian de shenfen beijing,” 285-254.

²¹⁵ *HHS*, 65: 2153-2154.

²¹⁶ *HHS*, 65: 2140.

as one of them.

The absolute majority of the proscribed scholar-officials and students of the Imperial academy, who were all the cultural elites of the time, were, not surprisingly, from the eastern part of the empire. The Historian Jin Fagen 金發根 has analyzed the places of origins of the proscribed or related people records in Later Han history and arranged the order of the regions in accordance with their numbers:

- (1) Guandong area, including the commanderies of Henan, Hongnong, (where Zhang Huan requested to move to), Taiyuan 太原, Shangdang 上黨, and the region to the east of Nanyang commandery and the north of Huai 淮 River.
- (2) The regions along the middle and lower courses of the Yangzi River, including Nan 南 commandery and the area to the east of Wuling 武陵 commandery.
- (3) The regions along the upper course of Yangzi River and the southwestern commanderies.
- (4) The metropolitan area of the Former Han and the northwestern commanderies.²¹⁷

It is clear that the most prominent cultural elites mainly concentrated in the

²¹⁷ Jin Fagen 金發根, “Dong Han danggu renwu de fenxi” 東漢黨錮人物的分析. *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 34(1963): 505-558. Besides Jin’s article, one can refer to Watanabe, *Gokan kokka no shihai to jukyō*, 367-418 and Higashi, *Gokan jidai no seiji to shakai*, 292-326. Watanabe’s research in particular criticizes Jin’s and provides a more detailed analysis of the origins and backgrounds of the proscribed members.

commanderies at the mid-lower reach of the Yellow River, and the commanderies such as Henan and Hongnong were just next to the imperial capital. The concentration of cultural elites reveals an uneven distribution of power in favor of the core area. For the periphery, of the 12 people recorded in the fourth category, 9 were from the former metropolitan area; the remaining 3 were Zhang Huan, Huanfu Gui, and Gai Xun. Nevertheless, these three men were only indirectly involved in the incident. On the other hand, as de Crespigny has pointed out that among the men who were praised as martyrs and heroes in the Great Proscription, only two had ever taken part in military campaign on the frontiers and the military generals such as the “Three Brilliants” received no mention, which reflected the “essential lack of sympathy and contact between” the scholar-officials and the frontier military men.²¹⁸

Once again, the statistical data show us the minor significance of the northwestern elites in relation to the cultural elites of the whole empire and their participation in the high politics. No matter how hard the northwestern elites like the “Three Brilliants” tried, the eastern scholar-officials dominated “Confucian State” was difficult to be challenged except by brutal violence, which would be realized by Dong Zhuo, a military strong man

²¹⁸ de Crespigny, “Political Protest in Imperial China,” 25.

and a *Liujun liangjiazi*, who did not adapt himself to the new rule of the game of power.

To conclude this chapter, the geographical characters and the composition of the settlers determined the military nature of the region called Liang province. When the empire was in an aggressive mode, the northwestern military elites reached their pinnacle; however, when the empire retreated to a defensive mode, their significance diminished. Limited by the geographical and cultural conditions of the frontier society the northwestern elites could only be latecomers and losers when the eastern-based scholar-officials re-shaped the political culture of the empire and dominated the imperial politics. But the new political culture did not bring a broader cultural unity to the empire. The new cultural elites of the empire drew a firm line between what they saw as the core of the empire and its barbaric periphery. They dominated the Later Han state and held a disproportionate share of central government offices by benefiting from their classical education, provincial quotas of the recommendation system, and geographical proximity to the imperial center. On the other hand, given their career frustrations and provincial origins, some of the northwestern military elites adapted to the new political culture while others felt the estrangement from the imperial center and finally resorted to violence—the means which they were most familiar with—to pursue their interests. Besides, not only

did the elites felt aggrieved but also the commoners became increasingly disaffected from the Later Han state. All in all, the elites needed a discontented people to support their actions against the empire. How the northwest was treated by the imperial center as a barbaric periphery and how the northwesterners were further alienated from the Later Han state will be discussed in the next chapter.

4

Enemy within the Gates:

The Qiang Wars and the Abandonment of the Northwest

In the past, when the Qiang caitiffs launched their rebellions, they began in the provinces of Liang and Bing, spread to Sili (the metropolitan area), wreaked havoc on Zhao and Wei to the east, and plundered Shu and Han to the west; five provinces were devastated and six commanderies were removed. In the surrounding areas, for over a thousand *li*,¹ nothing was left in the countryside; pillage and havoc were ceaseless day and night; people were being destroyed and burnt to ashes for days and months. However, the gentlemen of interior commanderies who were not affected by the disasters all proposed leaving the situation unfettered and waiting for the appropriate time to deal with it. How could such an intention meet the expectations of the people?²

往者羌虜背叛，始自涼、并，延及司隸，東禍趙、魏，西鈔蜀、漢，五州殘破，六郡削迹，周迴千里，野無孑遺，寇鈔禍害，晝夜不止，百姓滅沒，日月焦盡。而內郡之士不被殃者，咸云當且放縱，以待天時。用意若此，豈人心哉！

When the disheartened Wang Fu 王符 (ca. 90s-160sCE) wrote the above passage, which belongs to an essay entitled “Jiubian” 救邊 (Rescuing the Frontiers), sometime during a respite in the Qiang wars in the mid-second century CE, the terrible images of the war-torn northwest and the discontent with the imperial center might still have haunted

¹ *Li* is an ancient Chinese measure of length. One *li* in Han dynasty approximates to 0.415 km. But in certain contexts of the Han records, such as this quotation, the term *li* is used for rhetorical purpose rather than as a precise indication of distance.

² Wang Fu 王符, *Qianfulun jian jiaozheng* 潛夫論箋校正 (hereafter *Qianfulun*), annotated by Wang Jipei 汪繼培 and Peng Duo 彭鐸 (Beijing: Zhinghua shuju, 2010), 22: 257.

him. Even nearly two thousand years thereafter, the reader can still feel his sorrow, frustration, and anger from his words as he recalls the Qiang wars.

Wang Fu, a native of Linjing 臨涇 county in Anding commandery of Liang province, was a noted yet eccentric scholar of his age. Although no details of his life are given in the historical records, we know he was active during the first half of the second century CE, which covered two intense periods of the prolonged Qiang wars (107-118CE and 140-145CE) and also the period during which the Later Han state began turning to decadence in various respects.³ He probably never entered government service but was just an outspoken critic of contemporary politics and social issues. His commentaries were preserved in the work entitled *Qianfulun* 潛夫論, literally *The Comments of a Recluse*.⁴ Having experienced first-hand the Qiang wars and the concomitant chaos,

³ For Wang Fu's biography, see *HHS*, 49: 1630-1643. For an examination of Wang Fu's dates of birth and death, see Jin Fagen, "Wang Fu shengzu niansui de kaozheng ji Qianfu lun xieding shijian de tuilun" 王符生卒年歲的考證及潛夫論寫定時間的推論. *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 40.2(1969): 781-799.

⁴ For modern English-language research on the text, see Margaret J. Pearson, *Wang Fu and the Comments of a Recluse* (Tempe, Arizona: Center for Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1989) and Anne Behnke Kinney, *The Art of the Han Essay: Wang Fu's Ch'ien-Fu Lun* (Tempe, Arizona: Center for Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1990). Pearson's study focuses mainly on the political thought of Wang Fu whereas Kinney's focuses on the literary value of the text. Both works provide partial translations of the essays in *Qianfulun*, but do not touch the essays on the Qiang wars and frontier policy. On Wang Fu's political thought, one can also refer to Etienne Balazs, "Political Philosophy and Social Crisis at the End of the Han Dynasty," in H. M. Wright trans., *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy: Variations on a Theme* (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), 187-225. For Chinese scholarship, besides Jin's article mentioned in the previous note, see Liu Wenqi 劉文起, *Wang Fu "Qianfu lun" suo fanying zhi dong Han qingshi* 王符《潛夫論》所反映之東漢情勢 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1995).

Although calling himself a recluse, Wang Fu did not lead an isolated way of life. In fact, he had connections with some renowned intellectual figures of his time, including certain eastern-based scholar-officials; he was highly admired by the northwestern military elite Huangfu Gui.

Wang Fu left in his work the eyewitness accounts of the suffering of the northwestern people and his criticism of the imperial strategy dealing with the disasters. Three essays in the *Qianfulun* were on frontier problems, namely “Jiubian,” “Bianyi” 邊議 (Opinion on the Frontiers), and “Shibian” 實邊 (Fortifying the Frontiers), all focus on the Qiang wars. The value of his essays in understanding the history of the Qiang wars and other related issues cannot be overemphasized. When Fan Ye compiled the *Hou Hanshu* nearly three hundred years after Wang Fu, he adopted Wang’s report as one of the main sources in the account of the Qiang wars.⁵ In the twentieth century, the Sinologist Etienne Balazs praised Wang Fu as being “the most important eyewitness of his times, about which we would know very little if it were not for his account.”⁶ Nevertheless, some scholars have pointed out that Wang Fu was extremely hostile to the government and his essays on the Qiang wars were highly partisan as well as emotional.⁷ It is true that, as a northwesterner, Wang Fu’s criticism of the imperial court’s handling of the disaster unavoidably had a strong bias, but for the purpose of this study his attitude provides appropriately the viewpoints of some of his northwestern countrymen’s perceptions of the imperial center.

Before we move to the history of the Qiang wars, we shall first turn our attention to

⁵ de Crespigny, *Northern Frontier*, 91.

⁶ Balazs, “Political Philosophy and Social Crisis at the End of the Han Dynasty,” 199.

⁷ de Crespigny, *Northern Frontier*, 91.

the Qiang people per se, whom I have mentioned many times in this study hitherto. Who were the Qiang? It is a question that I shall deal with in the first section of this chapter. Then, in the second section, I shall outline the military conflicts between the Qiang and the Han regimes in order to provide a backdrop for our understanding of how devastating the Qiang wars were. The final section will focus on two interwoven subjects: firstly, the catastrophic impact of the wars on the Later Han in general and Liang province in particular; secondly, the court debates over abandoning Liang province during the intense periods of the Qiang wars and the ensuing forcible withdrawals. We shall see how the Qiang wars exposed the underlying conflicts between the northwesterners and the imperial center, aggravated the feeling of alienation of the former from the latter, and deepened feelings of distrust and estrangement between the two sides.

WHO WERE THE QIANG?

The military confrontation between the Later Han and the Qiang was a “Hundred Years’ War” that continued intermittently throughout the mid-first century CE to the late-second century CE and spanned nearly the whole life of the dynasty. It was a war of attrition in that the Later Han became entangled in the military conflicts, exhausted enormous amount of resources on fighting against the adversary and drained the imperial coffers to

the point of bankruptcy, but without achieving clear and decisive military and political victories. Undoubtedly, the Qiang wore down the Later Han and hence contributed to the failure of the empire. In this section, I shall try to examine who the insurmountable Qiang were.

According to the conventional viewpoint in Chinese history, the Qiang as an ethnic group has an ancient origin and enjoys a very long history. Nowadays in the People's Republic of China, the Qiang are one of the 55 officially designated minority groups (*Shaoshu minzu* 少數民族) or so-called “brotherly groups” (*Xiongdi minzu* 兄弟民族), who join the dominating ethnic Han to constitute the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu* 中華民族).⁸ The modern Qiang people are officially and commonly regarded as the descendants of the ancient Qiang since both of them reside in basically the same area corresponding generally to the modern provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, and Sichuan, and lead a nomadic way of life. In many modern studies the Qiang are regarded as an ethnic group whose history can be traced back to the Prehistoric period. Over this long course of history, the Qiang have passed down their ethnic identity and culture

⁸ On modern classification of minority groups under the PRC, see Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

generation after generation to the present.⁹

Chinese archaeologists also try to manifest the above assumption of traditional historiography in archaeology. Findings excavated in modern Gansu province and its environs are characterized to being the remains of the Qiang and the sites of Neolithic civilizations found in the areas such as Xindian, Siwa, and Kayue, mentioned in Chapter Two, are regarded as the settlements of the ancient Qiang.¹⁰ However, since no written evidence or other concrete traces left by the Qiang have been discovered, no clear linkage can be established between those ancient civilizations and the ancient Qiang, as well as to the modern Qiang. The assertion that the Qiang were the ancient inhabitants in the northwest is in fact more susceptible to the presumption that the Qiang have always been living in the same area. In other words, the people who inhabited the area in earlier times were the ancestors of the Qiang in the Han dynasties, as well as in later centuries.¹¹

⁹ It is a dominant view in enormous Chinese works, for example, Ma Changshou 馬長壽, *Di yu Qiang 氏與羌* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1984); Ren Naiqiang 任乃強, *Qiangzu yuanliu tansuo 羌族源流探索* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1984), in which the author asserted that the Tibetans are a branch of the Qiang people, see pages 38-42; Geng Shaojiang 耿少將, *Qiangzu tongshi 羌族通史* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2010). Some western scholarship also follows the same tradition when narrating the story of the Qiang, for example, see Terry F. Kleeman, *Great Perfection: Religion and Ethnicity in a Chinese millennial Kingdom* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 54-58.

¹⁰ For example, Yu Weichao 俞偉超, "Gudai Xi Rong he Qiang, Hu kaoguxue wenhua guishu wenti de tantao" 古代“西戎”和“羌”、“胡”考古學文化歸屬問題的探討 in idem, *Xian Qin liang Han kaoguxue lunji 先秦兩漢考古學論集* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1985), 180-192; Zhao Huacheng 趙化成, "Gansu dongbu Qin he Qiang Rong wenhua de kaoguxue tansuo" 甘肅東部秦和羌戎文化的考古學探索 in Yu Weichao ed., *Kaogu leixingxue de lilun yu shijian 考古類型學的理論與實踐* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), 145-175.

¹¹ In fact, it is a common practice of PRC scholarship on constructing the connections between various

Archaeological findings are interpreted as corroborating evidence for such an assertion. Nevertheless, since no concrete evidence is available, the lineage of the Qiang from Prehistoric to the Han periods should be suspected of being an invented or an imaginative construction.

Such an invented lineage of the Qiang people is not necessarily a modern invention but has a long tradition in Chinese historical records. The fact that there are no independent accounts of the Qiang in the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu* reflects that the Qiang had not yet been qualified as an important group in relation to the empire. However, when the Qiang became a menace to the Later Han empire, historians felt it was needed to understand and record such a dreadful enemy. As a result, the first independent and detailed account of the Qiang appears in the *Hou Hanshu*. In the “Account of the Western Qiang” (*Xi Qiang zhuan* 西羌傳) of *Hou Hanshu*, the compiler Fan Ye traces the origins of the Qiang to the San Miao 三苗, a tribe in the legendary period. According to Fan, the San Miao originally lived in the south and was a branch of a clan surnamed Jiang 姜. When the sage-emperor Shun 舜 expelled the Four Villains (*Sixiong* 四凶) to the frontiers, the San Miao was exiled to the northwest, an area that was part of Jincheng

commandery of the Han dynasties.¹² The story goes on to discuss the relationship between the Qiang and the ancient Chinese regimes—Xia, Shang, and Zhou in chronological order, and the Qiang were regarded as one group among the various Western Rong,¹³ an umbrella name of the western barbarians during the Zhou times. It was not until the time of the legendary chieftain Wuyi Yuanjian 無弋爰劍 that the Qiang people separated from the Rong family. According to the sources, Wuyi Yuanjian was a fugitive slave of the ruler of Qin state. He hid in a cave and survived the fire set by his pursuers. Then, he married a woman with a dismembered nose whom he met in the wild. As the Qiang people believed Wuyi Yuanjian was protected by divine power from the harm of fire, they honored and followed him as leader. The story also says how Wuyi Yuanjian and his wife shaped the customs of the Qiang as he taught them to practice animal husbandry and his wife who wore her hair hanging down to cover her nose-less face, was emulated by the Qiang in their hair style.¹⁴ The descendants of Wuyi Yuanjian gradually divided and constituted the various groups of the Qiang people in the Han times.

In the above account, Fan Ye provided his readers with a full story of explaining who

¹² *HHS*, 87: 2869.

¹³ *HHS*, 87: 2870-2874.

¹⁴ *HHS*, 87: 2875.

the Qiang were, where they came from, and why they emerged in the northwest as they were known in the Han times. When tracing the origins of the Qiang, Fan constructed a fictive relationship between the Qiang and the Han people by associating the Qiang with legendary figures such as Emperor Shun and the San Miao in order to lead his readers to believe that the Qiang were people with whom the Chinese ancestors had already associated.¹⁵ As the historian Nicola Di Cosmo analyzed, Sima Qian's effort to rationalize the Xiongnu in the *Shiji* gave an alien people a "Chinese" origin, to make them into "a legitimate component of Chinese history from the very beginning," and to make them "part of the family" of the Chinese,¹⁶ and Fan Ye did the same. It was a project of demystifying the Qiang and familiarizing the Han people with them.

Fan Ye also casted the Qiang in an appropriate role to explain their adversarial relationship with the Later Han. According to Fan, the Qiang were descendants of the evil San Miao who had conflicts with the sage Emperor Shun; the Qiang then became a member of the Western Rong family, the traditional enemy of the Zhou and Qin regimes.

