

## Textual Evidence for 04c Sino-Bactrian Contact<sup>1</sup>

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In this paper, I should like to report some results from a project to restudy the chronology and mutual relations of the pre-Imperial Chinese texts, in which my colleague Taeko Brooks and I have been engaged for the last quarter century. The value of these results for the theme of the present volume, if any, may lie in the fact that the project has been carried out as a purely philological exercise, without reference to any larger historical implications. As a philological exercise, however, the results have proved to be mutually consistent, and we now have reasonable confidence that our general picture of the chronology of the classic Chinese texts will hold up under further scrutiny. It therefore seems appropriate at this point to make a first attempt to confront this text chronology with the archeological evidence for Chinese contacts with other peoples.

The text project itself has been described elsewhere, and further publications are forthcoming.<sup>2</sup> I may note here only three relevant points: (1) The project ignores traditional commentaries, which consist largely of cultural exegesis rather than philology, though it does follow up the work of a minority tradition of critical scholars, which has suggested that certain of these texts are not monolithic, but miscellaneous in character; (2) It finds that many of these miscellaneous texts can be rationalized as *accumulative sequences*, with the writings of each philosophical school being gradually extended by that school itself, in response to new challenges over a period of time; and (3) By coordinating parts of different textual streams which have *the same date*, it is possible to recover a lively dialogue between competing philosophies, in what has always been called the Hundred Schools period, essentially the late 04c through the middle 03c. The *interactive character* of this admitted Golden Age of Chinese thought stands forth with a new vividness when seen from the viewpoint of this

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<sup>1</sup>In this paper, for compactness as well as greater cultural universality, years and centuries BC are preceded by a zero (0); a prefixed “c” means “circa,” and a suffixed “c” means “century.”

<sup>2</sup>An overview of the method and its results will be found in Brooks “**Prospects**,” and an annotated translation of one text, with methodological apparatus, in Brooks *Original*. The implications for foreign contact are explored in greater detail in Brooks “**Frontiers**.”

new chronology of the source texts. It is this recovery of a dialogue which has always been assumed to exist, but which on previous assumptions has not been visible in the texts themselves, that convinces us that our conclusions are an improvement on the older model.

Given that revised chronology, if we proceed to correlate passages in these texts which seem to refer to foreign peoples or to concern trade activity or cultural contact, we find that they suggest a considerable long-range trade activity, part of which would appear to have traversed the area inhabited by the Ywèjīr peoples, and to attest the results of that activity in the form of apparent cultural borrowings. I shall give examples from three different periods.

### 1. The 05c: India

The eastern Chinese state of Lǚ,<sup>3</sup> one of the few which is well-documented textually in this period, seems to have been originally oriented, both economically and diplomatically, not to the north but to the south: toward the Yángdǔ River states of Wú and Chǔ. This situation continued through the lifetime of Confucius (0549-0479) and for the rest of the 05c. Literary echoes in the *Analects* of Confucius imply contact with India, via the Yángdǔ River artery and the Indianized state of Dyēn in what is now Ywǎnán,<sup>4</sup> rather than with the steppe cultures. Among the cultural artifacts that made their way from this Indian culture area into the Chinese sphere are the crossbow, whose folk prototype is widespread from Assam to Ywǎnán,<sup>5</sup> and perhaps also the technique of smelting iron, which seems to have been known earlier in India than in China, and which is first developed in China in the states at the mouth of the Yángdǔ River.<sup>6</sup> An East Indian phenomenon which appears to have left literary and conceptual traces on this portion of the *Analects* is early Buddhism, which is the most likely source of the concept of the sage (which turns up in the *Analects*, without precedent, at mid-century) and the technique of meditation (which is visible slightly earlier).<sup>7</sup> There seem to be several verbal echoes in *LY* 7 (c0450) of what looks like the earliest textual state of the *Mahā-Parinirvāṇa Sūtra*, which describes

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<sup>3</sup>Chinese words are spelled in this paper in a system which is intended to be accessible to specialists in other fields, and which accordingly is based on standard Western alphabetic practice (“consonants as in English, vowels as in Italian”), plus v for the vowel of “bug,” ae for “cat,” r for “fur,” z for “adz,” and w for “umlaut u.” For a fuller description and three-way conversion tables, see Brooks *Common*.

