Imagining *Wu* in the Han

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Washington

2020

Committee:

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Jackson School of International Studies

University of Washington

Abstract

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This master's thesis attempts to analyze the perception and understanding of the concept of *wu* 武 in the Han dynasty by exploring the relevant literary sources. It is divided into four subsections. In the "Institutional Promotions of Wu," I explain how the Qin-Han legacy of military organization of the society makes *wu* a superior and desirable value. The order of honor by military merits, superiority of military offices in the governmental systems and even naming of certain offices using military terms reflect such promotion of the *wu* value. In the "Military Aristocratic Lineages" section, I demonstrate by tracing information scattered throughout various biographical records in the dynastic histories that some aristocratic lineages advanced or maintained their status mainly through military services. The "Martial Individualism" section explores the relationship between the individual and the state via their negotiation and struggle of power in using violence. This section is inspired and influenced by Sanctioned Violence in Early China. But one of the differences is that I note the possibility of a non-violent manifestation of *wu*. Lastly, the "Wu of Women" section analyzes two examples of women who display qualities of *wu* in the dynastic histories and

their significance. In conclusion, I argue that *wu* was still very much an integral part of Han culture despite many social changes from the Former Han to the Later Han. Even though *wu* probably originated from military actions, it was equally important as a cultural concept in the Han. There were various ways for the Han people to engage in activities that could be labelled *wu*. Some of these resulted from the momentum of history but others arose due to necessities created by the environment.

Introduction

> *"In our China, the custom of ranking martiality lower has existed since antiquity."*
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> Liang Qichao[1]

> *"The Confucianists, who are ultimately pacifist literati oriented to inner political welfare, naturally faced military powers with aversion or with lack of understanding."*
>
> Max Weber[2]

> *"Disparagement of the soldier is deeply ingrained in the old Chinese system of values."*
>
> John K. Fairbank[3]

What the above shows is a long-standing myth, even among the most renowned scholars, that traditional Chinese society has been one in which the military and people associated with it have always been despised. This myth has been reinforced by the "sick man of Asia" image in the 20th century when nationalistic scholars desperately needed a straw man to help channel their narratives. That China had become an accumulation of weaknesses is

[1] Qichao Liang, *Xin min shuo* 新民說 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shu Ju, 1941), ch 17.

[2] Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 444.

[3] John K. Fairbank, *The United States and China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 68.

closely tied to the perception of the 19th to 20th century as a time of humiliation.[4] Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873 – 1929), in his *Xin min shuo*, puts forward a rather radical view of how aggressive militarism is what could save the Chinese nation from foreign imperialism. Since Liang's time, the saying "*hao nan bu dang bing*" 好男不當兵 (a good man does not serve as a soldier) has been repeatedly cited by many scholars as direct evidence of Chinese popular contempt for military services.

This saying may or may not be a real reflection of public opinion in Liang's time. But the mistake here is, as Otto B. Van Der Sprenkel points out of Max Weber's mistake in analyzing the Chinese society,[5] the over-generalization of the entire Chinese history (whatever that even entails) over the millennia as a continuous, singular and even static entity. Fortunately, most recent scholarship has been trying to reverse such tendencies by analyzing history within its proper frameworks. Instead of generalizing and treating the "Chinese culture" as a unity, this thesis attempts to situate the concept of *wu* 武 in a specific time period, the Han dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD).

The accepted conventional wisdom now is that "Chinese" society was largely dominated by military aristocracy up until the Spring and Autumn period (ca. 8th c. – 5th c.), and the social elites were naturally oriented towards *wu* by this time. However, there are

[4] David Scott, *China and the International System, 1840-1949 Power, Presence, and Perceptions in a Century of Humiliation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 3.

[5] Otto B Van Der Sprenkel, "Max Weber on China," *History and Theory* 3, no. 3 (1964): 350.

different opinions in terms of changes in the perception of *wu* in early Chinese society following that. Scholar Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893 - 1980) theorizes that the transition of cultural focus from *wu* to *wen* 文 happened during Spring and Autumn. Yu Ying-shih refutes this theory and argues that there was not a clear-cut transition from *wu* to *wen* but rather both coexisted for quite some time even after Spring and Autumn.[6] Other studies, such as Hsu Cho-yun's *Ancient China in Transition* and Mark Lewis's *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, place emphasis on the Eastern Zhou when the focus on *wu* was still strong. While the former deals more with the social mobility changes, the latter discusses the state employment of violence to strengthen its grip on society and the changes in relationship between the state and violence. Revolutionary developments in military organization and warfare play significant roles in both books. However, they don't directly address issues associated with these matters in the long-lasting united empire that followed.

Therefore, in this thesis, I would like to explore the concept of *wu* positioned in the Han dynasty, a topic that has not gained much attention. However, the immediate problem is that *wu* could have an array of meanings. So far, I have avoided using a direct translation in fear that a single rendition in English might distort or eliminate the nuances. For the purposes of this thesis, I would like to focus on two aspects, namely militarism and martiality in relation to both state and individual. Unlike most other scholarship on military history, where the focus is usually on the military thought and theory, military organization, strategies and tactics or weaponry and methods of conducting war, I focus on the cultural

[6] Ying-shih Yu, *Shi yu zhongguo wenhua* 士與中國文化 (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1987), ch 1.

aspects of the military and martial influences and the perception and understanding of *wu* in Han times.

I. Institutional Promotions of *Wu*

The distinction between *wen* 文 and *wu* or civil and martial is as old as the Chinese civilization itself. The founding kings of the Zhou dynasty were posthumously known as King Wen and King Wu respectively.[7] However, conceptual distinction does not necessarily

[7] In my opinion, if there is a "Chinese civilization," its origin would have been the Zhou dynasty. While the Shang came before the Zhou, it had very little to do, if at all, with the formation of the Chinese civilization. People knew very little about the Shang outside what recorded by the Zhou people. The most important cultural heritage the Zhou had inherited from the Shang is its writing system, the oracle script. However, for the past two thousand and five hundred years, people had not read anything in its original form from the Shang dynasty. The actual Shang written records, the oracle bones, were not discovered until 1899. Before that, the sole source of Shang culture was through the writing of the Zhou people. By the same token, if I really have to be strict, the origin of the Chinese civilization would have to be the Warring States to the Early Han. Most of the earliest written materials that had any significant impact on the formation of Chinese culture were created in this period. Only a handful came before that such as the Book of Songs, the Book of Documents, Confucius' Analects, Autumn and Spring and etc. But even these were recorded and transmitted by the Warring States and Han people (Except maybe materials preserved in bronze inscriptions but these were niche subjects of study even for the historical scholars). In fact, for the most part

lead to the separation of official and government duties into civil and martial/military categories. Modern scholars found that the strict separation between civil and military officials took place in the Song dynasty,[8] although the separation between these offices could be traced to as early as the Sui-Tang period. Although official posts of the Han dynasty certainly had inclination to be civil or military, the actual person taking the post was not distinguished by such classification. It was common practice for someone to switch from a more civil office to a more military one or vice versa.

Conventional wisdom holds that the early half of the Eastern Zhou was dominated by a military aristocracy. The Warring States period that followed stimulated many societal changes as a result of intensified competitions between the states. Scholars imply a transition during the Warring States period where the hereditary aristocracy gave way to newly emerged professional soldiers and bureaucrats in military and administrative duties.

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of the imperial period, the transmitted texts that Chinese cultural elites had access to were those that were reorganized and edited by the Han people (many of them even by Eastern Han people such as the Zhuangzi!). Modern scholars have more access than the historical scholars to the pre-Han texts thanks only to the archaeological excavations in the twentieth century. Most transmitted texts would reflect the opinions of their Han editors. In many cases, we can never even be sure that certain passages in a now-transmitted book were originally intended to be in a single book or even written by a single person. Therefore, I treat the Zhou dynasty as the earliest possible source of the Chinese civilization.

[8] Dongmei Zhao, *Wen Wu Zhi Jian: Bei Song Wu Xuan Guan Yan Jiu* 文武之間：北宋武選官研究 (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010).

Combined with the rise of commerce and a merchant class, upward social mobility reached an unprecedented level. A newly emerging class known as the *shi* 士 started to take over important political and military positions in the various states.

Having said the above, what is more relevant to our discussion is the military reforms that started to change the political landscape during this time period. Hereditary military aristocracy that once dominated military leadership was slowly replaced with professional soldiers and commanders who may have come from much humbler backgrounds. Studies of military affairs in rational and philosophical ways had begun. Military thinkers such as Sun Tzu produced a number of literary works that were aimed at helping rulers organize their military forces and even the entire state's resources in order to maximize their competitiveness in vying for the hegemony over (and potentially unification of) the known world.

Eventually, one of the most successful of these warring states, the kingdom of Qin, emerged victorious and united the known world through its rapid and effective military conquests. The Qin success is often attributed to the reforms enacted with the help of Lord Shang Yang 商鞅 (390 – 338 BC). Although Qin was the ultimate victor among the warring states, it was not the only one that attempted various reforms. Other states also enacted similar or unique reforms. However, focus on the groundbreaking changes in this period potentially distracts us from recognizing the legacies that had inevitably been inherited from the old world.

While we realize that the *shi* class was an emerging force, it was still descended from the old aristocracy and bore marks of the old ways. Even when the *shi* represented a break away from the rigid hereditary aristocracy, they were nonetheless part of the aristocracy albeit

in the lower strata of it.[9] For example, Confucius has traditionally always been celebrated a learned person, a scholar, and a *ru* 儒, which implies a sense of gentleness.[10] As a result, we overlook the martiality embedded in the aristocratic legacies. Martial training had always been part of aristocratic education. Confucius himself recommended the Six Arts (*liuyi* 六藝) which included charioteering and archery.

