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Barbarians or Not? Ethnicity and Changing Conceptions of the Ancient Yue (Viet) Peoples, ca. 400–50 BC

The study of ethnicity in contemporary social sciences is helping to pave a more sophisticated path in our studies of identity in Asian history. However, the scope of inquiry generally remains limited to the ancient north and northwestern, and the contemporary southwestern, frontiers of China,¹ leaving out other distinct areas of ethnic study. One of the more neglected of those concerns the ancient history of ethnic

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¹ The consistent focus on the northern and northwestern frontier is not surprising, given the constant and often intense conflict between China and its nomadic neighbors of the steppe, e.g., groups such as the Rong 戎, Di 狄, Xiongnu 匈奴, Tabgatch (Tuoba Xianbei 拓拔鲜卑), Jurchen, Mongols, and Manchus, who have continuously played a role in shaping, guiding, creating, or even dictating the policies and actions of various Chinese states.

A few representative examples provide an adequate picture of this scholarly emphasis. Joseph Fletcher, Owen Lattimore, Pamela Crossley, Mark Elliott, James Millward, Laura Hostetler, Jonathan Lipman, and Dru Gladney have done extensive work on Chinese and Inner Asian, Sino-Manchu, and/or Sino-Muslim relations from Qing to contemporary times. More specifically, for ethnicity and/or foreign relations in pre-Qing China, scholars such as Wang Gungwu and Morris Rossabi treat the northern frontier in analyzing Khitans, Jurchens, and Mongols in relationship to the “Han” peoples of the Song and Yuan periods; see Wang, *The Structure of Power in North China during the Five Dynasties* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1967), Rossabi, *The Jurchens in the Yuan and Ming* (Ithaca: Cornell U. East Asia Papers, 1982), and Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th–14th Centuries* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1983). More than a few scholars from the disciplines of Six Dynasties art history and religion address the issue of Chinese ethnic relationships with Central Asian warlords and leaders in historical perspective. For early imperial China, Nicola di Cosmo and Marc Abramson focus primarily on the northern and western frontier areas and distinctions among ethnicities and nomadic groups from Central and Northern Asia. Di Cosmo’s recent book on pre-Han and Han relationships to “steppe” cultures that practiced pastoral nomadism provides an important starting point for understanding the early history of China’s northern frontier: *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2002); also Abramson, “Deep Eyes and High Noses: Constructing Ethnicity in Tang China (618–907),” Ph.D. diss. (Princeton U., 2001). See also the work of Wang Mingke 王明珂 on the northern Qiang peoples before the Han, esp. his “The Ch’iang (Qiang) of Ancient China through the Han Dynasty: Ecological Frontiers and Ethnic Boundaries,” Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 1992). It is also not surprising that much work on ethnicity falls into the contemporary and modern periods, since the cultural anthropologists who generally engage such topics tend to study live cultures and subjects. Anthropological work on China has a spatial component as well, and it generally covers the southwestern frontier, near

relations in southern China itself.² In this paper I aim to remedy the lack of adequate awareness of ethnic history in China's southern regions by examining how Warring States and Han-dynasty (ca. 400–50 BC) authors viewed the Yue 越 as an identity apart from themselves. What were the changing criteria these authors used in expressing identities and differences, and how might such criteria differ or agree with the criteria for our current understandings of ethnicity? How did these authors, stemming as they did from different cultural, political, and intellectual contexts, reflect their own sense of identity through their judgments of Yue otherness?³ Did they consider the Yue to be different but more-or-less on equal footing? Or did they think of them as subhumans – as “barbarians” – in relationship to themselves?

The general lack of scholarship on historical ethnicity in the south is curious because early Chinese texts do not particularly shy away from mentioning the hundreds of diverse groups that comprised the early landscape of the south. Written in Chinese by members of the educated class, these sources hint at an intricate history of ethnic relations in the south, and they speak rather frankly of southern kingdoms and various types of peoples, languages, customs, and origins. They also do not fail to present a general history of how dominant groups such as strong states and imperial dynasties interacted with, expanded into, assimilated, and were otherwise influenced by cultures and polities in the southern regions.

So why have contemporary scholars largely neglected this history? I suggest that it is due not to a lack of interest but, rather, to the extraordinary impact created by modern constructions of a “Chinese”

Tibet, Burma, and Vietnam. See representative works by Joseph Rock, Sow-theng Leong, Stevan Harrell, and Ralph Litzinger; particularly well-articulated examples are those of Harrell, ed., *Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 2001), Harrell, ed., *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: U. of Washington P., 1996), and Leong, *Migration and Ethnicity in Chinese History: Hakkas, Pengmin, and Their Neighbors* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1997).

² Some works on the early history of South China include those of Keith Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1983), as well as Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, Wang Mingke, Wolfram Eberhard, Leonard Arrousseau, Richard Holcombe, and C. P. FitzGerald. For a pioneering effort on the state of Chu and its position within the context of Spring and Autumn/Warring States China, see Constance Cook and John Major, eds., *Defining Chu: Image and Reality in Ancient China* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1999). For an account of later Chinese frameworks for civilizing measures on its southern frontiers, see Magnus Fiskesjö, “On the Raw and the Cooked: Barbarians of Imperial China,” *Inner Asia* 1.2 (1999), pp. 139–68.

³ Certainly, the personal backgrounds of each author would have helped determine the way in which each approached the term “Yue.” In the many examples of “Yue” from the period, however, we often are faced with a lack of adequate biographical or contextual information about the author. This seriously hampers our ability to ascertain the reasons underlying each type of approach to identity, as well as our ability to compare changing conceptions of ethnicity in an historical fashion.

ethnic identity,⁴ which are intimately linked to what Lydia Liu calls the “invention of China in modern world making” and which have origins in early identity myths.⁵ Propagated during the Warring States period and epitomized by Sima Qian’s 司馬遷, *Shi ji* 史記 of the early-Han period, these mythologies posit the existence of a continuous and homogenous “Hua 華,” “Xia 夏,” “Hua-Xia 華夏,” or “Zhu-Xia 諸夏” people who trace their roots back to the ancient sage kings, but they do not acknowledge how these referents of identity were transformed and reconstructed over time.⁶ Nor do they admit much concerning the ways in which Chinese identity was influenced and altered by other, often alien, groups and identities.