¹⁵ In the "Account of the Xiongnu" of *Shiji*, Sima Qian constructed a fictive kinship relationship between the Xiongnu and the ruling house of the Xia dynasty. For detailed study on the topic, see Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, 294-311; Wang Mingke 王明珂, *Huaxia bianyuan: lishi jiyi yu zuqun rentong* 華夏邊緣：歷史記憶與族群認同 (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua shiye gufen youxiangongsi, 1997), 292-295; Wang Mingke, *Yingxiong zuxian yu dixiong minzu: genji lishi de wenben yu qingjing* 英雄祖先與弟兄民族：根基歷史的文本與情境 (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua shiye gufen youxiangongsi, 2006), Chapters 3 and 8.

¹⁶ Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, 300.

These stories revealed that the vicious nature of the Qiang was ingrained and one should not be surprised by the bellicose relations that prevailed between the Qiang and the Han.

Besides, as an enemy of the Han people, the Qiang were depicted as debased and barbarous as possible. They were the offspring of the ostracized San Miao and then a member of the barbarous Western Rong; their legendary chieftain Wuyi Yuanjian was originally a slave of the Qin state, which was regarded as the culturally backward regional state of the Zhou dynasty. Hence, the ancestors of the Qiang were constructed as being the worst of the worst. Furthermore, Wuyi Yuanjian hid in a cave like an animal to escape from his pursers; he later married a nose-less woman he met in the wild. Although Fan Ye did not explain why Wuyi Yuanjian's wife had her nose cut off, it probably implied she was a convict since amputation of the nose was one of the official punishments in early China. It is clear that the couple was described as the scum of the earth. Moreover, that the couple met and married in the wild meant they did not go through proper marriage rites and "meeting in the wild" (implies that having sexual intercourse in the wild) was in particular an uncouth practice criticized severely by the Han Confucian scholars. Needless to say, the descendants of a fugitive slave and a convict who married in the wild like animals were a degenerate people. One instance of

the Qiang's barbarism was that they felt no shame in following Wuyi Yuanjian's wife, probably a convict, in letting their hair hang loose (*pifa* 披髮). From the standpoint of Han culture, untied hair was a sign of abandoning refined culture and turning oneself into a barbarian, which I will discuss more later. All these depictions clearly show how the Qiang people were being despised and de-humanized in the standard history.¹⁷

Although Fan Ye compiled the “Account of the Western Qiang” nearly 300 years after the Later Han, it does not necessarily mean that the reconstruction of the Qiang story was his own invention. He must have based his writing on the sources transmitted from the Later Han times.¹⁸ For instance, Ying Shao 應劭 (d. 200), a famous scholar-official in the last decades of Later Han, mentioned the Qiang in his work entitled *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 (Comprehensive Discussion of Customs) as “originally from the Western Rong origins, and were people of low and degraded status” 本西戎，卑賤者也。¹⁹ It seems that, at least in the last years of the Later Han, it was a prevailing view that the Qiang were

¹⁷ In a sharp contrast to the Qiang, the Xiongnu were given a noble origin of being from the ruling house of the Xia dynasty in the Han historical records. It is probably because the Xiongnu were once a Eurasian hegemon and, most importantly, had established formal diplomatic and marriage relations with the Han dynasties, therefore, they earned much respect from the Han historians. For detailed discussion, see Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, 294-311; Wang, *Huaxia bianyuan*, 292-298; Wang, *Yingxiong zuxian yu dixiong minzu*, Chapters 3, 7, and 8.

¹⁸ de Crespigny, *Northern Frontier*, 55.

¹⁹ This is an entry not found in the present edition of *Fengsu tongyi* but preserved in the 10th century encyclopedic work *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽. See Ying Shao 應劭, *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu* 風俗通義校注, annotated by Wang Liqi 王利器 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 488. For detailed study on Ying Shao and his works, see Michael Nylan, “Ying Shao’s ‘Feng Su Tung Yi’: An Exploration of Problems in Han Dynasty Political, Philosophical and Social Unity” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1982).

members of the Western Rong family, which indicated that the Qiang were a group of barbarians in the west.

In recent years, the Taiwanese scholar Wang Mingke 王明珂 has published widely in the field of Qiang studies and provided, from my point of view, a persuasive theory of the identity of the Qiang in history. Basing his research on both textual sources and archaeological data, Wang proposed that although the name “Qiang” was mentioned in various Chinese documents, from oracle-bone inscriptions of the fourteenth century BCE that were excavated in the early twentieth century to the texts of the Han times, the Qiang were in fact not a “people” with continuity in time and space but rather just a general label used by the ancient Chinese to call the non-Chinese people in the west.²⁰ According to Wang, the name “Qiang” was an exonym (a label used by outsiders to refer to a given group) used by the ancient Chinese with other ethnic labels such as Di, Yi, and Rong rather than an autonym (which people use to identify themselves).²¹ Therefore, it

²⁰ Wang first proposed this view in his doctoral dissertation, see Wang Mingke, “The Ch’iang of Ancient China through the Han Dynasty: Ecological Frontiers and Ethnic Boundaries” (Ph.D dissertation, Harvard University, 1992). He later expounded this thesis in his Chinese works like *Huaxia bianyuan; Yingxiong zuxian yu dixiong minzu; Manzi, Hanren yu Qiangzu* 蠻子、漢人與羌族 (Taipei: Sanmin shujun gufen youxiangongsi, 2001); *Qiang zai Han Zang zhjian : yige Huaxia bianyuan de lishi renleixue yanjiu* 羌在漢藏之間：一個華夏邊緣的歷史人類學研究 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gufen youxiangongsi, 2003); *Youmuzhe de jueze: miandui Handiguo de bei Ya youmu buzhu* 游牧者的抉擇：面對漢帝國的北亞游牧部族 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2008).

²¹ Wang, “The Ch’iang of Ancient China through the Han Dynasty,” 99. Not until the 4th and 5th centuries CE did the term “Qiang” become an autonym of the Qiang people. For the self identity of modern Qiang people, see Wang, *Manzi, Hanren yu Qiangzu*, 21-58 and 91-122; Wang, *Qiang zai Han Zang zhjian*, 1-35

represented a sense of otherness and a concept of “those in the west who are not us” among the ancient Chinese.²² In other words, “the Qiang were not only some people living along China’s western frontiers generation after generation, but also a concept in the minds of the ancient Chinese generation after generation,” and “the people were the Qiang because the Han Chinese believed that they were.”²³ Wang further suggested that the demographic and geographic implications of the term Qiang changed over time. From the Shang to the Han dynasties, the term “Qiang” was generally applied to the people(s) widely distributed across the west and northwest of China, and its ethnic boundary kept shifting towards the west along with the Chinese westward expansion.²⁴ During the Han dynasties, the Han people reached the boundary of ecological extent and the autochthonous people lived there were thus named “Qiang” by the Han empire.

In fact, given the limited availability of historical sources, especially with no direct evidence left by the ancient Qiang, it might not be possible to establish a clear connection between the Qiang of the Han times and the ancient peoples who inhabited the same area of activity. Therefore, hereafter, I will cut the Qiang people of the Han times off from the periods before and after the Han times and adopt Wang Mingke’s view of treating the

and 251-296.

²² Wang, “The Ch’iang of Ancient China through the Han Dynasty,” 1-3.

²³ Ibid, 98.

²⁴ Ibid, 129-132.

term “Qiang” as an ancient ethonym and a catch-all category of identification for the people living in the west of the Han regimes. The term “Qiang” as an exonym does not necessarily mean that the people who were called “Qiang” cannot be treated as an ethnic group. Here, I follow the definition given by Sian Jones that an ethnic group was “any group of people who set themselves apart and/or are set apart by others with whom they interact or coexist on the basis of their perceptions of cultural differentiation and/or common descent.”²⁵ By this definition, the people who were called “Qiang” (as an exonym) during the Han times constituted an ethnic group not only because they were regarded as and set apart by the Han people but also because, as will be shown below, they developed a different culture from the Han people. Also, conflicts with the Han empires made the Qiang acutely aware of their common boundaries, forcing them to define their differences from the Han and leading them to build defenses or launch offensives against the common adversary.

As the Qiang were distinct from the Han people, we may ask what kind of marker(s) of distinction the Han people adopted. Since antiquity, the Chinese people have been in contact with peoples dissimilar from themselves; some of them could be distinguished

²⁵ Sian Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 1997), xiii.

from physical appearance like the notion of “deep eyes and high noses,” which became a salient feature and stereotype of defining foreigners in later periods.²⁶ However, there was no record that the Qiang had different physical features from the Han.

Hairstyle was surely a significant marker of ethnicity. In contrast to the hairstyle of the Han people, the Qiang let their hair untied, which was regarded by the Han people as a signifier of cultural barbarism.²⁷ In the early Later Han, a famous scholar Ban Biao 班彪 (3-54CE) once warned Emperor Guangwu that there were large numbers of surrendered Qiang intermingling with the Han people in Liang province, and it would cause tremendous problems if the empire did not take any preventive measures. He called the Qiang a people who “let the hair unbound and folding the robes to the left” 被髮左衽 (*pifa zuoren*), pointing out that the customs between the Han and the Qiang were different (*xisu jiyi* 習俗既異), and their languages were mutually unintelligible (*yanyu butong* 言語不通).²⁸ It was true that the Qiang left their hair unbound, as we have seen above, but we have no evidence of the Qiang’s clothing. In fact, whether the Qiang really folded their robes to the left was not the crux of the matter. What Ban Biao said *pifa zuoren* was

²⁶ See Marc Samuel Abramson, “Deep Eyes and High Noses: Physiognomy and the depiction of barbarians in Tang China,” in Nicola Di Cosmo and Don J. Wyatt eds., *Political Frontiers, Ethnic Boundaries, and Human Geographies in Chinese History* (London: Routledge, 2003), 119-159.

²⁷ Also, as Abramson has pointed out in his article, in certain context, “hairstyles and head coverings also had significance in that they were viewed both in Inner Asia and China as makers of political allegiance.” See Abramson, “Deep Eyes and High Noses,” 125.

²⁸ *HHS*, 87: 2878.

of symbolic meaning to draw a line between civilized people and barbarians. Since Confucius first used the phrase *pifa zuoren* to describe the non-Zhou people,²⁹ the phrase had become a metaphor of bestiality used by ancient Chinese scholars to describe alien people who led a barbarous and uncivilized way of life.³⁰ By using this catchphrase, Ban Biao wanted to emphasize the fundamental cultural differences between the Qiang and the Han, and he used the different customs and languages as supporting evidence. Although we do not know the language of the Qiang people during the Han times, we have historical records of their social customs.

According to the sources available, the most significant markers that distinguished the Qiang from the Han were their way of life and social organization.³¹ The “Account of Western Qiang” says,

[The Qiang] have no fixed abode, but follow the availability of water and grass. Their lands produce little of the five grains, and they make their living by raising and herding animals... when the father dies, [the son] marries the step-mother; when the elder

²⁹ See Chapter 14 of the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語). In Confucius’s day, the Zhou people knotted their hair, wore caps, and folded their robes to the right; letting hair unbound and folding robes to the left was a non-Zhou custom, which meant the violation of the Zhou rites. From the Zhou times onward, the proper combination of “robes and caps” 衣冠 (*yiguan*) was symbolized as one of the essences of Chinese culture.

³⁰ In the “Account of the Xiongnu” of *Hanshu*, which was mainly compiled by Ban Biao’s son Ban Gu, the phrase *pifa zuoren* was also used to describe the barbarians. See *HS*, 94B: 3834. Another example in a memorial jointly written by two Han officials can be found in *HS*, 73: 3126. Goldin, “Steppe Nomads as a Philosophical Problem in Classical China,” 220-246, has a brief discussion on the usage of the term *pifa zuoren* by the Han scholars.

³¹ For a summary of the living style and social organization of the Qiang in the Han times, see Guan Donggui 管東貴, “Handai de Qiangzu (I)” 漢代的羌族(上), *Shihuo yuekan* 食貨月刊 1.1 (1971): 15-20 and “Handai de Qiangzu (II)” 漢代的羌族(下), *Shihuo yuekan* 1.2 (1971): 87-97. Guan also doubts the relationship between the Qiang of the Han times and their assumed ancestors in the same area of activity.

brother dies, [the younger brother] marries the widow. Hence, there are no widowers and widows in their country, and their breeds are prosperous. There are no monarchs or officials; no one tribe is superior to others or trying to unify the others. When [a group is] strong, they will separate from their original tribe and have their own leader; when [they are] weak, they will attach to a stronger one. They raid and plunder each other and worship strengths as heroic... They are good at fighting in mountain valleys but weak on plains. [Their military strength] cannot be enduring, but [they are] determined to charge headlong plunge. [They] regard dying in battle as auspicious, and dying from illness as inauspicious. [They] can withstand extremely cold weather just like animals.³²

所居無常，依隨水草。地少五穀，以產牧為業.....父沒則妻後母，兄亡則納厘綆，故國無鰥寡，種類繁熾。不立君臣，無相長一，強則分種為酋豪，弱則為人附落，更相抄暴，以力為雄.....其兵長在山谷，短於平地，不能持久，而果於觸突，以戰死為吉利，病終為不祥。堪耐寒苦，同之禽獸。

Ying Shao provided a similar entry in the *Fengsu tongyi*, which Fan Ye probably copied into his work,

[The Qiang] have neither monarchs and officials nor superiors and subordinates. The strongest one is the leader. [They] cannot be unified, and divided into various breeds and groups. The strong bully the weak, and they raid each other. For a male to die in battle is regarded as auspicious and to die from illness considered inauspicious.³³

無君臣上下，健者為豪，不能相一，種別部分，強者陵弱，轉相抄盜，男子戰死以為吉，病終者謂之凶。

Both passages must have depicted the most notable features of the Qiang that struck the Han writers and distinguished them from the Han people. According to Fan's account, the first striking contrast between the Qiang and the Han was that the former led a nomadic way of life, raising and herding animals for livelihood while the latter was

³² *HHS*, 87: 2869.

³³ Ying, *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu*, 488.

composed mainly of a sedentary agrarian population. Benefiting from modern geographical and archaeological studies, we now know that the Qiang and the ancient people who inhabited the same area led a nomadic way of life as a strategy of survival and in adaptation to the natural environment.³⁴ A series of changes in climate occurred in the area of activity of the Qiang people and their presumed ancestors from the late Neolithic to the Bronze Ages, roughly around 3000-500BCE, which led the area to become separate from the middle and lower Yellow River Valleys (the core of China proper) in terms of human ecology. This transformed the inhabitants from sedentary farmers into nomadic pastoralists.³⁵ Herding cattle, horses, sheep, and goats constituted the Qiang's production portfolio. The Qiang were, in particular, known as shepherds. The Later Han scholar Xu Shen 許慎 (d. 120sCE) explained the meaning of the character “Qiang” 羌 in his etymological classic *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Explanation of Simple and Compound Graphs) that the character Qiang was formed by “sheep” and “man,” and that the Qiang were shepherds in the west.³⁶ Ying Shao also said that the Qiang “work

³⁴ For the natural setting and human ecology of the area of activity of the Qiang people and their presumed ancestors, see Wang “The Ch’iang of Ancient China through the Han Dynasty,” 5-13; Wang, *Youmuzhe de jueze*, 158-162.

³⁵ Wang “The Ch’iang of Ancient China through the Han Dynasty,” 14-57.

³⁶ Ibid, 110. The character Qiang first appeared in oracle-bone inscriptions of the Late Shang period (ca. 14th-12th centuries BCE) and the pictograph is composed of two parts: sheep and man. Wang Mingke suggests that Qiang was a label used by the Shang people to refer to non-Shang or hostile population living west of them. Also, the Qiang captured in the wars were used by the Shang people as human sacrifices in ancestral worship ceremonies which implied that the Shang people did not treat the Qiang as human beings

mainly as shepherds, therefore the character Qiang is formed by sheep and man, and they are thus called.” 主牧羊，故羌字從羊人，因以為號。³⁷ It is clear that the image of the Qiang as shepherds was engraved in the memory of the Han people.

The fact that the Qiang had no fixed abode nor cities or towns and had to keep moving with their cattle in search of pasture all marked their utmost fundamental differences from their Han neighbors. For the Han people, a sedentary way of life was an indisputable signifier between civilized and non-civilized peoples. It formed the basis for the Han people to define the cultural and ethnic “others.”

Another distinctive contrast between the Qiang and the Han was their social customs and organizations. The Qiang practiced levirate marriage, where a brother of a deceased man was obliged to marry his brother’s widow; a son of a deceased man was obliged to marry his step-mother.³⁸ These practices, as a strategy of survival in a tough natural environment, were surely for the benefit of the Qiang to continue their family lines. However, in the eyes of the Han people, especially in the Later Han period when the classical training scholar-officials exerted great influence on the intellectual world, the Qiang’s marriage practices were behaviors of bestiality and sacrilege that should be

but just animals. See Wang, “The Ch’iang of Ancient China through the Han Dynasty,” 101-103.

