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The Polarization of the Concepts *Si* (Private Interest) and *Gong* (Public Interest) in Early Chinese Thought

Many scholars of early China agree that the fourth century BCE witnessed a surge in intellectual interest in concepts that have been dubbed the self, “subjectivity,” the private realm, and the body.¹ As such a sphere came into greater focus in intellectual circles, so did a new discourse that evaluated what it meant to benefit or deprive the self and its related parts. The famous statement purportedly by Yang Zhu 楊朱 (or Yangzi 楊子) that claims he was not willing to pluck out a single hair in order to benefit the world reminds us of such a discourse.² Around the same time, there also emerged discussions that polarized various ideas of self and the private sphere (*si* 私), on the one hand, versus the state and the public sphere (*gong* 公), on the other, especially in circles that concerned themselves with public policy and statecraft, but also more generally. These discussions formed a forceful counterpoint to the discourses involving human subjectivity and the body. Indeed, their open dislike of the influence of private, individual, and personal realms in politics strongly suggests that the statecraft writers were reacting to and in dialog with those intellectuals who engaged discussion of subjectivity, the self, and its agencies.

In this essay, I outline a brief history that reveals the emergent polarization of the terms *si* and *gong* in early Chinese thought, which I then discuss in light of contemporary interests in the self and the body.

¹ The foremost proponent of this view in the West was A. C. Graham, in *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1989), pp. 53–64; 95–105. Poo Mu-chou elaborates on a religion of personal welfare, and, though he does not discuss the fourth century as special in any way, his sources for documenting his points were becoming widespread then. See Poo Mu-chou, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). Nathan Sivin speaks of the emergence of the body as a microcosm of the larger cosmos during this period; see his “State, Cosmos and the Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55.1 (1995), pp. 5–37. See also John Emerson, “Yang Chu’s Discovery of the Body,” *Philosophy East and West* 46.4, (1996), pp. 533–66.

² *Mencius* 7A.26.

Rather than pit statecraft writings against self and body writings, however, I discuss these two types of writings in terms of a shared commonality: the goal of holism and unitary systematization over atomism and fragmentation. Unlike most scholarly discussions of the terms *si* and *gong*, which tend to focus exclusively on political implications, I link the discourse on these terms to the growth of a pervasive, cultural orientation that not only expressed the public-private dichotomy in a polarized, value-laden way, but that also favored concepts of unity, wholeness, objectivity, and universality over concepts of fragmentation, division, partiality, and one-sidedness. Such an orientation is described by what Mark Lewis has called the growth of an elite preference for “totality” as opposed to “partiality.”³

A note about terminology is in order. The term *si* itself was never merely defined in early China as a discrete, atomistic self. It could refer to a larger body or entity including the individual and his or her private, non-official realms, and including as well a cluster of meanings associated with what is private, unofficial, partial, particular, individual, and divided. Similarly, as *gong* developed in contrast to *si*, it came to represent what is objective, impartial, universal, impersonal, and unified, in addition to that which is “public” and “official.” In my discussion of *si* and *gong*, I do not restrict my analysis to limited translations of these terms. Instead, I contextualize the emergent polarization of *si* and *gong* in light of a larger conceptual movement that on the one hand condemned the concepts of “self-interest,” “private interest,” and partiality, defined broadly according to the connotations of *si* just mentioned, and, on the other hand, praised the conceptual cluster associated with the term “*gong*.” I use *si* and *gong* as reference points precisely because they shed interesting light upon a broader conceptual problem that engaged our ancient writers: that of partiality and incompleteness versus objectivity and completeness.

The concepts *si* and *gong* have been analyzed by a few scholars of Chinese thought, but such scholarship rarely draws explicit connections between such terms as they are applied to the state and the larger intellectual problematic just described. Liu Zehua 劉澤華, for example, discusses *gong* and *si* mostly in relationship to writings on statecraft and politics, stressing especially how *gong* was prized and *si* denigrated in relationship to the rise of authoritarian rulers and forms of government.⁴

³ Mark E. Lewis, *The Construction of Space in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 195–97.

⁴ Liu Zehua, “Chunqiu Zhanguo de ‘li gong mie si’ guannian yu shehui de zhenghe” 春秋

While I agree with Liu that the polarization of these terms appears to be linked to attempts at strengthening the central power of the state, I take pains here to show how the *gong* ideal was intended to limit the ruler's power in important ways. Also, while Liu dates the rise of *gong* and *si* discourse from Spring and Autumn times (770–481 BCE), and possibly earlier, I show that the two terms do not gain philosophical significance as an oppositional pair before the Warring States period (481–221 BCE). Even a mere glance at the sources upon which Liu relies will demonstrate that the discourse on *si-gong* was especially relevant to Warring States writers on statecraft, such as Shen Dao 慎到, Shang Yang 商鞅, Han Feizi 韓非子, Xunzi 荀子, and the authors of *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋. This suggests a more specific time frame for the rise of such a discourse, one starting from the mid-fourth century BCE, and not several centuries earlier.⁵

A few Western scholars have advanced narrower claims concerning the *si-gong* dichotomy in early China. Michael Nylan argues that Warring States Ru 儒 became increasingly interested in the ideal of *gong*, which helped shape their beliefs in renouncing hereditary rule.⁶ I do not find much to disagree with there. Paul Goldin has argued that the concept of *gong* in the *Han Feizi* should be understood as equivalent to the ruler and royal power, rather than as the “public” or “official.”⁷ Goldin furthermore states that this stands in contrast to later writings in which “*gong* typically refers to imperial control in accordance with the universal Way, and *si* denotes those troublesome areas where *gong* has failed to take hold.”⁸ This is an intriguing claim that resonates with Liu's arguments about the rise of authoritarian rulers and forms of government. To add to it, I would like to emphasize Goldin's phrase, “imperial control in accordance with the universal Way,” and highlight the main meanings of *gong* in the late Warring States in terms of such a statement. Rather than pointing first to imperial control, however, *gong* denotes a larger conceptual ideal concerned with what is universal, fair, objective, unified, and whole. In other words, the operative words for understanding *gong* in later Warring States contexts are not “imperial

戰國的立公滅私觀念與社會的整合, in idem, *Xierzhai wen gao* 洗耳齋文稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), pp. 337–73.

⁵ Ibid. For another important work on *si-gong*, see Mizoguchi Yūzō 溝口雄三, *Chūgoku no kō to shi* 中國の公と私 (Tokyo: Kembusha, 1995).

⁶ Michael Nylan, “Confucian Piety and Individualism in Han China,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116.1 (1996), p. 7.

⁷ Paul Goldin, “Han Fei's Doctrine of Self-Interest,” chap. in idem, *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), pp. 58–65.

⁸ Ibid., p. 61.

control,” but “universal Way.” Of course, it should be made clear that specific, pro-empire or pro-state authors may have advocated *gong* in idealistic terms precisely so as to cover up or beautify their flagrant promotion of state interests. Nonetheless, I would argue, one cannot simply equate *gong* with imperial interests in all contexts.

In short, while I would agree with Liu and Goldin that the condemnation of self-interest and praise of *gong* were often related to contemporary states’ goals of unifying and increasing royal power and control, and that *gong* ideals were often expected to be carried out by the ruler and his state, I would add that it was also a method of keeping royal power in check. This interpretation of *gong* differs slightly from Goldin’s and Liu’s: rather than stressing imperial (and often authoritarian) control – which was often, no doubt, a part of it – my analysis emphasizes the function of *gong* as a transcendent ideal, one applicable to what might be dubbed the cosmic or “universal state.” My view stresses the need to understand this concept as an ideological solution to a wide variety of complicated political and cultural problems, and not merely to reduce it to the interests of the state.

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF USAGES OF *SI* AND *GONG*

Han Feizi (third century BCE) was one of the first authors to explicitly articulate what he believed was a polarization between the terms *si* and *gong*, seen in the following statement: “Public and private interest are mutually contradictory 公私之相背.”⁹ For Han Feizi, the terms *si* and *gong* had always been in opposition to each other, ever since the legendary figure Cang Jie invented writing:

In ancient times when Cang Jie created writing, he referred to self-interest as *si/mou*, and that which opposed self-interest (*si/mou*) as ‘being public-minded.’¹⁰ Cang Jie originally understood that *gong* and *si* are mutually contradictory. The current belief that both are beneficial is an unfortunate occurrence resulting from a lack of scrutiny. 古者蒼頡之作書也，自環者謂之私，背私謂之公。公私之相背也，乃蒼頡固以知之矣。今以為同利者，不察之患也。¹¹

⁹ See Zhong Zhe 鐘哲, ed., *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), p. 450.

¹⁰ This statement also occurs in the commentary to the *Shuo wen*, under the entry for *si*. The word for “self-centeredness” (more literally, “surrounding the self”) in the *Han Feizi* is *zi huan* 自環, which is written in *Shuo wen* as *zi ying* 自營, “managing the self.” Commentator Lü Wenchao (1717–96) claims that the two terms, *huan* 環 and *ying* 營, were originally used interchangeably; see *Han Feizi jijie*, p. 450.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Goldin, “Han Fei’s Doctrine,” pp. 58–59, translates and discusses this passage.