Martial training had always been part of the traditional aristocratic education. Despite the decline in hereditary privileges in securing military offices, aristocratic families towards the end of the Warring States still maintained the necessary training. Xiang Ji 項藉

[9] If we were to draw a parallel, we could look at the Meiji Restoration. While the revolution was ultimately to dismantle the old feudal society and build a modern nation state, the major influencers, thinkers and revolutionaries were largely samurai in origin. They buried the samurai system yet they themselves were samurai and bore unerasable marks of the warriors. Han Xin, an instrumental figure in the Han victory over Xiang Ji, was likely of noble birth but had fallen into poverty after their kingdom fell to the Qin. He is said to always have carried a family heirloom sword on his person and even got into trouble for that when several thugs challenged and insulted him for that. In this story, we may find a rather interesting parallel between this impoverished noble carrying a sword (a symbol of nobility) and the struggling samurai after the Meiji restoration, some of whom insisted on carrying a katana even after the *Haitourei* 廢刀令(Sword Abolishment Edict) was issued. Both of these men clinged to their old ways even when such actions were no longer seen as feasible or even legal.

[10] The Han dynasty classical dictionary *shouwen* 說文 states: *ru* is gentleness 儒柔也.

(232 – 202),[11] one of the leaders of the rebellions against the Qin rule, hailed from the vanquished Chu state. He was a descendant of one of the most prominent Chu families. Even after the fall of their kingdom and loss of their station, Xiang Ji is said to have been trained by his uncle in martial arts and military strategies.[12]

Zhang Liang 張良 (251 – 186 BC), one of the closest advisors to Liu Bang 劉邦 (? – 195 BC), another leader of the rebellions and later the founding emperor of the Han dynasty, descended from a cadet branch of the Han 韓, a kingdom of the Warring States period, royalty and served as the prime minister of the kingdom for generations. Zhang Liang is known for his advisory roles in planning and strategizing but not in commanding armies. Sima Qian wrote that he thought of Zhang Liang as being a huge man, and he was astonished when he saw the image of Zhang Liang that he had a small build and a feminine look. Due to health reasons, Zhang Liang was never able to lead an army into battle on his own. Instead, he stayed beside Liu Bang as an advisor. However, even for him, in his youth, he is still said to have been a good swordsman and commanded a gang of warriors of his own.[13]

Putting the pieces together, on the one hand, there were extensive reforms that aimed at transforming states into effective war machines; on the other hand, the old martial spirit still echoed in the ways of new leaders. It is therefore too soon to claim equivalence between *shi* and scholar in the late Warring States and Early Han.

[11] Also known as Xiang Yu 項羽.
[12] *Shiji*, 7.295-296.
[13] *Shiji*, 25.2036, 2040.

The Han dynasty inherited most of its institutions from the Qin with moderate changes to fit its circumstances. But emphasis on military organization of the society, military expansion and military meritocracy remained intact in the Han. The following are some examples that illustrate this.

A. The Twenty-Rank Order of Nobility

The Han dynasty kept intact the peerage system from the Qin that consisted of 20 titles in a hierarchical order.[14] This system was designed as part of Lord Shang's reforms to militarize the state to accompany its expansionist policies. It was meant to reward people with military contributions in order to incentivize fierce battlefield performance. According to the *Book of Lord Shang* (*Shangjun Shu* 商君書), the system was closely tied to the military chain of command. A higher title often meant a higher position in the military hierarchy that commanded more soldiers. A person was rewarded with both material gains and honor based on the number of heads he managed to cut off from the enemies.[15]

There is a vivid depiction in the *Shiji* of how the reward system had impacted behavior of the Han army.

[14] In addition, the Han dynasty also had feudatory kings and kingdoms. In the early Han, several of these were created to reward Liu Bang's allies who aided him in the war against his major enemy Xiang Ji. Later these feudatory kingdoms were gradually abolished, and such titles were exclusively reserved for the imperial princes. *Hanshu*, 13, 14, *Tongdian*, 31.

[15] *Book of Lord Shang*, 19.

"*Then, (King Xiang) committed suicide by slashing his own throat. Wang Yi took his head. The rest of the horsemen trampled on each other and fought for (the body of) King Xiang. A few dozen of them were killed.*"[16]

The above happened in the last battle between the Han and the Chu. The Hegemonic King Xiang Ji was cornered with only a few horsemen left. Knowing that death was inevitable, he talked to one of the Han horsemen that he used to know that he could take his head and claim the reward of a lord title of 10000 households that Liu Bang had promised. However, after Xiang Ji died, the Han soldiers swarmed in to fight for the evidence of their right to claim the reward. In the end, five of them each got a piece of Xiang Ji's body and were all made lords of fiefs of more 1000 households.[17]

As a result, the whole nobility of the early Han was created due to their military contributions. Even those who did not participate personally in combat such as Xiao He 萧何 (257 – 193 BC) and Zhang Liang were rewarded for their support roles in logistics, organizing, planning, and strategizing during the campaigns. The founding emperor Liu Bang even decreed that the highest two orders of the titles should only be awarded to those who had military contributions although this rule had not always been followed, an exception we will discuss in the following section. For the most part of the Han dynasty, titles of feudatory lords were awarded in two broad categories: one by military contributions (referred to as merit-lords in this paper); one by imperial grace (referred to as grace-lords in this paper). The latter included those of the imperial consort's family members as well as those who became prime ministers: both by convention would have been enfeoffed regardless

[16] *Shiji*, 7.336.

[17] *Shiji*, 7. Hanshu, 16.

of their military participation. However, if we take into consideration the number of titles given, the overwhelming majority was still given to merit-lords who made significant military contributions.

The following is a list of all recorded ennoblement during the Western Han:

Reign	Merit-Lord	Grace-Lord	Other
Emperor Gao 高	147	2	4
Emperor Hui 慧	3	-	-
Empress Gao 高	12	11	8
Emperor Wen 文	10	3	14
Emperor Jing 景	18	2	9
Emperor Wu 武	75	9	5
Emperor Zhao 昭	8	6	1
Emperor Xuan 宣	11	21	4
Emperor Yuan 元	1	2	3
Emperor Cheng 成	5	10	15
Total	290	66	63

From the above table, we can already see that the vast majority of the ennoblement was due to military merit. Even some of those who are counted among the grace-lords were still military commanders that made great military contributions. But because of their marriage ties to the imperial dynasty, they were excluded from the merit-lords. For example,

Wei Qing 衛青 (? – 106 BC) and Huo Quqing 霍去病 (140 – 117 BC) who led the military expedition into the Xiongnu heartland were relatives to Empress Wei. Although they have been renowned for their military talent throughout history, they were still counted as grace-lords. The "other" column includes both imperial princes and those who were enfeoffed due to their deceased fathers' contributions. The latter in a sense were also merit-lords. But because the contributor died, usually killed in battle, before he could be awarded the title, it was his heir that received the honor.

Notable exceptions happened during the reign of Emperor Xuan and Emperor Cheng. Emperor Xuan's ascendency to the throne was a special case. His grandfather was the crown prince of Emperor Wu by Empress Wei. However, towards the end of Emperor Wu's reign, the old emperor favored his young son, Liu Fuling 劉弗陵 (94 – 74 BC), who would later become Emperor Zhao. Crown Prince Wei was involved in the *wugu* 巫蠱 (witchcraft) incident and committed suicide after a failed coup. The throne was passed down to Emperor Zhao. The deceased crown prince's family was ordered to be executed but the crown prince's infant grandson was saved by the prison warden who took pity on him. Emperor Zhao died young and did not produce an heir. The court officials under the leadership of Huo Guang 霍光 (? - 68 BC) first appointed Prince of Changyi 昌邑 (92 – 59 BC), a grandson of Emperor Wu's to the throne. However, the prince was said to have behaved horribly and was deposed by the court. Huo Guang and his close allies then sought the surviving grandson of Crown Prince Wei out, who would have been in the line of succession had his grandfather not died in an incident that many believed to be unjust. As a result, in order to reward those who made it possible for the emperor to ascend the throne, Emperor Xuan awarded an extraordinary amount of titles to his political allies.

Emperor Cheng's ennoblement on the other hand indeed indicates an erosion of the system where more grace-lords were made than merit-lords. Especially the consort family Wang clan had all five sons made lords after their lord father died when usually only one (usually the eldest) would inherit the title. That Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BC - 23 AD), the third generation of the Wang clan that controlled the court would eventually usurp the throne is not surprising.

The largest numbers of ennoblements took place during Emperor Gao and Emperor Wu's time. All those made nobles by Emperor Gao were his allies during his rebellion against the Qin rule and the later campaign against Xiang Ji for the hegemony of the *tianxia* 天下 (lit. all under heaven). Similarly, Emperor Wu's military expansion into the surrounding regions[18] and especially the wars with the Xiongnu produced a second wave of mass enfeoffment. Interestingly, roughly half of those enfeoffments were awarded to chieftains who surrendered to the Han dynasty with their clans from the surrounding regions saving Han's military forces for conquests.

In any case, the Twenty-Rank Order of Nobility served, as it was originally designed in the Qin, to incentivize the Han subjects to participate and contribute in a military capacity.

B. Militarization of the Central and Local Governments

a) The Office of the Commander-in-Chief

[18] According to the *hanshu*, the number of commanderies under Emperor Wu increased by 28. *Hanshu*, 28.1640

The title *jiangjun* (commander) was a Qin creation that was bestowed upon a minister who was to lead an army. During the Han dynasty, it was usually a temporary position created for a specific mission or campaign and would be revoked upon completion of such a task. However, several *jiangjun* titles were created during the reign of Emperor Wu that became semi-permanent and formed part of the close circle of imperial advisors in the central government. Examples include the *da jiangjun* 大將軍 (commander-in-chief), *piaoji jiangjun* 驃騎將軍 (commander of the swift cavalry), *juji jiangjun* 車騎將軍 (commander of the chariots and cavalry), *wei jiangjun* 衛將軍 (commander of the guards) and *qian*, *hou*, *zuo*, *you jiangjun* 前後左右將軍 (commanders of the front, the rear, the left and the right).

