

Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China

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Ideologies of the Peasant and Merchant in Warring States China

Roel Sterckx

A recurring observation in scholarly accounts of the social and economic history of early China is the claim that its rulers invariably prioritized agriculture over commerce and crafts. The early Chinese are said to conceive of farming as a “root” (*ben* 本) profession, they take wealth generation through secondary, or “branch” (*mo* 末), occupations as undermining the fate of the farmer, and they insist on the separation of the professions (*fen gong lun* 分工論).¹ “Agriculturalism”—a term I coin for the purpose of this essay to mean any ideology that defends the primacy of agriculture over trade and crafts—is highlighted in nearly every study of the history of Chinese agriculture.²

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- 1 The list of statements in secondary scholarship emphasizing agriculture as the bedrock of early Chinese society is endless. For examples, see Chen Ying 2010: 351–363; Zhang Hong 2003: 1; Li Genpan 1997: 3; Lu Baoli 2011: 66–68; Zhong Xiangcai 1997: 3–6; Meng Zhaozhua 1999: 133–139; Wu Song 2000: 67, quoting the preface to Jiang Jianping 1990. That agriculture was hailed by most Warring States, Qin, and Han political thinkers as the economic foundation of the state has become an almost axiomatic paragraph in any history survey of the period. See, e.g., Lewis 2007: 106, referring to Lewis 2006: 101–104; Yong and Cotterell 1975: 44; Roberts 1999: 20, 23. A corollary of this analysis is the picture of agriculture as one of the enduring features of a continuous and slowly evolving dynastic China. See, e.g., Bray 1984: 1, 47–48. For a more balanced assessment, see Loewe 1968: 152; Hsu 1980: 3.
- 2 In Chinese and Japanese secondary literature, shifting attitudes toward agriculture and trade are often identified by means of elliptic quotations lifted from primary sources. These include phrases such as 重農, “lending weight to agriculture”; 本農, “making agriculture the root”; 上農, “exalting agriculture”; 重農抑商, “lending weight to agriculture and repressing trade”; 背本趨末, “turning one’s back to the roots and pursuing the branches”; 尚本, “valuing the roots”; 務本禁末, “to be devoted to the roots and restrict the branches.” Hara (2005: 6–7) speaks of *nōhon shugi* 農本主義 (agriculturalism). It should of course not be taken for granted that terms such as *ben* 本 or *mo* 末 invariably refer to the same set of ideas and referents. See Zhang Shoujun 1988; and Wang Daqing 2006: 42–88, which attempts to refine the meaning of the “root-and-branch” concept across some late Warring States texts.

Events and debates that took place during the Former Han 西漢 (206/202 BCE–9 CE) have no doubt fueled these assumptions. After all, the need to emphasize agriculture was brought up at the courts of nearly all Former Han emperors.³ It is also during Han, with the rise of a powerful class of merchants, that antimercantile sentiment rang loud, despite pleas for a more diversified economy by figures such as Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 85 BCE) and Sang Hongyang 桑弘羊 (152–80 BCE).⁴ I will not deal here with the complex political and economic realities specific to the Former Han context that may have influenced calls to restore the farmer to his rightful station and restrain the power of merchants through legal discrimination and state monopolies. These merit a more detailed treatment elsewhere.⁵ What concerns me here is that, by Han times, both those who spoke in favor of the primacy of agriculture and those who were critical of it bolstered their arguments by invoking the

- 3 *Hanshu* 4: 117, 4: 125 (Emperor Wen 文帝, 167 BCE); 5: 152 (Emperor Jing 景帝, 141 BCE); 29: 1685 (Emperor Wudi 武帝, 111 BCE); 7: 232 (Emperor Zhao 昭帝, r. 87–74 BCE); 8: 245 (Emperor Xuan 宣帝, r. 74–49 BCE); agriculture as the foundation to encourage virtue, 興德之本).
- 4 One vociferous proponent of a “return” to agriculture was Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–168 BCE), who persuades Emperor Wen 漢文帝 (r. 180–157 BCE) to revive the imperial plowing ceremony, declare agriculture a “root” profession, and abolish taxes on land and agricultural produce. See *Shiji* 10: 428; *Hanshu* 24A: 1130; *Xinshu jiaozhu* 3: 103 (“Gui wei” 瑰瑋); Hsu 1980: 158–160; Swann 1950: 156–157. Chao Cuo 鼂錯 (d. 154 BCE) convinces the same emperor to grant ranks and redeem crimes in return for contributions of grain to the state’s granaries. See *Hanshu* 24A: 1131, 1133; Hsu 1980: 160–163. Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 195–115 BCE) laments the fate of the poor farmer forced to give up nearly half of his yield as rent to wealthy landowners, whereas Gong Yu 貢禹 (124–44 BCE) recommends the abolition of metal coinage to remedy the abandonment of farming. See *Hanshu* 24A: 1137 and 72: 3075; Hsu 1980: 163–164, 166–167. Critics of the government during the court debates of 81 BCE invoked the ideal of a “well-field”-type distribution of land and supported the idea of “reverting to the roots” (*fan ben* 反本) by managing the relationship between fundamental versus peripheral occupations. See *Yantie lun* 1.2: 29 (“Li geng” 力耕), 11.12: 162 (“You bian” 憂邊); cf. Levi 2010: 11.4, XII.4. In contrast, Sima Qian argues that agriculture and mercantile activity need not be mutually opposing spheres. More benefit can be gained by running them in tandem and by preventing certain trades from being monopolized by government. See *Shiji* 129: 3272; and the discussion in Hui Fuping 2000: 162–170. Imperial counselor Sang Hongyang, of merchant stock himself, notes that in antiquity the basic and peripheral professions complemented each other, with the market acting as both the spatial and the temporal catalyst for the circulation of goods: “if only agriculture had sufficed to take care of one’s family and nourish life, Shun would not have worked as a potter, nor Yi Yin as a cook” (使治家養生必於農則舜不甄陶而伊尹不為庖). See *Yantie lun* 1.1: 3 (“Ben yi” 本議); 1.2: 28 (“Li geng”); 1.3: 43 (“Tong you” 通有). For Shun’s 舜 career as a potter, see n. 42 below; for Yi Yin’s career as a cook, see Sterckx 2011: 65–76.
- 5 Some of the major developments are outlined in Loewe 1974: 91–112; 1986: 152–198; 2006: 135–168.

pre-Han past as an epoch when agriculture was extolled unquestionably over all other economic activities and agents. Some spoke of the golden age of Zhou as an agricultural utopia of dutiful peasants and sage-rulers who ensured the economic sustenance of their toiling subjects. Others commented that this model agrarian society declined as new ideas on the management of people, land, and goods in subsequent times reshaped the fabric of economic life, while the interests of the farming and trading professions increasingly impinged on each other.⁶ Yet despite differing views on the merits of the economic policies professed by those who had preceded them, the dominant image associated with the pre-Han past was one that hailed the primacy of the peasant.

To be sure, there can be little doubt that food production was a high priority for most thinkers and men of power who operated during the formative four or five centuries leading up to and into imperial times. Whether or not agriculture's alleged privileged status reflects the socioeconomic realities of the time nevertheless remains hard to corroborate. Historians of agriculture, ideally, can draw on a representative set of data from a variety of sources, including received texts, paleographic sources, and archeology. Yet given that quantitative evidence on farming populations, farmsteads, cultivated land, crop yields, and livestock remains inevitably insufficient and geographically dispersed, much of our understanding of agriculture in pre-imperial China continues to be driven by ideological agendas that are prominent in some of the key texts of the period. We can examine how people "thought" about agriculture or how they expected a farming population to conduct itself. But this by no means corresponds neatly to what may have happened on the fields.

Even agricultural thought was not without its controversies, however. How exactly did Warring States period (Zhanguo 戰國, 453–221 BCE) thinkers conceive of the role of agriculture and the peasant? What social values did life in an agrarian society impart in the eyes of those who ruled? And if "agriculturalism" was high on the agenda, did this then imply a mind-set that was anti-merchant or anticommerce? In what follows I hope to show that Warring States rhetoric on the peasant and the professions was more complex than a

6 Jia Yi notes that from antiquity through to the present plowing and weaving and storing up harvests were the ultimate mechanism to "order All-under-Heaven" (*zhi tianxia* 治天下). Chao Cuo hails the resourcefulness of Tang 湯 and Yu 禹, who managed to build up reserves and sustain the people despite successive years of droughts and floods. Dong Zhongshu deplores the alleged abolition of the well-field system (*jing tian* 井田) and the agrarian reforms instigated by Shang Yang. Dong speaks of ancient times as a period of fair taxation and corvée obligation and argues in favor of creating an institution that "somewhat comes near to the ancient system" (*yi shao jin gu* 宜少近古). See *Hanshu* 24A:1128, 1130, 1137.

straightforward acknowledgment that rulers should put agriculture first. Agriculture formed a leading ingredient in an ideological narrative that propelled the Central States from a world of chaos and division to one of political unification, order, and social control. Not only was the image of the peasant linked with political “unifiers” or the political center, but farming life itself was depicted as an exemplary matrix for a stable society. The image of the peasant, as the great stabilizer of society, offered a grid for social theory and human psychology. Peasants embodied sedentary stability, whereas merchants, as “nomads” of commodities and speculating on market forces rather than the forces of agricultural labor, exemplified the opposite. Working the land was seen as a way to forge human character to accord with the expectations of the ruler. Yet even the notion that agriculture should be defended at the expense of trade and manufacture was not accepted as a given by all Warring States thinkers. My analysis will show that the purported antagonism between farming and commerce and the discourse on the separation of the professions may have been largely ideological and rhetorical in nature. At any rate this tension appears less prominent in Warring States times than those who have looked back at the past—be they advisers at the Han court or historians of agriculture today—may lead us to believe. In what follows I focus exclusively on ideology, in the knowledge that such an emphasis on ideas leaves many important questions on the socioeconomic context behind these ideas unanswered.

The Farming Habitus

Depictions of agriculture and the Houji 后稷 figure—the ancestor of the Zhou ruling clan and one of the alleged inventors of agriculture—are attested in several odes preserved in the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poems*), most famously in “Sheng min” 生民 (“Birth to the People”; Mao 245).⁷ Generally, however,

7 Useful summaries of agricultural activities in the *Shijing* include Zeng Xiongsheng 2008: 66–80; Liang Jiamian 2002. On the evolving status of Houji, see Cao Shujie 2006: chapter 2; and Tomita 2010. Note that, to set apart the Zhou, the Shang are not infrequently described as a trading society (beyond the pun on the graph *shang* 商), which makes for a nice dialectic with the succeeding Zhou, who were agriculturalists. This association of the term for trade or commerce 商 with the Shang 商 people has been made by several scholars, starting with Xu Zhongshu 徐中舒 (1898–1991) and Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) in the 1930s and 1950s. It continues to be rehearsed, including in the recently published, comprehensive Yang Shengnan and Ma Jifan 2010: 448. For another example, see Wu Song 2000: 64. The evidence, however, remains dubious and is mostly limited to a statement by the Duke of Zhou in the “Jiu gao” 酒誥 in which he characterizes the people

besides an early plea for the importance of agricultural production in the *Guoyu* 國語, Springs-and-Autumns period (Chunqiu 春秋, 770–453 BCE) and related sources do not contain much discussion of agriculture as labor or as a profession.⁸ The *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 uses the image of the peasant (*nongfu* 農夫) in a number of analogies but refers to the peasant generically and mostly together with other professions. So Lord Wen of Wei 衛文公 (r. 659–635 BCE) is said to “devote himself to generating resources, instructing his people in agriculture, promoting the circulation of trade, and being kind to craftsmen” (務材，訓農，通商，惠工).⁹ The state of Chu 楚 is said to sustain heavy expeditionary demands upon its armies without major disruptions among its professions, which are listed as itinerant merchants, farmers, artisans, and stationary traders.¹⁰ The stability of the state of Jin 晉 is attributed to its people devoting themselves wholly to agricultural pursuits and its merchants, craftsmen, menials, and servants not changing occupation.¹¹

Yet references to the professions aside, these early analogies are revealing, as they already contain a register of character traits that would later be associated more frequently with the peasant in Warring States texts. Take the following statement by Zichan 子產 (Gongsun Qiao 公孫僑, d. 522 BCE):

政如農功，日夜思之，思其始而成其終，朝夕而行之。行無越思，如農之有畔，其過鮮矣。

Governing is like agricultural labor; one must think of it day and night, concentrate on its beginnings, and see things through to the end. From dawn to dusk one carries it out. In carrying it out, one should not go beyond what has been thought out, just as farmers have dividing ridges between their fields, with those transgressing them being rare. (*Zuo zhuan*, Xiang 25: 1108)

The peasant here stands for a person dedicated to a task, following it through to completion, never overreaching, and respecting the boundaries set out for

of Yin (Shang) as folk who went to peddle their goods on oxcarts once the farming season was over to earn extra income to maintain their parents.