Here, Han Feizi takes advantage of a visual link between the ancient graphs for *gong* and *si/mou* (私 / 厶, *mou* being what the Han-era dictionary *Shuo wen* 說文 suggests is an alternative way of writing *si*).¹² His point is that *gong* is written of component parts that literally negate the term *si* because the graph for *fei* 非, or “negate,” flanks the graph *mou*. On such an orthographic basis, Han Feizi argues that the terms had always been paired from the beginning of their existence. Similarly, statements found in the *Shuo wen* link *si* etymologically with *gong* as well, suggesting an ancient, semantic connection between the two terms.”¹³

One should be skeptical of such comments on the origins of Chinese writings. Han Feizi lived during a time when the two terms appear to have been inextricably linked and hotly debated, so his writings do not exactly provide us with the most objective account of their history.¹⁴ And the *Shuo wen* is by no means an unbiased guide or mirror into actual ancient meanings and etymologies. It makes frequent use of contemporary Han habits of discussing and interpreting language, which are sometimes erroneous.¹⁵ Rather than accept such comments at face value, we must examine the contours of the history of *si* and *gong* ourselves to gain a better sense of their changing meanings, and thus, the emergent polarization of the two during the Warring States period.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an exhaustive history of *si* and *gong* usage, especially since these terms are so prevalent in the literature of the period. What follows is a targeted discussion of the terms and concepts associated with *si* and *gong* in primarily two distinct periods – the early Warring States and the middle to late Warring States (roughly 350–221 BCE). My choice of passages for analysis is based on an overarching goal to demonstrate persuasively that during the latter period, *si* and *gong* became increasingly viewed as a polarized, dichotomous pair. A parallel point is that *si* accrued a negative, moral connotation of self-interest that was linked to partiality and fragmentation, while *gong* became imbued with positive, moral meanings associated with impartiality and unity, usually associated with a universal Way, and sometimes associated with an imperial ruler who was supposed to represent such an interest.

¹² The commentary in the *Han Feizi* provides this citation, quoting from the entry for *gong* in the *Shuo wen*. See *Han Feizi jijie*, p. 450.

¹³ Xu Shen 許慎, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, ed. Liu Dongmei 劉冬梅 (Shanghai: Shanghai shu dian, 1992), pp. 49 and 436.

¹⁴ Goldin, “Han Fei’s Doctrine,” pp. 58–65, discusses the use of *gong* and *si*.

¹⁵ Roy Miller, “Problems in the Study of *Shuo wen chieh tzu*,” Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1953.

In order to establish a relative chronology for the emergence of *si* and *gong* as a polarized, dichotomous pair, it is necessary to say a few words about the dating of the texts I use. The evolution of terms outlined here is not meant to precisely link specific meanings to specific historical events or dates, but to point to an arc of development that occurred over the course of the Warring States period. Such a development does not mean that older usages or meanings of the terms do not appear in later sources, but that their appearance declines in frequency considerably as compared to references to *si* and *gong* as an oppositional pair, or to either term used in isolation to represent a negative value or positive ideal. In general, I take Books 1–10 of the *Analects*, as well as the core chapters of the *Mozi* 墨子 and most of the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 to represent early Warring States materials and concerns.¹⁶ As mentioned below, I think it is likely that the *Shenzi* fragments may be textual artifacts dating to the latter half of the 4th century BCE and early 3rd c. BCE, and I would date the *Shang jun shu* 商君書, *Mencius* 孟子, *Guanzi* 管子, and *Zhuangzi* 莊子 to approximately such a period as well. Xunzi's and Han Feizi's works can be dated more squarely within the third century BCE, and the *Lüshi Chunqiu* dates to around 239 BCE.¹⁷

1. Neutral Usages of Si and Gong in Pre-Warring States and Warring States Texts

While the term *gong* is not uncommon in the literature and bronze inscriptions from Shang through the early and middle Zhou periods, it is, according to my observations, never directly paired with the term *si*.¹⁸ One common usage for *gong* is simply as “duke,” denoting the high-

¹⁶ The dating of the *Zuo zhuan* is difficult, as scholars disagree about whether the text predominantly describes court life of the 6th and 5th cc. BCE, or whether its values and descriptions more adequately date to the 4th. My own sense of the normative thrust of the text places it within the first half of the 4th c. BCE.

For an argument that the *Zuo zhuan* represents 6th through 5th century society and concerns, see Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722–453 B.C.E.* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), pp. 26–39. For proponents of a 4th c. and later dating, see David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), pp. 8–9. For an account of the *Zuo* as a heterogeneous amalgamation that derived from a variety of sources over the course of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States, see Li Wai-ye, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), pp. 33–59.

¹⁷ For discussions of the dating of many key texts in the Warring States period, see Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide* (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993).

¹⁸ The term appears 18 times in the oracle inscriptions, never in conjunction with *si* 私. Of these, 13 occur as a modifier to the term for “palace,” referring to the palaces of the highest nobility. The other five refer simply to *gong* as “minister(s)”; Zhang Yachu 張亞初, ed.,

est of ranks at the Zhou feudal court, after the ruler.¹⁹ Another usage, likely a later idealization of the Zhou ritual model, refers to three of the most prestigious positions in the Zhou court, that of *tai shi*, *tai fu*, and *tai bao*, as “San gong 三公,” or “the three ministers.”²⁰ In terms of kinship relationships as well, the term referred to the most esteemed, deceased member of the patriline – one’s father’s father, or grandfather on the father’s side.

Si, on the other hand, occurs infrequently in early and middle Zhou writings. Qiu Xigui states, “in ancient times ‘urine’ was sometimes called ‘*si*.’”²¹ This appears to be an entirely phonetic usage, and one can only speculate as to whether or not it bears relationship to the term’s later meaning, “self.”²² Instead, in order to denote one’s person or the private sphere, authors used the ancient graph “*si/mou*”, and it is likely that they did not invariably associate *si/mou* with its later contrastive partner, *gong*.²³

In *Analects* 2.9, Confucius speaks of Yan Hui’s 顏回 deliberations on his own person, away from Confucius as teacher (literally, after Hui has retired, *tui* 退) from a session:²⁴ “I can talk to Hui all day without his going against me; [he acts] as though he were stupid. But then, after retiring [from our meeting], he reflects on his private (self? behavior?), and [such action] is indeed adequate for implementing what I have taught. Hui is not stupid 吾與回言終日，不違，如愚。退而省其私，亦足以發，回也不愚。”²⁵ Here, the term *si* is vague. It could refer to behavior that is solitary and exclusive to one’s self, or it could refer to one’s self.

Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng yinde 殷周金文集成引得 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002). I have also consulted the Chinese Ancient Texts database (*Han da wen ku* 漢達文庫), at <<http://www.chant.org/>>.

¹⁹ For more on the Zhou hierarchy, see Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China: Governing the Western Zhou* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 118–41.

²⁰ This phrase appears throughout Warring States writings, but it is especially discussed in the *Li ji*.

²¹ Qiu Xigui, *Chinese Writing*, trans. Gilbert Mattos and Jerry Norman (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2000), p. 318.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ The *Shuo wen* demonstrates the use of the ancient graph by citing a passage from *Han Feizi* that uses “*si/mou*” instead of “*si*” 私. (Received versions of the *Han Feizi* have already emended the text to read “*si*” 私.) Xu Shen, *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, p. 321.

²⁴ *Analects*, 2.9. There are only two usages of the term *si* in the entire *Analects*. This relatively infrequent usage is noteworthy, for it suggests that these particular Confucian contexts do not go out of their way to distinguish sharply the personal/private from the public. Moreover, they also do not elaborate on the constituent parts of the self as many texts of the 4th–3rd cc. do.

²⁵ *Analects*, 2.9. Zhu Xi understands Confucius to be observing Hui’s private behavior. In my translation, I follow Yang Bojun, since I consider the verb *xing* 省 to be more self-reflex-

To confuse the matter even further, another way of reading the phrase, *xing qi si* 省其私, is not in terms of one's self or behavior at all, but as "reflecting within one's private quarters," which refers to the act of being in a more informal setting, involving other people, but nonetheless outside of the more formal teacher-student setting.²⁶ Regardless of the interpretive challenges regarding the usage of this term here, it is still the case that Hui's deliberations involving *si* occurred after his having retired from the presence of Confucius. Such deliberations are thus situated outside of his official capacity as disciple, as defined by the disciple-teacher relationship, and have something to do with changing the focus away from such a relationship towards another more private or personal sphere of interaction.²⁷

Since in the *Analects* the term *si* might refer to a private social context, and not necessarily to the solitary or isolated individual, negative connotations such as self-centeredness or self-interest do not seem appropriate. Other passages from the text support this view. In *Analects* 10.5, Confucius exemplifies outstanding behavior by knowing when to be formal and when to be relaxed ("During the ceremonial exchange of gifts, his countenance was accommodating; when having his private audience, he seemed at ease. 享禮有容色。私覲愉愉如也).²⁸ The text associates casual and relaxed situations with the term *si*, so that the relevant distinction is that between official and unofficial capacities and roles, or between formal contexts and informal, though perhaps still public, venues for social interaction.

Sometimes *gong* referred not merely to what is official, but to what is royal, or related to the ruler himself. This can be seen in passages *Analects* 14.18, which may be translated as "both presented themselves to the ruler," or "both presented themselves at court" 同升諸公),²⁹ and in *Analects* 6.14, in which Ziyou refers to a ruler's business or affairs: "If

ive than empirical. *Lunyu yizhu* 論語譯注, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), p. 16.