³⁷ Ying, *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu*, 488.

³⁸ On the role of female in Qiang society, see Wang, *Youmuzhe de jueze*, 180-188.

denounced since they severely violated the moral standard and social order of the Han society.³⁹ The Han literati believed that their moral principles and social customs were universal and the differences of the Qiang could only prove that they were uncouth barbarians.

Furthermore, from the Han point of view, the Qiang's lack of centralized political system and divisions of social hierarchy were clear signs of backwardness and barbarism. Since the pre-imperial age, the Chinese had already believed that their political system, administrative institutions, and social hierarchies were superior to those of their neighbors and this belief was strengthened by the establishment and continuation of the centralized empire in the Han times. Therefore, the absence of monarchs, officials, social hierarchies and the loose political and social organizations of the Qiang clearly defined their inferiority.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the lack of centralized authority and the existence of various competing groups made the Qiang a difficult enemy for the Han empires to find a consistent strategy to deal with.

Both Fan Ye and Ying Shao also mentioned the Qiang's worship of physical strength

³⁹ In contrast to the pre-imperial period, Chinese marriage and sexual relations and behaviors underwent a period of moral stringency in the Han times, for details, see Paul Rakita Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 75-109.

⁴⁰ Compared with the Xiongnu who established an empire with an emperor-like supreme leader the Chanyu and political hierarchy among the leaders as well as an institutionalized political-military organization, there should be no doubt that why the Han paid much respect to the Xiongnu as "advanced" barbarians and treated the Qiang as "inferior" barbarians.

and military prowess in order to depict the Qiang as valiant warriors as other barbarians and, most importantly, to emphasize the brutal and belligerent face of the Qiang, a trait which distinguished them from the civilized Han. As was pointed out earlier, Fan Ye used metaphors of bestiality to describe the Qiang so that one would not be surprised when he mocked the Qiang's capability of enduring extremely cold weather as animals did. Since the Qiang were animals or animal-like people, it went without saying that they had a different nature from the Han people, and it could explain why they were not the members of the Han realm and why they were always in conflict with the Han.⁴¹

It is clear that Fan Ye's account has listed out the ways of living and social organizations of the Qiang that made them different from the core Han population; nevertheless, I would suggest that such cultural differences were prevalent in a general sense and especially in the early period of the Later Han but were gradually integrated with the factor of political allegiance from the mid-Later Han period onward. Simply put, I would say political allegiance played an increasing role in defining the Qiang and the Han in the Later Han context. During the chaotic period, the impact of war might change people's ways of living, obscuring a clear distinction between the ethnic groups of Qiang

⁴¹ For further discussion on the Han scholars' view on the nature of non-Han people, see Goldin, "Steppe Nomads as a Philosophical Problem in Classical China," 220-246

and Han. As will be shown in the coming sections, over the course of the protracted conflicts, the ethnic boundaries between the Han and the Qiang in the northwestern region gradually became blurred. Both Han and Qiang united to fight against the empire, and ethnic Han people were called Qiang by their imperial adversary. The warlord Dong Zhuo, for example, was called a Qiang by his contemporaries since he was close to the Qiang chieftains and, most importantly, commanded a military force constituted by a large number of Qiang officers and soldiers.⁴² Also, many local strongmen in Liang province in the last decades of Later Han married Qiang women and commanded Qiang forces. On the political spectrum of the time, there were no great differences between the ethnic Qiang and ethnic Han in the northwest as they were all enemies of the imperial state and were “those who are not part of us and live in the west” in the eyes of Guandong based scholar-officials. In other words, “Qiang” was a label used to refer to a

⁴² A modern Chinese historian, Zhu Ziyuan 朱子彥, coins the term *Qiang Hu hua* 羌胡化 (Qiang-Hu-ized) to describe the nature of the Liang provincial military forces in the last years of Later Han, see his “Lun Han Wei zhiji Qiang Hu hua de Liangzhuo junshi jituan” 論漢魏之際羌胡化的涼州軍事集團, in *Jilindaxue gujiyanjiusuo* 吉林大學古籍研究所 ed., *"1-6 Shiji Zhongguo beifang bianjiang, minzu, shehui guoji xueshu yantaohui" lunwenji* "1-6 世紀中國北方邊疆·民族·社會國際學術研討會"論文集 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2008), 112-125. A Japanese scholar also points out that during the last years of Later Han all the military forces in Liang province were constituted by both Han and Qiang peoples, and it is hardly possible to distinguish the two groups. See Morimoto Jun 森本淳, “Dong Han monian de Qiangzu yu Hanzu” 東漢末年的羌族與漢族, in *Zhongguo Wei Jin Nanbeichao shixuehui* 中國魏晉南北朝史學會 and *Wuhandaxue Zhongguo sanzhiujiu shiji yanjiusuo* 武漢大學中國三至九世紀研究所 eds., *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi yanjiu: huigu yu tansuo—Zhongguo Wei Jin Nanbeichao shixuehui dijiujie nianhui lunwenji* 魏晉南北朝史研究：回顧與探索——中國魏晉南北朝史學會第九屆年會論文集 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009), 178-185.

hostile population living west of the Later Han imperial center. At this point, “Han” and “Qiang” are malleable terms that define the people who either swore allegiance to the imperial state or did not.⁴³

HAN-QIANG ENDURING RIVALRIES

As mentioned before, the military confrontation between the Later Han and the Qiang was a “Hundred Years’ War” and its consequences for the Later Han cannot be overemphasized. However, it is still an understudied subject.⁴⁴ From the perspective of the history of warfare, there are many battles and campaigns as well as strategy and tactics adopted by the two sides that deserve in-depth study, but not much has been done on these topics yet. The operational facet of the Qiang wars in particular deserves further research as conflict with the Qiang developed a new pattern of warfare and posed an unprecedented strategic situation that was drastically different from those that the Later Han army accustomed to. The Later Han military found it hard to adapt and adjust themselves to the battles with the Qiang, which can partly explain why the Later Han made their effort of overcoming the Qiang such a difficult task and could only won a

⁴³ Naomi Standen has shown political loyalty as a means to draw ethnic boundary in a study on the late 10th century north China, see her *Unbounded Loyalty*, 64-104.

⁴⁴ The three chapters in Rafe de Crespigny’s book on the Later Han’s northern frontiers is probably the hitherto most detailed study on the Qiang wars in any language. See his *Northern Frontier*, Chapters 2-4.

Pyrrhic victory. Nevertheless, space prevents me from exploring this fascinating subject any further in the present study, and I shall save it for my future research.

What concerns us in this chapter is the impact of the Qiang wars on the Later Han empire in general and on the northwest in particular, and how the prolonged conflicts aggravated the discontent and enmity of the northwesterners towards the imperial center. This section will first introduce the bellicose relations between the Former Han and the Qiang as a backdrop for understanding the enduring rivalries between the Later Han and the Qiang; then sketch the course of the protracted Qiang wars during the Later Han dynasty.

1. The adversarial relations between the Former Han and the Qiang

Generally speaking, the Qiang were never a main concern in the Former Han imperial strategy. The fact that there are no independent accounts for the Qiang in the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu* tells of the relative insignificance of the Qiang to the Former Han. In the eyes of the Former Han policy makers, the Qiang as a group only played a subsidiary role in the Former Han's strategic setting against the Xiongnu.⁴⁵ As mentioned in Chapter Two,

⁴⁵ Guan Donggui, "Handai chuli Qiangzu wenti de banfa de jiantao" 漢代處理羌族問題的辦法的檢討, *Shihuo yuekan* 2.3 (1973): 129; Yang Yongjun 楊永俊, "Lun Xi Han de 'gejue Qiang Hu' zhengce dui liang Han Xi Qiang zhi 'huo' de yingxiang" 論西漢的「隔絕羌胡」政策對兩漢西羌之「禍」的影響, in *Yichun shizhuan xuebao* 宜春師專學報 20.4 (1998.8): 27-31.

when the Former Han put the Qiang on the strategic agenda it was mostly for the purpose of cutting off their contact with the Xiongnu, the prime target of the empire. Nevertheless, the Qiang still engaged in military conflicts with the Former Han.

The first recorded formal contact between the Qiang and the Former Han happened in the reign of Emperor Jing when a Qiang tribe surrendered to the Han. Those Qiang were settled in five counties: Didao 狄道, Angu 安故, Lintao 臨洮, Didao 氐道, and Qiangdao 羌道.⁴⁶ Among them, there were three “dao”—special districts for settling alien populations. Also, from the biography of the famous “Flying General” Li Guang, we know that he once repented of his undue killing of around 800 surrendered Qiang rebels when he was the governor of Longxi commandery during the same period.⁴⁷

When Emperor Wu initiated the imperial expansionist project, there was an influx of Han troops and settlers into the Qiang’s area of activity. Conflicts ensued as the Qiang felt threatened and were even expelled by Han encroachment.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the Xiongnu sometimes played the Qiang card to threaten the Former Han’s backdoor—the southern part of the northwestern borderlands. This resulted in a collaborative assault upon the Han in 112BCE. Various Qiang groups resolved their hatred, formed a

⁴⁶ *HHS*, 87: 2876.

⁴⁷ *SJ*, 109: 2874; *HHS*, 87: 2876.

⁴⁸ *HHS*, 87: 2876.

confederation, gathered 100,000 men, and launched an eastward attack on the Han to echo a concomitant southward attack from the Xiongnu. Emperor Wu sent the cavalry of the northwestern region and the infantry of the interior commanderies in total of 100,000 to suppress the Qiang.⁴⁹ Afterwards the emperor set up the official position of Colonel Protector of the Qiang, mentioned in Chapter Three, to take charge of the Qiang affairs.⁵⁰ In 81BCE, the imperial court of Emperor Zhao divided two counties each from the commanderies of Tianshui, Longxi, and Zhangye to form a new commandery called Jincheng as means to strengthen control over and defend against the Qiang. The foremost general Zhao Chongguo, who would spend his last years dealing with the Qiang, probably moved to the new commandery at this time as we have discussed in the previous chapter.

The Qiang's offensive in 112BCE was launched not only at the Xiongnu's instigation but also as resistance to Han encroachment. In contrast to the conventional explanation given in standard histories that military conflicts between the Chinese regimes and the surrounding peoples were initiated by the avaricious barbarians for the purpose of plundering Chinese resources, the Qiang were in fact victims of Han territorial expansion

⁴⁹ *HS*, 6: 188; *HHS*, 87: 2876-2877.

⁵⁰ *HHS*, 87: 2877. Also see Gao, "Handai Hu Qiang Xiaowei shulun," 10-16; Liu, *Shizhe yu guanzhi yanbian*, 291-302.

and colonization.⁵¹ Accompanying the inroad of the Han power into the northwest was a large number of Han garrison soldiers and settlers who competed with the Qiang for the limited pasture and arable lands. In the scramble for resources, the Han colonists, backed by imperial military, nearly always gained the upper hand and displaced the autochthonous peoples from the preferred settlement sites. The state-sponsored conversion of pastures into settled agriculturally-productive tax-remitting land or government-owned grazing land forced the Qiang people into the rather unproductive uplands in the west. One focal point of struggle between the Han and the Qiang was the Great and Little Yu Valleys (Daxiao Yugu 大小榆谷), which are principally alluvial plains and loess-covered low hills and therefore a major agricultural area in the upper Yellow River Valley.⁵² The area originally provided a desirable site to various Qiang groups for their mixed economy. However, with the steady advance of Han settlers, the Qiang were forced out of the area and retreated to isolated enclaves. The deprived Qiang were certain to fight tooth and nail in attempts to recover their lost land.⁵³

⁵¹ To challenge the conventional assumption that raiding is a nomadic phenomenon, Naomi Standen has shown in a study that raiding as a means of economic exploitation along the frontier was practiced by both nomadic people and the sedentary Chinese, see her "Raiding and Frontier Society in the Five Dynasties," in Nicola Di Cosmo and Don J. Wyatt eds., *Political Frontiers, Ethnic Boundaries, and Human Geographies in Chinese History*, 160-191.

⁵² For the natural environment of the area, see Wang, "The Ch'iang of Ancient China through the Han Dynasty," 66-67.

⁵³ Yang, "Lun Xi Han de 'gejue Qiang Hu' zhengce dui liang Han Xi Qiang zhi 'huo' de yingxiang," 29-31.

In the meantime, increasing numbers of surrendered or captured Qiang were resettled by the Han state into the northwestern counties. In the new environment, these alien new-comers were usually discriminated against, abused and exploited by the Han local officials and inhabitants, with magnates in particular, which in turn exacerbated tensions and unease between the Han and the Qiang. During the reign of Emperor Yuan, for instance, an official named Hou Ying 侯應 (fl. 40s-30s BCE) once reported that the Qiang who lived along the frontiers were suffering from Han exploitation as the greedy Han officials and people seized their wives, sons, and animals.⁵⁴ Seeds of hatred were thus sowed.

After the 112BCE assault, the Qiang launched another large-scale offensive in 61BCE. Once again the Xiongnu played a role in abetting the Qiang against the Han, but the crucial factor that triggered this offensive was the Han-Qiang conflict over grazing lands. Several years before the offensive, when a Han emissary Yiqu Anguo 義渠安國 (His surname Yiqu probably reveals that his family was of Yiqu Rong origin, one of the western barbarians in the northwest during the Warring States period) visited the Qiang area, a Qiang tribe requested permission to move eastward from the barren mountainous

⁵⁴ *HS*, 94B: 3804.

area they were living to herd their animals in the no-man's area in the valley of the Huang River. When the emissary reported to the court, the Qiang specialist General Zhao Chongguo rejected the request. However, the Qiang thought they had already notified the Han official and thus led their animals across the Huang River. As local authorities were unable to handle the situation, conflicts arose. In 63BCE, several Qiang groups formed an alliance and swore to fight together. The court again sent Yiqu Anguo to settle the issue. Upon his arrival, Yiqu summoned 40 chieftains, had them beheaded, ordered his troops to raid the Qiang, and killed over a thousand of them. The massacre provoked uproar among the Qiang, and widespread revolts ensued.⁵⁵ When the situation was out of control, the 76-year-old General Zhao Chongguo volunteered to command the campaign against the Qiang. Unlike his colleagues who supported a heavy-handed policy of attacking the Qiang, Zhao installed colonies in the region instead, as he believed it was the most effective way to throttle the Qiang.⁵⁶ Although Zhao managed to suppress the Qiang, his victory was but a short-term palliative measure as the Han never reached an optimal way to solve the deep-rooted conflict with the Qiang.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *HHS*, 87: 2877.

⁵⁶ There is a detailed record in the *Hanshu* of the discussions on operational strategy between Zhao Chongguo and Emperor Xuan during the campaign, see *HS*, 69: 2975-2992. For English translation of Zhao's proposal, see Dreyer, "Zhao Chongguo," 665-725. There is also a discussion among central officials over the logistic problems in the campaign, see *HS*, 78: 3275-3278.

⁵⁷ There are opposing views among scholars that whether Zhao Chongguo's policy of setting farming

The two offensives launched by the Qiang, the appointment of Colonel Protector of the Qiang, and the establishment of Jincheng commandery all demonstrate the increasing importance of the Qiang in the imperial strategic concerns. Although only sporadic revolts of the Qiang occurred in the last forty years of the Former Han,⁵⁸ the imperial state never relaxed its grip on the Qiang,⁵⁹ especially when it came to preventing the Qiang from collaborating with the Xiongnu and protecting the communication lines between the imperial center and the Western Regions from being interrupted by the Qiang.⁶⁰

Besides textual records that referred above, documents on wooden boards and bamboo strips excavated in the northwest also speak of the tensions between the Han and the Qiang during the Former Han times. An official document found in the Juyan site states that if any staff of government offices were killed by the Qiang, family members of the deceased would be granted 30,000 cash for burial.⁶¹ Another strip was a letter written

colonies was effective or not. For the supporting views, see Guan, “Handai chuli Qiangzu wenti de banfa de jiantao,” 130-131; for the opposing views, see Yang, “Lun Xi Han de ‘gejue Qiang Hu’ zhengce dui liang Han Xi Qiang zhi ‘huo’ de yingxiang,” 29-31 and Wang, *Youmuzhe de jueze*, 174-175.

⁵⁸ For example, in 42BCE, see *HS* 79: 3296-3299.

⁵⁹ For example, see *HS*, 94B: 3804.

⁶⁰ Yang, “Lun Xi Han de ‘gejue Qiang Hu’ zhengce dui liang Han Xi Qiang zhi ‘huo’ de yingxiang,” 29-31

⁶¹ See Zhongguo shehuikexueyuan kaoguyanjiusuo 中國社會科學院考古研究所 ed., *Juyan Hanjian: jiayi bian* 居延漢簡：甲乙編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 191.

For the currency that the Later Han used was probably 5-*zhu/wu-zhu* 五銖 coins. For an outline of the Han monetary system, see Walter Scheidel, “The Monetary Systemes of the Han and Roman Empires,” in Scheidel ed., *Rome and China*, 137-207.