The Commander-in-Chief was the most prestigious of all. Liu Bang had first appointed Han Xin 韓信 (231 – 196 BC) as his commander-in-chief during the campaign with Xiang Ji. The position was not seen regularly until the reign of Emperor Wu. Wei Qing, Empress Wei's brother, was appointed as the supreme leader of the Han military forces by his brother-in-law. He was renowned for successfully leading expeditions into the Xiongnu heartland. In order to glorify the war hero, Emperor Wu bestowed upon him the composite title *da sima da jiangjun* 大司馬大將軍 (the grand commander of cavalry and commander-in-chief) that ranked one of the highest offices in the Han court. Following examples of Huo Guang and Wang Feng 王鳳 (? – 22BC), both imperial consorts' family members, this title was almost exclusively given to the head of the imperial consort's family who often acted as the effective head of the central government.[19]

[19] *Hou hanshu*, *zhi* 24.3563.

The *da jiangjun* as with other high rank *jiangjun* had its own *mufu* (lit. tent office), the administrative unit that consisted of staff members in charge of various tasks. It may also have permanent troops attached to the office. The *mufu* enabled the commander to form his own circle of advisors who acted on behalf and in the interest of the commander. The staff members of the *mufu*, due to their close relations with the *jiangjun*, could potentially rise high in the Han government further reinforcing their leader's position.

b) Noble Youth and the *Lang*

The office of *lang* 郎 or palace attendant was an important element of the Qin-Han recruitment system.[20] The term *lang* probably was derived from *lang* 廊 (corridor) referring to the fact that palace attendants waited along the corridor. It had initially been used interchangeable with *shilang* (waiting attendants) or *zhonglang* (inner palace attendants) although the latter two developed into their own posts later. Because of the association of the *lang* with noble youth, the term has come to mean male youth in general in later generations.

The practice of drawing younger members of the nobility to serve at the king's palace could be traced to the Warring States period and it was not exclusive to the kingdom of Qin. For example, *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 has a story where an old minister of the Kingdom of Zhao talks with the Queen Dowager about enlisting his youngest son, aged 15, into the ranks of the "Black Robes," likely an elite order of palace guards, in order to secure his future career (secretly the old minister does so in an attempt to persuade the Queen to send her younger

[20] Xiaoyou Zhao, "Xihan langguan zhidu de xingcheng" "西汉郎官制度的形成." *Zhongbei daxue xuebao: social sciences edition* 中北大学学报:社会科学版 23, no. S1 (2007): 29-32.

son to serve as hostage in exchange for military aid from another kingdom).[21] What we can infer from the story is that not only did young nobles serve as palace guards, but the service was as much a privilege as a responsibility.

The Han dynasty records depict a sophisticated system where the recruitment of *lang* depended on several sources. The most obvious is the sheltered privilege (*yin* 蔭) of a court noble. But the right to become a *lang* could also come from reward for military contribution to the empire, either his own or his father's. Although the *lang* served functions of protecting and waiting on the emperor, they were not simple ordinary palace guards. The mundane soldiers guarding the various palaces and gates fell under the command of the *weiwei* 衛尉 (Commandant of the Guards) whereas the *lang* reported to a different official, the Director of Palace Attendants (*langzhong ling* 郎中令 later known as *guangluxun* 光禄勳). The responsibilities of the *lang* were a mixture of offering bodyguard services as well as advisory ones to the emperor himself. They could potentially become quite close with the emperor personally thus securing a brighter career prospect.

Nevertheless, martial prowess was still an essential element in consideration for the post. The most well-known elite order of the imperial guards, the Feathered Forest (*yulin* 羽林), of the Han dynasty was an organization of the *lang*. In addition, there was also the order of Tiger Runners (*huben* 虎賁 previously known as Promised Gate *qimen* 期門) consisting of *lang* soldiers. They were armed guards accompanying the emperor where he travelled.

[21] *Zhanguo ce*, 21.768-772. *Shiji* has the same story. It was based on an earlier Warring States record. An even earlier version was uncovered from the WMD bamboo strips.

Their commanders were known as *zhonglang jiang* 中郎將 or Commanders of Palace Attendants. Another important specialized *lang* officer was the Commandant General of Cavalry (*ji duwei* 騎都尉) who led the imperial cavalry forces, and they were often dispatched to carry out special military tasks. Historical figures beyond count in both Han dynasties that rose to prominence once served in this position.

c) Military Responsibilities of Commandery Governors

One of the Qin reforms that had an everlasting imprint on the Chinese local administration is the division of the land into commanderies and counties. Instead of dividing and entrusting the land to the hereditary feudal lords, the Qin state reorganized conquered land into commanderies and counties that were governed by officials who were appointed by the monarch and acted on behalf of him instead of ruling in their own right. In theory, the governor acted merely as an agent and the land belonged to the monarch. In practice, however, the governor enjoyed great autonomy and authority that were akin to a feudal lord except that the governorship had a limited term and was not hereditary.

The Han dynasty modeled its local administration after the Qin system of commanderies and counties with some compromises that allowed the existence of feudatory territories especially in the early Han where the imperial government only controlled 15 commanderies out of 64.[22] The governor of a commandery is known as *taishou* 太守 or grand protector. The grand protector was the ultimate authority in a commandery and ruled the land as he saw fit. As the name might suggest, his responsibilities included defense functions in times of need, be it a foreign invasion or local rebellion. Military training and

[22] *Hanshu*, 14.391.

leading the army were also part of the job of a governor. The governor, together with some other officials of the commandery, was also in charge of holding tests for military recruits in the eighth month every year.[23] In borderland commanderies, a specific official known as the *zhangshi* 長史 was recruited in addition to the regular staff to aid in military affairs.[24] Because of the frequent military conflicts with the surrounding foreign tribes, governors of these regions often led the army into battlefield and acted much like generals. In fact, many of them rose from military background, such as the famous Western Han general, Li Guang 李广 (184 – 119 BC), who served as the governor of the Beidi 北地 (lit. northern land) commandery for many years. He was later called into the central government precisely because of his military exploits as a local governor.

One way to look at the prominence of the military offices is by examining the list of the Eleven Meritorious Ministers of the Qilin Pavilion (麒麟閣) made by Emperor Xuan of Han in memorial of the most prominent ministers of his time. Out of the 11 ministers, 5 were listed by their military titles (not that they held only these titles but certainly these were considered more prestigious). More importantly, the highest ranked 4 were all military. Even those of the Three Excellence ranks came after them.

II. Military Aristocratic Lineages

[23] *Hou hanshu*, 28.3624

[24] *Hanshu*, 7.741

As early as the early Eastern Han, Ban Gu 班固 (32 – 92 BC) had noted that "ever since the beginning of the Qin and Han, to the east of the mountains, there produced more civil ministers whereas to the west of the mountains, there produced more military leaders."[25] He explained that because the commanderies in the northwestern empire bordered the Qiang 羌 and Hu 胡 tribes, people from these places were accustomed to fighting and well trained in horsemanship and archery.

Many of the Han dynasty's accomplished generals indeed hailed from the regions "to the west of the mountains." However, what Ban Gu did not mention but can be reasonably inferred from the fact is that the constant fighting and military services led to the emergence of a group of aristocratic families that served the Han empire mainly through their military services and maintained their stations over generations as a result. From his and other historians' scattered records, we could glimpse into these lineages of military aristocracy.[26]

Because of the emotional depiction of the grand historian, Sima Qian, Li Guang is probably the most iconic of all Han dynasty's military commanders. His exploits were recited over and over for the following two millennia in various literary forms. If we look past the

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[25] "秦漢已來，山東出相，山西出將，" *Hanshu*, 39.2998.

[26] It is difficult to describe such a group. Here, I use the term "aristocracy" very loosely for a lack of proper word. Although, the opportunities to serve and privileges of holding military offices of these families were not explicitly made hereditary by the Han dynasty, they did enjoy preferential treatment. As we will see in the discussion below, some of the successful ones indeed obtained hereditary rights and privileges in various forms, most notably the title and enfeoffment of a lord.

colorful stories around Li Guang the person, he is but one person of many that served the Han dynasty because of their familial military training over generations.

Li Guang's ancestry could be traced back to the general Li Xin 李信 of the Qin state during the late Warring States period. His family settled in the Chengji 成紀 county of the Longxi 隴西 commandery and had been practicing archery for generations and was renowned for it. Li Guang himself was drawn into the army to fight off the nomadic invasions as a *liangjiazi* 良家子.

Liangjiazi or children of good family standing is an important term that we shall see repeatedly in the sections to follow. Many of the Han officials as well as consort candidates had to be selected from among the children of good family standing. According to the commentary by Ru Chun 如淳 in the *Hanshu*, a good family standing implies that the family could not have been involved in professions such as physicians, merchants, or craftsmen. Naturally, important military forces also consisted of these *liangjiazi*. The most favored in terms of military services are those from the so-called "Six Commanderies" which included Longxi, Tianshui 天水, Anding 安定, Beidi, Shang 上, and Xihe 西河.[27]

Multiple members of the Li family over the years had likely served in the Han army. Of Li Guang's generation, at least two of them had caught enough attention from the world that they had left marks on the historical records: Li Guang and his cousin Li Cai 李蔡 (148 – 118 BC), whose political career even eclipsed that of Guang's for he became the prime minister and was made a lord for his military contributions.

[27] *Hanshu*, 28.1644.

Three of Guang's sons served as palace attendants, the *lang*. One of them had made it to the position of the governor of the border commandery Dai 代, a place where frequent fighting occurred with the nomadic tribes. Another son, Gan 敢, was made a Lord within the Passes (*guannei hou* 關內侯) for fighting the Xiongnu.

Sima Qian had personally known Li Guang. According to his statement, Li Guang was not a culturally sophisticated person and lacked the art of articulation. He was even described as being like an honest peasant from the countryside. It is interesting to note that none of the Li family was described as being literarily sophisticated (unlike important figures from later dynasties) but rather fierce and brave.