The notion that “Chinese” identity (what early writers called Hua, Xia, and the like, as mentioned) has enjoyed a seamless and homogenous existence since antiquity has obscured our understanding of the early development of the heterogeneous states and cultures in what is now southern China.⁷ For example, from the earliest periods and off

⁴ Of course, this is not to say notions of pan-cultural, ethnic, and political “Chinese” identity did not exist at the time. References to such identities were abundant, but they were also constantly changing, and the boundaries associated with each identity were always in flux. In the Warring States period, for example, the “Hua,” “Xia,” “Hua-xia” or “Zhu-xia” would certainly have been relevant as references of self-identification, but not “Chinese,” or even “Han.” It is unclear when “Han” began to be used as an ethnic label, although during Yuan it was being used as such, in addition to the older ethnic terms and their closely linked toponyms, including “Zhongyuan” (Central Plains) and “Zhongguo” (Central States).

Political and temporal markers of identity name people according to the dynasty under which they lived. During Han, the term “Han” came into use by outsiders such as the Xiong Nu to refer to people of that dynasty. Other dynasty-based words of identity include “Tang,” “Song,” “Yuan,” “Ming,” and “Da Qing.” Intriguingly, some of these dynastic identifications were picked up by people in China and elsewhere to refer to the “Chinese” as an ethnicity (e.g., “Han” as a label used in China and Japan, and “Tang,” as used in Japan). See Endymion Wilkinson’s *Chinese History: A Manual* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), pp. 96–97, 682–88, 694–704, 722–25.

⁵ Lydia Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 2004), pp. 75–81. Liu shows how the super-sign, Zhongguo/China, was adopted as a form of self-identity only in modern times. Since the term “China” stems from either the Sanskrit or Persian words for “China” (*cina*, *chini*, respectively), it was a toponym used by others and thus not a part of the indigenous Chinese repertoire of self-identifications. My use of the terms “China” and “Chinese” in this paper serve merely as a convenient shorthand, the actual emic and vernacular referents of identity being the topic of theoretical debate generally, and forming much of our discussion. As Charles Holcombe puts it: “The tendency to project modern ethno-national identities into the remote past and assume that they are somehow eternal and immutable, however understandable, is a (dangerous) fallacy”; Holcombe, “Early Imperial China’s Deep South: The Viet Regions through Tang Times,” *T’ang Studies* 15–16 (1997–1998), p. 133.

⁶ Sima Qian draws up a simple lineage for the Hua Xia people that traces back to the Three August Rulers and the Five Emperors, then to the Three Dynasties of Xia, Shang, and Zhou; Sima Qian, *Shi ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992; hereafter *SJ*) 1–5, pp. 1–171.

⁷ The mythology of Han continuity and homogeneity presumes a notion of “Chinese,” or “Han,” culture that covers the entire geographic expanse of what roughly corresponds to the boundaries of later imperial dynasties, and especially the Qing empire.

and on through at least the late-sixth century AD, dominant states and cultures in the south, such as Chu 楚, Wu 吳, and Yue during the Eastern Zhou, and Shu 蜀 and Wu 吳 after the fall of the Han, had competed among themselves and with other dominant northern states for power and supremacy.⁸ No doubt the peoples and cultures of these states were influenced substantially by legacies of Chinese culture (which, through-out later imperial times was commonly referred to as “Han 漢” culture), but this does not mean that they did not continue to create and recreate their own sense of ethnicity, history, culture, and even political traditions. Moreover, even though all of these states helped contribute to the history of what is now China, many of the leaders and peoples did not identify themselves as Chinese according to any of its various historical labels. Even if some of these southerners did consider themselves to be Chinese (especially after the fall of the Han and among the elite classes), they might have construed their identity in ways that differentiated themselves from Chinese as perceived in the north, or they might even have concurrently identified in certain ways with the masses of ethnic others among whom they lived.⁹

The term “Yue 越” carries the modern Mandarin pronunciation of what in Chinese used to be phonetically closer to “Viet,” as in the present-day name for “Vietnam,” or the historical “Nam-Viet” (“Southern Yue”) – from which the name “Vietnam” derives.¹⁰ In delineating views about the Yue that were written down long before the rise of a historical Vietnam, I do not examine the history of the current boundaries of Vietnam, which are located far to the southwest of our area under discussion. Nor do I address the history of Vietnam’s current peoples, whose early history most likely does not intersect directly with the peoples we talk about here.¹¹ I do address, however, the early history of the term Yue and its changing referents, which is integral to under-

⁸ See Cook and Major, *Defining Chu*. See also Rafe de Crespigny, *Generals of the South: The Foundation and Early History of the Three Kingdoms State of Wu*, Asian Studies Monographs, ns 16 (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1990).

⁹ See Liu, *Clash of Empires*, p. 80.

¹⁰ C. Michele Thompson, “Scripts, Signs and Swords: The Viet Peoples and the Origins of Nom,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 101 (March, 2000), p. 17; elsewhere the author cites Jeffrey Barlow’s thesis that the Yue were identified by their association with a large battle-axe (*yue* 鉞), which serves as a cognate for Yue (*ibid.*, p. 22). Rao Zongyi 繞宗頤, citing *Da Dai li ji* 大戴禮記, shows that the term “Yue” can be a loan character for *qi* 戚 and vice versa; Rao, “Wu Yue wenhua” 吳越文化, *ZYY* 41.4 (1969), n. 2, p. 628. “*Yuenan*,” or Vietnam, was first bestowed as a name for the nation of Vietnam by Manchu rulers of the Qing in 1802; Holcombe, “Early Imperial China’s Deep South,” p. 133.