Unfortunately, we lack clear sources of what unit of currency did the Later Han use

by somebody to express his gratitude to his patron who had helped the poor writer resettle in the midst of the Qiang area (*Qiangzhong* 羌中).⁶² This kind of resettlement exemplifies the Han policy of moving poor people into Qiang-populated areas, on one hand, provided a new life for the needy yet, on the other, irritated the Qiang people. In Xuanquan 懸泉, a recently excavated site of a Han postal relay office near Dunhuang, remnants of late Former Han documents concerning the Qiang were discovered, including records of the offices of Colonel Protector of the Qiang and other relevant postings.⁶³ Furthermore, there were reports of the Han army suppressing Qiang revolts.⁶⁴

The Former Han and the Qiang maintained a fragile peace until the end of the dynasty when Wang Mang became the regent of the last Former Han emperor. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Wang Mang forced some of the Qiang groups to surrender their lands to establish Xihai commandery, a move which eventually backfired as the Qiang attacked the new commandery in order to recover their lost territories. Wang Mang's failure once again showed that scramble for land was a deep-rooted source of conflict between the two sides.

⁶² Ibid, 253. Wang Mingke suggests that “Qiangzhong” was a geographic concept with changing territories, see his “The Ch’iang of Ancient China through the Han Dynasty,” 129-132.

⁶³ See Hao Shusheng 郝樹聲 and Zhang Defang 張德芳, *Xuanquan Hanjian yanjiu* 懸泉漢簡研究 (Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 2009), 161-166.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 167-170.

2. The Qiang Wars during the Later Han

From the standpoint of the Later Han empire, the Qiang who engaged in the so-called “Qiang wars” were composed of both foreign invaders and rebels. The Qiang forces were constituted not only by the Qiang groups outside the imperial realm who had conflicts with the Han over land resources but also by those who lived in the empire and were subject to imperial rule. Growing conflicts between the Han and the Qiang within and without the empire triggered the protracted military confrontations.

For the Qiang people living outside the imperial realm, the Han colonization in the northwest meant encroachment upon their lands. Although the Later Han was not as aggressive as the Former Han in territorial expansion, competition for grazing and arable lands between the Later Han and the Qiang were still intense. In fact, the Later Han never stopped setting up colonies in the Qiang’s areas of activity. For example, around 100CE, one local official proposed the imperial court to reinstate Xihai commandery, which was abolished under the Qiang attack. The imperial court empowered this official to set up 34 colonies in the area as preparatory measures. Increasing numbers of colonies threatened the Qiang’s living space and thus intensified hostility towards the Later Han. As historical records show, when the Han colonists invaded the land of the Qiang, various Qiang

groups would form alliances and united forces against the Han armies.

Within the imperial realm, the availability of large numbers of Qiang was a main cause that made the Qiang problem last so long and spread so vast. As mentioned above, the Former Han resettled surrendered and/or captured Qiang in the northwestern commanderies, and a large Qiang population had stayed within or along the northwestern frontier by the end of the dynasty. The civil war ensued the downfall of Wang Mang enabled some of the Qiang originally outside the imperial realm to move in and to occupy counties in Jincheng commandery. During the civil war, Wei Ao and Dou Rong recruited armies from the Qiang and other non-Han peoples.⁶⁵ Although Dou Rong surrendered to the Later Han and Wei Ao was defeated, not all the Qiang groups who originally attached to the two men shifted their allegiance to the Later Han. Some of the Qiang were still openly hostile towards the Later Han and carried out raids on the Han territories.

In dealing with the Qiang, the Later Han followed its predecessor's practices by sending military forces to crush them, reinstating Colonel Protector of the Qiang to oversee the restive Qiang in the region, and resettling captured and surrendered Qiang in the imperial territory.⁶⁶ Here are some examples: In 35CE, General Ma Yuan 馬援

⁶⁵ *HHS*, 15: 588; 22: 796-797; 87: 2878.

⁶⁶ On the resettlement policy during the Later Han, see Kumagai Shigezo 熊谷滋三, "Go-Kan no

settled more than 8,000 Qiang in the commanderies of Tianshui, Longxi, and Fufeng 扶風.⁶⁷ The first two commanderies were in Liang province but Fufeng was in the erstwhile Former Han metropolitan area and it was the first time that the Qiang being settled in a non-frontier commandery. Ma's decision would incur criticism from later generations for sowing the seeds of Qiang rebellion in inland areas.⁶⁸ In 58CE, the Later Han troops defeated a Qiang tribe and settled 7,000 of them in the Former Han metropolitan area.⁶⁹ Henceforth, the Qiang spread to Guanzhong. In 77CE, a certain number of Qiang in the Former Han metropolitan area were moved to Hedong, an interior commandery next to the Later Han metropolitan region. In 101CE, the Grand Administrator of Jincheng commandery defeated the Qiang and resettled the 6,000-odd surrendered to the commanderies of Hanyang, Anding, and Longxi.⁷⁰ Besides, the commanderies of Beidi, Shang, and Xihe all had Qiang population, though no details were given in the sources.

In terms of resettlement, different Qiang groups received different treatment. The Later Han state settled some of the Qiang along the frontiers and allowed them to retain tribal organization in order to utilize their military strength as frontier garrisons. However,

Kyozoku naishisaku ni tsuite” 後漢の羌族内徙策について, *Shiteki* 史滴 9 (1988): 49-74.

⁶⁷ *HHS*, 24: 835; 87: 2878-2879.

⁶⁸ *HHS*, 87: 2901. Different from the traditional view, de Crespigny suggests that Ma Yuan's resettlement strategy was successful in weakening the Qiang's power, see his *Northern Frontier*, 73-74.

⁶⁹ *HHS*, 87: 2880.

⁷⁰ *HHS*, 87: 2884.

spreading along the frontiers gave these groups opportunities to collaborate with their counterparts who lived outside the empire; retaining tribal organization enabled them to preserve solidarity and autonomy, which would become their weapons in anti-Han operations. On the other hand, the Later Han state disbanded the tribal organization of some Qiang people, resettled them in counties to live with Han people, where they took up duty of paying taxes and corvée labor as common subjects of the empire; some were even recruited by the imperial state as special troops; some others were bullied by the local officials and magnates and were reduced to being their retainers and slaves. No matter whether they were soldiers or slaves in the Han territories, the Qiang generally suffered from exploitation which exacerbated their hostility towards the Han.

Since the wars between the Later Han and the Qiang lasted very long, it will not be necessary to weary the reader with the details. It will suffice to provide a sketch of the military conflicts; I will leave the details for a future study.⁷¹

After General Ma Yuan suppressed the Qiang in 35CE, fights between the Qiang and the Han broke out consecutively in 56, 57, and 58CE in the commanderies of Wudu and Longxi.⁷² Although the Han forces managed to defeat the Qiang, the power of the Qiang

⁷¹ de Crespigny provides detailed narrative of the Qiang rebellions between 107-150CE, see his *Northern Frontier*, 90-125.

⁷² *HHS*, 87: 2879-2880.

in the northwest was still very strong. When the newly-appointed acting Colonel Protector of the Qiang, Guo Xiang 郭襄 (fl. 50s CE), arrived Longxi commandery, he was frightened by the fact that the Qiang were prevalent in Liang province and immediately retreated to the capital. Guo was then dismissed and the office of Colonel Protector of the Qiang was also suspended,⁷³ which reflected the inactive attitude of the imperial court. In 76CE, a new round of military conflict with the Qiang broke out; the Later Han reinstated the Colonel Protector of the Qiang and spent great efforts in suppressing the Qiang.⁷⁴ The situation was out of control again in 86CE and the Colonel Protector was even killed in a battle in the following year. Shortly after, 800 Qiang tribal chieftains agreed to make peace with the new Colonel Protector but were all ambushed and killed. This aroused widespread anger among the Qiang and triggered another wave of Qiang offensives. It lasted until 89CE when a new Colonel Protector managed to pacify the Qiang.⁷⁵ However, military confrontation resumed in 92CE and the Later Han had to spend the following six years in making the Qiang surrender.

In addition to the incidents mentioned above, there were skirmishes that broke out intermittently. According to the historical accounts, these conflicts were mainly caused by

⁷³ *HHS*, 87: 2881.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *HHS*, 87: 2882-2883.

the Han mismanagement of the Qiang groups along the frontier. The Colonel Protector of the Qiang and other regional and local authorities held prime responsibility for relations with the Qiang. When there were Han officials who were capable of maintaining a good relationship with the Qiang, the region could enjoy peace and stability without recourse to the armed forces.⁷⁶ Otherwise, when the Han officials mishandled the situation, such as killing the surrendered tribal chieftains, widespread discontent and hatred spurred the Qiang to fight against the Han. Although the ability of the officials was important in managing the Han-Qiang relations, it was neither a stable institutional factor nor a long-term method to resolve such deep-rooted antagonism. Depending on capable officials was a stopgap measure that could only maintain a fragile balance between the two sides at best but could not guarantee long-lasting peace.

In the second century CE, three wars broke out between the Qiang and the Later Han and brought devastating effects to the empire. The first began in 107CE and ended in 118CE. The second lasted from 140 to 145CE. The third was from 159 to 169CE.

In 107CE, a Han emissary to the Western Regions forcibly conscripted several thousand Qiang cavalrymen in the commanderies of Jincheng, Longxi, and Hanyang as

⁷⁶ Guan, "Handai chuli Qiangzu wenti de banfa de jiantao," 131-132.

his escort. When they arrived at Jiuquan commandery, the unwilling Qiang cavalymen all fled as they were afraid of being deployed in the Western Regions with no return.⁷⁷ During the process of catching the Qiang fugitives, the Han troops raided many Qiang settlements and caused widespread discontent and fear. Nearly all the Qiang in Liang province immediately rose up against the Han authority. They attacked towns and killed Han officials. According to the sources, since those Qiang had already been settled in the empire for long time, they lived as common subjects and had no armor and weapons; therefore, they used bamboo and wooden sticks as spear and halberd, and wooden boards as shield. Some of them even wielded bronze mirrors to mislead the Han soldiers into thinking that they were holding bronze weapons.⁷⁸ Even though they were poorly equipped, the Qiang repeatedly defeated the Han forces.

Facing such a large-scale Qiang revolt, the Later Han imperial court deployed 50,000 troops under the command of General of Chariots and Cavalry (*Juji jiangjun* 車騎將軍) Deng Zhi 鄧鷺 (d. 121CE), who was the brother of the regent Empress Dowager Deng and also a descendent of Deng Yu (a founding member of the Later Han and the number

⁷⁷ For the role the Qiang played in the Later Han's enterprise in the Western Regions, see Li Zhengzhou 李正周, "Dong Han 'sanjue santong' Xiyu yu 'Qianghuo' zhi guanlian" 東漢「三絕三通」西域與「羌禍」之關聯, *Yantai shifan xueyuan xuebao* 煙台師範學院學報 21.3 (2004.9) : 24-27.

⁷⁸ *HHS*, 87 : 2886; *Qianfulun*, 24 : 279.

one of the “Twenty-Eight Generals of the Cloud Terrace”), with the assistance of Ren Shang 任尚 (d. 118CE). Appointing such a prestigious person as Deng Zhi as the commander-in-chief demonstrated that the Later Han imperial court began the campaign with high hopes. However, the results were disappointing. Deng’s army was defeated in 108CE. Dianlian 滇零 (d. 112CE), a Qiang chieftain, seized the chance to establish a regime in Beidi commandery and proclaim himself Son of Heaven, putting himself on equal footing with the Han emperor. Dianlian then called upon Qiang groups everywhere, invaded the regions of Zhao and Wei (modern northern Henan province and southern Hebei province) in the east and Yi province (modern Sichuan province) in the south. Guanzhong was at the Qiang’s mercy and its communication with the east was interrupted. Corresponding to modern Chinese geography, the provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Shaanxi, Shanxi, southern Hebei, and the northern portion of Sichuan were all subject to the Qiang’s military assault. The price of grain in counties in the Huangzhong 湟中 area, where the conflict was most intense, skyrocketed. Innumerable civilians were killed in chaos. Facing such a difficult situation, the immediate response of the imperial court was to call back Deng Zhi in order to protect him from continuous defeat, which would undermine the authority of the Deng family, and left Ren Shang to

take over the command.⁷⁹

Between 109 to 110CE, the Han armies suffered a series of defeats. The imperial court then ordered Ren Shang to retreat from the western frontier to Chang'an to strengthen the defense of Guanzhong. Meanwhile, at request of local officials, the government seats of Jincheng commandery and Colonel Protector of the Qiang were all removed from their original sites. The retreat of troops and government seats all prefigured the imperial court's intention of withdrawing from the war-torn region, which will be discussed in the next section about the debates over abandoning Liang province.

In 111CE, Ren Shang was dismissed for achieving nothing in the campaign. Meanwhile, the Qiang became stronger. They crossed the Yellow River and attacked the interior commanderies, including Hedong, Shangdang, Henei, and even threatened Zhao, Wei, and the imperial capital. The imperial court was frightened and immediately mobilized all the capital defense troops to hold the chokepoint access to the capital. Over 600 fortresses were thus built in north China to defend against the Qiang.⁸⁰ In the meantime, the imperial court forcibly evacuated the residents of Longxi, Anding, and Shang commanderies eastward to the Former Han metropolitan area. For those who were

⁷⁹ In fact, once back to the capital, Deng Zhi was appointed the Grand General, the highest status of the Han bureaucracy.

⁸⁰ *HHS*, 87 : 2887.

reluctant to move, the Han armies reaped all their crops in the fields and demolished their houses.⁸¹ These measures only fueled apprehension in the people of Liang province and finally provoked those homeless into acts of violence against Han authorities. Those northwestern residents finally joined Dianlian's regime, which subsequently transformed it into an anti-Han forces with a mixed composition of peoples.

Starting from 112CE, the war was a stalemate. In order to make a breakthrough, in 114CE, the Later Han set up 33 fortresses in the interior commandery Henei to strengthen the defense line, replaced the commanders with a new cohort, and summoned the Xiongnu cavalry for help.⁸² It was not until 118CE that the Later Han forces finally destroyed the Dianlian regime, though it was ruled by Dianlian's son by then, and order was temporarily reestablished in the affected region. The magnitude of the devastation in this ten-year war was unprecedented, which we will return to in the next section.

The peace achieved by the Later Han was short-lived. In the following year, some Qiang planned to revolt, although they were quickly suppressed. In 120CE, military conflicts between the Later Han and the Qiang broke out again and lasted till 122CE with heavy casualties on both sides. It was not until 126CE when a Qiang rebellion in Longxi

⁸¹ *HHS*, 87 : 2888.

⁸² *HHS*, 87 : 2889-2890.

was suppressed did Liang province really enjoy a short-term peace again.⁸³

During early 130s CE, the Later Han state resumed setting up colonies in the Huangzhong region, which fueled apprehension of the Qiang living there. In 134CE, some Qiang groups raided Han commanderies and began a new round of intermittent military conflicts.

The cumulative effect of the 130s CE conflicts was the second Qiang war (140-145 CE). When the war broke out, the Qiang forces attacked Jincheng and the Former Han metropolitan region. Ma Xian 馬賢 (d. 141CE), a hero in the previous war, was appointed as General Who Conquers the West (*Zhengxi jiangjun* 征西將軍) with 100,000 troops to suppress the Qiang. Meanwhile, 300 fortresses were set up as defensive measures. In 141CE, however, the 5-6,000 cavalry contingent led by Ma Xian himself met a crushing defeat at Mount Yegu 射姑山, and Ma and his two sons were killed and the contingent was decimated by the Qiang.⁸⁴ Ma Xian was the highest ranking official ever killed by the Qiang and his demise indeed marked a military disaster for and imposed psychological dislocation on the Later Han. Meanwhile, the death of Ma Xian encouraged all the Qiang within and beyond the imperial realm to unite against the

⁸³ *HHS*, 87 : 2892-2893.

⁸⁴ *HHS*, 87: 2895.

empire. As historical accounts describe, “the Eastern and Western Qiang therefore achieve a great union” 東西羌遂大合.⁸⁵ The Qiang divided into three armies: one advanced eastward to Chang’an and burnt the mausoleums of the Former Han emperors; another marched northward to Beidi commandery and defeated the Han defensive forces; the third moved northwestward to attack the Hexi Corridor. Consequently, the whole Liang province and Guanzhong region were ravaged by the Qiang. The Later Han state then resorted to evacuating the government seats of Anding and Beidi eastward.⁸⁶

In 142CE, the imperial court appointed Zhao Chong 趙冲 (d. 144) as Colonel Protector of the Qiang. Apart from using military forces, Zhao exploited the disunity of Qiang society and the discord among the Qiang chieftains. As a result, some Qiang groups surrendered. Although Zhao spent great effort in alleviating the situation, in 144CE, one of his attachés joined the Qiang forces. When chasing this fugitive, Zhao Chong and his men were wiped out in an ambush by the Qiang. It was not until next year, when the Han officials managed to bribe some of the Qiang chieftains, thereby dismembering the Qiang union, that the war ended.⁸⁷

The third war broke out in 159CE and lasted for ten years. In 159CE, Duan Jiong, one

⁸⁵ *HHS*, 87: 2896.

⁸⁶ *HHS*, 87: 2896.