One of Guang's grandsons by Li Gan, named Li Yu 李禹, served the crown prince of Emperor Wu. He once bullied and insulted a noble person in attendance, who later reported the incident to the emperor.[28] The emperor was ready to teach Yu a lesson by commanding him to fight a tiger (or even multiple tigers as Classical Chinese does not distinguish singular from plural so we cannot know this for sure. In any case, this is supposed to be an impossible task.). But of course, the emperor did not really expect him to actually fight a fearsome beast which would likely result in his death. The tiger was placed in a pit. Just as Yu was being lowered into the pit with ropes and before he could reach the ground, the emperor called off the action and decreed to call him back. He probably thought that it was enough to scare the

[28] This is not the first time that one of the Li's fought a noble person in the imperial palace. Li Guang's first born, Li Danghu, was recorded to have struck Emperor Wu's childhood friend and lover, Han Yan because the latter was supposed being impolite to the emperor.

insolent young man into submission. However, unexpectedly, Yu stroke the ropes with his sword and cut them off. He then went on to fight the tiger. The emperor then had to dispatch his guards to rescue him from the animal's den.

Indeed, Li Gan himself was also a reckless person. He blamed his father's suicide on the Commander-in-Chief Wei Qing and attacked him but was killed by Wei Qing's nephew the famous Commander of Swift Cavalry, Huo Qubing. The emperor had to cover this scandal up by claiming that it was a hunting accident.

Another of Li Guang's grandsons, Li Ling 李陵 (? - 74 BC), also started off as a palace attendant. He was famous for his martial prowess such as horsemanship and archery. He was named Commandant General of Cavalry and commanded 800 horsemen. Later, he was ordered to train and command 5000 southerner foot soldiers in defense of the Xiongnu. His unit was obliterated by a much larger Xiongnu army of reportedly 80000 strong when he was sent to reinforce Li Guangli's 李廣利 (? - 89 BC) main force. Li Ling surrendered to the Xiongnu. As a result, the emperor executed his entire family thus marking the fall of the Li family in the Han dynasty.

An equally capable but much more politically successful general is Zhao Chongguo 趙充國 (137 - 52 BC).[29] Very similar to Li Guang, Zhao Chongguo hailed from the Longxi commandery and started his professional military career as a cavalryman in the Feathered Forest thanks to his horsemanship and archery skills. For the most part of his career, Zhao Chongguo stayed a professional soldier for decades until he was in his seventies. By then,

[29] E.L. Dreyer, "Zhao Chongguo: A Professional Soldier of China's Former Han Dynasty." *The Journal of Military History* 72(3) (2008): 665-725.

Emperor Xuan needed someone to advise on his strategy dealing with the Qiang problem on the western borders. The prime minister Bing Ji 丙吉 (? - 55 BC), a trusted advisor to the emperor recommended Zhao Chongguo as an experienced Qiang expert to the emperor. Although the emperor was wary at first of his old age, he was soon convinced by Zhao Chongguo's insight into the matter. The numerous memorials preserved in the Han records stand witness to the old general's instrumental role in setting the military colony strategy regarding the western Qiang border for the generations to come.

Zhao Chongguo, as the Commander of the Rear, entered into the closest advisory circle of Emperor Xuan. His successful political career, in addition to his military expertise, was largely dependent on making the right allies at the key moments. He sided with Huo Guang in support of installing Emperor Xuan as the successor to the throne. After Huo Guang's death, he timely distanced himself from the Huo family that was spiraling out of control and was eventually brought down by the emperor. In this sense, he was indeed a keen strategist.

Like Li Guang, given the level of military training he received in his youth, Zhao Chongguo was unlikely the first generation to serve the Han as a soldier. Also, we know from records that at least when he was ordered to deal with the Qiang rebellion, his son Zhao Ang 趙卬 served as a commander of the palace attendants in leading the elite forces of the Feathered Forest and Promised Gate to support his military efforts. Zhao Ang, however, committed suicide after getting involved in a political struggle. Zhao Chongguo's lordship was passed down, his younger son, to the fourth generation until the end of the Western Han where all lordships were disrupted because of Wang Man's usurpation.

What we can see from the above is a career development pattern. Certain families from the so called Six Commanderies region had been well trained in military skills. They were then enlisted in the Han army and often times because of their fine skills, they would go directly into the elite palace attendant ranks, then from there into leadership positions in the military. Because one of the ways to enter the palace attendants was through sheltered privilege, those who had made a name and career for themselves would likely bring their descendants onto the same military service path. The *Han shu* explicitly mentions a number of families that followed this path to prominence including those of Shangguan Jie's 上官桀 (140 – 80 BC), Su Jian 蘇建 and Su Wu's 蘇武 (140 – 60 BC), Xin Wuxian 辛武賢 and Xin Qingji's 辛慶忌 (? – 12 BC) in addition to the two we have discussed above and possibly numerous others that escaped historians' records.

Other than the children of good family standing from the Six Commanderies serving as military leaders, the largest number of ennoblements by military merit during Emperor Wu's reign was given to surrendered chieftains from the surrounding regions. They formed another important branch of the military aristocracy in the Western Han. I would like to discuss a representative case of them here.

When Liu Bang first established the Han dynasty after defeating Xiang Ji, he installed seven kingdoms as rewards to his important allies, whom, however, he gradually got rid of in the years to follow. The kingdom of Han 韓 was entrusted to Han Xin 韓信, more commonly known as King Han Xin (Han *wang* Xin 韓王信) to distinguish him from the general Han Xin of the same name and period. When the distrust grew between the first emperor of the Han and the king, the latter defected to the Xiongnu, which resulted in the first major battle between the Han and the Xiongnu, the siege of Pingcheng 平城. Several

years later, King Han Xin was killed in battle during an invasion into the Han territory. Before he died, the king gave birth to a boy, likely with a Xiongnu woman, named Tuidang 頹當 after the settlement in which he was born. During the reign of Emperor Wen, Han Tuidang and his nephew, Han Ying 韓嬰, surrendered to the Han with their clan. Han Tuidang was made Lord of Gonggao 弓高, and Ying Lord of Xiangcheng 襄城. Han Tuidang was known as a fierce warrior. His bastard grandsons, Han Yan 韓嫣 and Han Yue 韓說 were both famous and served at Emperor Wu's court.

Han Yan was mostly known as a homosexual lover of Emperor Wu's. However, he was also a warrior with good horsemanship and archery skills, which would not be surprising given his family history. He was also well versed in Xiongnu military affairs. Because of Emperor Wu's campaign against the Xiongnu, Han Yan became even more prominent with his skills and knowledge. His presence in the palace, however, offended the empress dowager and he was eventually ordered to commit suicide.

His younger brother Han Yue was also a seasoned military leader who had fought with the Xiongnu and the Eastern Yue. He was enfeoffed twice, first as Lord of Longluo 龍雒 and later as Lord of Andao 按道. He was involved in the *wugu* incident and was killed by the Crown Prince Wei. His heir, Han Xing 韓興, possibly sided with the Crown Prince, was executed by Emperor Wu. However, considering Han Yue's contribution and death for the crown, his younger son Han Zeng 韓增 was, nonetheless, made Lord of Longluo in his traitor brother's place. It was Han Zeng that rose to the unprecedented prominence of the family. He served three emperors, Wu, Zhao, and Xuan. He stood with Huo Guang in installing Emperor Xuan. During the reign of Emperor Xuan, he was titled Grand Cavalry

Commander and Commander of Chariots and Cavalry, and was part of the central decision-making circle, and his position came only after that of Huo Guang and Zhang Anshi 張安世, the first lord of a two-century long lineage that was considered the most prominent during the two Han dynasties. His lordship continued until the end of the Western Han.

The transition from Western Han to Eastern Han saw some changes in the status of these military lineages. One of the major reforms in the Eastern Han military institutions is the abolition of universal military services. Mark Lewis observes that the Eastern Han military moved from a system where all adult males were registered recruits to more reliance on professional armies in standing commands.[30] The official recruitment also shifted to a more closely regulated recommendation system. It had become more common for those who were rated as "filial and incorruptible" or other good grades to be raised into leadership positions in civil as well as military services. However, while there was certainly a retreatment of the overwhelming majority of military leaders coming from border commanderies' military lineages, such military aristocracy did not get wiped out completely. Instead, the background of the military leadership became much more diverse in the Eastern Han.

Take for example the military leaders towards the end of the Eastern Han dynasty. The western front with the Qiang tribes experienced continuous turmoil. Huangfu Gui 皇甫規 (104 – 174 AD), most famous for his deeds as a borderland general who served as the Commander that Regulates Liaodong 度遼將軍 as well as Commandant that Protects the Qiang 護羌校尉, hailed from one of the old Six Commnaderies, Anding. His family was

[30] Mark Lewis, "The Han Abolition of Universal Military Service," *Warfare in Chinese History*. Ed. Hans van de Ven. E. J. Brill, 2000.

certainly of those prominent military lineages. His grandfather, Ling 令, was also once the Commander that Regulates Liaodong. His father was Commandant General of Fufeng 扶風都尉, and his older brother Jie 節 governor of Yanmen 雁門 (both of these two positions would likely see extensive military activities due to their locations). Huangfu Gui's nephew, Huangfu Song 皇甫嵩 (? - 195 AD) brought the family's glory to its peak by vanquishing the Yellow Turban rebellion. He ended up as the Commander of Chariots and Cavalry and assumed one of the Three Excellences titles, the Grand Commandant 太尉.

Another borderland general, Zhang Huan 張奐 (104 – 181 AD), took a slightly different path. Zhang Huan was the son of Zhang Dun 張惇, governor of Hanyang 漢陽. He was not from a military background but instead was famous for classics learning. However, opportunity brought him to a military position on the northwestern border. From there, he grew into a successful general. At the same time, he maintained his scholarly works, and his sons were known for their literary talents and none of them went into military. Zhang Huan's main political rival and fellow general, Duan Jiong 段熲 (? – 179 AD), however, resembled more of the typical Western Han *liangjiazi* general. He was a descendant of the famous Western Han Protector General of the Western Regions, Duan Huizong 段會宗 (84 – 10 BC) who pacified Wusun 烏孫 during his term. Duan Jiong was skilled in horsemanship and archery. However, he started his career as a civil official but later turned into military. By the time he entered into military, the conflicts between the Han and the Qiang became especially violent, and Duan Jiong was known for his heavy-handed suppression. He would also eventually receive the title of Grand Commandant.