<sup>4</sup>Tong “**Interpretation**.”

<sup>5</sup>Needham *Science* v5 pt 6 135-136.

<sup>6</sup>Wagner *Iron* 95-96; compare Brooks “**Technology**.”

<sup>7</sup>For the affinity of Chinese quietism and Indian yoga, see Mair *Tao* 140-148.

the death of the Buddha.<sup>8</sup> The name of one of two wisdom texts referred to in *LY* 9:24 (c0405) might easily be a translation of “*Dharma Sūtra*.” And the whole of *LY* 10 (c0380), as Waley has noted, is close in content and organization to the *Āpasthamba Sūtra*. We thus seem to have, over this 70-year period, not a random set of resemblances to Indian texts, but a seemingly gradual expansion of awareness, beginning with bits of lore and technique that might have been transmitted orally, and ending with what might be knowledge of an Indian text as such.

The society of Lǔ in the 05c was evolving out of a feudal situation, in which military force was supplied by a small group of hereditary warriors who with the leaders of the great clans monopolized positions at the Prince’s court. The society which was replacing it, and which Confucius, who was himself from an elite warrior family, strongly deplored, was an entrepreneurial one, based on direct rather than manorial taxation. Those who rose to prominence at court under these new conditions emphasized expertise, and based their calculations openly on profit rather than virtue.

It seems likely that trade was in the air as well. Mass-produced silk, so cheap that it was displacing plant-fiber cloth for ritual purposes, is mentioned in *LY* 9:3 (c0405). This staple of trade was thus available in good quantities, and with a good profit margin, by the end of the 05c. We know from surviving documents that the trade along the Yǎngdǔ was regulated by Chǔ, whence it follows that such trade was a routine and not an exceptional venture. It is therefore not a bold conjecture, but a natural inference, that a regular trade, down the Hwái Valley and up the Yǎngdǔ to Indianized Yǔnnán or to eastern India itself, existed in this period.

## 2. *The Early and Mid 04c: The Altai*

In this period we have text evidence from the state of Chí, the more powerful northern neighbor of Lǔ, in the earliest segments of the *Gwǎndǔ*.<sup>9</sup> They seem to date from the 0357 accession of the ruler who in 0342 would shock the eastern states by usurping the title of King from the powerless Jōu rulers. They show a strong systematic interest in the organization of society not only for political order but for economic effectiveness, and are already concerned to control

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<sup>8</sup>It will be seen that this finding supports the “long” chronology of the Buddha’s life, which assigns him a death date of 0483. The current fashion in Buddhology is the Bechert thesis supporting the short chronology. In my view this will have to be once again reconsidered. I note that the only two articles in the recent symposium Bechert *Dating* to be based on epigraphical evidence rather than speculative arguments, namely Narain “**Gotama**” and Aryasinghe “**Lithic**,” agree in supporting the “long” chronology.

<sup>9</sup>*GZ* 1-3 and *GZ* 7; see Rickett *Guanzi* 52-98 and 137-147.

excessive luxury among the people, a problem that presumably arose from considerable wealth already being accumulated, at that period, by trade. A distinctive knife-shaped coin was common to the area of Chí, part of Jâu on the west, and Yën on the north, extending into the area of modern Manchuria, and apparently defining a cooperative trading bloc.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the 04c, the Chí merchants were organized as a hereditary component within society, protected by exemption from military service and controlled by their own set of laws. From the ratio of merchant residence areas to normal residence areas, it can be seen that, by this time, the proportion of state resources *dedicated to commerce*, exclusive of silk or other production, was 6 out of 21 counties, or 29%.<sup>11</sup> On the production side of the economy, the study of small metal objects and other artifacts of the period has conclusively shown that whole classes of objects were made, sometimes in a steppe-influenced style, for the steppe market.<sup>12</sup>

The text-based inference of a major Chí economic impetus in 0357 fits rather well with the likeliest dates of the Pazyryk tombs in the Altai, at which Chinese objects have been found: silk, lacquer, and a bronze mirror of late 04c type. It seems consistent with the dendrochronological and radiocarbon evidence to date the Pazyryk tombs to the years 0390-0326.<sup>13</sup> Within that span, tombs containing

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<sup>10</sup>Li *Eastern* 387-389.