²⁶ I find this reading less likely, since the verb, *xing* 省, appears to be used as a transitive verb requiring an object (here, *qi si* 其私). If it were to mean "in one's private quarters," then it seems as though a preposition such as *yu* 於 would be necessary after the verb, as in *xing yu qi si* (省於其私), which may in fact be grammatically incorrect.

²⁷ This is reminiscent of Roger Ames' use of the term "focus-field" with respect to models of Confucian relationalism; see Roger Ames and David Hall, trans., *Daodejing*, "Making This Life Significant": A Philosophical Translation (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), pp. 11–54.

²⁸ *Analects*, 10.5. For this translation, see Edward Slingerland, trans., *Confucius: Analects, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), p. 100. Yang Bojun, *Lunyu yizhu*, p. 99, interprets the passage to be referring to Confucius' visits to foreign heads of state, however, some commentators believe that Confucius never acted as a foreign envoy.

²⁹ *Analects*, 14.18.

it was not the ruler's business, he would never visit me in my room." 非公事未嘗至於偃之室也).³⁰ The connection between *gong* as "duke," or "ruler," and its later connotations of "public," and "official," is a natural one. To present oneself to the ruler or to carry out a royal mission is to pay service to the state, which could be understood as serving the body of government that is responsible for the "public good."

The examples above from the *Analects* all suggest that while *si* and *gong* are not used together as a pair, their meanings are clearly contrastive and conceptually associated with each other. They denote the neutral, non-moral realms of unofficial and official or royal, and they merely describe different types of occasions for social interaction. Such usages do not point to evaluations of one type of sphere over the other, much less to the highly biased traits of self-interest and self-centeredness.³¹

Spatial distinctions that use *si* and *gong* to point to a more neutral geography of inner and outer also support this explanation. In *Analects* 10.4, the outermost gate is referred to as "*gong men* 公門," while in *Analects* 10.9 the "official court [of one's lord]," or "palace," is simply, "*gong*."³² Similarly, a passage in the *Shijing* refers to one's undergarments as *si*, denoting a sphere that is most private, occupying the space closest to the body and inside the external layers.³³ There is no hint in any of these passages that either spatial reference, inner or outer, or their associations with "private" and "public" respectively, is linked to evaluations of better or worse.

Another common, neutral usage for *si* occurs in the *Shijing* in reference to an individual's family relations – not always, but often – on the female side.³⁴ Moreover, the phrase "*si ren*" 私人, which appears in

³⁰ *Analects*, 6.14.

³¹ There is at least one instance, however, in which *gong* connotes something quite positive, representing an ideal that might be contrasted with something negative. This occurs in *Analects* 20.1, where it means "being fair" and is listed among the traits one should strive for in governing people.

³² *Analects*, 10.4 and 10.9. Commentators generally agree that the first *Analects* passage refers to the gates of one's lord, i.e., the outermost gates at court, an official sphere. See *Lunyu yizhu*, pp. 98 and 104; D. C. Lau, trans., *Confucius, The Analects* (New York: Penguin, 1979), pp. 101, 103. Though the *Zuo Zhuan* and *Guliang Zhuan* are not early Warring States texts, I cite these passages here to confirm the usage of neutral spatial geographies associated with *gong* in any text from the Zhou period. The only other instance of *gong* in the *Analects* occurs in a chapter that dates most certainly to the later Warring States period. This usage refers to *gong* in a positive sense, as an attitude of impartiality, and not as a neutral sphere or position. *Analects*, 20.1.

³³ Cheng Junying 程俊英 and Jiang Xianyuan 蔣見元, eds., *Shi Jing zhu xi* 詩經注析 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1991), Mao 2, "Ge Tan" 葛覃, p. 6.

³⁴ See, for example *Shi Jing zhu xi* (Mao 57, "Shuo Ren" 碩人), p. 164, in which "Duke

the *Shijing*, or “*si chen*” 私臣, appearing in an early chapter of the *Mozi*, is usually taken by commentators to mean something like “retainers,” or “one’s own men.”³⁵ These usages for *si* all suggest a proximity to one’s person based on descent, kin relations, or patronage. In many contexts these references are neutral and descriptive, aiming to highlight proximity to the self and family but not to evaluate such proximity according to standards of good and bad.

In even later texts as well, the connotations of *si* and *gong* are descriptive of social or political realities and not necessarily used to define normative goals associated with the official sphere. For example, in Mencius’ discussion of the well-field system, eight plots of land of 100-*mu* each surround a single plot of official, state-owned land 公田 (or “ruler’s land”).³⁶ Eight families work on and till the 100-*mu* of land that constitutes their unofficial, private allotment 私百畝.³⁷ They must, however, together fulfill their responsibility to the ruler’s affairs 公事 by working on the royal plot before they turn to their own private work 私事.³⁸ In this example, *si* and *gong* simply refer to the type of political claims and responsibilities one has over the land on which one labors, as well as over the products of that land. The yield from official, or royal (*gong*) land goes to the state, and hence, it is, at least theoretically, for the public good, whereas the yield from private (*si*) land goes directly to one’s self and family.

Even though one’s public duty or duty to the throne has temporal priority over one’s private work, one cannot conclude from this passage in *Mencius* that one is more important than the other. Temporal priority implies vulnerability in this case, not necessarily superiority. Mencius assumes that state lands are more likely not to be cultivated than private lands. This follows from another assumption that private concerns are natural and more likely to be fulfilled than public, state ones. By asking people to address state concerns first, one can be more

Tan is the brother-in-law (of Zhuang Jiang’s sister).” In Mao 154, *si* functions reflexively, “for ourselves,” as opposed to for one’s lord. Here, it presumably would be including the entire family sphere, including relations on both male and female sides; *Shi Jing zhu xi* (Mao 154, “Qi Yue” 七月), p. 411.

³⁵ *Shi Jing zhu xi* (Mao 203, “Da Dong” 大東), p. 633, and (Mao 259, “Song Gao” 崧高), p. 891. A similar phrase that most likely shares the same meaning is *si shi* 私士, occurring once in the *Gongyang Commentary* to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*; Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, *Mozi jiangou* 墨子閒話 (Taipei: Huaqu shuju, 1987), 9 (“Shang Xian, B” 尚賢中), p. 53.

³⁶ Compare this with *Analects*, 6.14, where 公事 refers to a ruler’s business.

³⁷ In 3A3, Mencius refers to a poem from the *Book of Songs* (Mao 212) that also speaks of “public” and “private” lands.

³⁸ *Mencius*, 3A3.

certain they are addressed at all. Accordingly, by placing private concerns in a secondary position, one need not worry as much that private concerns will not be addressed or fulfilled. Thus, the primary/secondary distinction between *si* and *gong* responsibilities in this passage underscores a strategic and practical perspective that has more to do with insuring the fulfillment of both spheres rather than the inherent valuing of one over the other.

The *Zuo zhuan* provides an enormous amount of information regarding the concepts *si* and *gong*. *Si* often appears as a morally neutral term, meaning “private,” as in one’s “private soldiers” or the act of talking, making a promise, or swearing on an oath “in private.”³⁹ And *gong* sometimes refers neutrally to an “outer” or “palace” gate.⁴⁰ Yet even in this relatively early text, we find a few instances in which the term *si* has acquired a negative value to it or both terms appear in opposition to each other. We discuss those examples in the sections below.

2. Negative Connotations of *Si* in Late Warring States Contexts

In the passage from the *Han Feizi* cited above, Han Feizi asserts that the negative connotations of *si*, what I have translated as “self-interest,” but what more literally refer to “self-centeredness 自環者,” or “revolving around the self,” were original to the term. I have just shown that this is not necessarily the case, as we find many instances of relatively neutral usages of the term before the fourth and third centuries BCE. Around that time, *si* began accruing clearly negative values. These were associated not just with the self but also with the many layers of integrated relationships around it, including such groups as one’s wives, relatives or family, consorts, and friends. The meaning of *si* is extended to signify the act of favoritism or being partial to any such limited person or group, as well. In this section I present a few salient examples in which *si* does not appear with *gong* but nonetheless takes on a highly charged, negative meaning that implicates the positive ideal of *gong*. For lack of space and time, I will not analyze separately the instances in which *gong* appears without *si* yet implies the latter, but will proceed instead to demonstrate how the two developed conceptually as opposites that were often paired or juxtaposed to highlight contradiction.

³⁹ For Zhao Meng’s 趙孟 talking in private with Zi Chan 子產, see *Zuo zhuan* (Zhao 1.4), p. 1209. In the same chapter, we find “private oath 私盟” (Zhao 1.9, p. 1215). For “private soldiers” 私卒 and making a “private request 私請,” see Xiang 25.8, p. 1104, and Xiang 23.5, p. 1083, respectively.

⁴⁰ *Zuo zhuan*, Xiang 23; and *Guliang zhuan*, Zhuang 1.

In the *Mencius*, *si* is once used verbally to refer to favoring, or being partial to one's wife and sons 私妻子 at the expense of taking care of one's parents – which stands as among the five common types of unfilial behavior.⁴¹ Being partial by going against the primary duties of filial piety and ritual priority (one's wife and sons are ritually inferior to one's parents) casts a negative light not only upon oneself but also upon the objects situated within such a sphere – in this context, one's wife and son.