Although Huangfu Gui, Zhang Huan and Duan Jiong were collectively known as the Three Brights of the Liang province, the differences between them were obvious which is very distinct from the almost identical promotion path of their Western Han counterpart Li Guang, Zhao Chongguo, and Feng Fengshi 馮奉世 (? – 39 BC), the last of whom will be discussed later.

III. Martial Individualism

> *"The ru disrupts order with his graphic words. The xia offends against the forbidden with his martial prowess."*
>
> Hanfei 韓非 (280 – 223 BC)[31]

Now let us turn our attention to the individuals acting outside state capacity. When we talk about individuals with martial prowess, we cannot help but notice a group so called *xia* 俠. The term *xia* seems to suggest that it originally refers to a specific kind of behavior where one lets go and follows one's own volition.[32] It is often used as a composite word in conjunction with *ren* (to rely on, to entrust) as in *renxia* 任俠. A number of commentators offered explanations.

[31] *Hanfeizi*, 49.1057

[32] Making the spirit, being fond of the spirit and relying on the spirit 為氣，好氣，任氣

Ru Chun's commentary on *renxia* in the *shiji* says, "to mutually trust with someone is reliance; to share right and wrong is being *xia*. This is what is referred to as 'with authority, (one) traverses provinces and villages; with force, (one) subdues nobles and lords"[33]

Ying Shao 應劭 (153 – 196 AD) says, "reliance refers to that which possesses (characteristics of) stability and completeness and can be entrusted with matters."[34]

Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581 – 645 AD) says, "reliance refers to that which relies on and makes use of its vigor and power. The meaning of *xia* is to grasp and hold, thus it is to hold and support someone with authority and power."[35]

From these commentaries, it becomes clear that there are two core values attached to the behavior of *renxia*: 1) use of force, power, or authority; 2) sharing responsibility and assisting some else. In addition, Xun Yue 荀悅 (149 – 209 AD) says "those who establish emotions evenly, control punishment and reward, and build up private connections, in order to stand strong in the world are referred to as the wandering *xia*."[36] Having said the above, we could now attempt to define what exactly a *xia* is.

First of all, he must possess great power. Often it would be a person's martial prowess. However, it seems that in rare cases, authority established though one's deeds seems to be an acceptable replacement for the physical violence. Second, he must act in such a way

[33] *Shiji*, 100.2729

[34] *Shiji*, 37.1975

[35] *Shiji*, 37.1975

[36] *Shiji*, 124.3181

that benefits others. He must share another person's burden and act as if it was his own responsibility. His use of force cannot be merely for his personal gains. Third, he must act according to his own will. Lastly, his relationship with others has to be private and personal. Let us look at a few examples.

Sima Qian traces the origins of the *xia*, at least partially, to the Four Princes of the Warring States.[37] The Wei 魏 prince Wuji 無忌, Lord of Xinling 信陵, was probably the most representative of the *xia* characteristics. In terms of power, he was the half-brother of the king and a feudal lord in his own right. In addition, he was not only brave, intelligent and generous but also humble and respectful, thus possessing the power of virtues. His most celebrated exploit was to rescue the neighboring Kingdom of Zhao from the Qin aggression upon the request from a Zhao prince. Therefore, he was taking another's problem into his own hands, and he was ready to die for the mission. Furthermore, he was so resolved to rescue Zhao that he defied his elder brother and liege lord, the king's order to not intervene. His eventual success was attributed to the help he received from his friends, with whom he had built up strong personal bonds. The old recluse Hou Ying 侯嬴 who offered the advice to take over the Wei army with a clever ruse and committed suicide to show his loyalty did so to express his gratitude for the kindness and respect the prince had shown him. The herculean butcher Zhu Hai 朱亥, for the same reason, killed the Wei general with a massive hammer so that the prince could seize control of the army. Even the king's consort Ruji 如姬 stole the tally to redeploy the army for the prince because he had previously avenged her

[37] *Shiji*, 124.3183

father. The whole development of this event is a perfect reflection of the values of the *renxia* world.

The early Han figure, Zhu Jia 朱家, is another typical example that fits the *xia* model. It is said that he had saved the lives of hundreds of renowned masters and countless commers (presumably during the wars of the Qin conquest). But he would never talk about it much less seeking repayment. When he gave out relief money, he started from the poorest. While he was extremely generous to others, he lived a humble life himself eating plain food, wearing simple clothing and riding a small oxen cart. He saved the famous general Ji Bu 季布 (101 – 220 AD) when he was being hunted down by the emperor yet when Ji Bu once again rose to fame and wealth, he avoided him.[38]

It was quite a trend for Early Han people to engage in *renxia* activities. Even a number of figures that rose high on the political hierarchy were known as *renxia*. Zhang Liang,[39] Ji Bu,[40] Dou Ying 竇嬰 (? – 131 BC),[41] Guan Fu 灌夫 (? – 131 BC),[42] and Zheng Zhuang 鄭莊 [43] are just a few examples.

[38] *Shiji*, 64.3184

[39] *Shiji*, 55.2621

[40] *Shiji*, 100.3681

[41] *Shiji*, 49.2499

[42] *Shiji*, 107.3828

[43] *Shiji*, 120.3112

Today, in the modern Chinese context, *xia* is a person that acts selflessly to help the weak and stand up against the oppressor with his (unusual) power. It has a strong positive connotation that such a person is almost like a superhero in popular culture. However, a *xia* in Early Chinese usage referred to the above-mentioned mode of behavior and a way of life. It was at best a neutral term, and often times, in the eyes of those who put great emphasis on law and order, it was abnormal and may even be an evil. Both *shiji* and *hanshu* have dedicated chapters to recording these wandering *xia*. But it is quite easy to discern the difference in attitude of the two authors towards them.

Sima Qian seems to be quite fond of the *xia*. He argues that even though some of their actions may not be conforming to the proper and upright ways, they were trustworthy, genuine, reliable, selfless, and modest. He also recognizes that the *xia* were simply upholding their own ideals even if they were not exactly the same as the orthodoxy. They should be differentiated from the simple bullies. He even laments the fact that he could not find records of the commoner *xia* in the pre-Qin time. On the other hand, Ban Gu shows little appreciation of the way of *renxia*. He sees them as at best outliers of the society at worst disruptors of the proper cosmic order. The power these people, from the Four Princes of the Warring States to the Han dynasty commoner *youxia*, displayed was usurped from the proper imperial authority. Their very existence stood witness to the erosion of world order.

The Han emperors would probably have resonated a lot with Ban Gu's opinion. Guo Xie's 郭解, one of the most famous *xia* figures, fate is a good indication. Guo Xie was quite a criminal in his youth but earned people's trust and respect by acting humble, just and forgiving later in his life. His renown grew to the point where people would kill for him without him even asking. This is a challenge to the imperial authority if we regard the

monopoly on violence is exclusively reserved for the emperor and the state. In the words of the official, Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 (199 – 121 BC), who sentenced him to death, his first transgression was that he, as a commoner, "executed authority."[44] The distrust of the emperors towards the *xia* was not entirely unfounded. When the Prince of Huainan attempted to rebel, he was indeed advised to take advantage of the wandering *xia*.[45]

Going back to the Hanfei quote in the beginning of this section. We could notice the interesting juxtaposition of *wen* and *wu* as well as *ru* and *xia*. This kind of juxtaposition occurs fairly frequently in the Han records. For example, when Sima Qian talks about his travel to Xue 薛, the domain of Lord Mengchang 孟嘗君, one of the Four Princes of the Warring States and a generous patron of the *xia*, he says that he noticed that there were a lot of young brutes in the streets of Xue which is quite different from the neighboring Zou 鄒 and Lu 魯. When he asked for the reason, someone answered that it was due to the fact that Lord Mengchang gathered too many vicious people of *renxia* that supposedly changed the local customs.[46] Zou and Lu are the birth places of Confucius and Mencius and thus represent a refined and cultured environment. Yet, the neighboring Xue was completely different which provides a stark contrast as if *ru* and *xia* are natural opposites. This perception is further reinforced if we consider the fact that, in the earlier story about Guo Xie, it was Gongsun Hong who ordered Guo Xie's death. If Guo Xie is the most iconic of the *xia*, then Gongsun Hong was the pivotal instrument in pushing Confucianism into the

[44] Shiji, 64.3188

[45] Shiji, 118.3090

[46] Shiji, 75.2363

status of orthodoxy in the Han dynasty. Some historians indeed consider that the rise of Confucianism since the reign of Emperor Wu contributed to the demise of the once flourishing *youxia* phenomenon in the early Han.[47] However, this view would be overly simplified.

An interesting case is Guo Ji 郭伋 (39 BC – 47 AD) who was an important figure that helped the founder of the Eastern Han, Liu Xiu 劉秀 (5 BC – 57 AD), in his administration. He served both at the center as one of the emperor's advisors but also in leading a military government in the border provinces successfully fighting both rebels as well as Xiongnu incursions. What's more relevant in our discussion is the fact that this Guo Ji's great grandfather was the aforementioned infamous Guo Xie. Despite the fact that Guo Xie was executed, and his lineage supposedly wiped out by Gongsun Hong, at least one of his great grandsons, Guo Fan 郭梵 not only survived but thrived. Guo Fan in his life had attained the position of a commandery governor. He gave birth to Guo Ji. By the end of the Western Han, Guo Ji was a midlevel military official in his youth. This already resembles a pattern of the rise of a typical great military family that we have discussed above. Guo Ji during his governor terms demonstrated excellent military talent and eventually joined forces with Liu Xiu and became a renowned minister in the Eastern Han.