¹¹ See Keith Taylor’s refutation of Leonard Arousseau’s migration theory of the Yue peoples. As Taylor notes, the current population of Vietnam is more likely to have stemmed from the regions around modern-day Vietnam than from the old Yue regions of southern China. While ruling classes of Yue did migrate southwards into Vietnam over time, it is unreason-

standing the origins of cultures and practices that no doubt influenced the leadership and society of the later Vietnamese polity.

Throughout this paper, the voice that speaks of and depicts the Yue peoples is not the voice of the Yue themselves. Since only very few self-representations of the Yue exist in ancient Asian literature, I do not examine Yue self-identity *per se*.¹² Rather, I analyze how authors in the Central States regions identified themselves in relationship to their alien other to the south.¹³ As depicted in these early sources, Yue identity becomes no more than simply the projection of the other in relationship to the self.

ARCHEOLOGICAL AND LINGUISTIC VIEWS ON THE YUE

Who were the peoples associated with the term Yue? In some archeological and linguistic circles, scholars still lump together an entire geographic area in both prehistoric and early historic times, calling it the Yue “mega-culture.”¹⁴ They claim that this culture extends from the Yangzi River to the southern and southeastern coasts of China and that Yue peoples were coastal dwellers and cultivators of wet-rice agri-

able to claim that the bulk of the current population of Vietnam migrated with them; Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, pp. 314–15. See also Mark Lewis’ comments on the immobility of the peasants as opposed to the elite in “Warring States: Political History,” in Michael Loewe and Edward Shaughnessy, eds., *Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1999), p. 649.

¹² One such early documentation of a Yue voice occurs in an ancient Yue song, transliterated in Liu Xiang’s *Shuo yuan*. Since there was no written form of the language in question, the Han author provided readers with a phonetic transliteration of the Yue lyrics, along with a Chinese translation of it. Other fragments of the Yue voice can be found in *Shi ji*, in quotations by distinguished and highly educated men from various Yue polities; they were well versed in the culture and norms of the Central States and arguably possessed a problematic relationship to the indigenous peoples over whom they ruled.

In the case of the Yue lyrics, Liu Xiang’s Chinese translation “gives little indication as to which transliterated syllable corresponds to which Chinese word,” making it very difficult to ascertain the language group to which such a language belonged; Tzu-lin Mei and Jerry Norman, “The Austroasiatics in Ancient South China: Some Lexical Evidence,” *MS* 32 (1976), p. 277. Thus, though the Yue song of the *Shuo yuan* provides a perspective that is derivative of Yue, it is still through the filtering of the Chinese language that we come into contact with it. Furthermore, the presentation of the song in the Yue voice does not in itself preclude the likelihood that the style and content of the song had been greatly influenced by Zhou lyrical forms or poetical models. For a brief linguistic study and translation of this song (into Japanese), see Izumi Hisanosuke 泉井久之助, “Ryū Eko Setsu En kan daiichi no Etsuka ni tsuite” 劉向說苑卷第一の越歌について, *Gengo kenkyū* 言語研究 22–23 (1953), pp. 41–45.

¹³ The toponym “Central States,” as used during Warring States times, referred vaguely to states that occupied the regions around the Zhou heartland in the Wei and Yellow River valleys. General usage of the toponym also suggests that these states were full-fledged members of the Zhou political sphere. The toponym does not include interstitial states of the same geographic region belonging to the Rong, Di, and other various peoples.

¹⁴ Heather Peters, “Tattooed Faces and Stilt Houses: Who Were the Ancient Yue?” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 17 (April 1990), p. 7.

culture. Other salient traits of Yue culture, sometimes also referred to as Wu-Yue culture, include the production of stamped geometric pottery, shouldered stone axes, and stepped adzes.¹⁵

Linguists such as Jerry Norman, Mei Tsu-lin, and Edwin Pulleyblank suggest an Austroasiatic background for the cultures that sprang up in these areas during the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, and perhaps even well into the Warring States (464–221 BC).¹⁶ Some scholars even associate such a linguistic connection with the more nebulous category of ethnicity. According to Pulleyblank, the fact that the name Yue in early Chinese writings referred to peoples all along the coast “is prima facie evidence that there was an ethnic and linguistic identity among the inhabitants of the whole region, but of course it does not prove that this was so. It could be a misapplication by the Chinese of a familiar name to quite unrelated peoples.”¹⁷ Here, Pulleyblank links the Chinese usage of the term Yue with both a linguistic and ethnic reality, though according to the evidence he uses, there are indeed no grounds on which one might claim this. Pulleyblank’s statement gives us insight into how easily one might slide from thinking about Yue as a referent to Yue as a distinct ethnicity.

The likelihood that the early peoples of the South spoke languages that belonged to the same linguistic group is perhaps much greater than the likelihood that the peoples of this area were all of the same ethnicity. Mei Tsu-lin and Jerry Norman have quite convincingly demonstrated that peoples associated with the referent Yue were “at least partly AA (Austroasiatic).”¹⁸ They cite references to individual Chinese terms that possessed Austroasiatic derivations, and they show how such terms were variously linked in the received literature to the South (the state of Chu), as well as to the people of “Yue” or “Southern Yue (Nan Yue 南越).” The most famous example is that of “*jiang* 江,” which became the proper name of the Yangzi River, but which can be traced to the general word for “river” in several Austroasiatic languages.¹⁹ Mei and

¹⁵ Peters, “Tattooed Faces,” p. 3. See also Rao, “Wu Yue wenhua,” p. 610; and William Meacham, “Origins and Development of the Yue Coastal Neolithic: A Microcosm of Culture Change on the Mainland of East Asia,” in David Keightley, ed., *The Origins of Chinese Civilization* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1983), pp. 147–76.