Given the extended scope for what was considered to be “private” in early Chinese contexts as compared to Euro-American contexts, it is not surprising that we can find usages of *si* that refer to objects of private interest that do not imply an atomistic self. For example, one's *si* in some contexts refers precisely to one's womenfolk, one's wife and son, or to one's nuclear – as opposed to extended – family or kin. In a later Mohist passage, the author warns against rearing or hoarding concubines (“restrained women” 拘女) at the expense of the general population over which a leader rules. He refers to such concubines as *si*: “In nourishing the private (*si*), today's rulers of large states take on several thousand restrained women, while those of smaller states take on several hundred.”⁴² Here, *si* is used as a noun specifically referring to those objects that are integral to a ruler's private, sexual life and realms of pleasure. Such objects are held responsible for the moral degradation and lack of a sense of public duty to the state that is incumbent upon rulers and people in high political positions. Authors thereby establish a clear dichotomy between public responsibility to the state and private interest in matters deemed inimical to state interests and/or public morality.

Many later Warring States authors use *si* as an adjective meaning “private” in association with self-interest that benefits the self or the few. In the *Shang jun shu* (*Book of Lord Shang*, ca. 350–200 BCE), for example, *si* is commonly used in conjunction with *li* (profit, 利) to underscore private, non-state interest that can cause damage to the state.⁴³ Such selfish interests must be curbed in the name of public interest/profit 公利, which in the text is clearly associated with the ruler's interest.⁴⁴ Shang Yang recommends combating the pernicious effects of private factions or otherwise non-state-sanctioned groups with strict measures

⁴¹ *Mencius*, 4B30.

⁴² *Mozi jiangou*, 6 (“Ci Guo” 辭過), p. 34.

⁴³ See especially Shang Yang, annot. Gao Heng 高亨, *Shang jun shu zhuyi* 商君書注譯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1974), 2 (“Ken Ling” 墾令), p. 19.

⁴⁴ *Shang jun shu zhuyi*, 8 (“Yi Yan” 壹言), p. 81.

from above: “Those on top open up [the way] for public profit and block factionalism (“*si* men,” literally, “private gates” 私門).”⁴⁵ In a text that staunchly supports state, and, in particular, royal interests against any other unofficial institution or party, the boundaries for *si* and *gong* are drawn between factional groups and the central, royal state. *Si* in this usage, as in many of the examples above, is not strictly associated with individuals but with private interest groups.

The “Opening and Blocking” chapter of the *Shang jun shu* begins with an argument for meritocratic appointment that lambasts *si*, this time better understood as self-interested favoritism, rather than that which is private.⁴⁶ The text states: “Favoring ones relatives is tantamount to using self-interest as one’s way, whereas that which is equal and just prevents selfishness from proceeding 親親者，以私爲道也，而中正者使私無行也。”⁴⁷ Once again, *si* is ruinous because it furthers a partial interest and allows favoritism, not objective judgment regarding the merits of a person, to take hold in the governing and ordering of society.

In early Han bamboo strips recently excavated from *Zhangjiashan* 張家山, *si* is used in compounds that name specific offices, and it is also used to identify a private, unauthorized sphere in which certain action, such as commercial activity, takes place:

In the case of not possessing authorization to sell but nonetheless selling things privately (*si*) to someone, those who sell will all be tattooed [on the face] as grain-pounders; those who buy and are cognizant of the situation will be charged for the same offense. 不當賣而私爲人賣，賣者皆黥爲旦舂；買者知其情，與同罪。⁴⁸

While it is clear that the violation described in this instance involves not having the proper state authorization to engage in private commercial transactions, the association of *si* with the act of breaking the law demonstrates that the private realm was something about which authorities were suspicious and over which they sought regulation and control. Indeed, as Michael Nylan recently suggests, contra her own previous claim that “‘a marked inability to disentangle private obligation from public duty’ prevailed during the two Han dynasties,” evi-

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ This chapter of the *Shang jun shu* may actually have been written by Shang Yang himself in the mid-4th c. BCE. See the entry by Jean Levi in Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts*, pp. 369–70.

⁴⁷ *Shang jun shu zhuyi*, 7 (“Kai Sai” 開塞), p.74.

⁴⁸ Zhangjiashan zhengli xiaozu 張家山整理小組, *Zhangjiashan Han mu zhu jian* 張家山漢墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu chu ban she, 2001), p. 143.

dence from excavated texts now support a view that “strict separation between public and private, legal and ethical, could prevail sometimes, in early Western Han at least.”⁴⁹

Received texts, such as the *Mencius*, also confirm usages of *si* in reference to unauthorized action and the excessive pursuit of personal benefit. Mencius, at 2B8, condemns taking and granting power without authorization. The relevant term is *si*. Similarly, at 2B10 he tells a story of a merchant in ancient times who is despised for trying to gain advantage in the market by choosing the most “strategic position” for himself (*long duan* 龍斷: a high position from where one might ascertain areas of greatest profit). In the same passage, Mencius quotes the following about a man, Zishu Yi 子叔疑, who was able to gain excessive profit for himself: “Among humans, who doesn’t want to be rich and noble? Yet among the rich and noble, [Zishu Yi] alone had his own private (*si*) ‘strategic position’ therein 人亦孰不欲富貴？而獨於富貴之中有私龍斷焉。”⁵⁰ Here, *si* as “private” accentuates the fact that Zishu Yi is able to attain a unique position of power for himself. It is linked to unsavory personal traits such as greed and self-interestedness, which go beyond the basic human desires to accumulate wealth and acquire a reputation. Indeed, *si* in this passage connotes breaking with the norms of proper behavior and the limits of proper desire in order to seek out excess profit for the self.

Even in self-cultivation texts such as the *Zhuangzi* we encounter a condemnation of selfish partiality paired with praise for an individual’s connection to the universal Dao. While there are no occurrences of *gong* referring to the cosmos or public sphere in the “Inner Chapters” of the *Zhuangzi*, three passages feature the term *si* as a type of partiality or favoritism. Of the three passages, one refers to the unbounded impartiality of Heaven and Earth (*wu si* 無私, Chapter Six), while the other two refer to the human act of being partial or having favorites (Chapters Two and Seven).⁵¹ So even though the term *si* is only rarely invoked in the “Inner Chapters” – occurring more frequently in the later chapters of the text – its negative meanings of partiality and self-interest are present. This makes sense when one considers the negative value *Zhuangzi* places on maintaining a sense of self (*ji* 己). Intrigu-

⁴⁹ Michael Nylan, “Notes on a Case of Illicit Sex from Zhangjiashan: A Translation and Commentary,” *Early China* 30 (2005–06), p. 44.

⁵⁰ *Mencius*, 2B10.

⁵¹ *Zhuangzi jishi*, ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Taipei: Sanming Publishing Co., 1993), 4 (“Inner Chapters”), pp. 1–310.

ingly, the foil to such partiality is an ideal that lies not in an official, public realm of the state – the usual sphere for *gong* – but in a universal, impartial realm extending beyond the self to the cosmic Dao. We note the use of both *gong* and *si* in a later chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, “All Under Heaven,” which effectively demonstrates that such a universal realm is, in fact, the realm of Dao embodied by the ancient sages: “Impartial and not cliquish, flexible-minded and without partisanship...the ancient masters of Daoist methods possessed these [characteristics] 公而不黨，易而無私... 古之道術有在於是者。⁵²”

The discussion above illustrates the development of negative connotations associated with the notion of *si* and self during the Warring States period. It appears that the semantic range of the term, which previously included neutral connotations, narrowed during this period to refer more exclusively to a highly charged, often negative context, implicating self-interestedness, partiality, and favoritism in the contrastive conceptual pair of “public versus private.” Not only did the meaning of *si* narrow in such a manner; the term *gong* often took on an expanded scope to include the state and its public affairs and realms, the ideal of *yi* 義 (justice/righteousness, as in the early Mohist writings examined above), and the cosmic realm of the universal Dao as well. In the next section, we look at *si-gong* dichotomies, examining in more detail how these negative aspects of *si* developed in relation to the positive valences for *gong*.

3. *The Polarization of Si-Gong during the Warring States Period*

As early as the fourth century BCE, discussion of *si* and *gong* began to change in two fundamental and related ways. First, the terms began to be invoked more frequently as a charged, dualistic pair. Second, as pointed out in the previous section, this dualistic pair became intertwined with moral notions of good and bad. Though neutral usages would still appear in the literature, they are overshadowed by instances in which *si* and *gong* referred to good or bad activities, influences, or agendas. Indeed, the rhetoric of *si* and *gong* as a charged pair of negative and positive values became pervasive throughout the literature, especially in the later Warring States and early imperial periods.

The two terms are juxtaposed together even in relatively early Warring States texts like the *Zuo zhuan*. There, *si* and *gong* have to do

⁵² Ibid. (“All Under Heaven” 天下), p. 1086. It is interesting to note that A. C. Graham believed this chapter to be one of the latest in the *Zhuangzi* compilation, dating to the early imperial period. See A. C. Graham, trans., *Chuang-Tzu, The Inner Chapters: A Classic of Tao* (London: Mandala, 1991), pp. 257–58.

with the ruler's court and a minister's loyalty to it, as opposed to his private or self-interests: "to have self-interest injure the public good goes against loyalty 以私害公，非忠也。⁵³ In this passage, we also find phrases such as "self-interested resentment" (*si yuan* 私怨), which link *si* up with a powerful emotion to suggest personally-motivated behaviors that may be fuelled by negative desires such as anger, greed, ambition, etc. This resembles another *Zuo* passage, which contrasts benefit to be bestowed upon one's lord with private interest: "With respect to the lord's affairs you should benefit your lord and not observe a private [calendar of] inauspicious days 公事有公利，無私忌。"⁵⁴ It is clear that the two terms are beginning to be viewed in opposition to each other, and that *gong* is associated with positive values linked to one's lord and his court, while *si* is associated with private kinship realms and responsibilities.