⁸⁷ *HHS*, 87: 2896-2897.

of the “Three Brilliant of Liang Province,” was appointed Colonel Protector of the Qiang. The ruthless Duan was well-known for his iron-hand policy in dealing with the Qiang. Once he assumed the new position, Duan defeated several Qiang groups who raided Longxi commandery. It was only the beginning of the war. In the following years, Duan and the Qiang fought back and forth in the northwest. When Duan was in a campaign in 161CE, the Qiang and other non-Han people under his command mutinied because of their discontent with overdue services. Duan’s troops collapsed, and he was jailed by the imperial court.

Duan’s successor was unable to suppress the Qiang and the situation grew worse. The imperial court then appointed Huangfu Gui, one the “Three Brilliant of Liang province,” to command the imperial forces in the west. Huangfu managed to alleviate the situation for several months. Zhang Huan, another one of the “Three Brilliant,” also participated in this war. Both Huangfu and Zhang were different from Duan Jiong as they did not rely solely on armed forces but also adopted sympathetic stances in dealing with the Qiang.⁸⁸

However, it was not easy to solve the deep-rooted antagonism between the two sides.

Even though Huangfu and Zhang temporarily restored order in certain areas, there was no

⁸⁸ For analysis of the different strategy of the “Three Brilliant” in dealing with the Qiang, see Yang Yongjun, “Shi bijiao ‘Liangzhou sanming’ de zhi Qiang zhengce” 試比較「涼州三明」的治羌政策, *Xibei shidi* 西北史地 1996.2: 73-80.

room for complacency. In 162CE, various Qiang groups united again and launched another wave of offensives. All commanderies in the west were ravaged and the Later Han “nearly lost Liang province” 涼州幾亡.⁸⁹ Facing such an uncontrollable situation, the imperial court released Duan Jiong and appointed him Colonel Protector again.

After returning to the battlefield, Duan Jiong launched a large-scale counteroffensive campaign. From 164 to 165CE, according to accounts, there was not a single day that Duan was not fighting (*wuri buzhan* 無日不戰).⁹⁰ As a result of his effort, the Qiang were exhausted. Duan was ennobled for his victory. In 167CE, the Qiang in the west rose up again but were wiped out by Duan. The history says, “the Western Qiang were thus pacified” 西羌於此弭定.⁹¹

Nevertheless, the Eastern Qiang were still active in Guanzhong. As Duan Jiong achieved success in the western front, the emperor summoned him to the capital and asked his opinion on how to handle the eastern front. Duan said that the Qiang could only be dealt with by “putting pikes between their ribs and blades on their necks” 長矛挾脅，白刃加頸.⁹² The emperor found Duan’s view persuasive and appointed him to take charge of the eastern front. Once he arrived, Duan won a battle and killed many Qiang.

⁸⁹ *HHS*, 65: 2147.

⁹⁰ *HHS*, 65: 2147.

⁹¹ *HHS*, 65: 2148.

⁹² *HHS*, 65: 2148.

The imperial court then granted him the title of General who Crushes the Qiang. In order to keep his promise to the emperor and end the war quickly, Duan continued his offensive strategy and even carried out widespread genocide, wiping out the Qiang groups he encountered. As a result, the Qiang who faced Duan either died or surrendered. In the end of the biography of Duan Jiong in *Hou Hanshu*, the compiler Fan Ye praised Duan's victory as making "the valley quiet and the mountain vacant" (*gujing shankong* 谷靜山空),⁹³ which clearly reflected the result of mass killings. However, it was definitely a Pyrrhic victory as the protracted warfare had already drawn the Later Han to the verge of bankruptcy and, most importantly, deeply undermined the imperial authority in the northwest.

SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION

The magnitude of devastation caused by the Qiang wars was unprecedented in the Later Han history, and in the history of early imperial China. The protracted warfare not only resulted in tremendous loss of life and property but also unleashed a maelstrom of unrest in the northwest, which finally turned the northwesterners hostile towards the imperial center. After winning the Qiang wars, ironically, the imperial center had lost control of

⁹³ *HHS*, 65: 2154.

the northwest and it was the northwestern warlord Dong Zhuo who gave the final blow to the Later Han imperial authority and triggered the dismemberment of the empire.

1. Economic losses and heavy casualties

The sporadic conflicts with the Qiang during the first fifty years of Later Han had already necessitated large garrison forces in the northwest and required heavy maintenance costs. From 100s CE onward, the prolonged Qiang wars even left the Later Han on the brink of bankruptcy and took a heavy toll on both belligerent sides.

According to the accounts of *Hou Hanshu*, military spending, including feeding the troops and other logistical expenses, in the first Qiang war (107-118CE) “cost over 24 billion cash and emptied the state’s coffers.”⁹⁴ 用二百四十餘億，府帑空竭。 In 111CE, when the war “spread to the interior commanderies, innumerable people on the frontier died; the provinces of Bing and Liang were consequently exhausted.”⁹⁵ 延及內郡，邊民死者不可勝數，并、涼二州，遂至虛耗。 Although the historical records did not give the exact number of casualties, it would not be baseless to say that the death toll of the Later Han soldiers was high, not to mention that of civilians. For example, when Ren Shang met a devastating defeat in a battle in 108CE, over 8,000 of his soldiers died. Also, from

⁹⁴ *HHS*, 87: 2891.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

the “Stele for Zhao Kuan,” which I have analyzed in the previous chapter, we know that around 108 and 109CE Zhao Kuan was the Deputy Major of the Colonel Protector of the Qiang and was engaged in a battle, in which the Later Han army was decimated; Zhao Kuan himself barely survived but lost his four sons who were troops.⁹⁶ Furthermore, when the Qiang forces invaded the interior commanderies, which had enjoyed a long period of peace and prosperity, it caused panic in those areas. A great number of fortresses were built in the interior and residents were forced to evacuate. A Later Han stele dating to 117CE called *Si Sangong shan bei* 祀三公山碑, which was inscribed for commemorating an offering to a local deity carried out by local officials, used the phrase “suffered from the Qiang’s raid” 遭離羌寇 to describe the context behind erecting the stele.⁹⁷ It is noteworthy because the stele was located originally in Changshan Guo 常山國 (in modern Hebei province), an enfeoffed kingdom in the interior of the empire, and thus shows the Qiang war’s impact on the area beyond the Northwest.

The threat of war, pillage, and the subsequent hyperinflation in grain prices all caused large-scale dislocation of population in the northwest.⁹⁸ Once again, Zhao Kuan provided

⁹⁶ Gao, *Hanbei jishi*, 433; Nagata, *Kandai sekkoku shūsei*, v.1: 225-229 and v.2: 226-227.

⁹⁷ For the full inscription, see Gao, *Hanbei jishi*, 32-33; Nagata, *Kandai sekkoku shūsei*, v.1: 34-36 and v.2: 56-57.

⁹⁸ On the refugees of Liang province, see Zhang Shuang 張爽 and Xue Haibo 薛海波, “Shilun Dong Han Liang zhou liumin wenti” 試論東漢涼州流民問題, *Gansu shehui kexue* 甘肅社會科學 2006.2:

a real case of dislocation as he followed the refugees who moved to Guanzhong after the catastrophic defeat, which we have seen in the last chapter. Moreover, a comparison between census data that was carried out by the Later Han in 140CE and by the Former Han in 2CE, both listed in Chapter Two, shows clearly that the northwestern commanderies experienced a drastic drop in population in the first one hundred years of Later Han. For example, the percentage of registered household in Longxi and Jincheng commanderies was only 10% of the Former Han's and Beidi commandery was even only 5%. The apparent population decrease in northwest could have resulted from various reasons, but the first Qiang war (107-118CE) was undoubtedly a significant one. Many people were killed in the war and even more fled and disappeared from the government household registers to shirk their onerous duties and avoid military service as much as possible. As a result, while the Later Han state had to throw enormous resources into the Qiang wars, the taxable northwestern households were shrinking quickly; in order to compensate for the loss, local governments squeezed the remaining residents, which in turn forced them to evade the burden even more. A vicious circle was thus formed.

Although the second Qiang war (140-145CE) was shorter than the first one, it still

cumulatively cost over 8 billion Later Han currency.⁹⁹ The death toll of soldiers was no less than during the previous war. For instance, General Ma Xian, his two sons, and several thousand cavalymen were wiped out in the battle of Mount Yegu; most of the 100,000 men originally under Ma's command finally died in battle in the subsequent years. The history summarizes that "the bones of the soldiers who did not attain a proper death were widely seen in the countryside."¹⁰⁰ 士卒不得其死者，白骨相望於野.

The third Qiang war (159-169) lasted ten years and incurred enormous costs. Despite the lack of details about all the expenses and casualties of this war, there is a record of Duan Jiong's military achievements which could give us a glimpse of the scale of the war. According to his biography, Duan Jiong fought 180 battles, killed 38,600-odd Qiang, and captured 427,500 livestock from them. In total, Duan spent 4.4 billion cash.¹⁰¹ Surprisingly, only 400-odd of his soldiers were killed in battle, though we do not have corroborating evidence of the authenticity of that number. These were only the statistical data related to Duan Jiong, without counting the expenses and casualties under other commanders in the ten years.

Although the Qiang wars were finally ended by Duan Jiong's mass killing, the wars

⁹⁹ *HHS*, 87: 2897.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *HHS*, 65: 2153.

had already exhausted the imperial coffer and left a trail of desolation across the northwest. Worse still, the northwestern region was also suffering from natural disasters during the protracted military confrontation. Civilians died in the greatest numbers when war coincided with natural disasters. Natural disasters further dislocated the people who survived and produced a large number of refugees, which caused social disorder not only in Liang province but also other regions where the refugees spread. Some scholars suggest that the influx of the northwestern refugees to the interior of the empire brought discontent and conflict to other regions and finally underlay the widespread popular uprising such as the Yellow Turbans Rebellion in the last years of Later Han.¹⁰²

Based on the historical records, we can make a brief list of serious natural disasters happened in Liang province during the Later Han period as follows:

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 93CE | Earthquake in Longxi commandery. ¹⁰³ |
| 97CE | Earthquake in Longxi commandery. ¹⁰⁴ |
| 109CE | Great famine in the whole province, cannibalism was reported. ¹⁰⁵ |
| 138CE | Earthquake in Jincheng and Longxi commanderies. ¹⁰⁶ |

¹⁰² Zhang and Xue, “Shilun Dong Han Liang zhou liumin wenti,” 77-80.

¹⁰³ *HHSZ*, 16: 3328.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *HHS*, 5: 214.

¹⁰⁶ *HHSZ*, 16: 3330.

- 144CE Earthquake in six commanderies of Liang province. In the past eight months, there were in total 180 earthquakes in the area.¹⁰⁷
- 161CE Earthquake in the whole province.¹⁰⁸
- 180CE Earthquake and flooding in Jiuquan commandery.¹⁰⁹
- 183CE Flooding in Jincheng commandery.¹¹⁰

Though this is not a complete one, it can still give us a glimpse of the situation in Liang province during the period in question.¹¹¹ It seems that from the late first century to the mid-second century the northwestern region had entered a period of frequent earthquake, especially in Longxi and Jincheng commanderies. Hence, it might not be coincidental that the two commanderies were subject to most frequent attacks from the Qiang. Historical records reveal that the entry of the 138CE earthquake was immediately followed by a report of the Qiang attacking the fortresses of Jincheng; after the 144CE earthquake was another Qiang assault, which killed the Colonel Protector of the Qiang.¹¹²

The Qiang were probably affected by the earthquake and resorted to raiding as a way of relief; they could have also seized the opportunity to attack the empire when the Han

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ *HHSZ*, 16: 3331.

¹⁰⁹ *HHSZ*, 16: 3332.

¹¹⁰ *HHSZ*, 15: 3312.

¹¹¹ For further information on the natural disasters happened in Liang province and the ensuing problems, see Zhang and Xue, "Shilun Dong Han Liang zhou liumin wenti," 77-80.

¹¹² *HHSZ*, 16: 3330.

local officials were preoccupied with relief work.

The combined effects of prolonged warfare and natural disasters indeed devastated the war-torn areas and deeply disrupted people's lives, but the northwestern writer Wang Fu complained repeatedly in his essays that if the regional and local officials were more concerned with the welfare of northwestern people and if the imperial army were more efficient, the Qiang wars could have ended earlier and the devastating effects of the wars could have been alleviated.¹¹³ In other words, from Wang Fu's point of view, poor management and mishandling of the situation were the cause of the long lasting suffering of the northwestern people.

Wang Fu's criticism was supported by the evidence given in the historical sources. As mentioned before, the Qiang people were exploited by regional and local officials, which caused riots. Even in times of peace, official corruption and embezzlement prevailed in Liang province, and both the Han and non-Han peoples suffered. The malfeasance of officials in Liang province became especially serious in the middle of the dynasty. During the late 150s CE, according to the wooden strips excavated in a family vault of imperial kinsmen at Gangu 甘谷 prefecture in modern Gansu province (which belonged to

¹¹³ Wang Fu mentioned this point several times in his works, see *Qianfulun* Chapters 21-24.

Hanyang commandery in the Later Han times), there were cases where local officials of Liang province even dared to infringe upon privileges of members of the imperial clan who lived in their jurisdiction by encroaching on their lands and forcing them to render levies, from which they were supposed to be exempt because of their royal kinsmanship.¹¹⁴ If even the privileges of imperial kinsmen (though distant) were violated, it would not be difficult to imagine that the commoners of Liang province were all at the mercy of local officials.¹¹⁵

Therefore, one reason why both Huangfu Gui and Zhang Huan had good reputations in Liang province and even earned respect from Qiang adversaries was their righteousness and denunciation of official corruption. After General Ma Xian's catastrophic defeat in 141CE, Huangfu Gui submitted a petition to the imperial court in which he sharply pointed out that the Qiang revolts were mainly caused by the mismanagement of frontier commanders, that it was their exploitation that forced the Qiang's military resistance, and that it was their inefficiency and incapability of dealing

¹¹⁴ For details, see Xiao Kangda 尚亢達, "Gangu Hanjian yu dong Han houqi shehui zhengzhi" 甘谷漢簡與東漢後期社會政治, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 考古與文物 1989.6: 78-85; Zhang Xuezheng 張學正, "Gangu Hanjian kaoshi" 甘谷漢簡考釋, in Gansusheng wenwugongzuodui 甘肅省文物工作隊 and Gansusheng baowuguan 甘肅省博物館 eds., *Hanjian yanjiu wenji* 漢簡研究文集 (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1984), 85-140.

¹¹⁵ Besides the corruption and malfeasance of local officials, the violations of imperial kinsmen's privileges in Liang province may also reflect the chaotic situation that under the turmoil of warfare and natural disasters members of imperial clan were deprived of any real protection.

with the situation and their attempts to cover up defeats that delayed the opportunities of pacifying the Qiang in the early stages.¹¹⁶ Later, when Huangfu Gui was appointed to command imperial troops in the northwest, he exercised his plenary authority to cashier corrupt regional and local officials as a necessary measure to pacify the Qiang;¹¹⁷ in the same manner, when Zhang Huan was in charge of the Qiang affairs in the northwest, he promoted incorrupt behavior, which earned him the trust of Qiang tribal leaders.¹¹⁸ The admirable behavior of both Huangfu and Zhang, on the other hand, reflected the prevailing corruption among officials in the northwest. However, what Zhang and Huangfu did was not an institutional mechanism for dealing with the Qiang questions. Therefore, when both of them were removed by their political opponents for their anti-corruption campaigns and other reasons, the relations between the Qiang and the Han regional and local officials deteriorated again.

Apart from malfeasance and corruption, the fact that quite a few officials advocated withdrawal from Liang province during the Qiang wars aggravated the chaotic situation even further. Moreover, the imperial army sent to the battlefield was criticized as inefficient and incompetent, which finally fostered the rise of the non-imperial controlled

¹¹⁶ *HHS*, 65: 2129.

¹¹⁷ *HHS*, 65: 2132.

¹¹⁸ *HHS*, 65: 2138.

northwestern military forces. Withdrawal and the military balance between the imperial troops and the northwestern forces will be discussed in the following two subsections.

2. Abandoning the Northwest and forcible Withdrawals

Facing incessant armed conflicts with the Qiang, especially after military setbacks, the idea of abandoning the northwest arose among some officials. The most revealing expressions of the idea were three debates over abandoning the region. The proponents insisted that it was the best way to solve the Qiang problem once and for all. Such an idea found wide support among central officials as well as their regional and local colleagues in Liang province. For the northwesterners, on the contrary, such an idea meant abandoning them and was unacceptable. Although the proposals of abandonment were never formally put into practice, the imperial court adopted an alternative way of evacuating the regional and local government seats and forcibly removing the residents, which provoked large-scale discontent among the northwesterners. The idea of giving up Liang province not only showed the estrangement between the imperial center and the northwest but also deepened the distrust between the two sides.