<sup>11</sup>GZ 20 (c0306); Rickett *Guanzi* 324-329.

<sup>12</sup>So *Traders*, especially chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup>As recapitulated in Hiebert "Chronology," of the six tombs (or kurgans) in question, #1-2 and #4 form an early group, and #3 and #5-6 a late group. All tombs of the late group contain Chinese objects. Growth rings in the larch logs with which the tombs are lined gives this relative chronology: #1-2 are of the same date and define Relative Year 0, then follow #4 after 7 years, #3 after 30 years (Relative Year 37), #5 after 11 years (Relative Year 48) and # 6, unfortunately, indeterminate. Larch sections from the original excavation have been retested by the Aegean Dendrochronology Laboratory at Cornell University; the results confirm that the gap between #1-2 and #5 is 48 years. The total age of the tree from which a tomb #1 log was cut was 122 years; that of a tomb #2 log was 209 years; two samples from tomb #5, possibly from the same tree, gave 181 years (information from Jennifer Fine, of the Aegean Dendrochronological Laboratory, 13 August 1996). These tree ages are higher than those previously reported, and used by Hiebert in correcting the radiocarbon datings. The radiocarbon tests themselves (Hiebert p121) give a center date of c0400 for #2 and c0525 for #5. Since by the dendrochronological results, tomb #5 is firmly known to be 48 years *later*, rather than 125 years *earlier*, than tomb #2, one of these dates must be wrong. It seems likely that the tomb #5 date is distorted by being based on older, inner wood (that tree being 209 years old), and that it must be discarded, and a slightly-adjusted date for #1-2, c0390, accepted. This would put tomb #5 (Relative Year 48) at c0342, the year of the Chí Kingship. Given an average gap of 16 years between tombs, we might intercalate #6 at Relative Year 64, or

Chinese objects would fall in the final phase, 0353-0326. That is, the first Chinese objects at Pazyryk seem to turn up 4 years after the accession of a vigorous, trade-minded new Ch'í ruler.

The Chinese *objects* in the Altai do not of themselves document a Chinese *presence* in the Altai, since indirect trade or successive diffusion of booty are also possibilities.<sup>14</sup> But direct contact seems to be rendered more likely by the possibility that the Scythian divination system may have passed at about this same time from that culture area to the eastern Chinese states. That this type of divination, mentioned by Herodotus as typical of Scythian culture, was known to the Altai peoples seems to be firmly established by the set of short sticks of unidentified function found in Pazyryk tomb 5.<sup>15</sup> Chinese tradition about sortilege divination is that it goes back to the beginning of the Jōu dynasty, but no archeological or firm textual evidence supports this; the Jōu kings seem to have continued to use the Shāng method of bone divination. Nor can it be shown that Confucius (0549-0479) was aware of the sortilege method, or its text, the *Yì*. That text is first quoted in the *Dzwo Jwàn*, a work of c0312, by which time there seem to have been in existence two versions of the *Yì*, an early one divergent at some points from the present text, and a later one identical with it. A first conjecture as to the date of the earlier of the two might be c0350. The text of the *Yì* gives grounds for suspecting that it arose in a context of trade, or at any rate of difficult journeys. It uses, in a positive sense, the trader's term lì 利 "profit, benefit" for a favorable auspice.<sup>16</sup> It symbolizes undertaking a venture by "crossing the great river."<sup>17</sup> And one particularly vivid passage sides with the traveler against the local resident: "The traveler's gain is the townsman's

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c0326; the maximum 30-year gap would give instead c0312. The tomb #6 mirror is of a type for which molds have been found at the later capital of Yēn, relocated after the disturbances of 0314-0313. Whether this favors the later of the two extrapolated dates for tomb #6 depends on whether we envision Yēn as retaining, or redesigning, its stock mirror types when it rebuilt its capital and its economy. The former hypothesis is here adopted, but the question remains open to further argument, and further evidence.