The early Mohists are perhaps among the first to systematically idealize certain concepts related to what would later become *gong* while denigrating what would later become associated with *si*. Though they do not always use the terms *gong* and *si*, they draw clear distinctions between a private, personal and morally inferior sphere of interaction on the one hand, and objective, public, and universal standards deriving from Heaven's Will on the other.⁵⁵ Their idealizations of public, political interest (singular and unified) at the expense of private, personal interests (plural and differentiated) permeate their thinking, representing radical claims for universal values and unified standards, especially as represented by the centralized state.⁵⁶ The following passage in "Elevating the Worthy, Upper" sheds some light upon the public-private dichotomy and the values associated with each:

If one has ability, then he is promoted. If he has no ability, then he is demoted. Promoting public justice (*gong*) and casting away

⁵³ Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), "Duke Wen 6.6.8," p. 553.

⁵⁴ Ibid., "Duke Zhao, 10.3.5," p. 1241. I am thankful to a reviewer for pointing out that the larger context for the term *ji*忌 in this *Zuo* passage refers to the anniversary of the death of one's ancestor.

⁵⁵ See, for example, the statement in *Mozi jiangū* 4 ("Fa Yi" 法儀) that "Heaven's actions are expansive and not [restricted to the] private sphere."

⁵⁶ While the early Mohists do not specify that *gong* is associated with state interests, it is clear from their political philosophy – one that supports a single-state model based upon Heaven's universal standards – that this is what they imply. That the term *gong*, referring traditionally to rulers of states, should also develop the meaning of "public" becomes especially clear once one considers that early Chinese conceptions of the "public sphere" often referred to the state realm, as the early Mohists demonstrate.

private resentments (*si*) – this is the meaning of such statements. 有能則舉之，無能則下之。舉公義，辟私怨，此若言之謂也。⁵⁷

Here, the compound, *gong yi* “public justice” represents a universal standard that exists independently of individuals, parts, and parties, each motivated to act out of concern for itself and not the general good. In the context of the Mohist belief in strong, just leadership coming from the top, one may also wish to think about *gong* as referring to the idealized, official, state sphere. Juxtaposed with *si*, “private resentments,” an intensely emotional description of partisanship, “public justice” transcends the private realm to represent the more objective needs of an entire polity.

Apart from the example above, the early Mohists only infrequently refer to the actual terms, *si* and *gong*, as a charged pair. Instead, they frequently employ a cluster of terms that drive home the distinction between localized, personal spheres of interaction and universal, impersonal, public spheres.⁵⁸ Scattered throughout the early Mohist corpus and helping to clarify the problematic of private versus public for these thinkers are terms such as “oneself” (*zi* 自) and “relatives” (*qin* 親), representing the private sphere; as opposed to terms such as “others” (*ren* 人), and “distant-ones” (*shu* 疏), representing the public, or more universally-encompassing sphere. Similarly, the verbs “to unify; be indiscriminate towards” (*jian* 兼) and “to distinguish from or discriminate against” (*bie* 別) oppose each other by identifying impartial versus partial ways of acting in society.⁵⁹

In criticizing sociopolitical conditions of their day, the early Mohists criticize self-interested leadership, expressed through the phrase, “depleting others to benefit oneself” 虧人自利.⁶⁰ By recommending the elimination of leadership that is based in private, self-interested aims in favor public and legitimate forms of authority, early Mohists set a more universal standard for authority:

⁵⁷ *Mozi jiangou*, 8 (“Shang Xian, A” 尚賢上), p. 42. The translations in this chapter are for the most part my own. On occasion, I make use of translations and adaptations of translations from Burton Watson, trans., *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964).

⁵⁸ The conceptual machinery for polarizing *si* and *gong* was therefore basically in place since the beginning of the Mohist movement. The term *si* occurs only four times in the early Mohist corpus, out of a total of 14 times in the entire Mohist writings. The term *gong* is used quite frequently throughout the text to refer to people’s names and titles, but it is perhaps only used twice to refer to the public sphere (One instance is discussed below, and the other occurs in *Mozi jiangou*, 42 [“Jing Shuo, A” 經說上], in which the word’s meaning is not entirely clear.)

⁵⁹ Bryan Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 144, points to this last distinction.

⁶⁰ *Mozi jiangou*, 17 (“Fei Gong, A” 非攻上), p. 118.

Nowadays, the mightiest make it their business to attack other states, but nobody knows to condemn [this]. Rather, they follow along and praise the action, calling it “just.” Can this be called knowing the difference between what is just and what is not? 今至大爲攻國，則弗知非，從而譽之，謂之義。此何謂知義與不義之別乎？⁶¹

The author of this passage implies that the personal interests that rulers pursue cannot be justified as legitimate or morally compliant with the system of Heavenly justice in the world.⁶² Though the terms *si* and *gong* are not present in the passage, the critique on personal motivations (“making it one’s business”) at the expense of public justice is clear.

Justice is considered to be public because it stems from the realm of Heaven, whose authority and power are universal in scope. This is evinced in the following passage, which is one of the few passages that invokes the term *si*: “This is a case of [King Wen] universally loving the world with expansive greatness. It is comparable to the sun and moon universally shining upon the world without having private [preference] 即此言文王之兼愛天下之博大也，譬之日月兼照天下之無有私也。”⁶³ Here, the all-encompassing and indiscriminate nature of Heavenly forces shining upon the earth drives home the point that Heaven is a source of universal scope and values beyond the private (*si*) realms of existence.

The early Mohist attempt to promote universal and public values over particular and private ones is most clearly exemplified in their famed doctrine of universal caring (*jian ai* 兼愛).⁶⁴ Universal caring outlines a method of treating people that requires the extension of one’s active concern and caring to people outside one’s own personal sphere, as indicated in the following passage:

⁶¹ *Mozi jiangou*, 17 (“Fei Gong, A” 非攻上), p. 119.

⁶² See especially the three “Against Aggressive Warfare” chapters, 17–19 (“Fei Gong”), pp. 118–29.

⁶³ *Mozi jiangou*, 16 (“Jian Ai, C” 兼愛下), p. 111.

⁶⁴ P. J. Ivanhoe wields a good argument for why the term *jian ai*, commonly translated as “universal love,” should more aptly be referred to as “impartial caring”; idem, “Mohist Philosophy,” in Edward Craig, ed., *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge Press, 1998) 6, pp. 451–55. I believe that the term *jian* more strongly denotes universality than impartiality. In a passage in Chapter 16, the term *jian* is used as an adverb to support the radiance of King Wen that spreads to cover all the far-away tribes (*Mozi jiangou*, 16 [“Jian Ai, C”], p. 111). Even though the notion of partiality is referred to in the metaphor of the radiance of the sun and moon, the predominant image in the entire passage remains one of extensive coverage, breadth, and inclusion. Also, physical distance and space seem to play a clear role in defining the term *jian*, especially in relationship to the action of extending beyond localized, personal, and private spheres of the self (*si*).

When one analyzes [the roots of] chaos in the present day, from what [does one find that it] arises? It arises from people not caring for each other. When ministers and sons are not filial toward their lords and fathers, we call this “disorder.” It is because sons care about themselves and do not [extend their] caring to their fathers that they take from their fathers and benefit themselves... 當察亂何自起？起不相愛。臣子之不孝君父，所謂亂也。子自愛不愛父，故虧父而自利...⁶⁵

Finding the roots of social disorder in people’s own self-centered concerns, the author recommends transcending the boundaries of the private and particular so as to show concern for all people. But while universal caring is close to treating people equally, the underlying motivation for expounding on such a concept for the early Mohists does not seem to be to promote egalitarianism. Rather, it is to transpose one’s personal, private interests onto the needs and requirements of the public sphere. In such a way, the early Mohists propose to avoid the problems associated with the familistic model of concern that pervaded the Ru, and most likely much of elite Zhou society, at the time.⁶⁶

Arguing that universal concerns should replace, or perhaps more precisely, be superimposed upon private or personal ones, early Mohists also reject contemporary problems of nepotism, family solidarity, and favoritism that do damage to ideals of merit and worth. Although generally not considered to be a core chapter of earliest date, the chapter, “Against Ru, Lower 非儒下,” provides an example of Mohists condemning those who act under the principle of “favoring ties of kinship (*zhong qin* 重親).” Of this principle, they state: “It is said: ‘By such a means, [one] favors ties of kinship.’ This is when one wishes to increase that which is in one’s utmost private [interest] while paying little heed to that which is of utmost seriousness. Is this not extraordinarily perverse? 有曰：「所以重親也。」爲欲厚所至私，輕所至重，豈非大姦也哉？”⁶⁷ While ostensibly addressing the issue of correct mourning practices, this passage clearly also criticizes the sociopolitical practices of nepotism and

⁶⁵ *Mozi jiangou*, 14 (“Jian Ai, A” 兼愛上), p. 91.

