

“To Follow the Way and Not One’s Lord”:
Intellectuals and Empire Formation in Axial-Age China

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1. Introduction

How do intellectuals participate in state affairs and influence society, and why do some intellectuals' thoughts prosper and be legitimized as the state ideology, while others' ideas do not? This question can be explored by examining the case of the Axial Age, a period when philosophers and prophets emerged, interacted with each other and other elites, and, to some degrees, set the paths of civilizational development. Talking about the Chinese Axial Age, the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770-256 B.C.) was an important era of social change and institutional formation. It was based on the cultural and political inheritance of Eastern Zhou that the Chinese empire was crystalized, in the Qin (221-206 B.C.) and Han dynasties (202 B.C. – 220 C.E.). But before we get into the specifics of Eastern Zhou, I must introduce its predecessor, the Western Zhou dynasty (11th century – 771 B.C.) first. Traditionally, it was believed that in Western Zhou the ritual system of the Chinese empire was founded, which normalize the manners and relationships of elites (Hsu and Linduff 1988). Besides, Zhou was different from later dynasties in terms of its political system: a binary system where the king of Zhou directly ruled the western metropolis and regional rulers, who were usually royal family members, controlled the colonies in the east (Li 2008).

Although it helped Zhou kings to control their large territory during the early expansion period, this political structure was proved to be unstable and unsustainable. In the east, blood ties and cultural connections between the royal court and regional states "tended to weaken naturally and the high degree of autonomy granted to the regional states under the 'Fengjian'¹ the institution began to move them towards independence." In the west, the king kept granting land to official aristocrats in exchange for loyalty, but without successful expansion, such a strategy could only weaken the capacity of the royal court and empower the aristocracy (Li 2006: 139-140). In 771 BC, King You of Zhou attacked Shen state for their protection of the abandoned former prince. However, Shen state cooperated with Zeng state and nomad tribes, defeating King You of Zhou. He was killed in the battle and the capital Haojing was

¹ Fengjian is usually translated as feudal. The main difference is that in the early western Zhou dynasty, the regional states enjoyed less autonomy compared to their counterparts in medieval Europe.

looted. In 770 BC, the formerly abandoned prince became King Cheng of Zhou, and, with the protection of the army of several vassal states, he moved the court to Luoyi, the eastern capital. Here began the Eastern Zhou, and the Spring and Autumn period.

Most scholars divide the Eastern Zhou into two periods, the Spring and Autumn (771-476 B.C.²) and the Warring States (475-221 B.C.³). Albeit many significant social changes happened in these two periods, my study will focus on two major fields: state and intellectual. First, from the perspective of the state, there were three remarkable transformations. Regarding the military, there was continuous and intensifying interstate warfare through which small states were annexed and great powers rose. Second, in governance and administration, centralized and semi-bureaucratized states were formed, with the increasing capacity for taxation and war-making. Third, rituals changed, as archeologists found that both Zhou ritual systems were spread to regional states (Li 2006) and Shang rituals of human sacrifice reemerged (Huang 2004).

Second, intellectuals emerged as an autonomous social group and participated in all three processes. Decadent Zhou court can no longer sustain its official education system through which knowledge was monopolized by nobles. Private education became popular, where common people were educated and intellectuals disseminated their doctrines. Against this backdrop, the so-called hundred schools of thought emerged. Intellectuals of different schools tried to explain such dramatic social change from different perspectives and argue with each other. Moreover, they built different forms of networks and different types of organizations, which became vehicles or channels for them to shape the state and society. For instance, they could either persuade politicians to conduct rituals properly, or become politicians themselves to make laws and military strategies.

As the name, the Hundred Schools of Thought, indicates, traditionally, intellectual historians categorize Eastern Zhou intellectuals into different schools, such as Confucianism, Legalism, Taoism, Mohism, etc. However, in recent years, historians

² There are disagreements on the end of the Spring-Autumn period and the beginning of the Warring States period, but this seemingly arbitrary choice of 475 B.C. will be justified (or modified) as I conduct an empirical analysis of this period.

³ The Zhou Kingdom was annihilated in 256 BC, but the war between the states continued until the Qin state unified China in 221 BC.

have noticed that it could be problematic to analyze intellectuals' ideas based on their schools of thought, because it may risk overestimating their differences (Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan 2003, Pines 2009). But as a sociologist, I am less concerned with the content of thought but rather the institutionalization of ideas and the organizations of intellectuals. For instance, could we distinguish each school of thought by their political participation and social organization? Beginning from this question, from a comparative historical perspective, my main research questions are, in early China, first, how intellectuals participated in state affairs and organized as a school, and second, why some schools of thought survived or prospered while others withered away.