¹⁶ Mei and Norman, “Austroasiatics in Ancient South China,” pp. 274–301. See also E. G. Pulleyblank, “The Chinese and Their Neighbors in Prehistoric and Early Historic Times,” in Keightley, *The Origins of Chinese Civilization*, pp. 411–66.

¹⁷ Pulleyblank, “Chinese and Their Neighbors,” p. 438.

¹⁸ Mei and Norman, “Austroasiatics in Ancient South China,” p. 276.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 280–83.

Norman hypothesize that this Austroasiatic term came into the Chinese vocabulary from the area where the Han River meets the Yangzi River in southern China, thereby suggesting a southern origin for Austroasiatic influences on Chinese.²⁰ They further support their linkage between Yue and Austroasiatic languages by pointing to early Chinese comments on linguistic differences specifically associated with the Yue peoples. As early as Han times, the famous commentator Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 AD) demonstrated this difference by highlighting the word “to die,” which, he claims, the Yue people referred to as “*cha*” or “*za* 札.”²¹ The Han-era dictionary *Shuo wen* 說文 also points to another example, listed under the entry for *sou* 搜: “Nan Yue calls ‘dog’ **nog-siog* 獾搜.”²² According to Mei and Norman, this suggests that the meaning “dog” was attached to *sou*, the second character in the compound. They thus claim that the early pronunciations for both “to die” and “dog” can be clearly linked to the Austroasiatic linguistic group.²³

But as Heather Peters points out, current archeological or linguistic cultures should by no means be confused with ethnicities: “Widespread similar, or shared, cultural traits need not necessarily mark ethnicity and can easily mask a plethora of diverse ethnic groups and cultures. Some overlapping traits may simply express an ecological response to a shared environment.”²⁴ The “Yue” that archeologists and linguists refer to should therefore not be confused with the historical reference “Yue,” which may or may not have been a single ethnicity. In the discussion that follows, I briefly outline some basic definitions of ethnicity, emphasizing the one proving most useful for the study at hand. In adopting a definition of ethnicity, I ask us to revise our understanding of ethnicity in southern China so that we do not equate archeological or even linguistic evidence with legitimate proof of shared ethnicity.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 282.

²¹ Ibid., p. 277.

²² Ibid., pp. 277–79.

²³ Ibid. Chinese words for tiger (*hu* 虎); large tooth (*ya* 牙); crossbow (*nu* 弩); and the ancient Chu word for fly, or gnat (蠶 *wei*), are among words deriving from such a linguistic group, though there is no evidence of a connection between these terms and the Yue; Mei and Norman, “Austroasiatics in Ancient South China,” pp. 284–94.

A slightly different claim is that of Stephen O’Harrow, who surmises that archaic Vietnamese might have constituted the lingua franca of the cultures extending from northern Vietnam well into southern China during the Bronze Age; O’Harrow, “Men of Hu, Men of Han, Men of the Hundred Man: The Biography of Si Nhip and the Conceptualization of Early Vietnamese Society,” *BEFEO* 75 (1986), pp. 249–66.

²⁴ Peters, “Tattooed Faces,” p. 10.

DEFINITIONS OF ETHNICITY

Definitions of ethnicity are of two main kinds: primordialist and circumstantialist.²⁵ The primordialist position views ethnicity as fixed and innate, and tends to equate ethnicity with an inherited property characteristic of a group of people.²⁶ Under such a definition, one's ethnicity is independent of history and can be determined at any time through the examination of a fixed set of criteria. Many scholars, such as the ones mentioned above who believe that there was a single ethnicity for the ancient coastal and Austroasiatic-speaking peoples of South China, ascribe to such a primordialist view on ethnicity. They consider the Yue to constitute such an ethnicity, sometimes even suggesting that the shared cultural and linguistic links among Yue individuals correspond to a shared genetic link. In addition, many ethnic peoples themselves define their own ethnicity in terms of a primordial outlook. By embracing such a concept of ethnicity, these ethnic peoples are often very successful at preserving more definite and fixed boundaries of their cultural identity (including such aspects as language and customs) through the preservation of their genealogies.²⁷

The circumstantialist position, on the other hand, views ethnicity as a category that is defined and redefined throughout history; it is therefore historically contingent, subject to manipulation, and open to negotiation.²⁸ An important aspect of this position is that it distinguishes between ethnic markers, or ethnic indicia, and ethnicity itself.²⁹ Ethnic indicia are traits or properties that serve as criteria for ethnicity. These may be innate properties, such as skin color, body hair, shape of one's nose, and so forth; or they may be acquired goods, for example, religion, or loyalty to a certain body of texts. Ethnicity, on the other hand, constitutes an identity that is based on the assemblage of such indicia, but it is not equivalent to any single one. Furthermore, propagation of any given definition of ethnicity is maintained through mechanisms that facilitate the "perpetuation of group consciousness and cohesion" as well as its separation and difference from outside groups.³⁰ Thus,

²⁵ Abramson, "Deep Eyes and High Noses," p. 44.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ This seems to be the case for the Nuosu peoples of contemporary Southwest China, who maintain an oppositional, highly exclusive identity; see Stevan Harrell, *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China* (Seattle: U. of Washington P., 2001), pp. 320–25.

²⁸ Abramson, "Deep Eyes and High Noses," p. 45; and Mark Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2001), p. 17.

²⁹ See Abramson, "Deep Eyes and High Noses," p. 40, and Jonathan Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1997), p. 32.

³⁰ Abramson, "Deep Eyes and High Noses," p. 40.

though a given construction of ethnicity is real and might prove to be lasting for oneself and one's immediate progeny, it nonetheless is still a constructed category that can be altered according to changing historical circumstance and reconceptualizations of self and other.