<sup>14</sup>It is cogent that, as Hiebert "Chronology" 122 observes, later excavation of more than 170 tombs of the same culture has yielded no Chinese objects, so that the Pazyryk finds are unique and isolated. It may be, however, as Hiebert himself suggests (p118), that higher sites such as Pazyryk vertically dominated lower sites of the same culture. This, plus extensive looting of all the sites, might help to explain the seeming concentration of Chinese artifacts at one site. It remains true that the period of Chinese contact, whatever its nature, is brief. Suggestions in the present paper attempt a rational explanation of that brevity.

<sup>15</sup>Rudenko *Frozen* 324, listing "a large quantity of thin sticks" in tomb #5.

<sup>16</sup>In Wilhelm *I* this crass term is softened and philosophized as "furthering."

<sup>17</sup>In Hexagram 5 (Wilhelm *I* 1/25) and several other places.

loss.”<sup>18</sup> One can readily imagine it to have drawn on the experiences of commercial travelers, and to have been written in the first place to give them a cheap and portable prediction system. Here, then, may be a Chinese *literary* artifact symbolic of travel, balancing the Chinese *physical* artifacts found in the tombs of the Scythian culture area. The two-way cultural interchange, if such it proves to be, seems somewhat to favor a direct-visit hypothesis over an indirect-diffusion one.

### 3. *The Late 04c: Bactria*

A much more extensive pattern of reverse loans, from a foreign civilization to China, exists in the case of contact with West Asia, and specifically with Bactria, celebrated in antiquity as the trade crossroads of the entire Asian world.

Needham has listed a number of parallels between Greek and Chinese culture, and concluded that they do not imply a process of transmission between west and east Asia in this period.<sup>19</sup> One reason for accepting Needham’s conclusion, when it was first published, was that the Chinese halves of these resemblances did not make any very convincing pattern in the data. They were scattered over several texts, seemingly both early and late, and seemingly at random. Some of them, Needham argued, would have required almost simultaneous transmission, such as the recurrence of a saying of Xenophon in the writings of the Mician school. Xenophon and Mwôdź, notes Needham, were contemporaries. This turns out to be a red herring. The question is not whether the respective *individuals* were contemporaries, but whether the *texts* in question are of the same date. No one doubts that the stylistically coherent works comprising the Xenophon corpus (always excepting the *Constitution of the Athenians*) were actually written by Xenophon. But the very diverse writings of the Mician school a priori cannot be, and by a study of their content and linguistic peculiarities<sup>20</sup> can be shown not to be, by a single hand. The separate date of the portion of the Mician corpus in which the Xenophon theme occurs gives ample time for west-to-east transmission, and thus in effect reopens the question of transmission as a serious possibility.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Hexagram 25 line 3 (Wilhelm *I* 1/109). This is by no means the most cynical saying in the book; compare for example the changeable friends of Hexagram 2 (Wilhelm *I* 1/10).

<sup>19</sup>Needham *Science* v1 151-157.

<sup>20</sup>For a preliminary analysis, see Brooks “**Triplets.**”

<sup>21</sup>The Xenophon source is *Memorabilia* 1B9, noting that government, unlike the trades, is wrongly assumed to require no special training. The date of this portion of the *Memorabilia* is c0381. The Mician echo, *MZ* 47:8, can be dated from the portions of the *Analects* with which it interacts to c0309, giving an interval of 72 years during which eastward transmission might have taken place. The Xenophon remark also appears in other texts contemporary with

If we plot the Greek members of such resemblances according to their date of probable composition, we get a very striking pattern: all of them, down to some observations of Aristotle which are the latest of them, occur before the year c0340, at which time Aristotle was tutor to Alexander, and resident at Alexander's court in Pella. It is known that Aristotle returned to Athens in 0335, and that Alexander set out in 0334 to conquer the world, devoting the years 0329-0327 to the subjugation of Bactria and the establishment there of a Hellenized garrison capital with not less than 30,000 of his soldiers as its first citizens. Aristotle being a sufficiently capacious repository of Greek culture down to his own time, and Alexander (and quite likely some privileged members of his staff) being direct students of Aristotle, it is obvious that all the necessary Greek elements will, with a high degree of probability, have been present in Bactria from c0328 onward. As for the Chinese counterparts, it turns out that they too have a relatively well-defined limit: none is in a text which it is necessary, on internal grounds, to date to earlier than the year 0326. The source cut-off (c0340, Aristotle) is precise, the destination cut-in (c0326, the relevant Chinese text strata) is precise, the two agree well with each other, and the transmission of an Aristotelian version of Greek culture to Bactria, thus cutting the required transmission distance in half, would seem to remove the last substantial barrier to regarding these *apparent* borrowings as *actual* borrowings.