2. Sociological Works on Early China: State and Intellectual

Sociological studies on early China have two foci: state and intellectual. The state-centered approach highlights how the state's political institutions and military powers changed, whereas the intellectual-centered approach focuses on the literati's thoughts and social connections.

Kiser and Cai (2003) emphasize that large-scale and severe interstate wars facilitated the bureaucratization process in warring-states China, because wars weakened aristocracy, provided models of bureaucracy, developed roads, and trained personnel. Hui (2005) explains why ancient China was unified by Qin whereas early modern Europe remained a multi-state system, and the answer she offers is that Chinese states adopted self-strengthening legalist reform and cunning diplomatic and military strategies. Zhao (2003, 2015) aims to explain both China's bureaucratization and unification, and he believes Kiser and Cai's (2003) and Hui's (2005) explanations are insufficient. He instead argues that frequent but inconclusive wars promote the spread of efficiency-oriented instrumental culture in different social fields, which drove social changes. This force was eventually controlled by the Confucian-Legalist state that successfully integrate ideological and political power.

The mutually reinforced relationships between state capacity, legalist reform, war-making, and bureaucracy are well addressed by extant studies (e.g., Kiser and Cai 2003, Hui 2005, Zhao 2015), but two inter-related puzzles remain unanswered. First, as

historians and sociologists generally agree that there was an increase in the military, political, and economic power of several key states in Eastern Zhou, we still know little about how their symbolic, ideological, or cultural power changed. Indeed, as Gorski (2003: 165-166) argues, "states are not only administrative, policing and military organizations. They are also pedagogical, corrective, and ideological organizations." Even though, as Zhao (2015) finds, there were many critiques about how politicians violated norms or rituals in military and political activities, it is questionable to simply synthesize these violations as a general rationalization process, and it would be problematic to understand "the ritual collapse" as the dysfunction of ideology or decrease of symbolic power, because without exercising symbolic power, the state is unable to function sufficiently (Loveman 2005). Only by exploring how the symbolic and ideological power of the state changed in this period and the different roles intellectuals played in this process can we have a more complete understanding of the dynamics of social change in pre-imperial China and the formation of the Chinese empire.

Second, if political elites were all rationalists who favored legalism to enhance the power of their states, or, in Zhao's (2015: 192) words, if "the effective mobilizing and fighting capacity brought about by Legalist reforms made legalism the most attractive ideology to ambitious or beleaguered rulers", why scholars from other schools of thought, such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Mohism could still emerge, survive, get funded, attract followers, and sometimes even get appointments? If the growth of the power of states required intellectuals' ideas, did the growth of the power of intellectuals always require states' sponsorship?

Sociology of intellectuals and Axial Age offer preliminary answers to this question. Although he does not use the word "Axial Age", Weber does aim to explain the uniqueness of western civilization by comparing how different Axial Age religions shaped the pathways of civilizational development. When it comes to China, Weber (1964) contends that Confucianism was rational but not transcendental, which led to a passive adaptive attitude to the world that cannot endogenously give rise to industrial capitalism. Against Weber, Eisenstadt (1985) offers us a general pattern of social

change in Axial Age China, arguing that China's "this-worldly transcendentalism" explains a variety of institution formations in imperial China. Although their theories elaborate on the political power of imperial Confucianism, their interests are the long-term influence of the Axial Age and inter-civilization comparison, so less attention is paid to inner-civilization variations, especially the differences in organization and political participation between different intellectuals and different schools of thought in early China, and how inter-state and inter-school struggles together contributed to the emergence of the Chinese empire and imperial ideology.

By contrast, Randall Collins (1998: 137) investigates the network and competitions of ancient Chinese philosophers and concludes that "intellectual creativity is driven by opposition." For Collins, the network between intellectuals is constituted by the interaction ritual chain of arguments, citation, and teacher-student relationship, which reflects their status in the attention space. In other words, the number of connections one intellectual built with others is an indicator of the extent to which he received others' attention and recognition. His framework helps us understand that scholarly recognition is another source of the social power of intellectuals, which is independent of, if not contradictory to, political status, but he downplays the networks between politicians and intellectuals, which risks oversimplifying the convoluted relationship between power and knowledge. Collins (1988) also reviews the different organizational forms of each school and many ways through which intellectuals could intervene in politics and societies but does not offer a typology and makes a systematic comparison between them, so we still know little about the elective affinity and evolutionary dynamics of ideas, organizational forms of intellectuals, modes of political participation, and formations of political institutions, without which we cannot well understand the crystallization of Chinese empire.