8 See *Guoyu* 1.6: 15–22 (“Zhou yu 周語, shang”), in a remonstrance by Lord Wen of Guo 虢文公 to King Xuan of Zhou 周宣王 (r. 827–782 BCE). Note that the *Guoyu* is a Warring States source, but it does contain materials dating to the Springs-and-Autumns and, possibly, Western Zhou period.

9 *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* (hereafter *Zuo zhuan*), Min 2: 273.

10 商農工賈不敗其業 (*Zuo zhuan*, Xuan 12: 722).

11 其庶人力於農穡 and 商工阜隸不知遷業 (*Zuo zhuan*, Xiang 9: 966).

him by his ruler. Marking off fields by means of boundaries and canals and parceling out land in equitable proportions are activities that belong to the core vocabulary describing efficient, controlled, and orderly rule. Zichan (anno 543 BCE) is on record as having marked off the fields in Zheng 鄭 with boundary ridges and irrigation ditches and as having farmhouses arranged in fives.¹² A ditty preserved in the *Zuo zhuan* suggests that his interventions were received skeptically at first, but within three years, he was praised for rendering the fields fertile and its people amenable to instruction.¹³ Instilling order and setting up proper divisions of agricultural land produces people with minds receptive to instruction and authority. Plotting land facilitates plotting people and plotting minds.

The ideal of collectively cooperating farming households organized in well-field communities (*jing tian* 井田), first described in the *Mengzi* 孟子, draws on the same assumptions.¹⁴ Whether, as Mark Lewis (2007: 248–249) argues, the well-field symbolizes the idea that “division is the basis of social order and good government” or, as Benjamin Schwartz (1985: 45–46) notes, Mencius’s emphasis is on equality among the peasants and their inclination toward mutual cooperation and solidarity, at the core here lies the idea that intervention in the physical and spatial layout of the farming landscape impacts the psychology of those who work it.¹⁵ The Mencian farming household, receiving from its overlord one hundred *mu* 畝 of farmland and some extra on which to rear animals, grow mulberry trees, and put up a cottage, is autarkic and perfectly balanced.¹⁶ An overlord takes the income of a ninth plot jointly tilled by eight families. Land is a privilege to be granted, and corvée a way to repay usufruct of the land. It is this cooperative unit of eight families (*lu jing ba jia* 廬井八家), taxed proportionately at the rate of a tithe (*shi yi* 什一) on their land, that constitutes the idealized farming community that many in Han accused Qin to have dispensed with.¹⁷ It is a farming community, as Hsu Cho-yun points out (1980: 9–10), that embodies the ideal of “levelled wealth.”

How much of an economic reality was the well-field? Scholars, starting with Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), have been divided between those who relegate the well-field model entirely to the realm of utopia versus those who believe that it

12 田有封洫，廬井有伍 (*Zuo zhuan*, Xiang 30: 1181).

13 *Zuo zhuan*, Xiang 30: 1182. See also *Lüshi chunqiu* 16.5: 999 (“Le cheng” 樂成); *Han Feizi* XIX.50: 446 (“Xian xue” 顯學).

14 *Mengzi* 5.3: 118.

15 Schwartz (1985) is keen to point out that Mencius does not mention the hardships that the peasants likely suffered at the hands of overlords who required labor service.

16 *Mengzi* 1.3: 5; 1.7: 17; 13.22: 310.

17 See, e.g., Wang Mang 王莽 in *Hanshu* 99B: 4110.

represented an economic reality.¹⁸ The answer probably lies somewhere in between. Suffice it to note that very few concrete references to *jing tian* occur in Springs-and-Autumns and Warring States period texts, and the majority of our information is derived from Han sources.¹⁹ Boundary-marked landed plots are not without a historical base. Some scholars speculate that pictograms of parceled fields can be identified as early as the Shang oracle bone script (Wang Qizhu 1994: 161–162). The fact that poems in the *Shijing* are adduced to associate the origins of the well-field system with legendary sages in distant antiquity who open up uncultivated land, penetrate the wilds, mark out boundaries, and divide and measure up lots of lands, indicates that implicated in the well-field model are expectations of social order and unity of mind among cooperative communities organized in a grid.²⁰

While we cannot be sure what agro-economic reality the well-field stood for, it is beyond doubt that it offered the ideological adversary of a model of land reform advocated by Shang Yang 商鞅 (d. 338 BCE). The exact nature of the land reforms in Qin remains the subject of much uncertainty. The land reforms do not form a topic of discussion in the *Shang jun shu* 商君書 (*Book of Lord Shang*) itself. Nevertheless, guided by Han sources, most premodern and modern commentators accept that Qin replaced a type of well-field system, or some derivative thereof, with a grid of pathways dividing land into blocks or, in the much-quoted formula of Sima Qian, that Qin, “in order to create arable lands, opened up the paths and ridges that marked the boundaries of the

18 Hu Shi took a highly skeptical view in his essay “Jing tian bian” 井田辯 (1919). In 1929 Guo Moruo 郭沫若 did not believe there was any historical reality to the well-field system, but by the 1950s he had changed his mind, as his views on the textual sources that document it changed. See Cao Yuying 2005: 3–7. For recent assessments, see Zhong Xiangcai 1997: 28–30; Satake 2006: 348–371; Zhang Jinguang 2013: 344–360. The well-field continues to invite some of the most historically dubious claims, such as in Lu Baoli 2011: 32, where it is argued that the Xia implemented it. Likewise, some Western scholars have too easily accepted it as an economic reality. See, e.g., Maspero 1927: 67–68.

19 For instance, there is a rare exhortation in the “Chi mi” 侈靡 chapter of the *Guanzi* 管子 encouraging the ruler to “specify” or “measure” the size or number of well-fields (斷方井田之數; *Guanzi* XII.35: 689), but the chapter is, as Guo Moruo has argued, likely of early Han provenance and/or, as other scholars emphasize, corrupt. See Rickett 1998: 297–304, 319; Hu Jiacong 2003: 298–306.

20 Much quoted in this respect are “Da tian” 大田 (“Large Fields”; Mao 212), which distinguishes between “the lord’s fields” (*gong tian* 公田), presumably worked by the public, and fields for private use (*wo si* 我私); and “Xin nan shan” 信南山 (“Truly, Southern Mountains”; Mao 210), where Yu the Great is at work drawing boundaries and dividing plots.

fields” (為田開阡陌封疆).²¹ It is somewhat unfortunate that Shang Yang’s reforms are often taken to imply that he completely uprooted and destroyed the feudal polity; that Qin farmers were empowered through private landownership and the availability of sophisticated iron tools;²² or even that peasants became free or independent.²³

Recognition of private landownership and the power to trade land continue to be highlighted as a main cause for Qin’s political and military success. The term “ownership,” however, is problematic. It implies that peasants could contractually buy and sell land. Note that a core agriculturalist chapter in the *Shang jun shu*, “Ken ling” 墾令 (“Ordinance to Cultivate Wastelands”), does not refer to property.²⁴ There is, as yet, very little evidence prior to the Han or the very end of the Qin dynasty that peasants could sell their plots.²⁵ For instance, evidence from the imperial Qin local archive of Qianling 遷陵 County, discovered in 2002 at Liye 里耶 (Hunan), does not indicate that land was regularly sold or purchased (*Liye Qin jian* (yi) 2012: 4). “Possession” therefore at most might have meant that the Qin farmer could temporarily occupy his plot and had the right to manage and harvest it (much like usufruct or a freehold tenancy). No evidence so far in the form of sale contracts or documents attesting to ownership confirms that alienating agricultural land was either permitted or widely practiced. This must partly account for the fact that, as I will show later, despite the ideological stance taken in the *Shang jun shu* in favor of the oppression of merchants and the monetary economy, few Warring States thinkers could have witnessed a vibrant class of merchants buying or selling

21 *Shiji* 68: 2232; see also *Shiji* 5: 203. The technical meaning of this phrase remains contested among scholars ever since Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 (1130–1200 CE) “Kai qian mo bian” 開阡陌辨.

22 For a detailed list of Warring States archeological sites (up to 2007) across China where iron agricultural tools have been found, see Li Yaguang 2009: 2–22. Iron plows and murals depicting plowing scenes have been found on sites across Han China. For a recent survey of sites, see Du Qingyu 2010: 47–49.

23 See, e.g., Hsu 1980: 13–14; Lewis 2007: 18; Duyvendak 1963: 27ff.; Marks 2012: 67, 84, 96.

24 There remains debate over whether the “Ken ling” chapter can be associated with the historical Shang Yang. Yang Kuan 楊寬 has suggested that it is a late Warring States policy document put forward by followers of the Legalist “school”; yet the balance of opinion situates its origins near 359 BCE and Shang Yang himself, even though it may not have been the original text of what he put to Lord Xiao. For a summary of the arguments, see Zhang Linxiang 2008: 76–81, 107–109; Tong Weimin 2013: 81–96.

25 A record of the sale of inherited land in the Baoshan 包山 materials (Jingmen, Hubei; burial dated ca. 316 BCE) may at present be the only and earliest example. See *Baoshan Chu jian* 1991: 28 (slips 151–152) and discussions in Chao Fulin 2003: 644–646; Pines 2005–2006b: 172–173n37.

land and, as a consequence, could have advocated radical antimercantile philosophies.

To what extent, then, was Shang Yang's program about the emancipation of the farmer and the generation of produce? Two references loosely link Shang Yang with the legendary Shennong 神農 (Divine Husbandman). The first is bibliographical and in the form of a comment by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) in his *Bielu* 別錄 (*Listings by Separate Categories*);²⁶ the second is a passage in the “Hua ce” 畫策 (“Planning Policies”) chapter (18) of the *Shang jun shu*. The passage hails a utopian world under Shennong, following which human civilization irreversibly declines:

神農之世，男耕而食，婦織而衣，刑政不用而治，甲兵不起而王。神農既沒，以彊勝弱，以眾暴寡。

In the age of Shennong, men plowed to obtain food, and women wove to obtain clothing. Without the application of a policy of punishments, order prevailed; without the raising of armored soldiers, he reigned as a monarch. After Shennong's demise, the powerful were overcoming the weak, and the many oppressed the few. (*Shang jun shu* IV.18: 106–107)²⁷

It may appear un-Legalist to find a reference in the *Shang jun shu* to an agrarian golden age in which no force or government intervention was needed to instill order. In his much-acclaimed study of the so-called “Nong jia” 農家 (School of Tillers), Angus Graham notes that one would expect a claim for the need for harsh policies and punishments from the very beginning of human civilization. Graham then, rather wildly, speculates that mention of the golden age of Shennong must have slipped into the *Shang jun shu* through farming manuals known to Legalists that escaped the burning of the books in 213 BCE (Graham 1979: 69–73, 93–94). However, reference to a lack of force and punishment need not necessarily be contradictory when it occurs in an origin narrative. The point in invoking an agriculturalist utopia here is to show that it was unsustainable and had declined, and that a new political agenda with a sage at the helm was required to rectify deviations from this original order.²⁸ And it is

26 Yan Shigu's 顏師古 (581–645) gloss on *Hanshu* cites *Bielu*, according to which the *Shennong shu* 神農書 (*Book of Shennong*) contained “theories of Li Kui 李悝 and Shang Yang” (*Hanshu* 30: 1743).