An additional point in favor of this conclusion is that the fragments in question are neither systematic nor recondite. They do not imply an acquaintance with Greek culture as a whole, or esoteric mastery of any phase of it. They are essentially gee-whiz items: striking tidbits that might have been shared over a drink after the conclusion of some Bactrian deal. One of them is the dilemma of rival loyalties expressed in Plato's *Euthyphro*, where a son shocks Athens by accusing his father of a crime. The name Euthyphro itself symbolizes the dilemma, since it is based on the stem euthy-, meaning "upright." The same dilemma is expressed in *Analects* 13:18 (c0322), where Confucius expresses his disapproval of another zealous and legalistic son, who has accused his father of a crime. Again the name of the son is symbolic, and again it is based on a stem, jí 直, meaning "upright."

There could hardly be a neater correspondence, but the matter does not end there. The *Euthyphro* is also the one of Plato's dialogues in which, for the first time, definition is insisted on. It is here that Socrates first says, Don't cite me an *example* of virtue; define for me what virtue *is*. And it is in *LY* 12 (c0326) that, for the first time in Chinese thought, previously undiscussed basic terms are defined; indeed, *LY* 12 consists of nothing but a string of definitions of terms.

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this portion of the *Mwōdž*, notably *Mencius* 1B9 (c0316, apparently the first of the set) and *Analects* 15:34 (c0305, the last).

And finally, it is in this same span of the *Analects*, LY 12-13 (c0326-c0322), that we are for the first time aware, in this and in other Chinese texts, of a dialogue *between the texts themselves*: This implies a wider awareness of the ideas of others, and a need to provide a counter to them. In that atmosphere of lively discussion, tidbits of exotic thought from Bactria were all the more likely to be met with interest and curiosity, and to become, themselves, part of the Chinese philosophical debate.

We may then with some confidence conclude that the Hellenization of Bactria, the point of overlap between eastern and western trading zones, brought for the first time within reach of Chinese travelers a smattering of Greek culture, down to the period when Aristotle had served as Alexander's tutor, and that the climate of contemporary philosophical inquiry in China itself was such as to be receptive to the interest and stimulation of that smattering.

### *Conclusion*

There is much else that might be explored in a longer paper, such as the Indo-Iranian influence on the yīn/yáng and five-planets proto-science of this same late 04c period, or the Iranian divine kingship theory which, to its lasting sorrow, China in the 03c adopted as the cornerstone concept of its unified political state.

But I wish in conclusion to consider just one general question that naturally arises in connection with this inference of direct borrowing from Hellenized (and pre-Hellenized) Bactria. It is this: Why, if there was the long-range contact between China and Bactria which these numerous and important borrowings imply, is there not a more direct mention of such contact in the texts themselves?

It may be enough to say, in answer, that no European history textbook known to me acknowledges the tremendous debt of so-called Renaissance Europe to Chinese statecraft and technology. Virtually every characteristic feature of this period can be shown to derive directly from eastern Asia.<sup>22</sup> The magnetic compass and stern-post rudder which made open-sea navigation possible and thus engendered the Age of Exploration, are Chinese inventions. The economic theories of the Physiocrats, with their agrarian bias, derive directly from Chinese policies. The music of Bach, which rests on the equal temperament system and thus ultimately on the 12th root of 2 as the frequency ratio of adjacent keys on the harpsichord, is indebted to the Míng-dynasty treatise which for the first time set forth that system, and whose transmission, through the Jesuit missionaries to the circle of philosophers around Father Mersenne in France, Needham has chronicled in convincing detail.<sup>23</sup> The art of printing from

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<sup>22</sup>There is a convenient conspectus in Needham *Science* v1 242.