Moreover, as Zhao (2015) and Collins (1998) correctly observed, during the late Warring States period, Chinese philosophies became more eclectic, and their thoughts mutually fused. Since Confucianism could, had to, and did absorb other schools of thought to become the imperial ideology, why were other schools unable or failing to assimilate Confucianism and be accepted as the dominant ideology of the Chinese

Empire? By exploring how intellectual breakthrough and state formation both facilitated and conditioned each other, this study aims to offer a comprehensive answer to the abovementioned puzzles.

In sum, we can see that, for sociologists who study early China, when they analyze the state, their attention is disproportionately paid to the political field, and as they try to understand intellectuals, the cultural aspect become the focus, which leads to an asymmetrical distribution. My research aims to reverse this by investigating the cultural power of the state and the political influence of intellectuals.

3. Theoretical Framework I: Intellectuals and Politics

Intellectuals make politics, and politics makes intellectuals. Traditionally, sociological studies of intellectuals center on two meta-questions: what the class of nature of intellectuals is, and how their ideas and actions are shaped by socio-political forces. More recently, scholarship has shifted to how intellectuals influence state and society, and how they perform their ideas. The literature on intellectuals and politics offers essential but inadequate help for analyzing the case of early China.

As Eyal and Buchholz (2010) point out, two classical problems of the sociology of intellectuals are who intellectuals are and to whom or to what they owe allegiance. According to Kurzman and Owens (2002), there are three distinct approaches to answering these questions: intellectuals as class-in-themselves (Benda 1928, Bourdieu 1990), class-bound (Gramsci 1971, Foucault 1984), or class-less (Manheim 1970, Collins 1998). Intellectuals are treated, respectively, as an independent class that has its own interest, as a heterogeneous group of which the members represent different classes, or as individuals who transcend class interest and pursue their own ideals. Admittedly, this is a plausible framework to categorize intellectual studies in the last century, but Kurzman and Owens (2002) do not discuss the reasonability to use a general theory to explain all intellectuals. Rather than three theoretical approaches that aim to define the nature of intellectuals as a whole, we can also treat their typology as a way to categorize three types of intellectuals. Class-in-themselves, class-boundness, and class-lessness can be understood as three ways through which intellectuals define themselves, which

shapes their actions and positions.

Another tradition of intellectual research explains the formation and application of intellectuals' ideas by social-structural factors. In Alexander's (2016) classic dichotomy, this is a "sociology of culture" approach where culture is a "dependent variable", and he divides this into two sub-categories. The model of social determinism is characterized by Marx and Engels' (1970) classic statements that ideas, as "superstructures", are determined by class relations, "the base". The theory of agency is represented by Bourdieu's (1988) and Lamont's (1987) work, where intellectuals are considered to be strategic players who deploy ideas as a means to maximize their profits in a given social field. In Li's (2011) framework, social determinism can be differentiated from Marx and Engels' (1962) and Gramsci's (1971) economic determinism, and Manheim's (1985) and Althusser's (2001) social determinism that includes not only economic factors but also social-structural factors. Karabel (1996) and Brym (2001) offer more refined frameworks that include both economic, social, and political factors to explain the political positions of intellectuals. These theories can help us understand the social backdrop against which ideas are produced and political participation is enacted but cannot explain why intellectuals have different ideas and actions even when intellectuals are in the same society and have similar social relations and field positions.

By the 21st century, scholars' attention shifted from the external social conditions to the internal aspect of intellectuals. Against the first tradition of research, Eyal and Buchholz (2010) suggest that the sociology of intellectuals should be converted into the sociology of interventions, analyzing how different actors claim to be intellectuals and insert their knowledge into the public sphere. Following their steps, scholars explore how intellectuals are organized and positioned in the cultural field (Hernando and Baert 2020, Hauchecorne 2020), and how they acquire legitimacy, gain resources, or resist domination (Dumont 2020, Pérez 2020, Williams 2020). This literature overcomes the shortcomings of previous studies that analyze intellectuals as a homogenous static group by taking into account their diverse ways of self-organizing and political engagement. Yet, we still know little about how intellectuals' field

positions and organizational forms interact with their ideas and engagement strategies, and how these factors together explain their relative success and failure, both in the academic and political fields.