Jonathan Hall, a scholar of ancient Hellenistic identity, has proposed a useful definition of ethnicity that is grounded in the circumstantialist approach. Ethnicity for him is a constructed category based on a shared myth of descent and on an association with a specific territory.³¹ This definition is general enough to allow for varying claims on ethnicity but specific enough to distinguish ethnicity from other forms of identification such as nationality, kinship, and culture. It is important to note that one's sense of shared, ethnic territory is often not separate from one's sense of shared descent, as original ancestors are necessarily locatable to a specific place and time.

The criterion of a shared myth of descent helps clarify the idea that ethnicity can be dependent "not so much on real descent as on the symbols of descent and the individual's belief in them."³² It also helps distinguish ethnicity from other identifications such as nationality and culture. Nationalities can be based solely on geography (territory) and politics, but ethnicities are different because they incorporate a group consciousness of one's origins and ancestors. Similarly, ethnicities can be distinguished from culture insofar as they include a notion of shared descent. Many people can share the same culture, defined as the shared habits and practices of people living in similar environments, without having to share the same myth of descent.³³

In my usages of the term ethnicity here, I evaluate the textual evidence in light of Hall's two main criteria: the possession of a shared myth of descent and the linking of such a myth to a specific territory. I thus invoke a circumstantialist position that views ethnicity as an open, malleable social construction capable of changing with time, place, and person. Equipped with this definition, I ask whether authors during the Warring States and early-Han periods thought of the Yue as constituting a distinct ethnicity. If so, how did they present themselves as

³¹ Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, p. 32.

³² Elliott, *Manchu Way*, p. 17.

³³ Culture and ethnicity can be deeply related, thus making it difficult to distinguish between the two. Sow-theng Leong points to competition with others as a factor that helps carve an ethnicity out of people with a shared culture. While she does not give a definition of ethnicity, she provides us with a possible source or reason for its emergence, along with its clear connection to culture; Leong, in Tim Wright, ed., *Migration and Ethnicity in Chinese History: Hakkas, Pengmin, and Their Neighbors* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1997), pp. 19–20.

opposed to the ethnic other? And how did their concept of ethnicity change according to place and time?

WHO WERE THE YUE? BASIC HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The ancient kingdom of Yue was situated southeast of the relatively more central of the states within the Zhou political sphere, just south of the mouth of the Yangzi River (now northern Zhejiang and south-eastern Anhui).³⁴ Yue's political history is deeply intertwined with its non-Zhou and also non-Central State neighbor to the north, the state of Wu 吳, the boundaries of which correspond roughly to the region around Shanghai, southern Jiangxi, and southern Anhui.³⁵ Mark Lewis notes, however, that aside from areas where walls were built, it is very difficult to ascertain precise borders in any of the Eastern Zhou states, especially given the fact that borders shifted considerably over time.³⁶ Thus, any reference to such states necessarily only points to speculative boundaries that encompass the core regions of each.

In his discussion of Bronze Age southeastern cultures, Lothar von Falkenhausen writes: "Yue... is an almost unknown entity during the Spring and Autumn Period."³⁷ This is indeed true, since the earliest textual references to the Yue occur only under a late date in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, a classical text that records political and military events from about the mid-sixth century to 470 BC.³⁸ A bloody rivalry began when Wu invaded Yue in 510 and set off a series of battles involving control over the rice-growing land in the Yangzi delta.³⁹ By 482 BC, king Fuchai of Wu 吳王夫差 (r. 495-474 BC) had not only conquered Yue but had turned his military exploits toward the north to compete for and win the status of protector-general 霸 over the inter-

³⁴ Lothar von Falkenhausen, "The Waning of the Bronze Age: Material Culture and Social Developments, 770-481 B.C.," in Loewe and Shaughnessy, *Cambridge History*, p. 526.

³⁵ Ibid. For a detailed discussion of the similar origins of the Wu and Yue states, and their relationship to Chu, see Rao, "Wu Yue wenhua," p. 609, who cites Sima Qian to show that the Wu-Yue regions were originally known as the "Jing man 荆蠻" or "Chu man 楚蠻" regions, in reference to the Man 蠻 (also Min 閩) peoples. Rao goes further in order to claim that these terms seem to be taken from the customary names for these peoples; *ibid.*, p. 609, and nn. 1 and 2, p. 628.

³⁶ Lewis, "Warring States: Political History," p. 593.

³⁷ Falkenhausen, "Waning of the Bronze Age," p. 526.

³⁸ While the term "Yue" occurs in the text of *Zuo zhuan* for years that precede this period, it only begins to appear in the text of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in the entries for duke Shao (r. 541-516 BC); Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, annot., *Chun Qiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995). The earliest reference I can find occurs under Duke Shao (j. 10, part 5.8); see *ibid.*, p. 1270.

³⁹ Cho-yun Hsu, "The Spring and Autumn Period," in Loewe and Shaughnessy, *Cambridge History*, p. 564.

state community.⁴⁰ The tide quickly turned against king Fuchai, however, for in 473 BC, under the leadership of king Gou Jian of Yue 越王句踐 (r. 496–465 BC), Yue engaged in a victorious, three-year conquest of Wu.⁴¹ King Gou Jian's successful conquest and subsequent claim as protector-general of the interstate community marks the zenith of Yue power in the history of the Zhou period.⁴²

About a century later, in 333 BC, the state of Chu decisively defeated Yue, bringing about its end as a formal state.⁴³ Of this event, Sima Qian writes: "As a result of this, the Yue [ruling class] dispersed. The sons of many clans vied for positions, some becoming kings and others rulers. They banked south of the Yangzi along the coast and attended court in the state of Chu."⁴⁴ This is the clearest and most reliable information on what happened to the Yue ruling class in the aftermath of the Chu defeat. Sima points to the transformation of the rather large and powerful Yue state into many kingdoms and principalities claimed by the dispersed members of the Yue ruling class. Significantly, the Yue princes who became the leaders of these kingdoms and principalities were compelled to pay homage to the Chu royal court, so that all of Yue leadership was subordinated to Chu from that time to the end of the Chu state in 223 BC.