⁶⁶ Interestingly, early Mohists advocate universal caring by showing support for what might be called “traditional Ru values” of loyalty and filial piety. It is significant that the “universalistic” attitude they recommend for ministers, sons, and younger brothers is discussed in terms of a particular relationship of power rather than in terms of how such a relationship itself might be transcended so as to include people external to it. Despite the limitations of the type of “universal caring” advocated here, it seems apparent that early Mohists wish for people to move beyond a “private” sphere of self to act correctly within a more “public” – as well as a publicly accepted – sphere of involvement.

⁶⁷ *Mozi jiangou*, 39 (“Fei Ru, C,” 非儒下), p. 263.

favoritism in the official realm, or, by implication, the pedigree-based social order of traditional times.⁶⁸ Through their critique of *si* – in this case, the prioritization of *qin* relationships (親 close-ones, relatives, ties of kinship) – over “what is of utmost seriousness,” the Mohists disavow themselves of conceiving of certain Zhou values, such as filial piety, fraternity (*di* 弟/*ti* 悌), and loyalty (*zhong* 忠) too narrowly, and not in terms of the universal value of *jian*.⁶⁹ The Mohist view of society thus denigrates values and actions associated exclusively with the self, family, or private realm – defined according to interests belonging only one person or to a particular group of people who do not act in the interest of the state (that is, when the state accords with Heaven’s Will). The Mohists condemn such values not because such views indulge the self and partisan groupings but because they lack more universal representation and thus threaten the public good.⁷⁰

Mohist writings thus provide us with one of the clearest and perhaps earliest conceptual foundations for the development of a deep cultural distrust of what is exclusively private or related to the sphere of *si*; namely, that which does not have more general, objective, and universal implications in society. The Mohists’ constant denigration of things associated with the particular, private, and partial, along with their concurrent praise of the universal, public, and objective lays the philosophical foundation for the emergence of such terms as a charged pair in the centuries to come.

Other sources provide us with a clear sense of the polarization of *si-gong* spheres in Warring States discourses. The so-called *Shenzi*, 慎子, a text mentioned in ancient sources that only exists in fragmentary form today, provides ample clues about the genesis of a philosophy that condemns all things partial while praising all things universal and encompassing. Paul Thompson’s reconstruction of the *Shenzi* fragments (Shen Dao 慎到, ca. fourth c. BCE) uses methods established in Western biblical scholarship to piece together and evaluate the authenticity of fragments preserved in later Chinese writings. If one accepts that the fragments Thompson reproduces are in fact artifacts from the Warring

⁶⁸ *Mozi jiangou*, 39 (“Fei Ru, C”), pp. 260–63.

⁶⁹ Notably, the Mohists do not discard such terms as filial piety, fraternity, or loyalty, as is clear from the “Jian Ai” chapters. They merely broaden the scope of their usage. For example, early Mohists describe the value of yielding out of “fraternity and age (generation)” as one associated with the public realm (or that takes on the meaning “*chu* 出,” outside the home); *Mozi jiangou*, 35 (“Fei Ming, A” 非命上), p. 244–45.

⁷⁰ Interestingly, the “public” appears to be defined very much in terms of the ruler and state, and the society that directly relates to the state, which may be seen as consonant with the Mohist vision of a single, religious and political apparatus that dominates society.

States period, which I think is likely the case, then one may gain a glimpse of a deep engagement with the *si-gong* dichotomy.⁷¹

In the *Shenzi*, laws (*fa* 法) are linked to a notion of impartial objectivity associated with universal interest and *gong*. The author justifies the use of laws by pitting *gong* values against partiality associated with the interests of a few, or *si*: “For this reason, when dividing up horses, one uses bamboo sticks; when dividing up land, one uses a hook. It is not that the using of sticks and hooks is superior to relying on human knowledge, but it is the means by which one abandons favoritism (*si*) and blocks resentment 是以分馬者之用策，分田者之用鉤，非以鉤策爲過於人智也。所以去私塞怨也。⁷² Here, *si* is no longer merely a private realm or realm of the self or small group, but an attitude of favoritism or partiality that may arise from one’s limited association with a part, or small fraction, of the universal whole. The versatility of the term as an emergent attitude or form or political policy, rather than material designation of persons or spatial designation of realms, is clear in this passage.

The contradiction between *si* and *gong* values is nowhere more apparent than in the fragment 73 from the *Shenzi*, in which even laws are but just one method of many that help society transcend partial interests in favor of impartial, universal interests:

Thus, milfoil and stalk divination is the means by which a universal (*gong*) consciousness is established; balances and scales are the means by which universal measures are established; books and contracts are the means by which universal trust is established; lengths and volumes are the means by which universal criteria are established; legal policies and ritual compendia are the means by which public justice is established. Wherever the universal good (*gong*) is established, partial interests are abandoned.⁷³ 故著龜，所

⁷¹ I believe Thompson’s painstaking study presents scholars with a powerful case that “there is no evidence, internal or external, to suggest that any hypothesis of spuriousness is more probable than the hypothesis of authenticity”; Paul M. Thompson, *The Shen Izu Fragments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 173. From the vantage point of intellectual history, the fragments seem to be a good fit with ancient, Warring States concerns, especially as we uncover more and more of the intellectual culture through excavated texts. It seems clear that a figure named Shenzi, the alleged author of the text, might have been associated with concepts such as *si-gong*, *shi*-power (of one’s environment), and *fa*-laws, which are the main fare of the received fragments. Given that such concepts fit neatly into the conceptual arc of the 4th-3rd cc. BCE, a medieval, that is, Six Dynasties, dating would be rather difficult to justify.

⁷² The action mentioned is apparently something like casting dice, as used in the phrase, “casting bamboo sticks” and “casting hooks,” in fragment 24, Thompson, *Shen Izu Fragments*, p. 243. While I have used my own translations here, I have benefitted greatly by consulting John Emerson’s translation of Thompson’s fragments, published online at <<http://haquelebac.wordpress.com/2011/09/11/a-translation-of-thompson%E2%80%99s-shen-dao/>>

⁷³ Thompson, *Shen Izu Fragments*, fragment 73, p. 275. Thompson pulls this passage out

以立公識也；權衡，所以立公正也；書契，所以立公信也；度量，所以立公審也；法制禮籍，所以立公義也。凡立公，所以棄私也。

Here, the creation of universal standards in all aspects of life (religious, economic, political, legal, creative) is the preferred approach because it establishes *gong* and denies *si*. The terms are a contradictory pair linked to the positive value of public interest (*gong*) and the negative value of private, or partial, interest (*si*).

If one follows the traditional ordering of the fragments, the text goes on to specify in concrete, sociopolitical terms what happens when *gong* prevails in society, which is tantamount to a direct critique of all things *si*:

Thus [when an enlightened ruler establishes *gong*], [private] desires do not oppose the correct timing [of things], favoritism does not violate the law, nobility does not trump the rules, salary does not exceed [that which is due] one's position, a [single] officer does not occupy multiple offices, and a [single] craftsman does not take up multiple lines of work. 故欲不得干時，愛不得犯法，貴不得逾規，祿不得逾位，士不得兼官，工不得兼事。⁷⁴

The state of not-*gong*, which was previously designated to be *si* in the paragraph above, is implied to be an utterly destructive social force. A society run by *gong* values and measures is a well-balanced society in which limits and duly allotted measurements or capacities are upheld. In short, it is an organized society, governed by standardized and universally applicable rules and laws, not a chaotic society determined by prejudicial emotions and the transgression of boundaries.

The *Shenzi* fragments transpose the language of the old ritual order – defined so heavily by boundary-keeping in the context of social roles – to fit a much broader conception of boundary-keeping in the context of a universal, imperial (and highly bureaucratized) state. Such a state order is one defined not primarily by rites (*li* 禮) and the underlying value of humanity (*ren* 仁), but by laws (*fa* 法) and the underlying value of *gong*, or public/universal interest.

The question arises as to whether or not *gong*, as Paul Goldin has argued regarding the *Han Feizi*, should always be understood as linked to the ruler or royal sphere.⁷⁵ An implication of such a claim is that there is no *gong* outside of the “royal” arena, so that *gong* was neces-

of the traditional arrangement of the fragments, which places this section into the chapter “Weide” 威德.

⁷⁴ Chapter “Weide”; see Thompson, *Shen Tzu Fragments*, fragment 26, p. 245.