27 Cf. Duyvendak 1963: 132.

28 Yuri Pines (2013b: 31–35) has recently made the point that, in these narratives, Shang Yang's assumption is that a peaceful stateless society is untenable: monarchic rule is

this call for biophysical and psychological order, rather than the blunt use of punishments, that dominates the analysis of the farming condition in the *Shang jun shu*.

First, measuring out the right proportion of farmers per area of land is said to guarantee optimal cultivation.²⁹ The ecological model is one in which land is parceled out in such a way that each territorial unit includes a proportional share of all major landscape features and natural resources:

地方百里者，山陵處什一，藪澤處什一，谿谷流水處什一，都邑蹊道處什一，惡田處什二，良田處什四。以此食作夫五萬，其山陵、谿谷、藪澤，可以給其材，都邑、蹊道，足以處其民，先王制土分民之律也。

In a territory of a hundred square *li*, mountains and hills should occupy one-tenth, marshlands and swamps another tenth; valleys, dales, and running rivers another tenth; cities, towns, and highways another tenth; two-tenths should be taken up by barren fields, and four-tenths by fertile fields. In this way 50,000 laborers can be fed; its mountains and hills, valleys and dales, marshlands and swamps can provide the required natural resources, and the cities, towns, and highways should suffice to manage its people. This was the standard according to which the former kings regulated the land and divided the people. (*Shang jun shu* IV.15: 86–87 [“Lai min” 徠民])³⁰

Perfectly balanced geophysical qualities of a territorial unit enable the ruler to “place,” “locate,” and hence “deal with” (*chu* 處) the population in such a way that it is easily and accessibly controlled. Ordering land enables one to divide or distribute one’s people across it. Although this passage and an earlier variant in “Suan di” 算地 (chap. 6) suggest that exploiting natural resources should complement agriculture, a passage in “Ken ling” (chap. 2) emphasizes that marshlands ought to be monopolized to prevent those who dislike farming, or

required once society becomes more complex and stratified. For an explicit reference to Shennong, stating that his way of rule was appropriate to his times but damaging nowadays, see *Shang jun shu* 11.6: 47 (“Suan di” 算地).

29 *Shang jun shu* 1.3: 24 (“Nong zhan” 農戰); cf. Duyvendak 1963: 92. Note that manipulating the topography and dividing up the lands is also a prominent trope in the First Emperor’s stele inscriptions. See, e.g., *Shiji* 6: 252; Kern 2000a: 43, lines 22–33; and my discussion below.

30 Cf. Duyvendak 1963: 86. Variant at *Shang jun shu* 11.6: 43 (“Suan di” 算地); cf. Duyvendak 1963: 103.

those who are lazy, from seeking a living through foraging.³¹ The state is to be in full control of both human and natural resources, neither of which should fall into private hands.

In terms of their underlying ideology, there are significant commonalities across Classicist and Legalist models of the farming society: in essence, the Mencian-type well-field community or usufruct-based tenancy relationship is also based on the core idea that plotting out land and agricultural labor provides the best model for social order and control. Yet whereas in the Mencian model cooperative labor defines the peasant's relationship with other households and his superior, in the *Shang jun shu*, turning wastelands into arable lands (*geng cao* 耕草) takes on a highly moral and psychological character. In the Legalist state the peasant is not merely an agent for agricultural output. More importantly, agriculture secures a population whose minds are amenable to control: the farming habitus assumes mental simplicity or even stupidity (*yu* 愚).³² Farming detracts the mind from temptations presented by other professions, by literature, by education. Farming is the antidote to glib talk, to deviant curiosity, craftiness, and intellectual disputation. It embodies an uncarved purity of mind (*pu* 樸) and single-mindedness of purpose (*yi* 壹) (i.e., an unquestioning mind). Shang Yang's farming population is a tabula rasa inscribed according to the will and wits of the ruler.³³ Thus, when exposure to other professions has been prevented:

愚農不知，不好學問，則務疾農。知農不離其故事，則草必墾矣。

If stupid farmers do not become knowledgeable or fond of learning, they will apply themselves energetically to agriculture. If knowledgeable farmers do not abandon old ways, then it is certain that wastelands will be brought under cultivation. (*Shang jun shu* 1.2: 15 ["Ken ling"])³⁴

31 *Shang jun shu* 1.2: 12; cf. Duyvendak 1963: 95.

32 See, e.g., *Shang jun shu* 1.2: 7, 13 ("Ken ling").

33 *Shang jun shu* 1.3: 24–25 ("Nong zhan"); cf. Duyvendak 1963: 93. There is an echo of this in the "Sheng ma" 乘馬 chapter in the *Guanzi*: "Therefore, what [only] the intelligent understand and the stupid do not understand should not be used to instruct the people; what [only] the skilled are capable of and the unskilled are incapable of should not be used to instruct the people. Unless it is something that the people will submit to carry out as the result of one single order, it cannot be considered very good. Unless it is something that everyone can do, it cannot be considered to have great merit" (*Guanzi* 1.5: 91).

34 Cf. Duyvendak 1963: 88.

Simplicity of purpose produces a law-abiding population.³⁵ The single-mindedness (*yi* 壹) of the people ensures that they are simple (*pu* 樸), which in turn naturally leads them to farming. Farming fosters diligence (*qin* 勤), which in turn may result in wealth creation (*fu* 富).³⁶ For Shang Yang poverty is a necessary precondition to stimulate productivity. It encourages people to work hard and even develop an eye for profit.³⁷

In addition to fostering an unquestioning mind, farming is also linked to a propensity for domesticity, registration, and socioeconomic fixity. The peasant symbolizes the sedentary rather than movement, the inner sphere rather than the outer:

一則農，農則樸，樸則安其居而惡出 ... 民入則樸，出則惑，故其農勉而戰戰也。

Having unity of purpose, people will farm; if they farm, they will be simple; and being simple, they will dwell quietly and dislike going out. ... If the people are simple at home and anxious abroad, then they will exert themselves in farming and be alert in warfare. (*Shang jun shu* 11.6: 48 ["Suan di"])³⁸

The aim is to prevent people from wanting to escape (*chu* 出) their controllable social unit: anchorage to the land permits registered population control.³⁹ What needs to be avoided at all cost is a population of landless peasants.⁴⁰

As much as the *Shang jun shu* advocates a blunt discriminatory treatment of merchants and condemns the monetary economy, it is important to note that, throughout, its analysis of the relative benefits of agriculture is predominantly formulated *ex negativo*. The farmer is not the instinctively cooperative agriculturalist as found in Shennong's utopia; he is a lesser evil that is more amenable

35 *Shang jun shu* 11.6: 44 ("Suan di"); cf. Duyvendak 1963: 103–104.

36 *Shang jun shu* 111.8: 61 ("Yi yan" 壹言); cf. Duyvendak 1963: 112.

37 *Shang jun shu* 1V.6: 44–45 ("Suan di"), 111.9: 64 ("Cuo fa" 錯法); cf. Duyvendak 1963: 104, 113. For poverty leading to success, see also *Shang jun shu* 111.13: 78–79 ("Jin ling" 靳令); cf. Duyvendak 1963: 119.

38 Cf. Duyvendak 1963: 106.

39 *Shang jun shu* 1.4: 32 ("Qu qiang" 去彊); cf. Duyvendak 1963: 97: "If the whole population is registered at birth and erased at death, there would be no people who would escape producing grain and in the fields there would be no fallow land." Another passage describes agriculture as an "internal affair of the people" (民之內事), as opposed to warfare, which is linked to the realm of the external (外). See *Shang jun shu* v.22: 128 ("Wai nei" 外內); cf. Duyvendak 1963: 141.

40 *Shang jun shu* v.23: 131 ("Jun chen" 君臣); cf. Duyvendak 1963: 143.

to the ruler's control: farming shields one from distractions; farming is the ultimate mental and economic equalizer. The sages' forceful conversion of the populace to agriculture is nothing less than the imposition of new norms and a radical transformation of existing customs (*li fa hua su* 立法化俗).⁴¹ Shang Yang's peasant is the epitome of the psychologically unquestioning individual and the politically submissive society. This stance is softened significantly in Legalist writings of the late Warring States period and imperial Qin. As we will see, the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 will concur in acknowledging that cultivating land and producing food should be at the heart of the Legalist state, yet Han Fei is not so much concerned with the farming mind as with farming as a profession and social agency among other occupations.

Let us now turn to the Confucius figure. In the *Lunyu* 論語 Confucius is torn between the advocacy of agriculture as a necessity for good society and the question of whether farming can be considered a respectable profession. While Confucius is regularly adduced, in the *Lunyu* and elsewhere, to praise the virtues of agriculture,⁴² he takes a distant view of agricultural labor, which he ranks below an official career:

子曰：君子謀道不謀食。耕也，餒在其中矣；學也，祿在其中矣。君子憂道不憂貧。

The Master said, "A gentleman devotes his mind to the Way and not to securing food. When you till the land, ending up being hungry could be a matter of course; when you study, ending up with an official salary could be a matter of course. The gentleman worries about the Way, not about poverty. (*Lunyu* 15.32: 168)

Confucius here portrays farming as a lesser gateway to wealth creation and social status, an idea reinforced in his exchange with Fan Chi 樊遲 in *Lunyu* 13.4. There he insists that agriculture and horticulture are the business of the petty person, whereas the gentleman should be able to muster his people with moral values only (ritual propriety, righteousness, trust). This idea that

⁴¹ *Shang jun shu* 111.8: 60 ("Yi yan"); cf. Duyvendak 1963: 111.

⁴² For instance, the Confucius figure in the *Han Feizi* praises Shun for solving disputes among farmers, fishermen, and manual laborers while admitting that it is not the sage's duty to be engaged in these sorts of preoccupations in normal circumstances. See *Han Feizi* xv.36: 349 ("Nan yi" 難一). For Shun, farming, fishing, and firing pots before taking up the reigns of office, see also *Mengzi* 3.8: 82–83, 12.15: 298; *Mozi* 11.9: 77 ("Shang xian 尚賢 zhong"), x111.49: 736 ("Lu wen" 魯問); *Lüshi chunqiu* 14.6: 809 ("Shen ren" 慎人); *Huainanzi* 1: 23 ("Yuan Dao" 原道); and the discussion in Pines 2005a: 249ff.

the sage should uphold the division of labor and not engage in self-sustaining agriculture is carried forward more vociferously in the *Mengzi*, where the primitivist Xu Xing 許行 (fl. 315 BCE) is at the receiving end of a scathing tirade by Mencius (*Mengzi* 5.4: 123–126).

So amid the Ru acknowledgment of food production as the undeniable engine of society lurks a criticism of farming labor as an occupation distinctly inferior to the labor of the mind—or, perhaps, as Derk Bodde (1991: 211–212) has suggested, an exhortation for the gentleman not to become a technical specialist. It is hard not to detect a modicum of disdain in Confucius's (and Mencius's) tepid comments on the merits of tilling the soil or, at least, to ignore the implicit suggestion that a gentleman should not be preoccupied with it.⁴³ In this the Ru are unlike the worthies (*xian* 賢) in the *Mozi* 墨子, who, in governing a township, “leave early and come back late, plowing and harvesting, planting trees and gathering pulse and grain.”⁴⁴ The *Mozi* concurs that a lack of food is one of the great misfortunes that can befall a state,⁴⁵ and it condemns offensive warfare (cf. the Legalist agenda) and music (cf. Ru-ist ritual) on the grounds that they disturb the planting, sowing, and cultivating of trees as well as reaping and sowing.⁴⁶

43 Li Ling (2007: 235–236), for instance, takes Confucius's attitude as one that counters “agriculturalism” 重農主義 (his words) and is quick to remind his readers that Mao Zedong took offense! Wang Zhangmin (2009) suggests that Confucius simply wants his disciples to be concerned with moral principles rather than ask about the trivialities of physical labor. *Lunyu* 13.4 has also been adduced to make the tenuous claim that, already in Springs-and-Autumns times, grain farming and the production of fruit and vegetables were two diversified and specialist industries. See Gu Derong and Zhu Shunlao 2001: 211–212.