For the segment of history postdating the final defeat of Yue, our sources refer to a new category called the "Hundred Yue 百越," which appears to represent a Chinese shorthand for these many dispersed groups, or possibly others who might have appeared as related to the erstwhile state of Yue.⁴⁵ Sources unfortunately do not provide solid clues regarding a perceived ethnic relationship between "Yue" and the "Hundred Yue." The only information we might glean consists in the post-333 BC appearance of the category "Hundred Yue" in the literature of the period, which points to a possible connection between the dispersed ruling class of Yue and the creation of new kingdoms across

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Falkenhausen, "Waning of the Bronze Age," p. 526.

⁴² Yang, *Chun Qiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 12.20 and 12.24 (Duke Ai), pp. 1715–17, 1722–24; cited in Hsu, "Spring and Autumn Period," p. 564.

⁴³ King Wei of Chu 楚威王 (r. 330–328 BC) defeated and killed king Wu Jiang of Yue 越王無疆. Sima Qian, states, "completely overtaking the old Wu lands up to Zhejiang, and, in the north, destroying [those parts of] Qi up to Xuzhou"; *SJ* 41 ("Yue Wang Gou Jian shijia" 越王句踐世家), p. 1751. I adopt the precise date from Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ *SJ* 41, p. 1751. In this passage, commentators point out that the region referred to corresponds to the current Nanjing-Suzhou area.

⁴⁵ As far as I can tell, there are no existing references to the Hundred Yue that predate the dissolution of the state of Yue. Rao explains that people referred to the Yue as Hundred Yue because the ruling classes of Yue themselves possessed mixed surnames. This appears to be Rao's own speculation, since I am unable to confirm his explanation using early sources; Rao, "Wu Yue wenhua," p. 609.

the southern landscape that might have taken Yue as their name, and, hence, their ruling ancestral lineage. Since “Hundred Yue” appears only as an ascriptive label, however, we should be wary of assuming that all or any of the peoples for whom the label would apply actually stylized themselves as “Yue.”

In one example from *Shi ji*, the term Hundred Yue refers to groups south of Chu that were conquered by the Chu minister Wu Qi 吳起 during the reign of king Dao of Chu 楚悼王 (r. 328–298 BC).⁴⁶ Another example from the same text refers to the Hundred Yue in relationship to the areas around modern-day Guangdong, Guizhou, and Guangxi.⁴⁷ And in yet another example, third-century BC authors writing from the state of Qin refer to roughly the areas south of the Han River of Yangzhou as the outskirts of the Hundred Yue.⁴⁸ If we assume these authors are familiar with their southern geography, and if we take this to be a reference to the current-day Han River, the Hundred Yue would seem to have been located west of the historic states of Wu and Yue, and most likely south of Chu.⁴⁹ From these references, we gain a sense that the geographical location of the Hundred Yue centered around the entire Xi River basin in modern-day Canton, and that the Hundred Yue might not merely be a shorthand for the broken-up principalities of the previous state of Yue.

⁴⁶ *SJ* 65 (“Sunzi Wu Qi liezhuan” 孫子吳起列傳), p. 2168; Peters, “Tattooed Faces,” p. 3. As Peters points out, this story is repeated in *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (compiled 5th-c. AD), where the author used the reference “Southern Yue,” and not “Hundred Yue.” This, I believe, might be attributed to vagueness in the *Shi ji* source, or, possibly, *Hou Han shu*’s narrative anachronism. Some of the earliest textual references to Southern Yue occur in *Shi ji*, where Sima Qian recounts how Zhao Tuo, a former Qin commissioner, established the kingdom and appointed himself king just after the fall of the Qin (*SJ* 113 [“Nan Yue liezhuan” 南越列傳], p. 2967). We do not know if a so-called Southern Yue existed as a kingdom in the Canton region before this time, or sometime after the Chu conquest of Yue in 333 BC. *Zhuangzi* contains a reference to the kingdom of Southern Yue that occurs inside a passage most likely postdating the Qin dynasty; Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, annot., *Zhuangzi ji shi* 莊子集釋 (Taipei: Wanjuan lou, 1993) 20 (“Shan mu” 山木), p. 671. For the dating of *Zhuangzi*, see Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), pp. 56–59. If the name “Southern Yue” was used exclusively as a name for the post-Qin kingdom, then this would appear to provide a solid *terminus a quo* for the *Zhuangzi* passage.

⁴⁷ *SJ* 113, p. 2967.

⁴⁸ Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, annot., *Lü shi chungiu jiaoshi* 20 (sect. “Shi jun lan” 恃君覽), p. 1322. Commentators refer to Yang as Yangzhou 揚州, a reference to the ancient Nine Provinces of Yü the Great; see Zhang Shoujie’s Tang-era comments to *SJ* 113, p. 2968, item 4. On the origins of the number nine as a literal reference to geographical regions, see Lewis, “Warring States: Political History,” p. 648. The region known early on as Yang Yue 揚越 appears to have referred to the southern reaches of the mainland – south of the Yangzhou region; *SJ* 113, p. 2967.

⁴⁹ It seems likely that the authors of *Lü shi chungiu* were using very crude reference points. The areas immediately south of the Han River would have belonged mostly to the state of Chu, which was not conquered by Qin until 222 BC.