⁷⁵ Goldin, “Han Fei’s Doctrine,” p. 59.

sarily defined in ancient China in terms of the ruler. While this claim is intriguing, I do not believe the evidence supports quite so narrow a reading of *gong*. First, one must consider that even the author of the *Shenzi*, who views the ruler as a key object of discussion, takes pains to distinguish the value of *gong* from the exclusive sphere of any single person or position. In Fragment 21, for example, we see that the concept of “benefit” (*li* 利) is to be understood as a universal right accorded to everyone under Heaven, not just the prerogative of the ruler: “In ancient times, those who enthroned and honored the Son of Heaven did not do so in order to benefit a single person 古者立天子而貴之者，非以利一人也。”⁷⁶ This suggests that *gong* was first and foremost a value concerning universal benefit and universal interest. That it should be implemented by a “true” Son of Heaven, or, ruler of the universal or “cosmic imperium,” is a secondary, albeit important, point and observation. One may not simply conflate royal interest with *gong* values in the *Shenzi*, and, arguably, not even in the *Han Feizi*.⁷⁷

The *Shenzi* author refines this point about the public interest (or, to be precise, the interest of “all under Heaven”) in Fragment 22, which delineates between the realm of individual administrators of a regime and the “regime” as an institution that is larger than the parts that make it up. Benefit should not go to any individual cog in the machine, but to the entire machine, consisting of everyone, not just rulers and administrators:

Thus, the Son of Heaven is enthroned for the sake of all under Heaven; all under Heaven is not established for the sake of the Son of Heaven. The ruler of a state is enthroned for the sake of the state; the state is not established for the sake of the prince. Officials are installed for the sake of their offices; offices are not established for the sake of officials 故立天子以爲天下，非立天下以爲天子也；立國君以爲國，非立國以爲君也；立官長以爲官，非立官以爲長也。⁷⁸

This general orientation towards the concept of *gong* as the “universal good” and “public interest” is in keeping with the Mohist un-

⁷⁶ Thompson, *Shen Tzu Fragments*, fragment 21, p. 240.

⁷⁷ Having not yet conducted a deep and systematic study of the term *gong* in the *Han Feizi*, I am unable to comment on the veracity of Paul Goldin’s claim that it only represents the ruler’s interest as against ministerial influences (*si*). Goldin’s argument pins a lot on a single statement about how a ruler will be imperiled if he allows *si* methods of honoring men and giving out appointments to prevail in the state. But this in no way proves that *gong* refers specifically or exclusively to a ruler’s self-interest; rather, it merely confirms the point that *si* is detrimental to both ruler and state (and, by implication, the people of the state).

⁷⁸ Thompson, *Shen Tzu Fragments*, fragment 21, p. 241.

derstanding of public benefit, and demonstrates that the developing discourse on *si* and *gong* involved thinking past the vestigial connotations of *gong* with ruling dukes and their courts to encompass a more universal sense of what is relevant, correct, and beneficial within the context of a universal or “cosmic imperium.”

Both passages above highlight the importance of benefitting the state not as an institution of and for rulers and those in charge, but as an institution of and for all the people universally (“all under Heaven”). To the extent that the state is considered to be a mechanism for universal benefit, *gong* should be linked to the state in this broader sense, not to the limited realm of a ruler and his interests. Thus, *gong* transcends even the ruler or state, especially if the ruler goes against *gong* values linked to the unified realm of the cosmos. Should the latter occur, one would follow *gong* values and not the ruler or state, although it is questionable that one should ever leave the confines of the state apparatus to do so (such a move might cast one into the realm of *si*). The meaning of *gong*, therefore, must be understood in terms of the ideal of a “cosmic imperium.”

The notion that the ruler, by instituting and preserving laws that are universally applicable, thereby becomes a ruler of such a universally encompassing imperium is suggested in the *Shenzi* through descriptions of his cosmic perspective:

He who in ancient times attained the wholeness of the big picture looked toward Heaven and Earth, gazed out at the rivers and seas, and accorded with the mountains and valleys. The sun and moon radiated, the four seasons progressed, and the clouds covered while the wind shook. [Such a ruler] neither overworked his heart-mind with knowledge nor exhausted himself with self-interest (*si*), but, rather, depended on laws and methods for settling matters of order and disorder, rewards and punishments for deciding on matters of right and wrong, and weights and balances for resolving issues of heavy or light. 古之全大體者，望天地，觀江海，因山谷。日月所照，四時所行，雲布風動。不以智累心，不以私累己。寄治亂於法術，托是非於賞罰，屬輕重於權衡。⁷⁹

Here, *si* values are opposed via a powerful depiction of a ruler who embraces the universal, unbiased tendencies of the cosmos. This ideal ruler leads by *fa*-laws and *shu*-methods, among other objective mea-

⁷⁹ This fragment of the *Shenzi* 慎子, from a section called “Textual Fragments,” is found in the *Siku Quanshu* 四庫全書 text titled *Shenzi yiwén* 慎子逸文, but not in Thompson’s book. See *Shoushange congshu* 守山閣叢書, the online *Siku Quanshu* facsimile, p. 97, retrieved at <<http://text.org/library.pl?if=en&file=86886&page=97>>.

asures of things. Even though the term *gong* is not invoked and the term *si* used but once, the entire passage describes the contradictory nature and oppositional meanings associated with the two terms. On the one hand, *gong* is the big picture that encompasses the objective and unbiased workings of nature's elements. Being *gong* corresponds to taking the ruler's self out of political decision-making and making use of concrete standards or criteria for judgment instead. On the other, *si* is precisely that element associated with the self, its needs, and interests, that impedes one from being *gong*.

What the *Shenzi* shares with the *Mozi* and other Warring States writings on statecraft is a healthy respect for *fa*-laws. The underlying power of *fa* lies in the fact that they uphold public, impartial, and objective values, not private or partial concerns. So the entire discourse concerning the usefulness and importance of laws is based in an understanding that they are the tools by which the public or common good (*gong*) can be established in place of private and biased desires, benefits, and rewards. In these writings, *gong*, in essence, comes to represent not merely a ruler's power or official prerogative, but a sense of objective fairness linked to the vast workings of the heavens and seasons, which is to be implemented through an idealized state and ruler and to benefit everyone universally.

It is interesting to note that this ancient Chinese notion of "objectivity," as associated with *gong*, is not rooted in the powers of a transcendent "rational" mind, as it tends to connote in English. Rather, "objectivity" is rooted in a social good concerning the concept of equal access to prerogatives and benefits, as well as social and material goods, and it is simultaneously related to the political goal of order and peace in the realm. It is surely no coincidence that the modern Chinese term for "fair" is *gong ping* 公平, "public-even/peace," or "*gong* + even/peace," and that even in the third century BCE, thinkers like Han Feizi were associating *gong* with *ping*. For this reason, the concept of *gong* only refers to "objectivity" in terms of impartial, objective sociopolitical measures that provide access to goods, opportunities, and rewards and punishments.⁸⁰

The oppositional usage of *si* and *gong* extends to other Warring States discussions of laws. In the *Guanzi* as well, *si* and *gong* clearly refer to polar opposites: "As private sentiments are enacted, so public laws are destroyed. 私情行而公法毀."⁸¹ Moreover, in the "Laws and Prohi-

⁸⁰ For more on the connection of *gong* with fairness, evenness, and peace in the social order, see below, the discussion of the "Valuing the Public Good" chapter of the *Lüshi chunqiu*.

⁸¹ *Guanzi*, "Eight Observations" 八觀.

bitions” chapter, we find the following: “[Such people] will recruit the state’s elite men as members of their own factions and carry out the universal Way to serve their own private interests. 故舉國之士，以爲亡黨，行公道以爲私惠。”⁸² This last statement shows that “private benefit” stood in contrast to the “universal Way.” In the context of this chapter of the *Guanzi*, *si* is problematic precisely because it carves out a sphere of power, motivation, and interest that conflicts with that of the more universal laws of a state, represented through the ideal of the “universal Way (*gong dao* 公道).”

One cannot discuss the polarization of *si* and *gong* without analyzing the “Honoring the Impartial 貴公” chapter of the *Lüshi chunqiu* (ca. 239 BCE). Not only does the chapter itself contain key insights into *gong* and *si* as impartiality or objectivity versus partiality and self-interest, its placement in the compendium is especially noteworthy. Preceding a subsection titled “Rejecting Self-interest” 去私, and following upon an intriguing chapter on the value of one’s person (“Favoring One’s Person” 重己), “Honoring the Impartial” sheds light on the particular intellectual dynamic of valuing the universal good at the expense of self-interest and partiality, not – to be sure – interest in the self and one’s body (as expressed in the preceding chapter, “Favoring One’s Person”), the latter of which does not necessarily conflict with the public good.

In the opening statement of “Honoring the Impartial,” the authors draw an explicit connection between the objectivity of *gong* and peace (*ping* 平) in the world: “In the past, when the ancient sage-kings governed the world, they invariably made impartiality their first priority. When they were impartial, the world was at peace. This peace was attained through impartiality 昔先聖王之治天下也，必先公，公則天下平矣。平得於公。”⁸³ Not only is world peace a consequence of a ruler’s impartial governing style, one’s possession or loss of the world is also contingent upon it: “Invariably, those who possessed the world did so through impartiality, and those who lost it did so through partiality 其得之以公，其失之必以偏。”⁸⁴ No doubt we see traces of the origins of the contemporary Chinese term for “fairness,” *gong ping* 公平, in this section. The connection between impartiality and world peace is not trivial, though, as it implies that *gong* had the power to make everyone content and harmonious with each other. It is also interesting that

⁸² *Guanzi*, “Laws and Prohibitions” 法禁.

⁸³ *Lüshi chunqiu*, 1.4.1. This translation is slightly altered from John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei: A Complete Translation and Study* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 70.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

gong is not juxtaposed with *si* in the last sentence, even though the two are frequently paired in subsequent passages in the chapter. That *gong* should be contrasted with partiality (*pian* 偏) here underscores *gong*'s universal scope.