The idea of giving up the northwestern territories first emerged in the early years of

the Later Han. About 35CE, when General Ma Yuan defeated the Qiang who had occupied a significant number of counties in Jincheng commandery since the last years of Wang Mang's regime, some courtiers suggested giving up the land west of Poqiang county in Jincheng as the territory was distant and dominated by adversaries.¹¹⁹ Although no details of the courtiers were given in the history, it might be reasonable to say that that was the voice of easterners. As already explained in the preceding chapter, from its establishment onwards, the Later Han imperial court was dominated by officials based on the eastern part of the empire. Hence, the suggestion of abandoning some western counties might represent the eastern-based officials' concerns and interests of not wasting resources on the far western borderlands.

In response to this, General Ma Yuan, a man from Guanzhong and an expert on northwestern affairs, with his firsthand knowledge of the area, pointed out that the walled towns located west of Poqiang county were all in good condition and provided favorable circumstances for defense, and it would be a mistake to leave the land to the Qiang, who would in turn take this advantage to strengthen themselves and cause further harm to the Later Han. Emperor Guangwu accepted Ma Yuan's strategic evaluations and decided to

¹¹⁹ *HHS*, 24: 835.

retain the territories.¹²⁰ The emperor's decision was probably based on the consideration that giving up the land recently taken from the defeated adversary Wei Ao would undermine the authority and stability of the newly-founded empire.

Although the imperial court retained the territories of western Jincheng commandery, the emergence of the suggestion of cession when facing only small-scale conflicts with the Qiang (which was rather easily suppressed by Ma Yuan) indeed presaged the idea of giving up the whole province when large-scale and protracted warfare broke out.

In 107CE when General Deng Zhi was sent to Liang province to command the Qiang campaign, a jailed ex-official named Pang Can 龐參 (fl. 100s-130sCE) had his son submit a petition to the imperial court, urging that the imperial court halt the troops in Guanzhong region and temporarily put Liang province aside in order to give people relief from the burdens of extra taxes and labor service as a means to save energy and resources for future action against the Qiang rebels.¹²¹ In the meantime, a senior official named Fan Zhun 樊準 (d. 118CE) recommended Pang Can as a suitable person to be entrusted the northwestern affairs. Empress Dowager Deng accepted Fan's suggestion, then released Pang and appointed him to command the garrisons in Guanzhong region.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ *HHS*, 51: 1687.

¹²² Ibid.

Pang Can's main concerns were the social well-being of the people, especially the people of the eastern sector as he was strongly against the practice of "sending grain across ten-thousand *li*" (*wanli yunliang* 萬里運糧) to Liang province, which deeply disturbed the normal lives of farming households. Pang did not propose giving up Liang province permanently but only as a short-term palliative measure of dealing with the problem until the empire regained enough resources and energy. The policy makers' appreciation of Pang's proposal reflected that they basically shared his view and preferred to take no immediate action with respect to Liang province. Pang Can was a native of Henan commandery, which was located in the vicinity of the Later Han capital Luoyang, and entered government service by being recommended as a "filial and incorrupt." Hence, his view might represent some other Guandong-based scholar-officials like him.

In the Spring of 110CE, the Qiang grew stronger, while the imperial army suffered a series of defeats. Natural disasters further deteriorated the situation in the northwest. Pang Can submitted another proposal to Deng Zhi, who was now the Grand General and the most powerful official, suggesting that the empire concentrate its defensive efforts on consolidating the region of Chang'an and its vicinity (that is, the metropolitan region of the Former Han dynasty) and move the residents of frontier commanderies to the

region.¹²³ Pang Can stressed that it was the best way to protect the empire and not to harm the living standards of most people. Deng Zhi was worried about the enormous expense of warfare in Liang province and was inclined to give up the province so that the empire could focus on the northern frontier against the Xiongnu; hence, Pang's plan was convincing to him. Deng then clearly manifested his intention to abandon Liang province in a court meeting with all senior officials, and the attendees unanimously agreed with him.¹²⁴

However, when the Grand Commandant (*Taiwei* 太尉, ranked as Chancellor) Li Xiu 李脩 (fl. 110s CE) told his staff about the decision shortly after the court meeting, Yu Xu, one of his staff who has been mentioned in the previous chapter, was strongly against it. Yu pointed out that, firstly, the preceding emperors had put in great effort to conquer the northwestern region, and it was inappropriate to give up the territory for the sake of saving money; secondly, if Liang province were abandoned, Chang'an and its vicinity would become the frontier and all the Former Han imperial mausoleums located nearby Chang'an would be exposed to enemies, which would be totally unacceptable for the Later Han, a dynasty that claimed itself as the successor of the Former Han; thirdly,

¹²³ *HHS*, 51: 1688.

¹²⁴ *HHS*, 58: 1866.

Liang province was famous for producing good fighters that were sturdier and braver than their counterparts in other provinces; they were a strong force that deterred the Qiang from leaving them behind and going directly to Chang'an and its vicinity. Yu further explained that if the northwesterners were still loyal to the Han, they would be willing to fight for the empire, but if the state abandoned the northwest and moved them from their homeland, they would definitely turn against the state, and nobody could resist such a formidable force.¹²⁵

Li Xiu was terrified by the picture drawn by Yu Xu and asked for a solution. Yu emphasized that the imperial court should pay serious attention to the attitudes and allegiance of the northwesterners. In order to harness such a strong force, Yu suggested that the senior officials of the central government should each recruit several northwesterners to serve in their office. Also, the male family members of incumbent regional and local administrators of Liang province should be granted honorary official titles. By doing this, the imperial court could reward the efforts of the northwesterners and the regional and local officials on one hand, and hold hostages to rein the two groups of people on the other.¹²⁶ It was Yu's plan of killing two birds with one stone. Li Xiu

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

immediately called for a court meeting and explained Yu's proposal to everybody. They finally turned the table and put Yu's plan into action. Liang province was thus kept in the imperial realm. However, Yu Xu earned no merit as he was hated by Deng Zhi and his brothers for his opposing views; later on, Yu was demoted to the rank of a local official.¹²⁷

Although Yu Xu frustrated Deng Zhi's plan, neither of them was really concerned about the interests of the northwesterners. Deng Zhi insisted on giving up Liang province for saving the empire from the turmoil in the northwest. That he secured a unanimous support for his plan in the first place was probably mainly due to his powerful status, but it might also reflect the view of the majority of senior central officials, the bulk of whom were Guandong scholar-officials. Yu Xu was capable of turning the table because his arguments touched the core concerns of the policy makers by emphasizing the importance of keeping Liang province to the legitimacy and security of the Later Han dynasty. His argument that abandoning the northwest would provoke the unruly northwestern forces against the imperial center especially invoked the nightmare of the senior central officials. Yu Xu's suggestion of using northwesterners in central

¹²⁷ *HHS*, 58: 1867.

government was in fact for the benefit of the imperial center but not wholeheartedly for the well-being of the northwesterners.

The third debate took place in 185CE. In the previous year, the Yellow Turbans uprising broke out and swept quickly across the eastern part of the empire.¹²⁸ While the imperial court had to put all its resources and energy into suppressing the Yellow Turbans, Liang province was at war again. Although the Qiang wars nominally ended in 169CE with Duan Jiong's mass killing, the region was never restored to peace. In the general population of Liang province, the issue was far from resolved. With the deteriorating political, social, and economic conditions that resulted from the protracted Qiang wars in the northwest, discontent among the Han settlers, the Qiang, and other non-Han peoples in the region towards the Later Han grew stronger and stronger. Finally, they launched a large-scale offensive in 184CE. The people of Fuhan 枹罕 and Heguan 河關 counties revolted against the local governments and had the “voluntary Hu followers from the Huangzhong area” (*Huangzhong yicong Hu* 湟中義從胡, which is a group of alien origins counted by Zheng Tai in Dong Zhuo's troops; see Zheng's speech cited in Chapter One) Beigong Boyu 北宮伯玉 and a man called Li Wenhou 李文侯 (probably an

¹²⁸ For detailed analysis, see Michaud, “The Yellow Turbans,” 41-127; Mansvelt Beck, “The Fall of Han,” 334-341.

ethnic Han according to his name) as their leaders.¹²⁹ They then joined the Qiang forces in Beidi commandery to attack Jincheng commandery. In Jincheng, two local strongmen, Bian Zhang 邊章 (d. 185CE) and Han Sui 韓遂 (d. 215CE), echoing the rebels, organized their own forces, killed the Grand Administrator, and controlled the commandery. The united force then turned to other commanderies in Liang province and even made an inroad on Chang'an and its vicinity in the following year. Facing the formidable forces of Bian and Han and their allies, the imperial court appointed Huangfu Song (nephew of Huangfu Gui) and Dong Zhuo to be responsible for restoring order in the northwest. Shortly afterwards, Huangfu Song was dismissed for having achieved nothing, and a senior official Zhang Wen 張溫 (d. 191CE) was appointed as commander-in-chief of the western front, with over 100,000 troops under his command.¹³⁰ However, no matter how large his forces, Zhang Wen was still unable to defeat his adversaries.

The Later Han was suffering from a multi-frontal war, with the Yellow Turbans in particular critically threatening the imperial center and the eastern sector of the empire, the Excellency over the Masses (*Situ* 司徒; ranked as Chancellor) Cui Lie 崔烈 (d.

¹²⁹ *HHS*, 72: 2320.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

192CE), a man from a prestigious Guandong scholar-official family, held a court meeting with all senior central officials and advocated giving up Liang province so that the empire could focus solely on the eastern front. Fu Xie (no. 22 on the list of northwestern elite in Chapter Three) immediately shouted out, “only beheading the Excellency over the Masses would all under Heaven be pacified”¹³¹ 斬司徒，天下乃安. Fu Xie was thus censured for his lacking respect to senior officials and was summoned by Emperor Ling to giving an explanation for his actions. Fu told the emperor that Cui Lie was wrong for suggesting the abandonment of Liang province. Fu explained that Liang province was of utmost strategic importance in defending the western flank of the empire, and it would be a catastrophe to leave such a vast land and its strong soldiers to the “barbarians who fold their robes to the left” (*zuoren zhi lu* 左衽之虜).¹³² Fu Xie’s emphasis on the strategic buffering function of Liang province earned the emperor’s agreement. Once again, Liang province was kept in the imperial realm. One point meriting our attention is that Fu Xie used the phrase *zuoren zhi lu* to describes all the adversaries in Liang province, no matter who they were and whether they really folded their robes to the left. It provides corroborating evidence that the term *zuoren* had become a metonymy for barbarism, and

¹³¹ *HHS*, 58: 1875.

¹³² *HHS*, 58: 1875-1876.

the ethnicity between Han and barbarian in the northwest was in large extent determined by political allegiance.

By summarizing the three debates over abandoning Liang province, I will suggest that what lay at the heart of the debates were two different visions of empire among the Later Han officials.

It was mainly the Guandong scholar-officials who put forward the plan of giving up Liang province. Their central argument was that by cutting off the chaotic northwest, the empire could protect itself from getting involved with any further trouble and thus save its energy and resources. It was an eastern-centered point of view and a lesser-empire vision that by preserving the resources and energy of the eastern sector, the Later Han could be a self-contained and self-sufficient empire. The significance of the idea of giving up the northwest can never be overemphasized. Since the establishment of the Qin empire in 221BCE, abandonment of imperial territory happened only once in the history of early imperial China. It was in 46BCE that Emperor Yuan of the Former Han (interestingly enough, his reign was also the period that the classical-training scholar-officials started flourishing in the imperial court) accepted an official named Jia Juanzhi's 賈捐之 suggestion of abandoning the far southern commandery Zhuya 珠崖

(modern-day Hainan 海南 island), which was annexed by Emperor Wu in 110BCE, because of the intermittent rebellions of the aboriginal people.¹³³ However, Zhuya was only a commandery in the administrative hierarchy and, most importantly, was much smaller and farther from the imperial center than Liang province. To abandon a whole province was something unprecedented. In fact, behind such a view lay the political message that “they were not part of us.” It was only when the eastern scholar-officials did not regard Liang province as an inseparable part of the empire that they could decide to give up the whole territory. The triumphalism that accompanied the conquest of the northwest prevailing in the reign of Emperor Wu of Former Han dynasty had long dissipated during the Later Han. Among the Later Han political elites, there were lesser expectations and hopes of the northwest frontier region.

According to Wang Fu’s essays, the view of giving up Liang province was not only advocated by central officials but also widely shared by regional and local officials in Liang province. Since the Later Han bureaucracy practiced the rule of avoidance, namely “Rule of the three mutual [exclusions]” (*Sanhu fa* 三互法), by which “no regional authority was nominated to govern his region of origin: no prefect, nor his adjuncts

¹³³ *HS*, 9: 283; *HS*, 64B: 2830.

governed his home county, no grand administrator nor his aides governed his commandery of origin, no regional inspector exercised control in the region where his prefecture was situated,”¹³⁴ generally speaking, the regional and local officials who governed Liang province were non-native people. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the mainstay of the Later Han bureaucracy consisted of eastern-based scholar-officials, a great proportion of officials dispatched to Liang province would doubtlessly be men of eastern background.¹³⁵ Some of them might even have various relations to the officials at the imperial center. Therefore, according to Wang Fu, these officials would not have the patience and determination to protect the territory. When riots broke out, they just wanted to escape from the chaotic northwest as soon as possible. That was why they echoed the voice of abandoning Liang province at the imperial center. That might also partly explain the prevailing corruption and malfeasance of the officials in Liang province. In addition, when Yu Xu suggested granting honorary titles to the male family members of those incumbent regional and local officials in Liang province, he was aiming to encourage those officials to fulfill their duties. To criticize the eastern-centered mindset of the

¹³⁴ Anthony Hulswé, “Law as One of the Foundations of State Power in Early Imperial China,” in S. R. Schram ed., *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987), 25.

¹³⁵ Yan Gengwang has pieced together fragments of historical data to make a list of Grand Administrators of Liang province in the Later Han period, see his *Liang Han taishou cishi biao* 兩漢太守刺史表 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1948), 236-251.

officials, Wang Fu mocked those officials that if their male family members were under the menace of the Qiang as those people on the frontier were, then those officials would unanimously support the campaigns against the Qiang.¹³⁶

On the other hand, the opposite side included officials with northwestern backgrounds like Fu Xie and like Yu Xu, who, while of eastern background, had a different view than his colleagues. They emphasized Liang province as an inheritance from the Former Han and its strategic position, especially its role in protecting the western flank of the empire. This view of greater-empire was used to uphold the integrity of the imperial territory. Wang Fu also criticized the officials who supported giving up Liang province as unwise since no country could sustain itself without frontiers.¹³⁷ Both Yu Xu and Fu Xie succeeded in preserving Liang province due to their strong arguments of imperial grand strategy, which touched the core concern and fear of the imperial court. They emphasized the strategic importance of Liang province and in particular the potential hostility of the northwestern military forces, which would be a nightmare to the empire if they turned against the imperial center.

Despite the fact that Yu Xu had succeeded in persuading the decision makers to keep

¹³⁶ *Qianfulun*, 22: 262.

¹³⁷ *Qianfulun*, 22: 258.

Liang province in the imperial realm, the Later Han state in fact adopted an alternative way of withdrawal from the northwest, thereby giving up Liang province, though temporarily.

In 110CE, after a series of defeats to the imperial army, the imperial court relocated the government seat of Jincheng commandery to Xiangwu 襄武 county in Longxi commandery and the office of Colonel Protector of the Qiang from Jincheng commandery to Zhangye commandery in order to avert from the Qiang attack. In the following year, “as the Qiang grew stronger, the regional and local officials, who were mainly from interior commanderies, had no commitment to defense and fight, and all sent memorials to [the imperial court to] strive to be first to move their commanderies and counties away from the menace of the adversary.”¹³⁸ 羌既轉盛，而二千石、令、長多內郡人，並無戰守意，皆爭上徙郡縣以避寇難. The imperial court agreed with them and moved the government seats of Longxi commandery from Didao to Xiangwu county of the same commandery, Anding commandery to Meiyang 美陽 county of Fufeng, Beidi commandery to Chiyang 池陽 county of Pingyi 馮翊, and Shang commandery to Ya 衙 county of Pingyi.¹³⁹ Both Fufeng and Pingyi were commanderies in Guanzhong

¹³⁸ *HHS*, 87: 2887.

¹³⁹ *HHS*, 87: 2888.

region and next to Chang'an. These government seats of commanderies were moved eastward or southward in order to escape from the Qiang. In addition to moving the government seats, the state ordered the people belonging to the respective commanderies to follow suit. The ordering of people to move confirmed what I have stated in Chapter Two that the imperial state defined the imperial sovereignty over its subjects more than over the territories, and the regional and local administrative units were based on governing registered population rather than clearly delineated territories.

However, most of the residents of Liang province were attached to their homeland and were unwilling to move. As a result, the officials carried out forcible movement by “cutting crops in their fields, demolishing their houses, leveling their defensive facilities, and destroying their storage.”¹⁴⁰ 刈其禾稼，發徹室屋，夷營壁，破積聚. These actions provoked great discontent among the affected residents. In the meantime, drought and locusts plagued Liang province, which worsened the situation of the people. The historical records depict a tragic picture under which many people who were forced to move either died on the way or become refugees. The elderly and the weak were abandoned and many of those who survived were forced to be servants or slaves of local

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

magnates.¹⁴¹ The direct consequence was a popular uprising led by the residents of Hanyang commandery Du Qi 杜琦 (d. 111CE), Du Jigong 杜季貢 (d. 117CE), and Wang Xin 王信 (d. 112CE). Du's force then allied with the Qiang chieftain Dianlian.