References to the geographical scope and periphery of the Hundred Yue occur somewhat later in the textual record. *Han shu* 漢書 provides an example in which the “lands of Yue” span a distance from the regions of Kuaiji 會稽 to Jiaozhi 交趾; or, as one commentator quantifies it, about 7,000–8,000 *li* (approximately 2,000 miles).⁵⁰ Of course, one must allow for the likelihood that geographical reference points for the Hundred Yue during the first century AD, when *Han shu* was written, had already changed dramatically since the late Warring States and early Han. Nonetheless, it is clear that by the first century AD the lands of Yue were thought to cover extremely great distances. This suggests that the category of Yue had become something more than the specific reference to the ancient kingdom of Yue, or even just the Hundred Yue, centered around the Canton region.⁵¹ “Yue” had become a relevant marker for peoples and places situated most anywhere in the entire southern portion of the traditional area of what is now modern China and in northern Vietnam.

The expansion of the geographical scope of Yue appears to be related to the proliferation of the term Yue in the names of southern kingdoms established during the late-Qin and early-Han periods. In Sima’s *Shi ji*, Southern Yue 南越 (Nan Yue; Nam Viet: situated around modern-day Canton) emerges as a legitimate kingdom after the end of the Qin empire, around 206 BC. And the kingdom of Min Yue 閩越 (Yue of the Min River Basin: situated around modern-day Fujian province) is officially established in 197 BC, five years after the beginning of the Han dynasty. While the first king of Southern Yue, Zhao Tuo 趙佗 (r. 206–136 BC), was himself not of Yue background, his kingdom nonetheless incorporated many groups from the Hundred Yue into it. Notably, in expanding its power beyond the scope of the former spaces of the Hundred Yue, Southern Yue took on the kingdoms of Au Lac 甌駱 (in contemporary Vietnam) and Min Yue as vassals.⁵² King Wu Zhu 無諸

⁵⁰ Also noteworthy is the fact that *Han shu* does not technically use the term Hundred Yue here. The phrase is merely, “the lands of the Yue 粵地.” Note the different character used here for Yue. This character came to refer to the areas around modern-day Guangdong and Guangxi in general; Ban Gu 班固, *Han Shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995) 28B, p. 1669. It is the Jin-era Chen Zan 臣瓚 who substitutes “Hundred Yue” for “Yue” in commentary to this passage. I cannot ascertain from the sources just when the name “Hundred Yue” became synonymous with “Yue” in common usage. The expanse (stated in *li* by Chen) corresponds roughly to the area between the mouth of the Yangzi near Shanghai and the Red River Valley near Vietnam. On the origins of the name Jiaozhi and its general location as a prefecture in the Red (Hong) River plain, see Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. 26.

⁵¹ Even linguists and archaeologists of recent times adopt this loose, Han Dynasty usage of the term. Hence, they anachronistically refer to “Yue” to designate the material and linguistic multiplex of southern prehistoric cultures.

⁵² Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. 24.

of Min Yue, in contrast to Zhao Tuo, descended from the famed king Gou Jian of Yue, so not only did he rule over so-called Yue peoples of the Min area,⁵³ he carried on the ruling lineage of the ancient Yue state as well.⁵⁴ This tight connection to the Yue peoples, homeland, and political traditions is reflected in the preservation of the term “Yue” in the name for Min Yue, even when the name was changed to Eastern Yue 東越 (Dong Yue), in 135 BC.

In addition to the proliferation of kingdoms that carried on the name Yue, the traditions of “Yue” continued to be relevant for kingdoms that were formed and ruled by Gou Jian’s descendants. One such kingdom was the kingdom of Donghai 東海, otherwise known as the kingdom of Eastern Ou 東甌 (Dong Ou).⁵⁵ The term “Ou 甌,” named after the Ou River in southern Zhejiang, seems to have retained strong associations with the defunct kingdom of Yue. As Keith Taylor points out, many small principalities that sprang up around the two kingdoms of Yue, Min Yue, and Southern Yue, “apparently chose to associate themselves with the venerable traditions of the Ou in order to increase their prestige with the more powerful kingdoms.”⁵⁶ Eastern and Western Ou were two such kingdoms, and it is precisely this term, Ou, that is picked up and used thousands of miles to the west of its origins to refer to the ancient Vietnamese kingdom of Au Lac.⁵⁷ Thus, not only is the term Yue relevant to the creation of Vietnamese identity, terms that are closely linked to Yue traditions, such as Ou, also play a role in the history of Vietnam’s ruling class and political traditions.

The history of the Yue kingdoms during the long period of the Han dynasty is one of Han imperial conquest and incorporation, as well as gradual cultural and political encroachment upon the southern ruling elite and peoples of these regions. The peoples of Eastern Ou migrated into more centralized, Han territories near the Yangzi around 138 BC.⁵⁸ The year 135 BC witnessed the capitulation of Min Yue to Han authority and the changing of its name to Eastern Yue in

⁵³ During the Qin this area was conquered and made into a commandary called Central Min; *SJ* 114 (“*Dong Yue liezhuan*” 東越列傳), p. 2979.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. 15.

⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 15–16, for the possible associations with this term and its relevance to the ancient Vietnamese kingdom of Au Lac. The term “Lac,” transcribed into Chinese as “Luo 駱,” seems to have been used by the Chinese for its sound, and not its reference to “white horses with black manes.” In its original language (following Mei’s and Norman’s hypothesis, it would have been an Austronesian tongue), “lac” might have meant “bronze drum.” “Au Lac” would then have referred to the “Ou of the bronze drum”; see Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, pp. 686–87, who cites Qin Xiaohang 覃曉航, *Lingnan gu Yueren mingcheng wenhua tanyuan* 嶺南古越人名稱文化探源 (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue, 1994).