44 *Mozi* II.9: 75 (“Shang xian, zhong”).

45 *Mozi* I.5: 35 (“Qi huan” 七患). On the importance of food production, see also *Mozi* I.6: 47 (“Ci Guo” 辭過), IX.37: 425–426 (“Fei ming 非命 xia”). Obviously, one must be cautious in assuming that the Mozi persona is consistent throughout the received *Mozi*. In a conversation with Wu Lü 吳慮 in the “Dialogues,” Mozi is happy to excuse himself from farming because his teaching and the spreading of his doctrine of righteousness are greater achievements, while teaching others to plow is of greater merit than only performing the plowing oneself. See *Mozi* XIII.49: 736 (“Lu wen”).

46 *Mozi* V.18: 202 (“Fei gong 非攻 zhong”), VIII.32: 381 (“Fei yue 非樂 shang”). Interestingly, Wolfram Eberhard (1948: 56) characterizes Mozi almost as a proto-businessman: “His ideal of social organization resembles organizations of merchants and craftsmen which we know only from later periods. His stress upon frugality, too, reflects a line of thought typical of businessmen. The rationality which can also be seen in his metaphysical ideas, and which has induced modern Chinese scholars to call him an early materialist is fitting

The association of the farming habitus with simplicity of mind and a malleability toward authority, advocated directly in the *Shang jun shu* and indirectly by the Confucius figure, is echoed in other, later Warring States writings, most notably the *Xunzi* 荀子 and the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋. Xunzi (d. after 238 BCE) stresses the importance of agriculture: the ruler brings wilderness lands into cultivation, fills granaries and storehouses, and provides useful tools.⁴⁷ Yet he also rehearses the *Shang jun shu*'s image of the toiling and unadorned farmer: agricultural activities ought to be inspected and salaries well managed to ensure that the farming population remains simple through hard labor (*puli* 樸力) and to make sure that limits can be imposed on what they are able or allowed to do (*gua neng* 寡能).⁴⁸ This is accompanied by progressive taxation and the use of statistical records to keep down the numbers of merchants and traders and to prevent farmers from leaving their fields except in the off-season.⁴⁹ Yet, unlike the *Shang jun shu*, Xunzi speaks of a farming population that appears more receptive to instruction and self-improvement, albeit that the language used remains predominantly a vocabulary of enforcement and social control: rural supervisors are to ensure that districts and hamlets are obedient (*shun* 順), that farming residences are fixed (*ding* 定), that peasants are admonished "to be transformed through instruction" (*jiaohua* 教化), that they are urged (*cu* 趨) to be filial and have brotherly affections, and so on. All this serves to create a farming population that heeds commands (*shun ming* 順命) coming from the ruler.⁵⁰

It is in one of the four agricultural chapters in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, "Shang nong" 上農 ("Exalting Agriculture"), that we encounter agriculturalism at its most political. "Shang nong" reiterates the Shang Yang idea that agriculture is a tool whereby one leads (*dao* 導) and organizes the people. Even more so than in the *Shang jun shu*, agriculture is a political instrument: it keeps people fixed in one location, simple-minded, and easy to use (*yi yong* 易用). To reinforce the idea that agriculture serves to indoctrinate the blank mind of the peasant, "Shang nong" invokes Houji (Lord Millet), who identifies farming and weaving as a "fundamental (moral) doctrine" (*ben jiao* 本教). In its claim that without

to an age in which a developing money economy and expanding trade required a cool, logical approach to the affairs of this world."

47 *Xunzi* v.9: 156, 173 ("Wang zhi" 王制), VI.10: 196 ("Fu guo" 富國); cf. Knoblock 1988–1994: vol. 2, 99, 110, 136.

48 *Xunzi* v.9: 168 ("Wang zhi"), VII.11: 229 ("Wang ba" 王霸); cf. Knoblock 1988–1994: vol. 2, 106, 169.

49 *Xunzi* VI.10: 179 ("Fu guo"); cf. Knoblock 1988–1994: vol. 2, 123. For a rehearsal of these ideas closely echoing Xunzi, see *Han shi waizhuan* v.31: 198.

50 *Xunzi* v.9: 168 ("Wang zhi"); cf. Knoblock 1988–1994: vol. 2, 106.

having the people physically labor in the fields (*li tian* 力田), both state and household would be difficult to control (國家難治), the chapter acknowledges agriculture as a prime agency for order and social control.⁵¹

A language of social control also forms the undertone to the image of the farmer as it appears in the so-called monthly ordinances or almanacs preserved in the first twelve sections of the *Lüshi chunqiu*. The tone of the seasonal ordinances that concern agriculture is entirely dirigiste. The language is riddled with imperatives (*ming* 命, *lao* 勞, *quan* 勸, *qu* 趣, *bi* 必, etc.). The farmer in the calendar is deprived of any sense of subjectivity, agency, or autonomy. He seems entirely incapable of making any decisions by himself either in assessing the ecological environment of his crops or in planning for seeding and harvesting. Throughout, the issuance of prohibitions and the temporal banning of certain activities are more dominant than the rhetoric of encouraged use and permission.⁵²

The seasonal ordinances exemplify what Wittfogel (1957: 3) has referred to as the “agromanagerial,” “agrobureaucratic,” or even “agrodespotic” character of a society. The assumption is again that the farmer is uneducated and unable to organize his own activities. Officials determine, fix, and inspect the boundaries of the fields, and farmers work them. Officials assess the quality of the soil, issue orders concerning seeds and crops, guide the farming population by means of instructions (以教道民), and personally participate in the work.⁵³ Farmers are made to labor; people are exhorted (勞農勸民) not to miss the season.⁵⁴ The sole license to understand or assess the workings of the natural world and the agricultural seasons lies with the political center, not the farmer. Punish-

51 *Lüshi chunqiu* 26.3: 1718–1720 (“Shang nong”). Histories of Chinese agriculture tend to overlook the ideological tone that marks the opening of this chapter and jump straight to the remaining three chapters (“Ren di” 任地, “Bian tu” 辨土, “Shen shi” 審時), which are largely technical in nature with an emphasis on the right timing of crops. See, e.g., Yang Zhimin 2006: 58–67. There is one other story preserved in the “Gui dang” 貴當 chapter that bespeaks agriculturalism, although it is largely allegorical. This is the case of a hunter who is able to buy a better hunting dog after earning money through plowing: “Such is not so only in the case of hunting, but it applies to all other activities. From antiquity to the present, there has never existed a case of someone becoming lord-protector without putting plowing first [*xian geng* 先耕]” (*Lüshi chunqiu* 24.6: 1638).

52 A similar point is made in Le Aiguo 2004: 160, with reference to the *Guanzi*, which also contains far more references to the use of seasonal prohibitions (*jin* 禁) than references to the permitted use/release (*fa* 發) of land and natural resources.

53 *Lüshi chunqiu* 1.1: 2 (“Meng chun ji” 孟春紀).

54 *Lüshi chunqiu* 4.1: 189 (“Meng xia ji” 孟夏紀).

ment is incurred when agricultural directives are not followed.⁵⁵ Farmers produce, but officials gather farming products and count, register, and store them.⁵⁶ Farmers offer labor, but officials organize the workforce and supply and repair tools.⁵⁷

To sum up, in the eyes of the Warring States masters of philosophy, agriculturalism was as much a political philosophy as an economic doctrine. The peasant did not simply embody a profession but offered a desirable prototype for human character and behavior. At the heart of political agriculturalism was the idea that shaping the land and agro-management enabled a ruler to shape the character of those who worked it. Agricultural labor embodied a notion of order and a receptiveness to the impositions of social control. But where did farming rank among the other occupations? How ideologically tight was the theory that agriculture was to be privileged over other professions?

Farmer versus Merchant

A salient feature of ideologies is that they tend to formulate their core values in a simplified and prescriptive language that often privileges one idea at the exclusion of another. The assumption that commerce develops at the detriment of agriculture may serve as a good illustration of this. To test it we need to examine to what extent agriculturalism in Warring States texts *de facto* implies hostile or negative attitudes toward the so-called branch (*mo* 末) professions. In what follows I will show that repeated insistence on the separation between merchants and peasants may be a tacit admission that such a separation was not upheld in reality.

The *Mengzi*, again, is a good place to start. Mencius leaves no doubt that agriculture is a cornerstone of the state: when a ruler is able to cause his people to plow deep and weed thoroughly, this is a sign of good rule; a sage should “govern the world so that pulse and grain will be as plentiful as water and fire.” The politics of the granary are also mentioned.⁵⁸ Yet what is striking is that, aside from the image of the parceled farm-scape or well-field that is invariably highlighted as evidence of his emphasis on a distinctively agrarian sociology, Mencius has much more to say about merchants, taxation, the politics of wealth creation, the mechanics of the market, and the morality of making or

55 *Lüshi chunqiu* 8.1: 427 (“Zhong qiu ji” 仲秋紀); 11.1: 575 (“Zhong dong ji” 仲冬紀).

56 *Lüshi chunqiu* 9.1: 473 (“Ji qiu ji” 季秋紀).

57 *Lüshi chunqiu* 12.1: 622 (“Ji dong ji” 季冬紀).

58 *Mengzi* 1.5: 10; 13.23: 311; 2.4: 33.

refusing to accept profit.⁵⁹ The agriculturalist tone in the *Mengzi* is rather modest: Houji's merits take care of only the basic human desires. More important as a threat to the state than uncultivated fields or a lack of amassed goods is the absence of ritual propriety and education. Those who, like Shang Yang, force people to open up lands for cultivation deserve punishment.⁶⁰

The pursuit of wealth through means other than farming is viewed very positively in the *Mengzi*, as long as the wealth is shared. Taxation is not so much an attack on the nature of commerce or an attempt to annihilate merchants as it is a way to restore an original balance.⁶¹ The Mencian ideal of the market is that of a catalyst for the perfectly balanced exchange of goods and produce. Taxation is merely a corrective that serves to restore the original flow of goods and services:

古之為市也，以其所有易其所無者，有司者治之耳。有賤丈夫焉，必求龍斷而登之，以左右望，而罔市利。人皆以為賤，故從而征之。征商自此賤丈夫始矣。

When the ancients set up markets, they did so in order to exchange what one had for what one lacked. The supervising authorities merely ensured good order. Then there came this despicable fellow who always had to seek out a vantage point and, climbing up on it, would gaze into the distance to the left and to the right in order to secure for himself all the profit there was in the market. The people all thought him despicable, and as a result, they taxed him. The taxing of merchants began with this despicable fellow. (*Mengzi* 4.10: 103–104)

Taxation is explained here almost as a moral corrective, a measure that helps instill some type of moral rectitude, a means to redress a deviation from what should be humans' natural and original understanding of commercial exchange. The exemplary ruler in the *Mengzi* taxes in such a way that he attracts *all* professions to his state, not simply farmers. The ancients, Mencius points out, conducted inspections at the borders and in marketplaces but im-

59 Note, by contrast, the interesting biographical anecdote (preserved in *Gu Lienü zhuan* 古烈女傳 1: 15) in which Mencius's mother decides to move their residence away from the market for the sake of his education.

60 *Mengzi* 5.4: 125; 7.1: 162; 7.14: 175.