To counter the second tradition, Alexander (2016) proposes a performance theory of intellectuals to explain their activities, emphasizing how they symbolically perform their ideas to receptive audiences. Influenced by Alexander (2016), scholars further explore how intellectuals link their philosophies to the social movements that they participated in (Morgan 2020), and how they strategically choose their positions in the field to compete with their opponents (Leperlier 2020). Other researchers are less affected by performative theory, but adopt similarly individualistic approaches, examining intellectuals' political engagements (Swartz 2003, Verovsek 2021), reputations (Lannigan and McLaughlin 2017), and connections between their intellectual and political interventions (Pestaña 2020, Brahimí and Brisson 2020). These studies accurately depict the process through which individual intellectuals present their ideas to and are judged by their audience but downplay how ideas shape institutions and have a long-term political effect.

To sum up, existing literature diverges in treating intellectuals as individual performers or members of collectivities. To reconcile the third and fourth traditions, I will examine both individual performances and organizational forms of intellectuals and see how these factors contribute to the short-term success of an intellectual as a politician or a master, and the long-term survival of a school of thought as an official ideology or prevalent belief system.

4. Theoretical Framework II: Axial Age and Empire Formation

If the literature of intellectuals and politics provides us a framework to analyze the "causes" of ancient Chinese intellectuals' social actions, studies on the Axial Age and empire formation help us understand their "effects". Jaspers is most famously known for proposing the concept "Axial Age", from about the 8th to the 3rd century BC when revolutionary philosophical thought emerged in major civilizations. He distinguishes "axial peoples", namely Chinese, Indians, Iranians, Jews, and Greeks, who had an

original and radical break-through in their cultures, from “peoples without the break-through” (such as Babylon and Egyptian Civilization) and “peoples that came after” (including “historical peoples” and “the primitives”) (Jaspers 1953: 51-53). His theory accurately reflects the similar evolutionary patterns of Axial Age civilizations, namely from small competing states to world empires (Kumar 2021) but does not specify the philosophers’ roles in the transformation of a people from primitive to civilized and then to an Axial-Age break-through.

Eisenstadt's works are built on Jaspers' (1953) concept of the Axial Age and Weber's (1978) theory of political and hierocratic domination where priests are seen as carriers of ideology who legitimize or struggle with political rulers. Eisenstadt (1986) argues that the nature of the Axial Age breakthrough is the emergence of intellectuals as an autonomous social group. This new social element radicalized the tension between mundane order and transcendental order and saw themselves as the carriers of transcendental order to whom mundane political elites should be accountable. They contributed to the institutional-political change in the Axial Age by bringing their ideas to political spheres and by competing, transforming, or cooperating with political rulers. He also analyzes the process of social change from pre-Axial Age to post-Axial Age, through which, for instance, the new autonomous scholar class replaced the “ritual, magical, and sacral specialists” (Eisenstadt 1986: 4).

After Eisenstadt proposed this general framework, scholarly attention was not directed toward using empirical cases to extend his theory but shifted to the clarification of the concept of the Axial Age itself, exploring how scholars use this concept, what the key features of the Axial Age are, and whether these features also existed in pre-Axial Age period or peoples without the break-through (Boy and Torpey 2013, Bellah 2005, Mullins et.al 2018). For those who do continue investigating the relationship between ideas and politics in the Axial Age, they usually discuss the ideational affinity between philosophies and the ideologies and institutions of empires (e.g., Pollock 2005, Arnason 2012), instead of the actual intellectual production and institution-building activities.

It is those who do not set their research within the framework of the Axial Age that

advances our understanding of intellectuals' roles in social transformation and empire formation during the Axial Age. Giesen (2011) builds four ideal types of intellectuals: cosmopolitan ascetic, enlightened legislator, revolutionary, and the voice of traumatic memory, each different in terms of their relation to politics. Fowler (2020) summarizes Bourdieu's theory of social transformation, highlighting the intellectual's capacity and will to challenge common beliefs and pursue universal ideals by initiating and leading "symbolic revolutions" during crises. Based on more empirical evidence, Collins (2011: 437) examines the political careers of 2700 thinkers, many of whom are Axial Age philosophers, and concludes that intellectual and political success can hardly be achieved simultaneously, because the "skills and pressures of the two spheres are too different", but he does not specify the mechanism against specific historical contexts. My study aims to find the unique conditions and factors that made an intellectual succeed and an idea perpetuated in early China, which may not exist in other Axial Age civilizations or in modern times.