In 129CE, when the order in Liang province was temporarily restored, Yu Xu urged the emperor to move back the commanderies-in-exile. In his memorial, Yu criticized the myopic officials who ignored the strategic value of Liang province and for readily abandoning the strategic defensive positions.¹⁴² The emperor accepted Yu's proposal and ordered the reestablishment of commanderies of Anding, Beidi, Shang, Longxi, and Jincheng.

In 141CE, however, the situation turned for the worse. After General Ma Xian's death in battle, the Qiang's plundering in Guanzhong and burning of Former Han imperial mausoleums, the Later Han found no way to suppress the Qiang and therefore resorted to the evacuation of commanderies again. Anding commandery was relocated to Fufeng and Beidi to Pingyi, both were next to Chang'an.¹⁴³ The defensive frontline was contracted and retreated to Chang'an and its vicinity.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² *HHS*, 87: 2893.

¹⁴³ *HHS*, 87: 2896.

¹⁴⁴ For detailed information of the back and forth movements of all the aforementioned commanderies, see Li Xiaojie 李曉杰, *Dong Han zhengqu dili* 東漢政區地理 (Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), 136-137, 139-153.

Although the Later Han state never openly abandoned Liang province, the evacuation of government seats and the concomitant forcible movement of residents exacerbated tensions between the people of Liang province and the imperial center. The relocation of government seats and of residents corroborated the northwesterners' perception that the officials as well as the imperial court had no determination or ability to defend and protect the land and people of the northwest; the forcible movement especially bred hatred among the northwesterners towards the imperial state. The Qiang wars as well as the ensuing withdrawals discredited the imperial authority among the northwesterners. As the imperial state was no longer reliable, the people of Liang province could expect little from the state and had to arm themselves for self-protection. The growing discontent with the imperial state engendered unrest among the northwestern military forces and turned them against the empire. This finally realized the prophecy of Yu Xu when he warned the imperial court about the worst consequences of abandonment.

3. Spontaneous Militarization flourished in Liang province

As briefly mentioned in the preceding chapters, the Qin state instituted a top-down sanctioned militarization program, with universal military service as the most crucial

component supplemented by the system of ranks of merit, which provided the Qin with a formidable military force to establish the first empire in Chinese history. The practice of sanctioned militarization was inherited by the Former Han dynasty. However, the role of sanctioned militarization diminished with time during the Former Han and was finally renounced by the Later Han: universal military service was abolished by the founding emperor Guangwu; the value of ranks of merit gradually diminished and transformed from a mechanism for rewarding service to the state, particularly in combat, to a perfunctory practice of giving titles without real respect and privileges.¹⁴⁵ The extent of adoption of sanctioned militarization shows a notable difference between the two Han dynasties, which confirms the comparison between the *zeitgeist* of them in the previous chapter. Since there have been many discussions on the military systems of the two Han dynasties, universal military service in particular, I shall not repeat them here.¹⁴⁶ The foci

¹⁴⁵ For the decline of the system and the devaluation of the ranks of merit in the Later Han period, see Zhu, *Jugong juezhi kaolun*, 133-164.

¹⁴⁶ There are numerous studies of the military systems of the two Han dynasties, to name a few will suffice. In Chinese scholarship, see Sun Yutang 孫毓棠, “Xi Han de bingzhi” 西漢的兵制 and “Dong Han bingzhi de yanbian” 東漢兵制的演變 in idem, *Sun Yutang xueshu luwenji* 孫毓棠學術論文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 269-327 and 328-355, respectively; Li Yufu 李玉福, “Qin Han shidai de bingyi zhidu” 秦漢時代的兵役制度 and “Qin Han shidai de junshi jianzhi” 秦漢時代的軍事建制, in idem, *Qin Han zhidu shilu* 秦漢制度史論 (Jinan: Shandong daxue chubanshe, 2003), 215-270 and 271-245, respectively; Huang Jinyan 黃今言, *Qin Han junzhi shilun* 秦漢軍制史論 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1993), esp. Ch. 2-5; for Japanese research, see Hamaguchi Shigekuni 濱口重國, “Kōbutei no gunbi shukushō to sono eikyō” 光武帝の軍備縮小と其の影響, in idem, *Shin Kan Zui Tō shi no kenkyū* 秦漢隋唐史の研究 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku shubankai, 1966), 291-325; in Western scholarship, see Michael Loewe, “The Western Han Army: Organization, Leadership, and Operation,” in Di Cosmo ed., *Military Culture in Imperial China*, 65-89; Rafe de Crespigny, “The Military Culture of Later Han,” in Di

of this subsection are the impact of the abolition of universal military service on the flourishing of bottom-up spontaneous militarization in Liang province and how the imperial court lost control of the northwest.

For the Later Han's abolition of universal military service, Lei Haizong 雷海宗 was arguably the best-known as well as its first modern critic. In his 1940 essay, Lei blamed Emperor Guangwu's decision as unwise as it not only incapacitated the military power of the Later Han but also destroyed the martial spirit of succeeding generations of Chinese people, which transformed Chinese culture into what he called an "amilitary" or a "demilitarized" culture (*wubing de wenhua* 無兵的文化); Chinese people were therefore suffering from foreign invasions.¹⁴⁷ Despite the fact that nationalist sentiments during the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945) deeply influenced Lei's perception of military factors in Chinese culture and thereby made some of his claims exaggerated, he did really point out the abolition had deeply undermined the overall military might of the Later Han dynasty. In his recent study on the topic, Mark Edward Lewis regards Emperor Guangwu's decision as a product of rational calculation with the nature of "abandoning

Cosmo ed., *Military Culture in Imperial China*, 90-111. For the background of the initiation of universal military service, see Tu, *Bianhu qimin*, Ch. 2 and 9; Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, Ch.2 and 3.

¹⁴⁷ Lei Haizong 雷海宗, *Zhongguo wenhua yu Zhongguo de bing* 中國文化與中國的兵 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1940), especially 44-61 and 125-159.

reliance on conscripts to form the elite forces and halting regular training while reserving the power to conscript in emergencies.”¹⁴⁸ Lewis argues that the reasons for the abolition were due to three considerations: economy—the Later Han state could save money from holding the annual inspection ceremony and maintaining a large standing commandery troops; loyalty—the imperial court could reduce the chances of mutiny, since during the last years of Wang Mang the annual assembly of commandery troops had provided opportunities for the power contenders to launch rebellions, and even the future Emperor Guangwu once made a failed attempt; and efficacy—a streamlined and professional army would replace the bulky farmer-conscripted army without disturbing most people’s daily lives.¹⁴⁹ In short, the intention of Emperor Guangwu was to secure his regime by means of demilitarizing most of the population and minimizing military expenditure.

With most of society theoretically unarmed and untrained in warfare, the standing imperial army would be the only military power in the empire and the emperor would be the sole possessor of military forces. During most of the Later Han, standing forces consisting of recruits were mainly stationed in the imperial capital and several permanent camps at key points in the empire. To deal with threats from different directions, the Later

¹⁴⁸ Mark Edward Lewis, “The Han Abolition of Universal Military Service,” in Hans van de Ven ed., *Warfare in Chinese History* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2000), 39.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 39-48; also Sun, “Dong Han bingzhi de yanbian,” 330-332.

Han set up, for example, Liyang camp 黎陽營, Duliao camp 度遼營, and Yuyang camp 漁陽營 in the north; Yong camp 雍營 and Chang'an camp 長安營 in the west; and Xianglin camp 象林營 and Fuli camp 扶黎營 in the south. However, these were mainly for the interior of the empire, and people along the frontiers were still required to provide certain military services for the frontier defense. Also, in order to have adequate men to defend the frontiers, an increasing number of convicts reprieved from death sentences were deployed to serve garrisons, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, and various non-Han people such as the Xiongnu and the Qiang were recruited and organized in frontier troops.

However, for such a vast empire as the Later Han, a handful of military camps only located at strategic points would not be sufficient to meet multi-frontal, protracted external or internal military conflicts. Hence, during times of emergency, the Later Han needed to call up reserve troops that were composed mainly of the untrained commoners.¹⁵⁰ Needless to say, they would only provide reinforcement in terms of quantity but not in quality. Since the common people were undertrained and undisciplined, a minor or partial defeat would throw the whole army into panic and chaos,

¹⁵⁰ See the examples listed by Lewis in "The Han Abolition of Universal Military Service," 36-37.

which would then create a snowball effect and result in the collapse of the army, which was what happened in the Qiang wars. Furthermore, since the commandery troops were disabled, when the Qiang succeeded in penetrating the frontier defenses and invaded the interior commanderies, there were no significant or capable troops to oppose the adversary; the Qiang were therefore able to roam those regions at will. As we have seen before, the only method the state could adopt was to set up a large number of fortresses in the interior as a means of passive defense. Based on these facts, we may be able to understand why Wang Fu complained in his work that the imperial army's incapacity to fight was one of the important reasons why the Qiang wars lasting so long.¹⁵¹

Ying Shao, whose *Fengsu tongyi* I have cited in the discussion on the Qiang, made a harsh and yet revealing retrospective comment in his work entitled *Han Guan* 漢官 (The Han Institutions) on the failure of the Later Han military system. Ying manifests his thought on military affairs in the beginning of the passage by quoting words from the classic *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳 (The Zuo Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals):

Heaven produces the five materials, and the people utilize all of them. Since none [of the five elements] could be discarded, who could give up using weapons [or violence]?¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ *Qianfulun*, 21: 250-253, 22: 267.

¹⁵² It is originally from *Zuo Zhuan*, see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 annotated, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 v. 3, the 27th year of the Duke Xiang 襄公 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 113. For Ying Shao's comments in the *Han Guan*, see *HHSZ*, 28: 3622.

天生五材，民並用之，廢一不可，誰能去兵？

Ying then argued that the abolition of universal military service of the Later Han led to the following results:

Since the commanderies and fief-states have abolished infantry and cavalry, the state lacks safety precautions, which really incites the rebels. When turmoil happens in one direction, [it needs forces from] other three directions come to rescue it... all the requisitions make the common people in uproar. Without sufficient training in archery and horsemanship or enough learning of disciplines and doctrines, the people are suddenly forced to face strong adversaries... Therefore the imperial troops perform poorly and are defeated in every battle... As a result, [the state] recruits soldiers from the three frontiers with distinct customs who are not our kind... by tracing the failure of the imperial troops, the saying “to fight without prior training is equal to throwing them away” is not vacuous!¹⁵³

自郡國罷材官騎士之後，官無警備，實啟寇心。一方有難，三面救之……一切取辦，黔首囂然。不及講其射御，用其戒誓，一旦驅之以即強敵……是以每戰常負，王旅不振……爾乃遠徵三邊殊俗之兵，非我族類……不教而戰，是謂棄之，跡其禍敗，豈虛也哉！

Ying Shao blamed the abolition of commandery troops, which was a direct result of the abandonment of universal military service, causing the imperial forces to become insufficient and incapable of protecting the empire. Mobilizing the common people who had no military training only aggravated the situation further. Ying quoted a saying from Confucius, “To send the common people to war without prior training is equal to throwing them away.”¹⁵⁴ 以不教民戰，是謂棄之. It is Ying Shao’s diagnosis of the

¹⁵³ *HHSZ*, 28: 3622.

¹⁵⁴ Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 annotated, *Lunyu yizhu* 論語譯注 (Hong Kong: Chunghwa Book, 1994), 13.30: 144.

failure of the Later Han imperial troops. In fact, Zheng Tai also quoted the same saying in his analysis of the weaknesses of the eastern alliance to Dong Zhuo, which I have cited in the beginning of Chapter One.

Moreover, Ying Shao pointed out a very important feature of the Later Han military system—employing non-Han troops. The imperial tradition of recruiting non-Han soldiers during the two Han dynasties can be traced back to at least the reign of Emperor Wen of the Former Han.¹⁵⁵ Chao Cuo, the statesman who proposed the project of resettling people along the northern frontier and of setting up farming colonies, championed the benefits of using surrendered non-Han peoples as frontier garrisons to resist Xiongnu invasions.¹⁵⁶ During the reign of Emperor Wu, the employment of non-Han soldiers went hand in hand with the large-scale external warfare and territorial expansion. Such a tradition was inherited by the Later Han and became an economical way of settling the increasing number of surrendered non-Han people such as the Qiang and the Xiongnu.¹⁵⁷ With the abolition of universal military service and the poor

¹⁵⁵ Non-Han soldiers might probably been used by Emperor Gao, the founding emperor of Former Han, during the civil war ensued the fall of the Qin dynasty. According to the sources, there were Loufan 樓煩 cavalrymen in the Han army and Loufan was a name of a northern tribe of the time. See *SJ*, 7: 328-329. However, we have no details about whether the cavalrymen called Loufan were alien people or not, nor do we know whether they were recruited on individual basis or tribal basis.

¹⁵⁶ *HS*, 49: 2282-2283.

¹⁵⁷ Hsing I-tien, “Dong Han de Hu bing” 東漢的胡兵, *Guoli zhengzhidaixue xuebao* 國立政治大學學報 28 (1973): 143-166.

performance of the imperial army, the Later Han empire came to rely increasingly on barbarian recruits to fill the ranks of its army along the frontiers.¹⁵⁸ For example, the troops under the command of Colonel Protector of the Qiang were, to a large extent, composed of the Qiang and other non-Han peoples.¹⁵⁹ Duan Jiong's mass killing of the Qiang rebels was in fact carried out by his Qiang soldiers.

Needless to say, non-Han troops served a good purpose to the imperial military machine with several advantages, particularly in external warfare. Recruiting non-Han soldiers minimized the laborious process of recruiting and training individual civilians since, comparatively speaking, the barbarian soldiers were tough fighters, and were familiar with the frontier terrain and climate. Another advantage was that the barbarian tribesmen could be brought into the army in groups, with their own tribal organization and existing structure of command and coordination—an efficient army could easily be formed. More than that, it was an ideal policy developed by the imperial rulers in that by using barbarian against barbarian, the empire could rein the alien people without exhausting its own resources.

Nevertheless, the fatal drawback of employing foreign troops was the question of

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid; Liu, "Lun Handai xizhi bianjiang minzu yu saine zhi zhengce," 299-300.

political allegiance. There was no guarantee of their loyalty to the emperor or his empire. The non-Han troops would easily turn against the Han empire when they were not satisfied with their treatment. For those non-Han peoples who were allowed to retain their tribal organization, such as the Qiang groups who were settled by the Later Han along its northwestern frontier, the preserved tribal solidarity, network, and command structure critically hindered their loyalty to the imperial center but provided motives of collective action and mechanism for mobilization against the empire. As we have seen, the trigger for the First Qiang War in 107CE was the mutiny of Qiang cavalymen who were afraid of the possibility of a long-term stationing in the Western Regions.

Even though they were nominally under imperial command, the political allegiance of the non-Han troops depended upon patron-client relations with the imperial commander. It was a highly personal relationship rather than a well-regulated institution. As mentioned above, a great number of the troops under Duan Jiong's command were the Qiang. During the last years of the second century CE when Duan Jiong was called back to the capital, as a means to discharge him from his army, and was later put to death as implicated in a eunuch factional struggle, many of his former officers and their followers became rebels. A central official named Liu Tao 劉陶 (d. 185CE) sharply pointed out

that since those former subordinates of Duan Jiong were skilled at fighting and were knowledgeable about the geography of the northwest, they were very hard to defeat.¹⁶⁰ The Qiang and other non-Han peoples also constituted the backbone of the military forces of the warlord Dong Zhuo, as Zheng Tai counted in his speech cited in Chapter One. Dong Zhuo grew up in Liang province and had established very close relationships with some of the Qiang tribal leaders since his early age.¹⁶¹ It was for these reasons that Dong was appointed to deal with the Qiang problem in the last years of the Later Han. Dong shrewdly exploited his networks with the Han and non-Han peoples in Liang province and the imperial court's reliance on him to establish his own forces in the northwest. The overwhelming high number of non-Han members of his army earned Dong's troops the name of "Qiang-Hu" army from the eastern based scholar-officials,¹⁶² and Dong himself was called a "Qiang-Hu" by his contemporaries.¹⁶³ Dong's troops, as he claimed, only followed his direction and would not under the command of other imperial generals. Therefore, it became a force which Dong could rely on to challenge the

¹⁶⁰ *HHS*, 57: 1850.

¹⁶¹ *HHS*, 72: 2319.

¹⁶² *HHS*, 84: 2801. Zhu, "Lun Han Wei zhiji Qiang Hu hua de Liangzhuo junshi jituan," 113; Morimoto, "Dong Han monian de Qiangzu yu Hanzu," 183; Wang Xien 王希恩, "Hanmo Liangzhou junfa jituan jianlun" 漢末涼州軍閥集團簡論, *Gansu shehui kexue* 甘肅社會科學 1991.2: 72-73.