61 *Mengzi* 2.4: 33; 2.5: 36. Levies at the rate of a tithe are deemed ideal (*Mengzi* 5.3: 118–119; 6.8: 153).

posed no levies.⁶² Market mechanisms are inevitable for Mencius, which is why, in his attack on Xu Xing's ideal of the autarkic sage, among other things, Mencius mentions the absence of price diversity on the market as a non sequitur since, he argues, it is part of the nature of things that they should be unequal. It is difficult to identify Mencius as being antimercantile.⁶³

By contrast, the *Shang jun shu* is unambiguously clear in its stance on merchants. It is, in my view, the only Warring States text that contains a sustained ideological stance in favor of the suppression of merchants. “Ken ling” starts off with the idea that farming represents purity and noncorruption, and it is pitched as the opposite pole to “private profit” (*si li* 私利). Agriculture and commerce may potentially be interdependent, but, Shang Yang argues, the prospect of commercial transactions between farmers and merchants will create a class of economic parasites:

使商無得糴，農無得糴。農無得糴，則窳惰之農勉疾。商無得糴，則多歲不加樂。多歲不加樂，則饑歲無裕利。無裕利則商怯。商怯則欲農。

Do not allow merchants to buy grain nor farmers to sell grain. If farmers can't sell their grain, then the lazy and inactive ones among them will exert themselves and be energetic. If merchants do not get to buy grain, then they have no particular joy in abundant harvests. Having no special joy in abundant harvests, they do not make copious profit in years of famine, and making no copious profit, merchants become fearful. Being fearful, they will wish to farm. (*Shang jun shu* I.2: 8–9 [“Ken ling”])⁶⁴

Shang Yang wants farmers and merchants to stand in an antagonistic relationship: “If the tolls at the borders and on the market are made heavy, farmers will come to hate merchants, and merchants will have a heart full of doubt and laziness.” Merchants deserve to be harassed so that “the ritual of sending gifts back and forth [去來賚送之禮] will not pervade the hundred districts.”⁶⁵

62 *Mengzi* 3.5: 77; 2.5: 36.

63 *Mengzi* 5.4: 123–124. While it remains hard to corroborate for the early period, several medieval commentators have linked the well 井 with the market 市 on the grounds that communal water wells were the place where people gathered and peddled their produce. This has led to speculation that the well-field model may have influenced small-scale agricultural commerce. See Wu Yucheng 2010: 76–85.

64 Cf. Duyvendak 1963: 86.

65 *Shang jun shu* 1.2: 17–18; cf. Duyvendak 1963: 88–89 (重關市之賦，則農惡商，商有疑惰之心).

Forced registration of merchants and their followers should serve to make merchants' lives miserable (*shang lao* 商勞).⁶⁶ Merchants therefore can and should be taxed out of existence:

欲農富其國者，境內之食必貴，而不農之徵必多，市利之租必重。則民不得無田。無田不得不易其食。食貴則田者利。田者利則事者眾。食貴，糴食不利，而又加重徵，則民不得無去其商賈、技巧，而事地利矣。故民之力盡在於地利矣。

If one desires to enrich the state through agriculture, then within the borders grain should be expensive, taxes for those who do not farm must be many, and levies on market profit must be heavy; this being the case, people cannot but till. If they do not till, they will be obliged to buy their grain. If grain is expensive, then those who till the land will profit. When those who till the fields gain profit, there will be many who will make [agriculture] their business. When grain is expensive, and dealing in it is not profitable, while, moreover, heavy levies are imposed, then people cannot fail to get rid of itinerant and resident merchants and those who gain a living through crafts and clever tricks and instead occupy themselves with profit from the soil. Thus, the strength of the people will be fully exerted to draw profit from the soil. (*Shang jun shu* V.22: 129 ["Wai nei" 外内])⁶⁷

Shang Yang's philosophy is based on the conviction that the agrarian economy in kind should be prioritized and maintained over and above the monetary economy.⁶⁸ Money causes a disproportionate outflow of grain. Just as farming folk should be prevented from leaving their unit, the image here is that of the state being threatened by "outlets" (*kong* 空 / 孔), that is, uncontrollable fissures in the economic polity that allow wealth to seep away.⁶⁹ In short, unlike for other Warring States thinkers, agriculturalism, for Shang Yang, is a force that excludes and negates the other professions. It is not simply a hierarchy of one over the other. Shang Yang advocates farming as the sole acceptable eco-

66 *Shang jun shu* 1.2: 18 ("Ken ling"); cf. Duyvendak 1963: 97.

67 Cf. Duyvendak 1963: 141.

68 *Shang jun shu* 1.4: 32–34 ("Qu qiang").

69 *Shang jun shu* 111.13: 81 ("Jin ling"), 5.20: 124 ("Ruo min" 弱民).

nomic preoccupation. In doing this he stands out among Warring States thinkers, including later Legalists.⁷⁰

That the antimercantile stance in the *Shang jun shu* may have been the exceptional, rather than the common, position becomes immediately clear when we compare that text with ideas associated with Xunzi, whose thought is often considered a conduit to later Legalist figures such as Han Fei and Li Si 李斯 (ca. 280–208 BCE). Though more present than in the *Mengzi* perhaps, agriculturalism is not particularly prominent as an ideology in the *Xunzi*. There is also little evidence that Xunzi seeks to demote mercantile activity as the lesser profession. More often the professions are mentioned alongside each other as part of the same argument or analogy. So Xunzi's director of the marketplace "follows the appropriate season in his preparations and enables merchants to travel about in peace, and goods and products to circulate freely" (貨財通).⁷¹ In one analogy he invokes both the good farmer (良農) and good merchant (良賈) as models for sages and scholars.⁷² In fact, comparisons with *all* professions are called upon to define the properties of the sage:

故聖人也者人之所積也。人積耨耕而為農夫，積斲削而為工匠，積反貨而為商賈，積禮義而為君子。

Thus, to be a sage is the result of what a person has accumulated. A person who accumulates hoeing and plowing will become a farmer. A person who accumulates chopping and hewing will become a carpenter. A person who accumulates trafficking in and merchandizing goods will become a merchant. A person who accumulates ritual propriety and righteousness will become a gentleman. (*Xunzi* IV.8: 144 ["Ru xiao" 儒效])⁷³

Xunzi also takes a generally positive view of wealth creation by means other than agriculture and praises farsighted folk who store up. Hoarding goods as a

70 Interestingly, the "Qu qiang" chapter identifies the three "permanent offices" (*chang guan* 常官) in a state as farmers (*nong* 農), merchants (*shang* 商), and "officials" (*guan* 官), and it entirely ignores artisans or an equivalent category of craftsmen in its analysis. See *Shang jun shu* 1.4: 26 ("Qu qiang").

71 *Xunzi* V.9: 170 ("Wang zhi"); cf. Knoblock 1988–1994: vol. 2, 107.

72 *Xunzi* 1.2: 27–28 ("Xiu shen" 修身); cf. Knoblock 1988–1994: vol. 1, 154.

73 Cf. Knoblock 1988–1994: vol. 2, 82. My translation keeps the rather-unidiomatic "accumulates hoeing and plowing" to give full weight to the concept of *ji* 積, which is prominent across several *Xunzi* chapters.

means of perpetuating one's wealth is human nature.⁷⁴ On several occasions there are positive comments about the commercial flow of goods, and Xunzi upholds the circulation of profits as a model. In one passage, a smooth flow of goods is even hailed as one of the fibers of his harmonious society:

通流財物粟米，無有滯留，使相歸移也，四海之內若一家 ...

The circulation and transport of natural resources and foodstuffs is not impaired by obstructions or hindrances, which causes them to be freely presented and interchanged so that all within the four seas will resemble one family. (*Xunzi* v.9: 161 ["Wang zhi" 王制])

This passage, which appears in the "Wang zhi" ("The Monarch's Regulations") chapter, continues with a lengthy discussion pointing out that the "great divine order" (*da shen* 大神) in the world is one in which goods flow from regions where they originate in abundance to where they are needed. Interestingly, the emphasis throughout is on the circulation of goods rather than people, and Xunzi argues that this flow of goods ensures that no one needs to abandon one's own profession: "Farmers need not carve or chisel, nor fire or forge; yet they will have sufficient utensils and implements. Artisans and traders need not till the fields, yet they will have enough beans and grains."⁷⁵ For Xunzi, commerce and crafts are essential to allow agricultural labor to continue undisturbed. The ideal is not one of mutually competing or exclusive professions; instead, it is one of clearly distinguished professional roles that echo how roles function within the state or family: "In a ruler acting as ruler, a minister as minister, a father as father, a son as son, an older brother as older brother, a younger brother as younger brother, there is a unitary principle. In the farmer acting as a farmer, the scholar-knight as a scholar-knight, the artisan as an artisan, and the merchant as a merchant, there is a unitary principle."⁷⁶

The crux for Xunzi therefore does not lie with agriculturalism or antimerchantism. The emphasis is on allowing specializations to flourish through clear

⁷⁴ *Xunzi* II.4: 67 ("Rong ru" 榮辱).

⁷⁵ 農夫不斲削，不陶冶而足械用，工賈不耕田而足菽粟 (*Xunzi* v.9: 162 ["Wang zhi"]); cf. Knoblock 1988–1994: vol. 2, 102).

⁷⁶ 君君，臣臣，父父，子子，兄兄，弟弟一也；農農，士士，工工，商商一也 (*Xunzi* v.9: 164 ["Wang zhi"]); cf. Knoblock 1988–1994: vol. 2, 103). For another mention of the roles of the professions to illustrate the need for social division, see *Xunzi* VII.11: 214; VII.4: 221.

task descriptions and professional hierarchies.⁷⁷ There is need for an elite of Ru to lead society, but the greater mass of the population (眾人) should include all professions: artisans, farmers, merchants, and traders.⁷⁸ Xunzi's ruler therefore is not the multitasking sage who masters all crafts, professions, and skills. The worthy and wise are not universally capable:

相高下，視境肥，序五種，君子不如農人：通財貨，相美惡，辨貴賤，君子不如賈人；設規矩，陳繩墨，便備用，君子不如工人。

In assessing high- and low-lying land, in assaying the fertility or barrenness of fields, and in determining the distribution of the five [types of] seeds, the gentleman is inferior to the farmer. In understanding goods and products, in appraising their fineness or baseness, and in differentiating their value or worthlessness, he is inferior to the trader. In setting up compass and square, in applying the blackened marking-line, and in ease of handling tools, he is inferior to the artisan. (*Xunzi* IV.8: 122 ["Ru xiao"])⁷⁹

Xunzi entrusts the ruler with the oversight and management of the professions, yet, echoing Confucius perhaps, the sage-ruler manages from a distance while farmers, merchants, and artisans do the work on the ground.⁸⁰ The presence of an enlightened ruler guarantees a cooperative of distinct professions that will realize their full potential and bring about an order Xunzi refers to as "ultimate peace" (*zhi ping* 至平).⁸¹ As in the *Shang jun shu*, there is an expectation that professional roles in society come with expected behavior in the form of a strict respect for hierarchy and the imperative that there should be no transgression of tasks. Unlike in the case of the *Shang jun shu*, however, there is little in the *Xunzi* to suggest that agriculture is to negate commerce.

It is indeed remarkable how little Xunzi's alleged disciple and inheritor of the ideological legacy of Shang Yang, Han Fei, has to say about the agricultural economy or indeed the relationship between farmers and merchants. Any ref-

77 The "Fu guo" 富國 chapter, for instance, advocates a moderate use of goods to enable the storage of surplus and creation of wealth but at the same time subscribes to the need for clear class divisions in society. See *Xunzi* VI.10: 183–184.

78 *Xunzi* IV.8: 145 ("Ru xiao"); cf. Knoblock 1988–1994: vol. 2, 83.

79 Cf. Knoblock 1988–1994: vol. 2, 71.

80 *Xunzi* XV.21: 399 ("Jie bi" 解蔽); partly repeated in *Xunzi* XIX.27: 504 ("Da lue" 大略).