Indeed, the temporary silence of the *renxia* in the late Western Han by no means indicates its eradication. When the rebellions broke out against Wang Mang, many of the local leaders that raised armies to fight were of the *renxia* type. Emperor Guangwu's older brother, Liu Yan 劉縯 (? – 23 BC), who started the rebellion in their home base, was such a

[47] *Hou han shu*, 67.2184

person.[48] Many of Liu Xiu's close allies were also known as *renxia* in their youth. For example, Dou Rong 竇融 (16 BC – 62) was descended from one of the Western Han imperial consort's families. His family resembled one of those military aristocracies we have discussed above. Dou Rong was not only a distinguished military leader but also famous for his *renxia*.

The fact is that the so called *renxia* had merged into the mainstream officialdom but had never vanished. When the time of wars and chaos struck again, they emerged immediately. The same can also be said of the Eastern Han. When the Yellow Turban rebellion had brought the empire into disarray, warlords fought amongst themselves. Military leaders such as Yuan Shao 袁紹 (? – 202 AD) and Cao Cao 曹操 (155 – 220 AD) among countless others were also known for their *renxia* behavior.

IV. *Wu* of Women

> *Eqin then straightened her body and reached her hands forward. She held his forehead in place with her left hand, and pounded his throat with her right hand, repeatedly tripping and spinning. (Li Shou) fell down following her hand (attacks). Consequently, she drew his knife to cut off Shou's head.*[49]

The above passage is an excerpt from Pei Songzhi's 裴松之 (372 – 451 AD) commentary on the biography of Pang Yu 龐淯 in Chen Shou's 陳壽 (233 – 297 AD) *Sanguo zhi*, where he quotes from the now lost book *Lie nu zhuan* 列女傳 by the Western

[48] *Hou han shu*, 14.549
[49] Sanguo zhi, 18.472.

Jin scholar Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215 – 282 AD).[50] The quoted chapter is supposed to supplement the story in the main body of the *Sanguo zhi* text where it tells of a certain Pang

[50] I think a clarification for the sources I am using here is necessary. I am writing on the Han dynasty and most of the evidence is based on literary sources. However, not all of them are by the hands of the people who had lived in the Han. How much can we claim that a piece of writing reflects the thinking of a Han person when the author lived only a few centuries after the fall of the Han? Therefore, in this thesis, I only use sources technically by the Han writers when writing about their thoughts but other sources for the more "material" facts such as institutions, events and etc. However, in the case of Pang Eqin, I make an exception to this rule. Technically, all of the sources used in this section were written after the fall of the Han, but I still take some of them as to reflect the Han thinking. I have several reasons. There is a genuine ambiguity in the demarcation of historical period here. I have used examples from the Three States period to illustrate Han thinking previously because the persons in question had lived under the Eastern Han. If we want to "cheat" a little further here, we could argue that the Shu Han was an extension of the Eastern Han as many did throughout history, and Chen Shou and Huangfu Mi could therefore be considered at least to coincide with the Han. More importantly, changes in people's thinking do not happen in a way that is as clear-cut as the change in the political regime. And in this case, change in the latter is equally ambiguous. Chen Shou's Sanguo zhi has Pang Yu in the records of the state of Wei, and the Hou Han shu has his mother in the "Lie nu zhuan" of the Han likely because she had lived most of her life as a subject of the Han dynasty. Similar double appearances of certain other characters in both Sanguo zhi and Hou Han shu indicate that

Eqin 龐娥親, mother of the military commander Pang Yu, who succeeded in avenging her father's death by personally slaying his murderer. The original story, like most text in the *Sanguo zhi*, is a succinct one that only gives minimal information about the event. In contrast, the fact that Huangfu's account is full of dramatic details like the one quoted above is quite remarkable.

Before we dive into the significance of the textual differences, let me give a brief description of the story in question first. According to his biography in the *Sanguo zhi*, Pang Yu was an official and military commander of the Wei state during the Three States[51] period (220 – 280 AD). Because of his exploits, he was well known for his loyalty and heroism by his contemporaries. Attached to his biography was that of his mother's. Eqin was originally from the Zhao family. Her father, Zhao An 趙安, was murdered by a certain Li Shou 李壽 from the same county. Before the Zhaos could exact revenge as dictated by Han custom, a plague hit the family and killed all three brothers of Eqin's. With all male members of the family gone, the only surviving daughter, Eqin, took upon herself the task of blood vengeance. Eventually, she found an opportunity and successfully assassinated the enemy.

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early Medieval writers also faced such dilemma. As a result, I regard this piece of writing attributed to Huangfu Mi and those of his contemporaries' reflections and continuation of the Han thinking even though traditionally Chen Shou and Huangfu Mi have been treated as Jin people.

[51] The more conventional naming is the Three Kingdoms period. However, the translation of guo 國 into kingdom is misleading and some scholars chose to use Three States which I concur.

Her action was well received by society. Not only was she not punished but she was regarded as an exemplary woman by the locals, the officials as well as the state, which guaranteed her a position in the dynastic histories that we can still read today.

Three surviving versions of the same story exist in early literary sources. The earliest and likely the most original is the one that is in the main body of the *Sanguo zhi* text.[52] The longest and most detailed is the one attributed to Huangfu Mi in Pei Songzhi's commentary to the *Sanguo zhi*.[53] The *Hou Han shu* also includes one in its "*Lie nu zhuan"* chapter that is somewhere between the *Sanguo zhi* one and the Pei commentary one in terms of length and detail,[54] which may be a result of adapting the more dramatic version of Huangfu's to fit its more "official" tone of a dynastic history. However, Huangfu's *Lie nu zhuan"* is no long extant and only a few scattered passages have survived in the various commentaries to the present day. Therefore, it is difficult to judge its authenticity as a whole from overall writing style and trustworthiness of the book. The Eqin story is the most complete we have.

Looking at the particular story alone, the author is not likely to have had direct contact with the characters mentioned in it. According to his biography in the *Jin shu*, Huangfu Mi died in the third year of Taikang 太康 (282 AD) at the age of 68 *sui*.[55] On the other hand, Pang Yu died during the reign of Cao Pi (187 – 226 AD, r. 220 – 226 AD),[56]

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[52] *Sanguo zhi*, 18.472.

[53] *Sanguo zhi*, 18.472 – 473.

[54] *Hou Han shu*, 84.2796 – 2797.

[55] *Jin shu*, 51.1418.

[56] *Sanguo zhi*, 18.472.

meaning that Huangfu had not even reached his teenage years when Pang Yu had died. However, both Pang Yu and his mother were well known figures of their time. Chen Shou and Huangfu Mi would very likely have heard of their stories from people who had more direct dealings with them or could even have met their descendants in person. More importantly, both of their writings might have been based on the same earlier written source, the biography of Eqin by a certain Liang Kuan 梁寬.[57] We don't know much about Liang Kuan except that he was from the same province as the Pangs,[58] and may likely have had some personally connections with Eqin. Possibly for these reasons, he is said to have written a biography for Eqin after her death, which might be the earliest common source of the later records.[59]

In any case, Huangfu Mi's account is full of dramatic dialogues and action sequences, which are likely fictional additions for didactic purposes. The title of the lost book, *Lie nu zhuan*, should remind one of the more famous Western Han work of the same name by Liu

[57] Ibid, 18.473.

[58] Liang Kuan does not have an independent biography in the Sanguo zhi but the same name appears several times in the biographies of others, which suggest that he was a military figure originally from Anding in the Liang province 涼州 and most of his records are related to Ma Chao's 馬超 (176 – 222 AD) rebellion. See Sanguo zhi 18.473, 25.587, 25.588, 36.782.

[59] Indirect evidence is that both Huangfu Mi and Liang Kuan were from the same county. Another surviving chapter from Huangfu Mi's Lie nu zhuan is about a woman from the Tianshui 天水 county of the Liang province. One could speculate that Huangfu Mi's focus was on his familiar provincials. See Sanguo zhi, 25.587.

Xiang 劉向 (77 – 6 BC). The content of the latter was clearly intended for propagating Confucian ideals of proper womanly behavior. Huangfu Mi, a renowned Confucian scholar of his time, was devoted to a recluse life and education, but many of whose disciples became important officials in the Jin.[60] Given such background, it is not unreasonable to assume that his *Lie nu zhuan* was modeled after Liu Xiang's and served similar purposes. In fact, the *Zizhi tongjian* of the Song dynasty (960 – 1276 AD), which is known for its didactic values, has adopted Huangfu's version. As a result, his account of Pang Eqin is a valuable source to help us understand the Han imagination of women's martial spirit.

As indicated in the previous section, blood vengeance was a common practice encouraged and expected of kinsmen in the Han dynasty. However, it was usually performed by the male members of the family. When all three of the Zhao brothers died, their enemy Li Shou is said to be pleased. This change in attitude is in stark contrast with his previously being "deeply concerned and prepared" when the brothers were still alive.[61] The only reason that Eqin had to take up the duty is because no male members survived in her family. In other words, she was only a substitute,[62] but a substitute by her own choice as she was certainly not expected to avenge her father by social norms.

[60] *Jin shu*, 51.1409 – 1418.

[61] Ibid, 18.472.

[62] There is one more example of blood vengeance by the hands of a female in Hou Han shu. A certain Lu Rong's husband was killed by a bandit. When the bandit was apprehended by the local authority, Lu Rong pleaded to personally behead the bandit and took his head as

Nevertheless, her resolve to complete the deed was unwavering and she made no attempt to hide her intention to exact revenge on the murderer. It is important to note that in Huangfu's writing, Eqin did not only avenge her father by killing Li Shou, but she did it in such a way that fully exemplifies her martial prowess. Her fighting with Li Shou, who is described as an arrogant bully, strong, armed and riding on a tall horse, was not a smooth one. She missed the first strike and lost her blade. But she succeeded in apprehending him with her bare hands and killed him by cutting off his head with her enemy's own blade, thus concluding a perfect revenge in the most violent way.