In sum, extant scholarship on the Axial Age and the formation of ancient empire either offer a general theory across civilizations or a macro comparative study between civilizations. The dynamics and variations within a civilization receive relatively little attention. My project will borrow the theories from the sociology of intellectuals, investigating how inter-school competitions co-evolved with inter-state conflicts, which ended up giving rise to the Chinese Empire.

4. Methodology

My initial selection of cases will begin with a four-volume series titled *The Chronicle of Thinkers in the Pre-Qin Period (Xianqin Zhuzi Xinian)* (Qian 1956). Unlike other intellectual history works that usually centered on the complexity and fluidity of ideas and concepts (e.g., Schwartz 1985), Qian Mu in this book offers a sophisticated chronology of 74 intellectuals' life events by closely examining contradictions and consistencies in different historical archives, which is a trustworthy and comprehensive survey of Eastern Zhou intellectuals' academic, social, and political activities.

However, since Qian's book was published relatively early, it does not take into account more recently excavated documents and scholarly debates. Thus, I will include Yuri Pines' (2002, 2009) *Foundations of Confucian Thought* and *Envisioning Eternal Empire* and Mark Lewis' (1999) *Writing and Authority in Early China* as additional sources of data to assist my analysis. Meanwhile, to understand the emergence of the Axial Age and the formation of the Chinese Empire, Western Zhou and Qin-Han are also non-negligible, so for Western Zhou, Li Feng's (2006, 2008) *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China* and *Landscape and Power in Early China*, and for Qin-Han, Charles Sanft's (2019) *Literate Community in Early Imperial China* and Cai Liang's (2014) *Witchcraft and the Rise of the First Confucian Empire* will also be included in my secondary literature. Despite the rigorousness of these secondary sources, they are also possibly biased and inaccurate, so original sources are also irreplaceable to remove potential bias and error (Lange 2013). I plan to collect relevant primary documents as well, such as *Analects* and *Records of the Grand Historian*, when there are contradictory accounts of the same phenomena or when there is a lack of data (Lange 2013).

I will code primary data and write memos for both primary and secondary data. I am going to focus on three aspects of information. First, regarding political elites, I am interested in how intellectuals persuaded them, commented on political affairs, took offices, and made laws, treaties, or wars. For intellectuals, the questions will be how they argue with each other, inherit each other's thoughts, and teach each other. For non-elites, I will explore intellectuals' attitudes toward them, how many of them were recruited by and became intellectuals, and how they interacted with intellectuals.

Overall, my study will involve two rounds of comparative analysis, both combining cross-sectional analysis and in-depth within case studies. The first round is within the case of Eastern Zhou, where I will both trace the process of change in intellectuals' ideas and political participation and compare different intellectuals of different schools. The second round is beyond this case, exploring how Eastern Zhou creatively destruct the inheritance of Western Zhou and foreshadows the emergence of imperial China, as well as the possibility to apply my theory to other Axial Age civilizations to investigate

the elective affinity between intellectuals' organizational forms and political institutions.

5. Pilot Study

In this section, I conducted a preliminary analysis of the data I already had and presented the structure of my study. Half of my writing will involve the origin and impact of Hundred Schools of Thought and a brief comparison between China and other civilizations during the Axial Age. The other half will be spent on a comprehensive and comparative analysis of major schools of thought in Eastern Zhou China.

(1) The vicissitude of the rite: political cultures before Hundred Schools of Thought

Although the origin of Chinese civilization is still controversial, rigorous scholars generally agree that at least from the Shang dynasty (c. 1600 BC – c. 1046 BC) China proceeded from prehistory to the recorded history period. Although we know relatively little about the details of political institutions and cultural activities of the Shang people, existing archaeological evidence suggests that divination, sacrifice, and war are major issues in elites' social lives. By winning the war, the Shang people could get prisoners of war, who later would be likely to become victims slaughtered as offerings during sacrificial rites (Thorp 2006).