81 *Xunzi* II.4: 71 ("Rong ru"); cf. Knoblock 1988–1994: vol. 1, 195. Perhaps *ping* here also implies a Xunzian view of "equality" as fundamentally hierarchic.

erence to it is generic.⁸² There is no mention of the four professional categories (scholars, farmers, craftsmen, merchants) that often appear in other Warring States texts. The *Han Feizi* makes passing reference to Shang Yang's granting of prominence to farmers and warriors and to the contrast between farmer-warriors and those engaged in secondary professions (*mo zuo zhi min* 末作之民). He also praises rulers for personally handling the plow or hoe.⁸³ Great leaders such as Yu 禹 and Zichan are commended for draining flooded areas, clearing fields, and planting mulberry trees despite being despised by the people for being cruel and greedy.⁸⁴

Yet at the heart of Han Fei's thought is not so much an appraisal of agriculture as the sole legitimate source of wealth but rather the idea that there should exist a balance between the professions. Commerce can lead to greater wealth—hence the power to purchase office. The enlightened ruler should therefore limit the number of people who trade, are engaged in crafts, or roam around, and he should disparage the reputation of these professions so that people concentrate on primary tasks (*ben wu* 本務) and are urged away from secondary occupations (*mo zuo* 末作).⁸⁵ In a chapter borrowed from the *Shang jun shu*, the *Han Feizi* acknowledges that, in times of surplus grain production, farmers may be granted rank in return for their physical labor (*jue bi yi qi li* 爵必以其力), but farming should not be a direct pathway to office.⁸⁶ On the other hand, occupying office without firsthand experience of farming and warfare is undesirable.⁸⁷ The charge that broad knowledge serves no cause without a background in laboring on the land is leveled at Confucius and Mozi: "Erudite, learned, eloquent, and knowledgeable as Confucius and Mozi were, Confucius and Mozi did not till and weed farming land, so what did the state obtain from them?"⁸⁸

82 *Han Feizi* IV.13: 96 ("He Shi" 和氏).

83 *Han Feizi* IV.13: 97 ("He Shi"); V.15: 112 ("Wang zheng" 亡徵); XV.37: 367 ("Nan er" 難二); XVII.44: 408 ("Shuo yi" 說疑); XVIII.46: 416 ("Liu fan" 六反); XIX.49: 452 ("Wu du" 五蠹); XIX.50: 459 ("Xian xue" 顯學). Note though that the ideal of the self-sufficient farming recluse is condemned, whereas that of the farmer-warrior is favored. See *Han Feizi* XIII.34: 315–316 ("Wai chu shuo you, shang" 外儲說右上).

84 *Han Feizi* XIX.50: 464 ("Xian xue").

85 *Han Feizi* XIX.49: 455 ("Wu du").

86 *Han Feizi* XX.53: 472 ("Chi ling" 飭令). For the textual history of this chapter and the relation between its versions in the *Shang jun shu* and the *Han Feizi*, see Zheng Liangshu 1989a: 82–96.

87 *Han Feizi* XIX.50: 461 ("Xian xue").

88 博習辯智如孔墨，孔墨不耕耨則國何得焉。(*Han Feizi* XVIII.47: 425 ["Ba shui" 八說]).

The *Han Feizi* is less concerned with attempting to define the primacy of agriculture or the malleable mind of the farmer. Nor should we look for laudatory comments about the farmer or his relationship to the land in the text.⁸⁹ Instead, it is emphasized that an increase in the number of people aspiring to (purchase) office through alternative forms of private wealth should be prevented. Commerce and craft need not be eradicated. Yet Han Fei stresses that, whereas agriculture can be a great equalizer of minds, commerce, literacy, and office can be great dividers, taking attention away from warfare and farming.⁹⁰ In this respect, a ruler should also never seek to achieve false equality among his subjects through progressive taxation, as this undermines the basic principle that wealth is justified if it results from diligent effort and restraint in consumption.⁹¹

By far the most extensive exposition of the political economy of early China, and hence the single most quoted source in discussions of agriculture, is the *Guanzi* 管子. The text is associated with the figure of Guan Zhong 管仲 (d. 645 BCE) and the state of Qi in Springs-and-Autumns times, but as will become clear below, its discussions of agriculture and commerce clearly belong to a late Warring States or early Former Han milieu. This is evident in the fact that the *Guanzi* contains an (imperfect) synthesis between core agriculturalist ideas, on the one hand, and, on the other, an acknowledgment that sophisticated market mechanisms are inevitable and need proper handling. Its use of vocabulary—most notably its more abstract use of terms such as *ben* and *mo* to refer to economic agency—and its frequent reference to a four-part division of the professions (*si min* 四民) indicate that the bulk of its chapters converse with ideas espoused by the Warring States masters discussed so far while probably also reflecting Han concerns.

Let us first turn to its agriculturalist component. In its opening and one of the earlier chapters, “Mu min” 牧民 (“Shepherding the People”), inexhaustible granaries and storehouses are identified as one of the sure signs of a well-run state.⁹² The fundamental role of land and its proper distribution as the basis of

89 In fact, one of the few stories in the *Han Feizi* that describes the motivation of agricultural laborers insists that they are simply after their rewards in the form of good soup, cash, and cloth. See *Han Feizi* XI.32: 274 (“Wai chu shuo zuo, shang”).

90 *Han Feizi* XI.32: 263–264, 280–281 (“Wai chu shuo zuo, shang”); XVII.45: 411–413 (“Gui shi” 詭使); XIX.49: 448 (“Wu du”).

91 *Han Feizi* XIX.50: 458–459 (“Xuan xue”).

92 *Guanzi* I.1: 2 (“Mu min”). Rickett (2001: 52) dates this chapter to the early or middle fourth century BCE. For hypotheses about the provenance and approximate dating of individual *Guanzi* chapters, I have mostly been guided by scholarship as summarized in Rickett’s chapter introductions.

government (地者政之本也) are acknowledged in several other chapters that are thought to be of Warring States provenance.⁹³ There is a significant concern with the definition of various lots and plots of land. Likewise, the age-old idea of maintaining, repairing, and periodically redefining or altering (更) boundaries and earthen banks between fields and household plots is on the agenda.⁹⁴ The *Guanzi* further leaves no doubt as to the intensity with which farmers should apply themselves to their tasks. On a few occasions agriculture is presented as warfare with the soil and equal to military preparation. Agricultural tools are compared to weapons.⁹⁵ Resoundingly Legalist too are recurring images of cultivating the wilds (ye 野) and “shepherding” the people. The need to bring barren lands under cultivation is highlighted as a priority over “branch production” (*mo chan* 末產), and law and order are said to encourage the people to “return to the roots” (*fan ben* 反本).⁹⁶ Interpreting the use of this “root” and “branch” vocabulary in the text requires caution, however. These terms contain a variety of meanings and do not necessarily always refer to a profession or economic activity. “Tending to,” “sticking to,” or “returning to” fundamentals often connotes the general idea of going back to the basics, being incorrupt, or focusing on important issues first.

Grain is not simply produce in the *Guanzi*; it is the core commodity in its economic model. The manipulation of grain prices is the benchmark of the *qing zhong* 輕重 (light and heavy) policies advocated in the economic chapters. These policies emphasize respect for the agricultural seasons. Strategies for the storage of grain by the state are at least partly explained as a measure to prevent merchants from hoarding supplies (see also Liu Jiapeng 2010: 40–47). The idea of curbing hoarding is included in expressions such as “nurturing the

93 *Guanzi* 1.5: 84 (“Sheng ma” 乘馬). For agriculture as the prime source of wealth, see also *Guanzi* XI.31: 585 (“Jun chen xia” 君臣下); XVII.52: 989 (“Qi chen qi zhu” 七臣七主). For the strategic use of trade (in deer and fox fur) to weaken an enemy’s agricultural base and deplete grain supplies, see *Guanzi* XXIV.84: 1520–1521 (“Qing zhong, wu” 輕重戊).

94 *Guanzi* 1.5: 90 (“Sheng ma”) also insists that water tables are to be observed carefully and taxes adapted according to the risk of drought and flood.

95 *Guanzi* XVII.53: 1016 (“Jin cang” 禁藏). The final “Qing zhong” chapter ends with similar martial imagery. See *Guanzi* XXIV.85: 1540 (“Qing zhong, ji” 己).

96 *Guanzi* 1.3: 48 (“Quan xiu” 權修); XV.47: 920 (“Zheng shi” 正世). Rickett (1998: 172) chooses to translate *fan ben* throughout as “reverting to the essential industry of agriculture.” It is not always obvious in my view that the text effectively calls for such a narrow reading of *ben* 本.

roots” (君養其本), “grasping the roots/beginnings” (*cao ben/shi* 操本/始), and the like.⁹⁷

It is important to stress that, despite its emphasis on grain, the *Guanzi* does not advocate the suppression of commerce. Rather, it proposes mechanisms to ensure that markets do not impinge on agricultural production.⁹⁸ Agriculture and grain sit at the heart of its economic model: yet it is not merely production but, rather, the politics concerning the circulation and hoarding of grain—that is, the manipulation of market forces—that is ultimately most important. Agriculture calls for carefully managed commerce. Economic knack is superior to bare productivity:

故[強本節用]可以益愈，而不足以為存...天下下，我高。天下輕，我重，天下多，我寡。然後可以朝天下。

Thus, [strengthening the roots and being frugal with expenses] enables one to improve matters greatly, but this is not sufficient to ensure survival. ... When the world lowers its prices, we should raise ours. When it treats something lightly, we should value it. When the rest of the world increases its supply, we should curtail ours. Then we will be able to bring the rest of the world to our court. (*Guanzi* XXIV.81: 1453–1454 [“Qing zhong, yi 乙”])

“Root” activity therefore includes the promotion of farming, but it also connotes a whole gamut of strategies that range from putting one’s own state first to being crafty in devising trading schemes that ensure a flow of goods toward one’s own court. While it is tempting to zoom in on the *Guanzi*’s full granaries in support of agriculturalist arguments, one should not overlook that the entire economic model presented in the text depends on commerce: the agents and agencies that ensure the flow, trade, and exchange of grain.

As the discussion above already shows, there are clearly different strands of thought on the agrarian economy at work across the different chapters that

97 *Guanzi* XXII.73: 1269 (“Guo xu” 國蓄); XXIII.78: 1378 (“Kui du” 揆度); XXIII.80: 1422, 1439 (“Qing zhong, jia 甲”), insisting that every peasant should be farming.

98 *Guanzi* XXIII.78: 1379 (“Kui du”): “Excellence in bringing order to commerce requires the careful supervision of markets. If the markets are well supervised, they will become less and less busy. If they become less busy, farms will have plenty of manpower. If they have plenty of manpower, the people will have sufficient wealth. If they have sufficient wealth, the prince will be able to collect taxes from them without draining them dry.” See Rickett 1998: 435. Noninterference during the nodal moments in the agricultural cycle is emphasized in *Guanzi* XXII.74: 1290–1291 (“Shan guo gui” 山國軌).

make up the received *Guanzi*. Teasing these out with greater clarity, if possible at all, will require a separate study. Our understanding of many of the arguments in the *Guanzi*, I suspect, can be fruitfully advanced only as part of an analysis of views on agriculture and commerce held during the Former Han. For now, I would note that while an emphasis on land cultivation and grain management, often formulated with a Legalist overtone, is clearly present in the older chapters (mid- to late Warring States), the “light and heavy” model and the politics of market mechanisms (storage vs. circulation) seem to occur mostly in chapters that bear a Han signature (including “Qing zhong” 輕重, “Guo xu” 國蓄, “Kui du” 揆度). Yet even among those later chapters, some appear more agriculturalist than others. For instance, “Zhi guo” 治國 (“Ordering the State”) appears to be the only chapter that explicitly argues for the primacy of agriculture over nonessential production. Not only does its subject matter appear akin to the arguments in memorials by Han commentators such as Jia Yi and Chao Cuo (see n. 4 above), but likewise, its definition of “secondary,” “nonessential,” or “peripheral” activities is broader than simply commerce or mercantile activity and comprises activities expressed in more abstract terms such as “nonessential creations” (*mo zuo* 末作) or “artful luxuries” (*qi qiao* 奇巧).⁹⁹ To my knowledge, “Zhi guo” also contains the only passage in the received *Guanzi* that argues in favor of the exchange of the fruits of labor rather than professional autarky or the separation of the professions, that is, ideas that may well chime with Han voices that favored a diversified economy (such as Sima Qian and Sang Hongyang):

故先王使農士商工四民交能易作，終歲之利，無道相過也。

Therefore, the former kings made the four classes of people—peasants, *shi*, merchants, and craftsmen—exchange their skills and perform each other’s work so that there was no way in which the benefits at the end of the year could be excessive for any one class. (*Guanzi* xv.48: 926 [“Zhi guo”])¹⁰⁰

Elsewhere, the *Guanzi* fully insists on the separation of the four professions. But this does not imply putting farmers above merchants and craftsmen or denying that the latter have an important role to fulfill. Not only peasants are expected to contribute to public works, but so should traders and artisans who are not otherwise engaged in official work. At stake in the *Guanzi* is not the

99 *Guanzi* xv.48: 924 (“Zhi guo”).