<sup>23</sup>Needham *Science* v4 pt1 214-228.



movable types, and thus the enabling of mass literacy, makes use of a Korean version of a much older Chinese invention. The arts of war, including cannon and exploding shells, had been in use in China since the time of the Mongol conquest in the 13th century. These and other established facts have been available to scholars and the educated public for generations. But the beginning student of European history is systematically kept ignorant of them.

A similar process of what can only be called cultural denial can be seen in the Chinese texts. In the 230-year span covered by the series of writings that we know as the Confucian *Analects*, there is only a brief period of something like 20 years at the end of the 04c during which non-Chinese peoples are mentioned at all. In the huge Mician corpus, there is also such a period, beginning earlier but ending about the same time, late in the 04c. In the beginning of that period, foreign or indigenous peoples are mentioned with interest, and even accepted as possible sources of good ideas. At the end, they are seen as a threat to Chinese culture. After the 04c, they are not mentioned at all. I believe that the key to this situation is the fact that the end of the period when foreign peoples were readily mentioned seems to coincide with the period when the steppe peoples, notably the Syūngnú, were becoming a military threat to China. This seems to be the time when the first defensive walls were built along that border, and when the nomad practices of mounted warriors and horseback archery were adopted, in self-defense, by the Chinese, who had previously driven horses hitched to chariots, but so far as the record shows had never sat astride them. The increasing level of cultural hostility seems a plausible explanation for the change in cultural receptivity above noted.

Despite this apparent taboo in the texts, there are a number of evidences of ongoing contact with Bactria, which can only have been incidental to trade. Among the most striking are the frequent and exact echoes of Jain metaphysics which are embedded in the 03c text *Jwāngdž*. The Jains, as distinct from the Buddhists, were influential in west India, or just south of the Bactrian trade center. The likelier scenario for their transmission is not a deeper penetration of India along the old 05c southern route, but a penetration beyond, or at the very least a cultural mixing at, Bactria. It seems that, for all the systematic paucity of the evidence, the least drastic inference to draw is of continuing trade between northern China and Bactria, at a level of profit sufficient to justify its difficulty, into the 03c.

The literary record itself is not as barren of hints of western journeys as might appear at first glance. There are a number of surviving writings, from the end of the 04c and during the 03c, which attest to the thrill and excitement of distant journeys to exotic places. The *Story of Emperor Mù* recounts a journey of a Jōu King to a land far in the west, reached by a route whose better-defined portion coincides

with the later Silk Road, where allurements and adventures await him. This tale is from the end of the 04c; a copy was buried in the tomb of a Ngwèi King who died in 0296. The spiritual wanderings ascribed to a dying soul in two pieces of the *Chǔ Tsz* anthology contain what look like remembered details of a series of travels, to the west and other directions. The motif of a far journey is common in the *Jwāngdž*, and though it is certainly metaphorical for a journey of the disciplined mind in meditation, its details may resonate with remembered or recounted actual journeys. What we seem to have, in these and other symbolic literary journeys, are not genuine records, but perhaps more accurately *sublimated memories*, of western and other journeys, which survive in a privileged domain of extravagant metaphor after the shutting down of direct mention of such foreign journeys and foreign peoples, around the year c0310.

I believe that, on present evidence, isolated and sometimes indirect as it is, we are justified in concluding that Chinese trading parties must have repeatedly traversed the lands of the Ywèjīr peoples, in the last decades of the 04c, and quite possibly in later decades also. And when the dust of new discoveries at last settles, it is quite possible that a stronger claim will then appear to be justified, namely, that access to, or exclusion from, foreign trade routes may have played an important part in determining the ultimate victor in the protracted struggle of the Warring States. The victory of Chín in this struggle has been repeatedly ascribed to its exploitation of iron weapons. Archeology, just as repeatedly, has refused to support this idea with evidence, showing instead that Chín was, if anything, backward in this respect. What Chín obviously had, that may be of more consequence than has yet been suspected, was the shortest route to the trading emporia of West Asia, and a geographical position from which the trading missions of the eastern Chinese states could easily be interdicted. It seems that this possible economic fact may help to supply the need that historians have heretofore sought, without success, in an imaginary military fact. The actual fighting, on this view, would be merely a tactical wrap-up, and the real superiority of Chín would rest, not only on its unmatched expertise in political administration, but perhaps also, in part, on its possession of the shortest, and least contested, route to the west.

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