Whereas wars provided victims for sacrificial rites, sacrificial rites legitimized wars. Although different kings had different preferences in sacrifice rituals, praying for the god to bless the victory of wars was always an important purpose of sacrifice. Before the war and sacrifice rite actually started, another important rite is divination. According to Chen (1999), both the Shang king and his ministers were wizards at the same time. In divination rites, they grilled tortoise shells and judged God's will through cracks. In this process, the king had the authority to give a final interpretation, through which political decisions were legitimized. After negotiating with the god through divination rites and before the war started, the Shang people provided sacrificial offerings to the god in the sacrifice ritual to pray for blessing.

Shang regime was overthrown by the Zhou people, who established their dynasty that now we call Western Zhou (c. 1046 – 771 BC). According to Li (2008: 271), Western Zhou was a “delegatory kin-ordered settlement state”. Delegatory means that

it was a quasi-empire where the Zhou king ruled directly in the royal domain (“metropolis”) and indirectly in regional states (“colonies”) through regional rulers. Kin-ordered indicates that the relationship between the Zhou king and regional rulers was not regulated by contracts and laws, like how medieval Europe feudalism worked, but by their kinship. Settlement implies that Western Zhou was constituted by settlements as basic social entities, and it was not a territorial state because there were empty spaces within and between different political units. In Mann’s (1986) words, the social cage was not closed.

On the cultural aspect, to justify their conquer of the Shang dynasty, the Zhou king claimed that he had a heavenly mandate to rule. As a conceptual innovation, the mandate of heaven on one hand legitimated the monarch’s rule, and on the other hand potentially rationalized rebellions against despotic rulers, which foreshadowed China’s civilizational dynamics. Although in Confucian scholars’ imaginaries, the Western Zhou dynasty was a utopia characterized by its perfect ritual system and rule by rites, we know relatively little about how this system really works. However, from archeological evidence, scholars do find that significantly fewer human sacrifices were performed in Western Zhou. Instead, animals were used as offerings.

In about 985 BC, in the war against the Chu state in the south, the King Zhao of Zhou lost all his elite troops, which characterized the decadency of Zhou. In 771 BC, King You of Zhou attacked Shen state for their protection of the abandoned former prince. However, Shen state cooperated with Zeng state and nomad tribes, defeating King You of Zhou. He was killed in the battle and the capital Haojing was looted. In 770 BC, the formerly abandoned prince became King Cheng of Zhou, and, with the protection of the army of several vassal states, he moved the court to Luoyi, the eastern capital. Here began the Eastern Zhou and Spring-Autumn periods.

On the political aspect, as philosopher Mencius condemned, “there is no just war in Spring-Autumn period.” With the legitimacy of the Zhou royal court declined, the ethical norms and lineage system that once regulated domestic politics and inter-state relations no longer worked well. As the king of Zhou gradually decayed to a symbolic ruler and more and more dukes and marquesses obtained de facto autonomy, they

started endless wars to fight for hegemony, aiming to become the leader of the inter-state coalition. Similar stories happened in domestic arenas. The nobles controlled the administration, interfered with the succession of the crown, and even launched coups and assassinate the monarch.

Significant intellectual changes also took place in this period, which is well analyzed by Pines (2002). First, unlike the Eisenstadt's (1986) Weberian model according to which the Axial Age breakthrough was characterized by the intensification of the tension between mundane order and transcendental order, Pines (2002) correctly observes that the Spring-Autumn transformation is in essence a collapse of the transcendental heaven to mundane political affairs. The statesmen increasingly questioned human's capacity to intervene and interpret Heaven's intent, while they also became skeptical about the necessity and reliability to follow the transcendental, either by divination or sacrifice, to resolve mundane issues. Secondly, the solution they found was to reconceptualize rite (*li*), a term that was associated with sacrificial ceremonies in Western Zhou, as the hierarchical sociopolitical order. According to Pines (2002), by separating the hierarchical essence of rite (*li*) from ceremonial decorum (*yi*), the Spring-Autumn thinkers were able to reconcile the violation of rites in practice and the maintenance of hereditary hierarchy as a basic principle. Finally, there were some other mentionable transformations, including the futile effort to build a multi-state system and the subsequent quest for unity, challenging of the sovereign's authority by ministers in the name of the state and people, and reinterpreting the term superior man (*junzi*) not as ascriptive status but a moral concept.