100 Cf. Rickett 1998: 176–180.

nature of one's profession but the intention with which it is carried out: only honest traders should be permitted to trade, and the same applies to artisans and peasants. By analogy, only trustworthy gentlemen should be permitted to hold office.¹⁰¹

Professional specialization receives a great deal of attention as a positive influence on the economy. The state should even be organized in districts according to the professions, albeit merchants and craftsmen should occupy fewer than half the number of districts occupied by the gentry and farming population.¹⁰² The engineered cohabitation of people of the same profession enforces continuity and the transmission of skills; social mobility across the professions is therefore undesired, unless one rises to *shi* 士 status.¹⁰³ While the desired character of farmers is still described in terms of uncultivated simplicity (*puye* 樸野), different behavioral codes serve to enhance the functioning of each profession: the *shi* are to be incorrupt (*lian* 廉); the farming population, stupid (*yu* 愚); merchants and artisans, honest (*yuan* 願).¹⁰⁴ The good ruler in the *Guanzi* is therefore one who ensures that, while keeping the professions separate, no single group gains the upper hand to the detriment of another. The *Guanzi* thus counterbalances Shang Yang-style agriculturalism with Mencian market optimism:

野與市爭民。家與府爭貨，金與粟爭貴，鄉與朝爭治；故野不積草，農事先也；府不積貨，藏於民也；市不成肆，家用足也；朝不合眾，鄉分治也。故野不積草，府不積貨，市不成肆，朝不合眾，治之至也。

The countryside should rival the marketplace in population. Private households should rival public storehouses in goods. Currency should rival grain in value. Local districts should rival the court in good government. Thus, the countryside will not accumulate weeds, because agricultural tasks have been put first. The public storehouses will not accumulate goods, because they have been stored by the people; marketplaces will not be filled with stalls, because private households have sufficient supplies; and masses will not gather at the court (to complain), because the local districts are governed well. Therefore, when the countryside is not

101 *Guanzi* 1.5: 91 ("Sheng ma").

102 *Guanzi* VIII.20: 400 ("Xiao kuang" 小匡). Rickett (2001: 321) proposes a date for this chapter of around 300 BCE.

103 *Guanzi* VIII.20: 402 ("Xiao kuang"); with a parallel in *Guoyu* 6.1: 220–222 ("Qi yu" 齊語).

104 *Guanzi* X.30: 550 ("Jun chen shang").

overgrown with weeds, the public storehouses are not piled high with goods, the marketplaces are not filled with stalls, and the masses do not gather at court—this is the ultimate sign of good government. (*Guanzi* 1.3: 52 [“Quan xiu”])

Qin

It is in this atmosphere of a polymorphous landscape of the professions, rather than the world of blunt Shang Yang-like agriculturalism, that we ought to situate the First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇帝 (emp. 221–210 BCE). The idea that farming was to be extolled at the expense of mercantile activity and crafts is hard to corroborate when we examine evidence directly or indirectly linked to the First Emperor and the period immediately before and after unification. I am aware of only one explicit mention of the promotion of agriculture (*nong* 農) that is paired with the elimination of the “branch” professions. This occurs in a line in the Langye 琅邪 inscription (219 BCE):

皇帝之功, 勤勞本事, 上農除末, 黔首是富.

The merits of the August Emperor lie in being diligently devoted to basic affairs, exalting agriculture and eradicating the branch [occupations], so that the black-haired people may be rich. (*Shiji* 6: 245)¹⁰⁵

Yet I question whether an expression such as *chu mo* 除末 here can be anything else but a generic expression or a trope referring to any activity or state of mind that detracts from agricultural labor. If it is understood to imply the eradication of crafts and commerce, it sits uncomfortably next to, for instance, a line in the Jieshi 碣石 inscription that refers to the First Emperor’s “bounty extending to every occupation”¹⁰⁶ or a line in the Mount Tai inscription that speaks of “the various professions finding their appropriate place”¹⁰⁷ or another line in the Langye inscription noting that “all professions flourish and prosper.”¹⁰⁸ While an insistence on the separation of the professions is made

105 For an alternative translation, see Kern 2000a: 26–27, lines 14–16. For an example of how this particular line is often inflated with hypothetical assumptions regarding Qin’s ruthless antimercantilism, see Gong Xian 2010: 7–8.

106 惠被諸產 (*Shiji* 6: 252); see also Kern 2000a: 43, line 31.

107 諸產得宜 (*Shiji* 6: 243); see also Kern 2000a: 20, line 14.

108 諸產繁殖 (*Shiji* 6: 245); see also Kern 2000a: 32, line 54.

explicit in the Mount Zhifu 之罘 and Kuaiji 會稽 inscriptions,¹⁰⁹ I see no evidence of hostility to merchants or craftsmen in these inscriptions. Equally in-explicit is a fragment among the recently recovered Liye 里耶 materials that states:

□[黔]首習俗好本事而不好末事，其習俗槎田歲更，以異中縣

...The black-haired people [of Qin] are accustomed to preferring fundamental tasks and disliking peripheral tasks; they are accustomed to clearing land [for agriculture] in annual rotations [of labor service], and this differentiates them from the central districts.¹¹⁰

The wider context of this fragment is lost. It is reasonable to interpret this statement as an acknowledgment that the Qin settlers in this remote frontier area of Qianling County had to put their minds first and foremost to the basic task of clearing land for agriculture and had less time than their neighbors in the Central States to engage in other forms of economic activity. Yet nothing suggests that the “peripheral tasks” mentioned here should refer specifically or exclusively to commerce.

By contrast, one might argue that the so-called unifying measures introduced by the Qin (currency, roads, weights, measures, etc.) could only enhance processes such as the circulation and accounting of goods or the efficiency and expansion of itinerant commerce.¹¹¹ Until more concrete evidence is uncovered documenting antimerchant measures, we must be cautious about inferring large-scale suppression of merchants during the Qin. It is only Sima Qian who tells us that the First Emperor forced merchants to be registered at markets and that he moved hundreds of thousands to labor in uncultivated territories.¹¹² Yet we must allow for a degree of Han rhetoric at play in those accounts.

109 *Shiji* 6: 250; see also Kern 2000a: 39, lines 25–27. *Shiji* 6: 261; see also Kern 2000a: 46, line 17.

110 Chen Wei 2012: 136–137 (slip 8–355). The editors suggest that 歲更 may refer to some system in which one alternates cultivation per season. Hulsewé translates 更 as a “turn of duty.” Like Hulsewé, I am not sure how this system may have worked in practice, but we can assume that *geng* refers to an annual corvée labor assignment or possibly the period between turns of duty. See Hulsewé 1985: 26 (A4), n. 3; 32 (A14), n. 1.

111 As Marcel Granet (1957: 103) noted decades ago: “But if the Chinese did not remain, as he [the First Emperor] wished, a people entirely devoted to agriculture, the opening up of great ways of communication, by which commerce profited, must have helped largely in the process of national unity.” See also Wu Cunhao 1996: 300–301.

112 The question remains though to what extent such forced registrations of merchants can be interpreted as fully-fledged suppression. In his chapter on the moneymakers, Sima

After all, it is only in the Han that the growth of commerce and the accumulation of private land could be conceived of as a linear process that began in the Warring States and had led to the circumstances they were facing. The *Shiji*'s "Basic Annals of Qin" (秦本紀) (*Shiji* 5: 203) refers to the promotion of agriculture only at the point when Shang Yang offers his program to Lord Xiao 秦孝公 (r. 361–338 BCE) in 359 BCE and when it mentions the so-called land reforms that affected the layout of the capital, now relocated to Xianyang 咸陽 (350 BCE). There is, however, no further mention of an ideological shift toward agriculture. To the contrary, there is a reference to Li Si, who indicates in a memorial that it is good to have the common people in their homes devoting themselves to agriculture *and* crafts.¹¹³ The only (and indirect) reference to farmers in the entire "Basic Annals" presents them as subjects exploited by the Second Emperor: they have to provide supplies for the capital and are possibly even prohibited from eating their own grain if they reside within a radius of three hundred *li* from the Qin capital.¹¹⁴ In practice, then, the Qin imperial agenda seems to be feeding the army. Although this was clearly clad in a version of the Legalist ideology of agriculture-cum-warfare (*nong zhan* 農戰), there is little evidence that this implied emancipating the farmer and suppressing other professions.

Indeed, as I mentioned before, pre-unification evidence of an acquisitive and expanding merchant class buying up land is scant. If measures to suppress merchants were really substantial, would one not expect to find traces of this in administrative law? So far, received Qin legal documents, patchy as they are, may be telling in this respect. The Shuihudi 睡虎地 corpus, for instance, does

Qian is happy to note that the First Emperor granted honors to a herdsman, Wuzhi Luo 烏氏倮, who had made a fortune trading his animal stocks against silk and other commodities. See *Shiji* 129: 3260.

113 百姓當家則力農工 (*Shiji* 6: 255). One may argue that *gong* here could refer to weaving. I think it refers to craftsmen more generally since Li Si continues by mentioning the *shi*.

114 *Shiji* 6: 269. It is not entirely clear what the text means here. Nakai Sekitoku 中井積徳 (1732–1817) suggested that a prohibition against residents within the Xianyang periphery consuming their own grain may have been a later interpolation since it would be inconsistent to impose such a measure when extra supplies already had to be brought in to feed newly stationed garrisons and their livestock, and when the periphery's couriers were told to bring their own food. Fang Bao 方苞 (1668–1749) suggests that it was the couriers who were forbidden to source food from within an area of three hundred *li* around the capital. See *Shiki kaichū kōshō* 1932–1934: vol. 2, 6: 74. I would add that feeding armies at the expense of the local population would not be an inconsequential policy for Legalists, or anyone else for that matter. Regardless of what happened, Sima Qian's picture of the farming population here is one of hardship and self-sacrifice.

not include a single mention of *nong* 農 or *shang* 商 designating the professional category of farmer or merchant, whereas it does contain provisions for artisans (*gong* 工).¹¹⁵ Agricultural labor and those involved in it are referred to with the modifier or noun *tian* 田. These documents are silent on prohibitions against the accumulation of land by merchants. They deal with the repayment of debt, the borrowing of government tools, the price-labeling of market goods, the circulation of cash versus cloth money, and proper accounting, but there are no generic prejudices or strictures against traders and merchants embedded in these documents.¹¹⁶

Likewise, it is noteworthy that the Shuihudi legal documents, which are concerned in great detail with managing the harvest and storing grain, have nothing to say about the management or ownership of land, with the exception of one item: an article that deals with the thievish shifting of border marks (*feng* 封) and that attempts to explain *feng* in relation to field paths (*qian mo* 阡陌), *pan* 畔 borders, and *qing* 頃 (100 *mu*) plots.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, from the badly damaged imperial Qin legal and administrative documents unearthed in 1989 in Tomb 6 at Longgang, Yunmeng 雲夢龍崗 (Hubei), it also appears that Qin maintained public ownership of land; although in these documents it is also clear that encroachment on public lands by individuals had become increasingly common.¹¹⁸

An isolated statute on agriculture retrieved from Tomb 50 at Haojiaping 郝家平 in Qingchuan 青川 (Sichuan) was issued by King Wu of Qin 秦武王 (r. 310–307 BCE) and dated September 27, 309 BCE. It goes into quite some detail attempting to define terminology and surface area for plots, paths, and border-mounds. This statute includes an instruction to “rectify the field borders and clear the large weeds from the field paths” (正疆[疆]畔及發千百[阡陌]之大草). The verb *zheng* 正 here implies the idea of correcting or possibly even modifying plots. To be sure, the Qingchuan document predates Shuihudi and imperial Qin by several decades, and it may reflect a peculiar situation in the

115 According to the CHANT database, the graph *nong* 農 occurs only once, not in the statutes on agriculture (*tian lü* 田律) but in the statutes on the controller of works (*si kong* 司空), where it means to return home for agricultural work (*gui tian nong* 歸田農). See *Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian* 2001: 253 (slip 144); cf. Hulsewé 1985: 67 (A67). The graph *shang* 商 does not occur at all. For the lack of occupational differentiation in the Qin census documents unearthed in Liye, see Charles Sanft’s chapter in the present volume.