The chapter's use of natural processes to depict impartiality mimics what we have seen in texts like the *Shenzi*, serving to naturalize the meaning of *gong*:

All Under Heaven is not the sole possession of one person; it belongs to all under Heaven. The harmony of Yin and Yang does not support growth of only one kind of thing, the sweet dews and seasonable rains do not favor one thing, and so the ruler of the myriad people does not show favoritism toward a single person. 天下非一人之天下也，天下之天下也。陰陽之和，不長一類；甘露時雨，不私一物；萬民之主，不阿一人。⁸⁵

Here, we find *si*-partiality and favoritism used in direct contrast with the value of *gong* mentioned in the preceding section of the text. Thus, the act of not favoring or being partial to any single thing, creature, or person characterizes the natural cosmos as well as the impartial ruler of the myriad people.

Lastly, I return to the *Han Feizi*, which constantly reminds its readers that "one cannot but be clear on [the distinctions between] *gong* and *si* 公私不可不明."⁸⁶ There, *si* is often linked to the negative term *li* (profit), while *gong* is linked to justice (*yi*): "Thus ministers and subordinates ridded themselves of their selfish heart-minds and behaved according to public justice 則人臣去私心，行公義."⁸⁷ Han Feizi's juxtaposition of *gong* with justice and *si* with self-interest suggests, like the passages just examined, that the public sphere is associated with objective standards of what is good and fair to all in the centralized state, while *si* – and therefore, self-interest – reflects the limited realm of partial benefit to the one or few, associated with non-state-sanctioned activities.⁸⁸ The opposition between the two terms could not be greater or more apparent.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 1.4.2, pp. 70–71.

⁸⁶ *Han Feizi*, 19 ("Shi Xie" 飾邪), p. 129. There are at least 8 different passages that use the terms *si* and *li* together in the *Han Feizi*.

⁸⁷ *Han Feizi*, 19 ("Shi Xie"), p. 128.

⁸⁸ The reader will note that my interpretation of Han Feizi's use of *gong* differs from that of Paul Goldin, who wishes to understand *gong* in this text as the ruler's self-interest; see Goldin, "Han Fei's Doctrine," p. 59. I remain skeptical of such a narrow interpretation; see n. 77, above.

CONCLUSION: THE CONCEPT OF
SELF-INTEREST IN EARLY CHINESE THOUGHT

The development in early China of a cultural trend that condemned self-interest, factionalism, and partiality while praising the public or universal good, objectivity, and impartiality is especially apparent in the way in which the term *si* emerged with *gong*, together becoming a dichotomous pair. As this essay has outlined, *gong* and *si* were often used independently of each other during the Spring and Autumn and early Warring States period to describe or denote either the relatively more private or more public spheres of an individual's interactions, though the boundaries for what constitutes these spheres varied from usage to usage. Later, roughly from the fourth to third centuries BCE, our sources reveal an upsurge in negative connotations of *si*, which usually also implied a cluster of positive connotations for *gong*.⁸⁹ The terms *gong* and *si* began to occur frequently as a dyadic pair, referring to the public versus private, official versus unofficial, and impartial (or holistic and objective) versus partial spheres.

In many late Warring States writings, negative associations with the private realm were grounded in a mistrust of arbitrary, unregulated forms of activity that stood to benefit persons or small groups in a partial manner. "Self-interest" as such was not defined exclusively in terms of the atomistic or discrete individual and his or her body, but in terms of the act of carving out boundaries that define "in-groups" versus "out-groups" and accord different treatments to each. Therefore, acts such as forming factions or seeking out personal benefit would have constituted selfish activities that had the potential to endanger the public good. In addition, activities that were not considered to have merit in the public sphere, such as engaging in pleasurable activities like sex or entertainments, were similarly considered to be selfish, and therefore, unacceptable in certain official contexts.

By the late fourth to third centuries BCE and into early imperial times, *si-gong* discourse and thinking became so prevalent that it pervaded a variety of writings, including intellectual treatises, historical anecdotes, writings on statecraft, and legal documents. Even in cases where such terms were not explicitly invoked in relationship to each other, the contrastive implications associated with *si* and *gong* were so strong that later Warring States readers familiar with the debates of the

⁸⁹ Michael Nylan's argument concerning *gong* provides evidence for one such positive usage. See Nylan, "Confucian Piety and Individualism in Han China," p. 7. Mizoguchi's overview of the terms *gong* and *si* in Chinese history and culture agrees with this general trend (*Chūgoku no kō to shi*, pp. 3-13, 42-56).

day would undoubtedly have understood each from within this polarized hermeneutical context.

Paul Goldin has linked the ideal of *gong* in the *Han Feizi* exclusively to the realm of the ruler and imperial interests or control. He has claimed that it is only after *Han Feizi* that writers use *gong* to refer to “imperial control in accordance with the universal Way.”⁹⁰ Given our current exploration of *si* and *gong* in the context of middle to late Warring States thought, it appears that *gong* acquired an association with the “universal Way” much earlier than Han Feizi’s time. Similarly, *gong* points not so much to imperial control as to an ideal of the cosmic imperium – in other words, to a value of universality that is to be implemented through the state apparatus. Indeed, the concepts and terminology associated with *gong* imply an idealized, universally-encompassing state – one that takes everyone’s interests into account in an objective and impartial manner. Precisely because *gong* is linked to idealized norms and values of objectivity and universality, one should be careful not to conflate it with the interests of a single person such as the ruler or his office. Rather, one should understand it in terms of the idealized cosmic ruler, who demonstrates *gong* values and implements *gong* measures through standardized or objective measures (such as *fa*-laws) of the state. By this same logic, if a ruler were not acting in accordance with such cosmic values of *gong*, ministers and other members of society might appeal to such values to rectify the situation, but perhaps only through the vehicle of the state.

Having clarified the nature of the development of *si* and *gong* values in later Warring States times, we can now address the larger issue of intellectual context. Rather than view what scholars have identified as fourth century BCE preoccupations with the self, body, and subjectivity as movements that emphasized the part (self) and partial at the expense of the whole (either society, state, or cosmos), I would like to suggest that discourses on the self, body, and subjectivity shared something crucial with the *si* and *gong* discourse examined here. They each emphasized and placed ultimate value in wholeness and unity as opposed to fragmentation and discrete parts. Indeed, whether an author was “self-oriented” or “state and society-oriented,” they each appear to have been a part of a larger sociopolitical and cultural ideal that praised wholeness and universal values while condemning partiality and self-interest.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Goldin, “Han Fei’s Doctrine,” p. 61.

⁹¹ For the case of Yangzi, I have argued elsewhere that his “self against state” stance seems

In early China, the development of a discourse that repudiated partiality and self-interest in favor of a larger sense of universal public good should be understood in light of the political needs of emerging imperial systems and increasingly centralized states. As Yuri Pines has recently argued, the Warring States period witnessed the unification of royal power and concomitant elite support for a single, “ruler-centered political order.”⁹² In its idealized articulation, the aims of such a universal, centralized system were to place a variety of groups – many with conflicting interests – under a rationalized, more unified system of control. Condemnations of self-interest shared ideas that were similar to those found in discourses on self-cultivation that glorified a “transcendent self”; each of these types of mid- to late-Warring States discourses endorsed the notion that an individual and the private sphere should transcend the self per se, so as to penetrate a more cosmic level of social, political, and spiritual awareness and being. The repudiation of *si* as private self-interest promoted the public good by focusing on what people should not do (that is, act in self-interested ways in factions, tribes, families, and so forth). Discussions of the cultivated, elevated, or perfected self, on the other hand, approached the notion of the public good by focusing on what individuals should do to improve themselves and become more attuned with a universal Dao. In either case, the emphasis on wholeness and objectivity over boundedness and partiality represents a cultural orientation that extolled the universal cosmos as the highest good. Differences in the two approaches mostly concerned who the chief arbiter for such good should be, with one approach advocating the “cosmic imperium” while the other promoted the “cosmic individual.”

The conceptual tendency to value what is universal and whole over what is one-sided and partial may also have been rooted in something larger than the ideal of a centralized state. Indeed, one might consider factors that go beyond political developments, even though this tendency may indeed have been fueled or largely motivated by contemporary political transformations. Such factors include elite, Hua-Xia

to have been based in a holistic conception of the unity and completeness of a material “nature” (*xing* 性) rooted in the cosmos. So while his thought appears to emphasize the part over the whole, he may merely have been defining part and whole differently, by shifting what was thought to be “whole” away from the polity and official realm to that of the self and its material body. See discussion of Yangzi in Erica Brindley, *Individualism in Early China: Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics* (University of Hawaii Press, 2010), pp. 70–74.

⁹² Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), p. 221.

attempts at pan-religious accommodation and cultural unification in light of the globalizing trends of the day. As the Central States ecumenical regions were becoming increasingly interactive and mutually influential, and as inherently different beliefs from ever farther reaches of the multi-state sphere came up against each other, thinkers of the day may have increasingly felt the need to articulate more consistent, unified, and all-encompassing visions of their own values. In other words, as the intellectually competitive and diverse world of the ancient Chinese thinkers was becoming smaller and more tightly linked, this may have resulted in an increased valuation of notions of Hua-Xia unity, cosmic wholeness, and universal values. While one may consider such a project to be imperialistic and ultimately related to the state, I would contend that it went beyond that to include ethnic, cultural, and fundamentally ethico-religious concerns as well.