¹⁶³ *HHS*, 84: 2798.

imperial authority.¹⁶⁴

Various factors such as protracted warfare, natural disasters, official corruption and exploitation contributed to the difficult situation that provoked not only non-Han troops but also Han residents in Liang province into turning against the Later Han state. As analyzed in the preceding chapters, Liang province was a highly militarized region and was well-known for producing formidable military talents and tough fighters. Since the imperial army from the east was incapable of restoring order in the northwest during the Qiang wars, the northwesterners had to rely upon themselves for self-protection. Those who were discontented even joined the rebels. When the imperial court decided to give up Liang province and carried out forcible evacuations, it aggravated the fear and discontent of the northwesterners. For the people of Liang province, the imperial court's proposal of giving up the province was no different from a proposal of abandoning them.¹⁶⁵ The northwesterners' distrust toward the imperial center thus reached the peak. In order to protect their regional interests, various local forces arose and united, regardless of whether or not they were Han or non-Han people. One Japanese scholar called the united front of anti-Later Han forces in Liang province as a multi-racial and

¹⁶⁴ Wang, "Hanmo Liangzhou junfa jituan jianlun," 71-72.

¹⁶⁵ Morimoto, "Dong Han monian de Qiangzu yu Hanzu," 178.

multi-ethnic “United regime of Liang province.”¹⁶⁶

In fact, during the long course of living together in the region, the Han and non-Han inhabitants gradually developed close relationships and adapted and accommodated each other, though intermittent conflicts happened. In the last years of the Later Han, it was difficult to differentiate between the Han and the Qiang.¹⁶⁷ Dong Zhuo was called a Qiang by his contemporaries; many of his subordinates were of mixed Han-Qiang family background; Ma Teng 馬騰 (d. 212CE), one of the most important military strongmen in Liang province and an ally of the aforementioned Han Sui, had a Han father who was an ex-local military officer and a Qiang mother;¹⁶⁸ both Ma Teng and his son Ma Chao 馬超 (176-222CE) were said to have earned wide support among the Qiang and the Hu. Those rebel leaders or military strongmen such as Bian Zhang, Han Sui, Ma Teng, and Wang Guo all commanded multi-ethnic forces like Dong Zhuo’s.¹⁶⁹

The threat of facing a common enemy—the Later Han state—gradually helped all the northwestern military men forge a regional identity as people of Liang province (*Liangzhou ren* 涼州人). As the historical records show, this identity was especially

¹⁶⁶ Morimoto, “Dong Han monian de Qiangzu yu Hanzu,” 183.

¹⁶⁷ Wang, “Hanmo Liangzhou junfa jituan jianlun,” 73.

¹⁶⁸ Chen Shou 陳壽, comp., *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997) 36: 945.

¹⁶⁹ Yang Yongjun, “Lüelun Handai Longyou difang shili de xingqi jiqi yu Qiang Hu de guanxi” 略論漢代隴右地方勢力的興起及其與羌胡的關係, *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊 2000.2: 107-108.

emphasized by the military leaders in the last years of the Later Han. Rebel leaders such as Ma Teng and Han Sui as well as subordinates of Dong Zhuo such as Li Jue 李傕 (d. 198CE) and Guo Si 郭汜 (fl. 190s CE), all declared themselves as people of Liang province. Even in 192CE when there were factional struggles over the succession of Dong Zhuo among his subordinates after the warlord's death, Li Jue and Guo Si, both from Liang province, temporarily put aside their conflicts and promoted the regional identity of people of Liang province to resist the attack launched by anti-Dong eastern scholar-officials. They were also regarded by their adversaries as people of Liang province.¹⁷⁰ The identity of people of Liang province was superimposed on internal differences among the northwestern military men in response to conflict with the eastern adversaries.

With the flowering of the regional identity of the people of Liang province, the imperial rule over the province ended before the empire's collapse. In 187 CE, while the Later Han state was still struggling to restore order in the northwest, a mutiny broke out among the people of six commanderies of Liang province who were conscripted in the army under the command of the Inspector of Liang province (*Liang zhou cishi* 涼州刺史)

¹⁷⁰ HHS, 66: 2176. Chen Yong has provided a detailed study of the emphasis of Liangzhou identity among northwestern military men after the death of Dong Zhuo, see his "Dong Zhuo jinjing shulun" 董卓進京述論, *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 中國史研究 1995.4: 112-121.

Geng Bi 耿鄙 (d. 187CE). The mutiny was said to have been caused by Inspector Geng's corruption and exploitation. The mutineers killed Geng and his associates, and then attacked other towns that were still under imperial control. Ma Teng, originally an aide-de-camp of Inspector Geng, quickly grasped the opportunity and became the leader of the mutineers. With the outbreak of mutiny, the imperial power was wiped out in Liang province. In 189CE, Ma Teng and Han Sui allied and became the dominant power in Liang province. On the other hand, although the imperial court ordered Dong Zhuo to suppress the rebels in Liang province, he established himself as a semi-independent power without obeying the imperial order and manipulated the situation between the northwestern rebels and the imperial court. Dong maintained connections with Ma and Han, and the two strongmen also wanted to benefit themselves by collaborating with Dong. Even though Liang province was still nominally a regional administrative unit of the empire, the imperial center found itself no longer able to control the region, which was already in the hands of warlords.

To recap, the chaotic situation in Liang province caused by natural disasters and protracted warfare furthered the estrangement between the imperial court and the northwesterners; the poor performance of the imperial army in the Qiang wars revealed a

decreased ability of the imperial center to protect its territory and subjects from horrors of warfare; the intention of giving up Liang province and the ensuing forcible evacuation further discredited the imperial center to the northwesterners. The disappointing performance of the empire in political and military terms left the people of Liang province no choice but to rely on themselves for self-protection. While the soldiers from other sectors of the empire generally performed badly, the military forces in the northwest retained a comparatively high strength as evidenced by Yu Xu, Fu Xie, and Zheng Tai, who were mentioned in different contexts.

The people of Liang province became less willing to support an imperial center that was unable to provide them with security and prosperity. They joined the rebels or formed self-armed forces, pushing them away from the imperial authority. During the Qiang wars and afterwards, the respect and support for the imperial center among the northwesterners diminished quickly, and the imperial court finally realized that it was no longer able to rule the northwest.

The lack of respect and support was a major cause of the fall of the empire. Certain elites of Liang province had foreseen or tried to trigger the downfall of the empire. In 187CE when Inspector Geng Bi was killed and the rebels were attacking the towns in

Liang province; Fu Xie, the northwestern statesman who successfully kept Liang province in the imperial realm in the 185CE debate, was the Grand Administrator of Hanyang commandery in Liang province. Besieged by the rebels, Fu Xie's son proffered advice to his father that all under Heaven had betrayed the imperial court and it was no longer worth defending for the dynasty.¹⁷¹ Fu agreed with his son but insisted that he had to die for his duty. The rebels also sent a messenger to Fu Xie and persuaded him that the Later Han dynasty had lost its mandate.¹⁷² After entrusting a confidant to take his son out of the siege, Fu Xie chose to die in battle. Fu's story reveals that people in Liang province, no matter which side they were on, had a feeling that the Later Han dynasty was going to end. About the same time, an ex-official and Hanyang native Yan Zhong 閻忠 (d. 189CE) told General Huangfu Song, the hero who suppressed the Yellow Turbans and the nephew of the famous Huangfu Gui, that the Later Han was falling and nobody was able to save it. As the most prestigious military leader of his time, Yan said, that Huangfu Song should lead his army to march to the imperial capital, wipe out the corrupt imperial court, and take the Mandate of Heaven himself.¹⁷³ Huangfu Song was terrified after hearing this and insisted that he would follow the principle of loyalty to the dynasty.

¹⁷¹ *HHS*, 58: 1878.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *HHS*, 71: 2303.

Although both Fu Xie and Huangfu Song recognized the deterioration of the empire, they refused to betray the Later Han. It was probably because they were “centralized” and “civilianized” by the imperial court and the dominant Guandong scholar-official culture. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Huangfu Song’s uncle Huangfu Gui had made a great effort to be recognized by the eastern scholar-officials. Such a family background and education might have influenced Huangfu Song to be a staunch supporter of the dynasty.¹⁷⁴ However, other northwestern elites like Fu Xie’s son and Yan Zhong did not hold the principle of loyalty to the empire. They manifested clearly that the Later Han was near its end. It was Dong Zhuo, an uncouth *Liu jun liang jia zi* who dared to desecrate the imperial authority, and led the northwestern troops to storm the imperial capital, deposed the emperor, killed the Empress Dowager and hammered the last nail into the empire’s coffin.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Chen Yong discusses the scholar-officials of the late Later Han period were bound by the principle of loyalty and dared not to directly challenge the throne, see his “Liangzhou sanming lun,” 72-74.

¹⁷⁵ For a detailed analysis of Dong Zhuo’s political actions after controlling Louyang, see Chen, “Dong Zhuo jinjing shulun”, 109-112.

5

Epilogue: *The Beginning of the End*

In his magnum opus *Dushi fangyu jiyao* 讀史方輿紀要 (Essentials of Geography for Reading History), Gu Zuyu 顧祖禹 (1631-92CE) made a comment about the role played by the northwestern region in the toppling of the Later Han dynasty,

As I have observed that since the ancient times, he who wreaked havoc throughout the empire always originated from Shaanxi.¹ While the Eastern Han dynasty was enjoying peace and prosperity, the Qiang and Hu launched revolt in the western frontier. Therefore, brilliant generals and vigorous soldiers all gathered in the region between the Yellow River and Long Mountain. As the situation unfolded to the worst end, [the northwestern rebels] were as avaricious as big swine and as venomous as serpents; [They] desecrated the imperial palace, thereby throwing the empire into turmoil.²

吾觀自古以來，為天下禍者，往往起於陝西。東漢當承平之際，而羌、胡搆亂於西垂，故良將勁卒盡在河、隴之間。迨其末也，封豕長蛇，憑陵宮闕，遂成板蕩之禍。

Gu sharply pointed out the militarized nature of the northwestern region during the Later Han period and traced the causal relationship between the concentration of military

¹ For Gu, Shaanxi was not confined to modern Shaanxi province but referred to the whole northwestern area.

² Gu Zuyu 顧祖禹, *Dushi fangyu jiyao* 讀史方輿紀要. He Cijun 賀次君 and Shi Hejin 施和金 annotated. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005) v.5, 52: 2451.

forces in the northwest and the downfall of the dynasty. These are associated with the main thread running through the present study that the highly militarized northwestern region was the harbinger of the disintegration of the Later Han empire.

In this project, I adopted a regional perspective by focusing on the role of the northwestern frontier region vis-à-vis the imperial center to explain the collapse of the Later Han empire. I emphasized the role that regional conflicts played in the decline and fall of the dynasty, and paid particular attention to the incompatibility between the militarized culture of the northwest and the civil values promoted by the imperial center, which was dominated by the eastern-based scholar-officials. Through this analysis, I have provided a case study of the relationship between the imperial center and the regions with different cultures and identities, and the variations of the conception of such a relationship in the period of early imperial China.

As a frontier region of the Qin-Han empire, the northwest was a new territory to the Chinese realm. Until the Later Han times, some portions of the northwestern region had only been part of imperial soil for one hundred years. Its coalescence into the Chinese empire was a product of long-term expansion and conquest, which arguably defined the region's military nature. Furthermore, in the harsh natural environment of the region,

only tough people could survive, and unsurprisingly, the region fostered vigorous warriors. Mixed culture and multi-ethnicity featured prominently in this highly militarized frontier society, which contrasted sharply with the imperial center that promoted unified cultural values and stood in the way of a greater degree of transregional integration.

When the Former Han empire was enthusiastic about marching to Inner Asia, the northwest played a crucial role in serving as a bridgehead, and the northwesterners, with the *Linjun Liangjiazi* in particular, contributed enormous efforts to the imperial enterprise. At that time, the northwestern region was deemed a military and political core of the empire, though it was in the periphery in a geographic sense. In short, it was the process of shaping the empire in the northwest that permitted the rise of military elites from the comparatively culturally backward Liang province. However, the Later Han rulers had a different vision of empire from their Former Han predecessors. When the Later Han adopted a retrenchment policy, the strategic value of the northwestern region changed accordingly. The region lost the importance it once enjoyed in the expansionist era of the Former Han. It was reduced to a land that was disdained for its cultural backwardness and was considered a region that could be readily given up in the eyes of the eastern-based

scholar-officials. At that time, the northwest was not only a geographic periphery but also a political periphery. In other words, the northwestern region and its inhabitants went through a process of political peripheralization during the Later Han.

When its strategic value was high, the imperial center was willing to spend enormous resources on the northwest; when its strategic value decreased, the imperial center would not give any patient and resources to the region. What determined the calculation of strategic costs and benefits was greatly influenced by the political culture that prevailed among the imperial policy makers.

Facing the prevailing political culture of the Later Han, which emphasized civil values and honored knowledge of classical studies, the northwesterners found themselves receiving lower political and social status than their eastern counterparts. For the northwestern military elites, the new political culture, which upheld the prominence of civil values, hindered their career advancement; for the common northwesterners, the eastern-based scholar-officials' ideas and actions of giving up the northwest showed that they were being abandoned by the imperial center. While the imperial center cared little about the welfare of the northwesterners, prolonged warfare and natural disasters exacerbated the hardship of the northwesterners. It was the disaffected northwesterners

who finally played the role of harbingers in the process of disintegration of the empire. Although the Later Han imperial center had already suffered from and was weakened by various problems, such as political infighting at the imperial court, popular rebellions, invasions launched by foreign peoples such as the Xianbei and Wuhuan along the northern frontier, and the massacre of the eunuchs at the capital unleashed by the official-scholars in 189CE especially brought the imperial center to a chaotic situation, the empire was still staggering. It was the warlord Dong Zhuo and his northwestern troops who entered the capital, as the outsiders, deposed and installed emperors according to their will, murdered the Empress Dowager, and thus desecrated the imperial authority. These actions gave the regional governors legitimate opportunities to establish their own semi-autonomous regional regimes in name of opposing Dong Zhuo and the rebels from Liang province, and thus dismembered the empire. Therefore, Dong Zhuo's march to the capital in 190CE marked the beginning of the end of the Later Han dynasty and also the breakdown of the early imperial system in Chinese history; a period of great disunion ensued.

As I have stated in Chapter One, this study is the first step of my study on the transformation of Chinese society and development of Chinese history during the period

before and after the fall of the Later Han, and the present study only provides the background of the collapse of the empire, for the process and result of collapse will wait for further studies.³

Lastly, I would like to point out two trends took place during the Later Han, though I cannot discuss in depth about them in the present study. They are “Regionalism” and “Confucianization.”

As I have elaborated in this study, under the façade of a unified empire, there were a multitude of regional variations and conflicts in the vast expanse of the Qin-Han empire. Regional cultures and customs persistently existed in Chinese history and hindered the empire from achieving cultural unification. For example, the Qin state established Nan 南 commandery on a newly conquered land in 278BCE, however, in 227BCE, which was over 50 years after the conquest, the Grand Administrator of Nan commandery still lamented and criticized in an announcement that regional culture harmed the interests of the imperial state.⁴ As mentioned in Chapter One, the Later Han dynasty was a time when the powerful families exerted great influence on both the imperial center and various

³ As what Yoffee said, “what happens after collapse is as important as the process of collapse itself,” and classified the studies of collapse into three aspects: background of collapse, process of collapse, and result of collapse. See idem, “Orienting Collapse,” 7.

⁴ Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 睡虎地秦墓竹簡整理小組, *Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian* 睡虎地秦墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1977), 15.

regions. The growth of powerful family and regionalism went hand in hand during the Later Han. By the end of the dynasty, regionalism had already become a strong force that undermined the empire, and narrow parochial interests had predominated over the imperial interests.⁵ What came with this trend was the devolution of military power to the regional governors, which provided them means and resources against Dong Zhuo in 190CE. The present study is only one of the stories of regionalism in the Later Han times, though it is the most important one.

The “Confucianized” political culture that dominated the Later Han imperial center played a crucial role in the scholar-officials’ perceptions of the northwest and its people. This political culture gradually formed in the last years of the Former Han and reached its pinnacle in the Later Han, and it was but the political revelation of a multi-faceted great tide of “Confucianization” occurred at the time.⁶ How “Confucianization” as a political, social, and intellectual movement influenced the civil and military values of the empire and the interactive relationship between the “Confucian state” and frontier societies deserve further study. Furthermore, after the fall of the Later Han dynasty, there was a tendency for some eastern-based Confucianized scholar-official families to actively

⁵ Hsu, “The Roles of the Literati and of Regionalism in the Fall of the Han dynasty,” 176-195; de Crespigny, “Provincial Gentry and the End of Later Han,” 533-558.

⁶ Paul Goldin has provided a case of “Confucianization” of the Han law, see his “Han Law and the Regulation of Interpersonal Relations: ‘The Confucianization of the Law’ Revisited,” 1-32.

militarize themselves as a response to the incessant warfare. This phenomenon compels us to consider the relationship between “Confucianization” and “Militarization.” However, to pursue these problems in detail would take us beyond the concerns of this work.

As I have said, this study is just a beginning of the end.

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