116 *Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian* 2001: 38 (slips 77–79), 39–40 (slips 82–85), 36 (slip 68), 37 (slip 69), 42 (slip 97), 44 (slip 101), 49 (slips 126–127), 101 (slip 32); cf. Hulsewé 1985: A39, A41, A45, A46, A51, A55, A74, D26. See also Zhang Zexian 2003: 363–369.

117 *Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian* 2001: 108 (slip 64); Hulsewé 1985: 164 (D136).

118 See Zhang Jinguang 2013: 112–146, esp. 120–123 on “thieving fields” 盜田.

recently occupied area of Sichuan, in which delineation of plots was topographically—and perhaps politically—more difficult than in the Qin homeland in the Wei 渭 River basin.¹¹⁹ Yet, speaking more broadly, for all the rigor with which the Qin land reforms are usually presented, Qin documents bespeak a degree of confusion and uncertainty about one of the basic instruments for managing land effectively: namely, the correct positioning of border marks and agreement on the units with which to measure plots. Their inclusion in the legal code could be interpreted as a tacit admission that people were trying to accumulate land by foul play. But, perhaps more importantly, it may indicate that the so-called Qin land reforms were conducted in a trial-and-error fashion or, at least, were much more in flux than the language of fixed and determined territorial management in received texts makes us believe.¹²⁰

The much-debated comment in the “Basic Annals” that is attributed to Xu Guang 徐廣 (352–425 CE) and that suggests that in 216 BCE Qin relaxed state control on land by “making the black-haired people occupy land of their own accord” (使黔首自實田) may well be the first acknowledgment of private landownership, and it possibly reflects an intermediate stage toward fully fledged private land possession in early Han times.¹²¹ But there is as yet little evidence to suggest that these early signs of discourse about land ownership during the Qin were formulated in terms of an antagonism between the professions of the peasant and the merchant. At any rate there is no clear evidence of a condemnation of merchants or explicitly agriculturalist rhetoric present in the Qin legal documents uncovered so far. In its conception and management of the professions, imperial Qin therefore does not represent a radical break from theories proposed in Warring States times. There is an acknowledgment

119 See Sichuan Sheng Bowuguan and Qingchuan Xian Wenhuaquan 1982; Hulsewé 1985: 212 (G1). See also a discussion of this document in Korolkov 2010: 58–98.

120 For a detailed assessment, see Zhang Jinguang 2004: chaps. 2–3. Zhang’s discussion emphasizes that the so-called land reforms, including the definitions of boundaries and field limits, were evolving and perhaps internally subject to several changes (168–169).

121 Xu Guang’s statement, quoted in Pei Yin’s 裴駟 (fifth century CE) *jijie* 集解 commentary (*Shiji* 6: 251), has and continues to spark endless discussion. It is as yet the only tangible hint at an official acknowledgment of landownership, but it originates from a commentator active five centuries later. Likewise, the meaning of the verb *shi* 實 remains problematic and highly disputed. It is not clear at all whether we are dealing here with the private occupation of (new) land that was not under government control, or whether, as some have suggested, Qin subjects were asked to report on the size of the plots they were, de facto privately, occupying to enable accurate taxation. My translation broadly follows Yuan Lin 1987.

of the importance of farming and the benefits of specialization that might ensue from separating the professions, yet beyond the rhetorical surface, anti-mercantilism or discriminatory policies toward the craftsmen are low key.

This brings me to a final question. What should we make of the insistence in virtually every source discussed so far that there should be a strict separation between the professions and that a transgression of these boundaries or leaving one's professional "habitat" should be prevented? Future evidence in the form of more administrative and legal documents will need to bear out how successful this policy was in reality or whether it was mostly an ideological expectation. I would argue that a vociferous insistence on clearly defined boundaries between the professions and their practitioners more likely signals that, in reality, multitasking and crossing professional boundaries were rife.

This distance between ideas and practice may even be reflected in the biographical narratives of some of the main proponents of so-called agriculturalist ideas. Let us start with the figure of Guan Zhong. He is said to hail from a merchant background, giving up trade before entering into the service of Lord Xi 僖 of Qi (r. 730–698 BCE). Yet his merchant origins are most likely a Warring States version of his biography since the Guan clan no doubt belonged to the Springs-and-Autumns period nobility, and such social mobility would be exceptional in pre-Warring States times.¹²² Likewise, among the imagined sociology that surrounds Confucius's disciples, it is noteworthy that one of his most prominent followers, Zigong 子貢, was known as a merchant par excellence. The title of the *Shiji* chapter dealing with the moneymakers ("Huo zhi liezhuan" 貨殖列傳) is alleged to derive from a statement by Confucius on Zigong's ambition to pursue wealth (cf. *Lunyu* 11.19); and there appears no objection here to wealth creation through means other than agriculture.

Even more revealing is the fate of Lü Buwei, the man associated with the text that contains some of the most outspoken agriculturalist and agronomical materials to have survived from pre-imperial China. Lü Buwei is on record not as some sort of physiocrat or enlightened scholar-farmer living off his land but, instead, as a successful merchant and peddler of schemes and ideas. If agriculturalism was anything more than a largely ideological package by the close of the Warring States period and in early Han times, it is noteworthy that

¹²² *Zhanguo ce zhushi* 7.8: 288 ("Qin ce 秦策 5"); *Shiji* 62: 2131–2134. I am grateful to Yuri Pines for drawing my attention to the Warring States elements that permeate Guan Zhong's purported biography. Note that virtually no thinker who promotes agriculturalism in Warring States and Han times seems to hail from a farming background. There is Bu Shi 卜式 (fl. 111 BCE), but he herded sheep (Sterckx 2002: 151).

Lü Buwei's *Shiji* biography emphasizes practices and virtues that would be diametrically opposed to the doctrines espoused in the text compiled under Lü's patronage. Sima Qian's biography opens unambiguously by stating that Lü was a great merchant (*da gu ren* 大賈人) who, by traveling here and there, buying cheap and selling dear, had amassed a fortune of thousands in gold.¹²³ I am not aware of any record that links Lü Buwei in a positive way to agriculture. On the contrary, not only does an episode in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 highlight his merchant background, but the story also has him ponder the merits of agriculture first, and trade next, as a route to wealth, and then *dismiss* agriculture, when compared with statecraft and even trade, as an inferior avenue to personal wealth.¹²⁴ Coincidentally or not, another story in the *Zhanguo ce* plays off merchants against ministers following a complaint lodged by Lord Jianxin 建信 (in Zhao) that Lü Buwei had been disrespectful to him:

希寫曰：「臣以為今世用事者，不如商賈。」建信君悖然曰：「足下卑用事者而高商賈乎？」曰「不然。夫良商不與人爭買賣之賈，而謹司時。時賤而買，雖貴已賤矣；時貴而賣，雖賤已貴矣。... 今君不能與文信侯相伉以權，而責文信侯少禮，臣竊為君不取也。」

Xi Xie 希寫 [speaking on behalf of Lü] said: "I take those who serve their states nowadays not to be as good as merchants."

Lord Jianxin countered: "Do you mean you find merchants worthier than officials?"

"Not at all," said Xi Xie, "but the good trader does not wrangle with people over the price for buying or selling; he only pays careful attention to timing/the seasons. When the times produce low prices, he buys. Even though he may buy something for a relatively high price, it will be cheaper than he could buy it in times of high prices. When the season forces high prices, he sells. Even though he sells for a relatively low price, it will still be higher than he could have gotten in times of low prices. ... Now you cannot win in a contest of power with Lü Buwei [文信侯] so you reproach him for being poor in propriety. This I, your humble servant, would not do if I were you, my lord." (*Zhanguo ce zhushi* 20.20: 756 ["Zhao ce 趙策 3"])¹²⁵

¹²³ *Shiji* 85: 2505.

¹²⁴ *Zhanguo ce zhushi* 7.5: 269 ("Qin ce 5").

¹²⁵ Shao Yiping (2005: 17) notes that the *Zhanguo ce* does not contain any accounts about merchants other than Lü Buwei and wonders why, in contrast with *Shiji*, there is this dearth of references to merchants in *Zhanguo ce*.

Here the good statesman is characterized as a good merchant. The persona of the First Emperor's patron is not one that speaks of eradicating trade; on the contrary, he appears as a merchant-manipulator par excellence. And one might be excused for detecting skills here that mirror those of a good farmer: as the farmer sows and harvests in the proper seasons, the merchant observes the seasons and the flow of produce in order to time and adjust his buying and selling. Peasants and merchants may well appear to be agents that, sociologically, pull in opposite directions, yet the activities and agencies they represent suggest that, throughout the Warring States period and into Qin times, they may have been at least as complementary to each other as they were mutual opposites.

Concluding Remarks

The merits of farming folk in the unification of empire may be recounted in the form of a story with multiple plots, counterplots, and subnarratives. The story certainly is more complex than a simple struggle of peasants versus merchants or the myth that grants agriculture an exclusive pride of place in explanations of the rise of Chinese civilization and empire. From the perspective of ideology, it would be an oversimplification to argue that Warring States thinkers merely advocated controlling or suppressing merchants.¹²⁶ Moreover, agriculture is a referent that covers many meanings. The same structures that were invoked as vehicles to promote agricultural productivity also functioned as mechanisms for social control that enabled rulers to manage every single aspect of the farmer's life, from the fields he was allocated, to the timing of sowing, to reporting the rat holes in the granaries.¹²⁷

In evaluating early Chinese society as an exemplary agrarian economy, we need to distinguish, therefore, between agriculture as an economic program and agriculture as a political doctrine or ideology. The peasant and merchant, as will be revealed in the much richer record available for later imperial China, do not simply appear as agents of certain modes of wealth creation and economic sustenance. Instead, they embody an amalgam of values, morals, and stereotypical behavior, and not infrequently, they are caricatured as diametri-

¹²⁶ Wu Song 2000 is one of the few studies by Chinese scholars I have seen to argue that the suppression of trade and crafts starts with the Warring States, Qin, and Han and that, prior to this, there is no sign of it. Wu's point of reference here is Hu Jichuang 1981: 6, who may have been among the first to have hinted that there is no evidence in pre-Warring States texts of the devaluation of mercantile activity.

¹²⁷ *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian* 2001: 128 (slip 152); Hulsewé 1985: 162–163 (D130).

cally opposed exemplars of views on loyalty, devotion, social responsibility, and the like. In the absence of sufficient data to allow the writing of an economic history or a history of agriculture in early China (many of which continue to be written, however), one would do well to write an account of the role of the idea of agriculture as a key catalyst in the political economy of the period—that is, a history of ideas as much as one of crop yields and technological advances only.