(2) The rise of Hundred Schools of Thought

Except for Laozi, a legendary figure whose mysterious life stories cannot be proved by credible historical materials yet, the first Axial-Age philosopher in China, and the first member of the Hundred Schools of Thought, should Confucius, the founder of Confucianism who lived in the late Spring-Autumn period. His main political agenda was rebuilding the ritual system of Western Zhou and exercising government by means of virtue. As his first contender, Mozi argued against the hierarchical rule and proposed

universal love and moderation in use. Later, Legalists and Taoists joined the debate. The former contended for rule by law and radical reforms of state-society relations, aiming to build the state as a war machine, whereas the latter believed that inappropriate intervention from the state was detrimental, and the rulers should follow the Way (Dao or Tao) and the rule of inaction. Despite their very different thoughts, in the following, I would like to categorize each school of thought by their different modes of political participation and self-organization. Pines (2009) identifies three types of intellectuals: “shameless” career-seekers, moralists who treated service as a mission and a means of self-fulfillment, and recluses who abandoned offices. On the other hand, Hernando and Baert (2020) offer four ideal types of collectives of intellectuals, differing by the presence of a single organizational basis and the degree of purported intellectual cohesiveness. Combining these two theories, I construct the following typology.

Table 1. Types of School

	Career-seeker	Moralist	Recluse
Organized collective	Late Mohism	Early Mohism	
Pluralist organization	Imperial Confucianism	Early Confucianism	Late Confucianism
Informal collective	Legalism	Late Confucianism	Taoism

My key argument is that the ultimate success of imperial Confucianism was owed to the organizational and political flexibility of their Eastern Zhou predecessors. On the organizational aspect, compared to other schools of thought, they attach the most importance to the teacher-student relationship, which guaranteed its continuous reproduction. At the same time, they downplayed intellectual cohesiveness, which allowed them to build connections with other schools of thought, enabling them to absorb other thoughts and become the foci of inter-school debates. Their moralist ideal was reflected by their active but unsuccessful political participation. Similarly, they took advantage of the “golden mean”. Their activeness made their existence in the court necessary, non-negligible, and irreplaceable, whereas their marginalization kept at least

some of the followers surviving in the turmoil of unpredictable political struggles.

By contrast, the strict intellectual and organizational boundaries of Mohism made them an outlier among other schools. Their emphasis on intellectual cohesiveness and organizational solidarity likely constructed a clear and robust Mohist identity. However, their commitment to protecting the weaker states and their self-sacrifice made the school hard to be reproduced in a time of annexation wars. Legalists' active and successful engagements in politics helped them win high prestige in short term, but victims of legalist reforms, their jealous peers, and the suspicious monarch always wanted to eliminate legalists and secure their own power. Taoists' passive attitude allowed them to stay away from political turmoil but surely limited their political influence. A common shortcoming of legalism and Taoism is their indifference to teacher-student network building, so each of them lacked a clear organizational basis. In the early Han dynasty, the imperial period, the Confucians (*ru*) can still be mobilized as a social group to participate in imperial building when opportunity structure was open, but legalism and Taoism became purely ideological currents or theoretical trends that were still studied, believed, and even implemented as policies by high-level bureaucrats and royal family members, including the emperor, nevertheless lost their carriers per se.

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Appendix

Table A1. Study Schedule

	3/2022- 4/2022	5/2022- 6/2022	7/2022- 8/2022	9/2022- 10/2022	11/2022- 12/2022	1/2023- 2/2023	3/2023- 4/2023
In-depth Review of Literature							
Reading Eastern Zhou Materials							
Analysis of Eastern Zhou Case							
Reading Western Zhou and Qin-Han							
Analysis of Historical Change from Zhou to Qin							
Reading History of Other Axial Age Civilizations							
Comparing China with Other Axial Age Civilizations							
Writing Report							

Table A2. Budget

Category	Item	Amount	Unit Cost (Yuan)	Sub-total Cost (Yuan)
Source of Data	Secondary Source (Historians' Works in Chinese)	4	30 (on average)	120
	Primary Source (Chinese Classics)	20	20 (on average)	400
Sub-total in Chinese Yuan		420 (≈\$65.97)		
Category	Item	Amount	Unit Cost (USD)	Sub-total Cost (USD)
Source of Data	Secondary Source (Historians' Works in English)	12	35 (on average)	420
	Primary Source (English Translation of Chinese Classics)	15	12 (on average)	180
Consumable Items	Paper	1	18.88	18.88
	Ink	1	41.89	41.89
Software	MaxQDA Analytics Pro	1	263	263
Sub-total in US Dollar		923.77		
Total Cost (USD)		989.74		