In this regard, Huangfu's version is quite different from that of Chen Shou's. The latter makes it clear that Eqin "covered her cart with curtain and hid a dagger in her sleeve," and she killed Li Shou by *ci* 刺 (assassinating).[63] There is a minor inconsistency in Huangfu's writing where he claims that Eqin "secretively bought an engraved blade" but at the same time, she relayed her declaration of vengeance to Li Shou.[64] A possible explanation is that this is a remnant from the original story that Huangfu had based his writing on, where

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sacrifice for her deceased husband. However, there was no indication that Lu Rong was trained in using a weapon. See Hou Han shu 84.2795.

[63] The character ci could both mean literally "to stab" or by extension "to assassinate" as in cike 刺客 (assassin). In this particular case, since it is implied that Eqin's killing was done in disguise, it is probably more likely to mean "to assassinate." Similar usages in this sense can be found in Sanguo zhi. For example, "卿得無為劉備刺客邪," *Sanguo zhi*, 3.107. or "今直刺殺之以謝百姓", *Sanguo zhi*, 10.315.

[64] *Sanguo zhi*, 18.472.

unexpected assassination was recorded, but Huangfu changed it to broad daylight melee fighting. As a side note, the *Hou Han shu* also adopted this assassination narrative.

Therefore, the exemplary display of martiality is likely an intentional creation by Huangfu who wanted to convey to his audience a rare but desirable quality of a model woman. This is not the only instance where martial prowess of a female character is recorded in an approving manner during this period. Chen Shou's *Sanguo zhi* writes that Sun Quan's 孫權 (182 – 252 AD) sister, who was married to her brother's ally-cum-rival, Liu Bei 劉備 (161 – 223 AD), was a tough, bold yet talented and clever lady like her older brothers. She maintained a retinue of more than a hundred armed handmaids and always made her husband wary of her intentions.[65] Therefore, a woman's ability to command a weapon and familiarity with martial arts are not unheard of and can sometimes be a symbol of their bravery and commitment to a cause.[66]

In addition, in these writings, the ability and willingness of the woman to use violence is carefully approached so that it does not diminish her supposed femininity as dictated by social norms. The stereotypical traits of a woman, such as softness, sentimentality and physical inferiority, are repeatedly emphasized. The image of being martial is not simply supplanted by a generic male or gender-neutral version that erases the female characteristics,

[65] Ibid, 37.793.

[66] The *Hou Han shu* "Lie nu zhuan" has yet another example of a woman wielding a blade with the intention to fight off bandits in order to protect her honor although her capability with such a weapon is not clear because she was forced to commit suicide to protect her mother-in-law before she could start the fight. See Hou Han shu, 84.2793.

but one can proclaim with confidence, from reading these texts, that this is a woman, a daughter, a wife or a mother being martial.

However, the deployment of violence by women is distinctive also in that, while I have discussed, in the previous section, about how individual appropriation of the dominance on violence challenged and undermined state authority, where the state took measures to ever so greedily guard its monopoly on violence, the same cannot be observed with women. In all versions of Eqin's revenge, after she had killed Li Shou, she turned herself in to the local authority in order to receive the ultimate punishment, which indicates that while blood vengeance was expected and encouraged, private execution of a free person was not only illegal but punishable by death. By leaving herself at the mercy of local authority, Eqin made clear that her intent was not to challenge the order but that she was a law-abiding and obedient subject. The magistrate now faced a dilemma of enforcing the law or honoring a widely accepted social norm of blood vengeance. He chose to maintain both by resigning and letting go of Eqin. However, she did not gratefully take his goodwill but insisted on making an example of herself. Either the magistrate or his military aide forcibly took her home, and she was subsequently pardoned by a higher authority. Pang Eqin's choosing to be submissive to authority was in turn well rewarded.

What's at play here is that in Confucian narratives where a ruler, a lord or a higher authority is often made analogous with the father figure, Pang Eqin's filial piety to her father is fully reconciled with her loyalty to the state. Her personal heroism is no longer a challenge to state authority but rather reinforces it. Then we can realize that Pang Yu's fame for being loyal and heroic is perfectly mirrored in his mother's image. It is, therefore, no surprise that steles were erected in her honor for the whole realm to see. An exemplary woman produces an exemplary son.

There is another mother figure in the Former Han whose bravery illustrates a form of martiality that did not involve the use of physical violence. Feng Yuan 馮媛 (? – 6 BC), also commonly known as Feng Zhaoyi 昭儀 (lit. illuminating propriety) or Consort Dowager of Zhongshan 中山太后, was one of Emperor Yuan of Han's 漢元帝 (75 – 33 BC, r. 48 – 33 BC) favorite consorts whose grandson eventually became the last traditionally recognized legitimate emperor of the Former Han, Emperor Ping of Han 漢平帝 (9 BC – 6 AD, r. 1 BC – 6 AD).[67]

Lady Feng was the daughter of Feng Fengshi 馮奉世 (? – 39 BC), one of the most celebrated military commanders of the Former Han, whose family, similar to the other military aristocracies presented in the above section, had been military leaders since the Warring States period. Their ancestor Feng Ting was the governor of Shangdang who participated in the pivotal battle of Changping between the kingdoms of Qin and Zhao. During the reign of Emperor Wen, another forefather of the family, Feng Tang advised the emperor on Xiongnu strategies. The son of Feng Tang, Feng Sui, served as palace attendant during the reign of Emperor Wu and was friend with Sima Qian.[68] Feng Fengshi was probably Feng Sui's son. Although Feng Fengshi was not from the famous Six Commanderies, he still came from a prominent military family of good standing and started his own career as a palace attendant. Over the years, he accumulated enough merits to become Commander of the Rear and also Director of the Palace Attendants. Ban Gu claims that his fame only came after that of Zhao Chongguo. Several of his sons also made it to

[67] *Han shu*, 97.4005 – 4007.

[68] *Shi ji*, 102.2757 – 2761.

prominence. One daughter was selected to be an imperial consort, who is the focus of this section.[69]

Lady Feng's life is described in the *Han shu* in two stages, one as a consort of Emperor Yuan and the other as the mother of Prince of Zhongshan. Her natal family as well as the Feudatory of Zhongshan was involved in one of the most significant political intrigues in the late stages of the Former Han that shaped the final political landscape of the waning empire.

The convoluted plot is beyond the scope of this thesis.[70] For our purposes, the only relevant facts are that Lady Feng and Fu Yao 傅瑤 (? – 2 BC) are presented as contrasting

[69] *Han shu*, 79.3293-3294.

[70] The events are described in the annals of emperors Yuan (v. 9), Cheng 成帝 (v. 10), Ai (v. 11), Ping (v. 12), the biographies of Feng Fengshi (v. 79), Wang Mang 王莽 (v. 99), Kong Guang 孔光 (v. 81), Empress Yuan 元后 (v. 98), Imperial Affine 外戚 (v. 97), Dong Xian 董賢 (v. 83), Shi Dan 史丹 and Fu Xi 傅喜 (v. 82) in the Han shu. In short, the relatives of Emperor Ai, the Fu family, were allied with the Zhao 趙 and Ding 丁 families who were also natal families of imperial consorts and Dong Xian, who was a homosexual lover of Emperor Ai and whose family gained immense power as a result. Their major political rivals were the Wang family who were the natal family of Empress Dowager Wang, the principle wife of Emperor Yuan, and their political allies such as Kong Guang 孔光 (65 BC – 5 AD) who was a leading figure of the Confucian scholar-officials of the time. The Fus, through their alliance with the Zhaos, succeeded in placing Emperor Ai on the throne and enjoyed a period of

counterparts in the biographies of the imperial affine. They were both given the title of *Zhaoyi*, which had been specifically created by Emperor Yuan to exemplify their status as second only to the Empress. While Lady Feng's son was given the Feudatory of Zhongshan, Lady Fu's was made Prince of Dingtao 定陶王 (therefore, Lady Fu is also known as Consort Dowager of Dingtao 定陶太后). Their grandsons became the last two legitimate emperors of the Former Han respectively (Lady Fu's grandson became Emperor Ai of Han 漢哀帝 (27 – 1 BC, r. 7 – 1 BC)).

However, their similarities end here. The authors of *Han shu*, by juxtaposing Lady Feng with Lady Fu, show their favor of the former over the latter in a number of ways. Lady Fu is described as possessing talent and sagacity but also good at interpersonal skills.[71] However, these skills were not utilized in a plausible manner. The *Han shu* attributed

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great power and prestige eclipsing the former power holder, the Wang family. However, after the death of Emperor Ai, the Wangs turned the table by placing the son of Feng Yuan, who happened to have been a longtime rival of the Fus, on the throne, ending the rule of the Fus and their allies, thus regaining power. However, despite the fact that a prince of Zhongshan was made emperor, his maternal relatives such as the Fengs and the Weis 衛 never gained real power. The Fengs were exiled previously to their native land and never came back. The Weis were also deprived of power later. As a result, Emperor Ping was merely a puppet of Wang Mang, who eventually usurped the throne from the Han. Although this thesis does not go into details of these events, this brief introduction to the background is nevertheless important to understand the purposeful juxtaposition of Lady Feng with Lady Fu.

[71] *Han shu*, 97.4000.

Emperor Ai's ascendency to the throne to Lady Fu's bribery of Empress Zhao 趙皇后 (i.e.趙飛燕, 45 – 1 BC), then wife of Emperor Cheng 成帝 (51 – 7 BC, r. 33 – 7 BC), who manipulated the emperor into taking Lady Fu's grandson as the heir apparent, which, according to the renowned scholar Kong Guang, who happened to be Lady Fu's political enemy, was not appropriate in terms of Confucian rituals and rites. Her manipulativeness is also shown by how she took her grandson away from his birth mother and fostered him by herself so that she could have a closer relationship with the future emperor. In contrast to her being kind and cordial with people of all stations when she was but a consort, Lady Fu is described as being so "haughty" that she even addressed the birth mother of Emperor Cheng as "old woman" after she had gained power.[72]

On the other hand, Lady Feng is depicted as a lady of high birth whose family had contributed to the empire in their various services, notably military. But her most exemplary exploit is her personal heroism. It is said that during the reign of Emperor Yuan, the emperor and his consorts were once at an enclosure of beasts to watch them fight. All of a sudden, a bear got loose and came at the emperor. The servants and consorts all ran away in fright. At this moment of great crisis, Lady Feng stepped forward and stood between the emperor and the frenzied animal. Seizing the opportunity, the guards rushed in and killed the bear. In the aftermath, when the emperor asked why Lady Feng did not run like the others, she responded "a ferocious beast stops once it gets a person. I was afraid that the bear would

[72] Ibid, 97.4002.

come at Your Majesty. Therefore, I blocked it with my body." For this reason and the fact that Lady Feng had given birth to a prince, she was given the special title *Zhaoyi*.[73]

Notice here that in these passages about Lady Feng, Lady Fu's name appears twice. The first time, when the bear attacked, "Fu Zhaoyi, among servants and consorts, all ran away in fright." The second time, when Lady Feng gave her answer as to why she did not run, it is said that "Fu Zhaoyi, among others, all felt ashamed."[74] It is clear that there were multiple consorts and servants who were present at the event, but the only person who is specifically singled out and mentioned by name is Lady Fu. The authors wanted the readers to compare and contrast the two ladies. We can only speculate as to why the *Han shu* shows favoritism of Lady Feng over Lady Fu. Possibly, the Fu family was seen as corrupt and power hungry and contributed to the fall of the Han. Lady Fu, as the manipulative hand behind it, was thought of as being partly responsible for the fall of a great empire by the Later Han intellectuals.

In any case, what's important to us is the character exemplified here of Lady Feng. She showed extraordinary courage and loyalty by standing between the beast and the emperor in order to protect him when all the other ladies ran away. The fact that there is no indication of her possessing any sort of martial skills or of weapons amplifies her heroism. Her explanation to her action is also simple and lacks sophistication. Indeed, such almost crude quality can be further illustrated in the depiction of her second stage of life as the mother of Prince of Zhongshan. In her biography, her son was first made Prince of Xindu 信

[73] Ibid, 97.4005.

[74] Ibid.

都 and then moved to Zhongshan. Lady Feng simply went with the imperial decision without any interference. When Lady Fu hurried to the capital to bribe the influencers around the emperor, Lady Feng was at the Feudatory with her son.[75] Like Lady Fu, Lady Feng also took care of her grandson. Unlike Lady Fu, she did it out of compassion rather than manipulation for personal gain. When the young prince felt ill, Lady Feng divined and prayed for his recovery. While Lady Fu's plot won her grandson the imperial throne, Lady Feng's prayers eventually led to the demise of the Feng family.

Lady Feng was framed in a case where her prayers for the young prince were interpreted as curses to kill the new emperor and his grandmother, Lady Fu, so that her grandson could succeed the throne, and she was put in jail and interrogated. The event is presented in an ironic way, of course, because it is Lady Fu who coveted the throne. During the interrogation event, the reader would learn more of Lady Feng. First, her heroic rescue of Emperor Yuan had never been known until this point by people outside the imperial palace. Even though it was probably her most significant merit, she never brought that up by herself, and it was Lady Fu, of all people, who let it loose when she intended to pressure Lady Feng into submission. Second, Lady Feng upheld the truth about her false accusations and never

[75] This can also be seen as a subtle indication of Lady Feng's character of honesty and loyalty as opposed to Lady Fu's. The Han feudal lords, when held no positions at the court, were supposed to stay within their fiefs. This is especially important for the imperial princes so that they could not interfere with politics in the capital. The compliance by Lady Feng is juxtaposed with the manipulation by Lady Fu who took advantage of her trip to the capital and made her grandson the new heir apparent.

gave in to tortures and executions of her family members. Only when she eventually learnt that this was entirely a setup by Lady Fu to get rid of her, she committed suicide.

In the end, the reader is given the image of a lady who is plain, brave, kind, headstrong and honest. This image is the direct opposite of Lady Fu's exquisiteness, sophistication, manipulativeness, hypocrisy, and deceptiveness. In other words, if Lady Fu is a person of *wen*,[76] then Lady Feng is the embodiment of *wu*. And this simple and crude *wu* is evidently appreciated by the Han intellectuals like the authors of the *Han shu*.

In this section, I have presented two women who displayed extraordinary possession of the trait *wu*. While Pang Eqin's *wu* is manifested in her command of physical power, Feng Yuan's is more subtle yet amplified by her mental strength. In this sense, their *wu* in both cases is highly in line with the early Confucian concept of *de* 德, and they were both highly appreciated and celebrated by the Han intellectual elites.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the various aspects of the concept of *wu* in the Han dynasty, from the state's institutional promotion of the *wu* in order to serve its expansionist

[76] The character *wen* 文 originally refers to patterned markings that imply a sense of beauty and order. In the positive way, the derived meanings include culture, civility and beauty. But in the negative way, it could also mean disguise, fantasy, exaggeration and misrepresentation. Lady Fu, in her depictions in the Han shu, certainly displays those qualities both positive and negative but probably leaning towards the negative.

purposes in the Western Han to the military aristocracy that arose as a result of these policies. We have noticed the self-reinforcing pattern that the lineages employed to make a long lasting aristocratic-like lineage possible. They first entered into the military services by offering fine military and martial skills. The best of them would end up being in the elite *lang* position. Being a *lang* opened doors to rise into higher military and political offices. Then by taking advantage of the sheltered privilege system, the office holders could send their descendants to serve as *lang* once again thus widening their career opportunities. Although none of the offices were strictly hereditary, some of the prominent families were able to secure a path leading to better chances at obtaining high offices in order to maintain a relatively stable station in the social hierarchy. Those who were made lords were in an even better position as the lordship not only provided permanent economic support but the prestige that came with it provided even more opportunities.[77]

However, we have to take note of the constant power struggle between the state/emperor and the lords. While the lordship is the ultimate reward to incentivize greater participation in the empire's military, the enfeoffment essentially weakened the state control over land and wealth. The Han emperor had spent much effort to reduce the power of feudal lords in the empire. Emperor Gao enfeoffed his allies with seven kingdoms and dismantled all of them in his lifetime. He left his heir with nine kingdoms ruled by members of the imperial Liu clan. However, they still caused much trouble for the generations to come until Emperor Wu divided most into small fiefdoms that posed no real threat. Emperor Wu gave out more lord titles than any other emperor of the Han dynasty except for the first emperor.

[77] For example, marriage into the imperial family. According to the Han laws, the princesses could only be married to sons of *liehou* 列侯 (lord) status or above.

Yet, he was also the one that revoked the most titles. Using the excuse of tribute gold not being pure enough, he revoked more than 100 lord titles. This is known as the *zhoujinshihou* 酎金失侯 (losing lordship over tribute gold) event.[78]

Mark Lewis argues, in *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, that the Warring States was a transitional period regarding the relationship between state and violence. By examining the performance and theorization of violence, he observes that the Spring and Autumn marked an aristocratic society centered around small individual city-states where the nucleus of authority is the head of each kinship-based aristocratic lineage. Furthermore, "martial prowess and military glory were their central concerns and indeed the very definition of manhood." However, as the wars intensified and lineages destroyed, there emerged "bureaucratic states" with expansive territories where the ruler was less "familial" but absolute and authoritarian lording over his dependents. This transition of course provides the basis for the final formation of the imperial rule and unity of China. This theory resonates well with Tanigawa Michio's argument that the Han dynasty represented a perfection of an ancient state. The Han empire was centered on the state and unity while the following "Six Dynasties" emphasized people and autonomy.[79] Linking their arguments together, the pre-Warring States society was scattered city-states organized around an aristocratic lineage head. As unification process of the Warring States slowly moved from this status and formed territorial states with authoritarian government. The imperial Han dynasty of course became the peak of this unity with a single supreme ruler at the top to bond all subjects under a single banner. Eventually, with the fall of the Han, the society descends into a more chaotic

[78] *Shiji*, 30.1439.
[79] Michio Tanigawa, *Medieval Chinese Society and the Local "Community"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). "Rethinking 'Medieval China,'" *Early Medieval China* (Routledge, 1997): 1-29.

network (which is not necessarily worse than the unity in Tanigawa's opinion) that focused more on the locality, individual and autonomy of the following Six Dynasties.

While I don't doubt the general validity of the above arguments, their perfectly neat, reasonable and logical explanation makes me wary that it does not necessarily draw the full picture of the often messy and chaotic reality. As we have seen in this paper, there have been constant struggles, compromises, and negotiations between the state and the individual, between the emperor and the various lords, between the *ru* and the *xia*, and between the *wen* and the *wu*. The blood vengeance of Guo Xie's guest led to the state's suspicion and thus his execution while that of Pang Eqin's made her a model of the state.

Similarly, according to Mark Lewis, an important change during the Han dynasty is the abolishment of universal military service, which leads to demilitarization of the population for the desire to achieve political stability. Using the examples above, we have seen that the Eastern Han's moving away from expansionist policies and excessive use of military forces, to a certain degree, did make families shift away from military aristocracy. Instead, great families based on classics learning had risen in this period. However, this transition is not so clear cut. Take, for example, the lineage of Ma Yuan 馬援 (14 BC – 49 AD). Ma Yuan was one of the founding generals of the Eastern Han renowned for his military talents. His daughter and granddaughter were married into the imperial household. In the Western Han, this would probably lead his family onto the military aristocratic path. While indeed many of his descendants served in military capacity. Not all of them did so. We can see a very much hybrid structure especially if we take into consideration the fact that one of his descendants, Ma Rong 馬融 (79 – 166 AD), was probably the most renowned scholar of classics learning of his time. There is no evidence at all that Ma Rong received any

military training. However, if we were to treat Ma Rong as a pure representative of the *ru* and the *wen* and thus denounced the *wu* as did many in the later period, we would be very mistaken. As a matter of fact, Ma Rong not only did absolutely nothing to downplay the importance of the *wu*, but on the contrary, in one of his memorials, he lamented that his generation neglected military and martial training. He even called those who prioritized *wen* over *wu* "vulgar" and "worldly."[80]

[80] *Hou Han shu*, 60.1974.

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