⁵⁸ *SJ* 114, p. 2980.

the wake of its attack on Southern Yue. And by 111 BC Han armies of superior number and force defeated the by-then expansive kingdom of Southern Yue.⁵⁹ Since Eastern Yue had aided Southern Yue in its rebel movement against the Han, Eastern Yue also fell to Han upon the defeat of Southern Yue. This defeat of the entire Yue southlands in 111 BC marks the beginning of more intensified Han influence in the political, administrative, and cultural sphere of the southern peoples. Southern Yue was divided up into seven prefectures, extending all the way from modern-day Guangdong to northern Vietnam.⁶⁰ While many original rulers continued to maintain control over their localities, these leaders had to pay allegiance to the Han and sometimes share control with immigrant Han administrators whose efforts were focused on overseeing commerce and insuring the security and maintenance of trade networks.⁶¹

WARRING STATES AND EARLY-HAN POLITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL NARRATIVES

In the Warring States and early-Han periods, stories about the historical state of Yue and the Yue peoples become more prevalent in the Chinese sources. These stories, such as those carried in *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, *Guo yü* 國語, *Shi ji*, *Yue jue shu* 越絕書, and *Wu Yue chungqiu* 吳越春秋, generally recount intrigues occurring in the military drama between Yue and Wu at the end of the Spring and Autumn period.⁶² If they do not reflect a fascination with the personality, leadership style, and military exploits of king Gou Jian, they demonstrate a keen interest in Yue's meteoric rise to power and the political and military environments that helped motivate it. General references to the Yue seem also to have increased in Warring States and Han literature, and are likely also to have been linked to Yue's new prominence, arising from the king's victories.

In the following analysis, I highlight three distinct and possibly competing ways of viewing the Yue, as "other." After a description of each view, I ascertain how it might correspond to an ethnic notion of the other, if at all. Then I ask to what extent this notion constitutes a

⁵⁹ *SJ* 113, p. 2977.

⁶⁰ Note that this helps explain *Han shu's* expanded geographic scope for the so-called "Yue lands," mentioned above.

⁶¹ Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. 29.

⁶² Dating *Wu Yue chungqiu* passages is difficult; the text draws largely on the other sources just listed. See John Lagerway's account of its textual history in Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts*, pp. 473-76.

debased interpretation of the ethnic other, or, put in the words of Martha Nussbaum, a view of the other as dehumanized through disgust towards it.⁶³ The views are as follows: 1. Yue people as distant participants in the interstate political spheres of the Warring States; 2. Yue people as culturally distinct from the Zhu-Xia and people from the Central States; and 3. Yue people as essentially distinct from the Zhu-Xia people by way of environmental and biological determinism.

1. Distant Participants: Political Differences between Yue and the Central States

A prominent way in which the Yue are mentioned in Warring States and Qin-Han texts is through discussion of political and diplomatic actions. Of these political references, many invoke the Yue to prove a point about the universally similar tendencies of all humankind. Take, for example, an anecdote in the early chapters of *Mozi* 墨子 (ca. 350 BC), which illuminates king Gou Jian's personal taste for bravery.⁶⁴ To test the bravery of his *shi* 士 warriors, Gou Jian personally requested that his own ships be burned:

“The treasures of Yue are in there!” he yelled to his warriors, and personally drummed them to progress. Upon the sound of the drum, the warriors were goaded on into a chaotic frenzy [to recover the treasure from the boats]. More than a hundred of the surrounding men found their deaths by leaping into the fire.⁶⁵ 試其士曰：“越國之寶盡在此！”越王親自鼓其士而進之，士聞鼓音，破碎亂行、蹈火而死者左右百人有餘。

This anecdote, which occurs in two of the three early-Mohist chapters called “Universal Caring,” points to problems associated with the partialities of rulers. In effect, king Gou Jian's tastes and his men's desires to pander to them give rise to the chaotic and uncontrollable behavior of his warriors. The author points to the Yue as one of many (including the cases of king Ling of Chu 楚靈王 and king Wen of Jin 晉文公) that might demonstrate how humans from all over are both partial (king Gou Jian) and poised to please and curry favor to those in power (Yue warriors). By including Gou Jian and his followers as examples

⁶³ M. C. Nussbaum, “Secret Sewers of Vice: Disgust, Bodies and the Law,” in S. Bandes, ed., *The Passions of Law* (New York: New York U.P., 2000), pp. 19–62.

⁶⁴ On the so-called early chapters of the Mohist corpus, see A. C. Graham, *Divisions in Early Mohism Reflected in the Core Chapters of Mo-tzu* (Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1985).

⁶⁵ Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, annot., *Mozi jian gu* 墨子閒詁 (Taipei: Huaqu shuju, 1987) 15 (“Jian ai, B” 兼愛中), pp. 97–98. This story also found in *Mozi*, sect. “Jian ai, C,” with more details, and in *Hanfeizi*, sect. “Nei shu shuo, A” 內儲說上.”

in a study of shared human behaviors, the author exploits their difference to strengthen his universal point about humans. At base, this view of Yue takes them to be human and equally vulnerable to pitfalls that cause sociopolitical disorder.

Our sources also treat Yue as an extreme example of what most states of the central domain symbolize, experience, or enact. For example, some Warring States and possibly early-Han writings suggest that Yue, though not technically a part of the Zhou royal order, was so much a part of the sphere of interstate politics, that it might be used as an outside, critical example of a state that takes common practices too far. Just as Yue was known to have been located on the extreme periphery of the Zhou cultural and political sphere, it also became associated with the extremity of common ideals, especially political ones and those related to diplomacy and warfare. In one of three early Mohist treatises against warfare, the author states that Qi, Jin, Chu, and Yue were fondest of warfare.⁶⁶ A passage in *Guanzi* 管子 states that Yue was clearly a superior power in comparison with those of the Central States.

Duke Huan [of Qi (r. 685–643 BC)] said: “There is no state in the world that is as powerful as Yue. Now I would like to launch an attack against Guzhu and Lizhi in the north. I fear that Yue will arrive here [to invade us]. Is there anything we can do about this?”⁶⁷ 桓公曰：天下之國莫彊於越。今寡人欲北舉事孤竹離枝。恐越人之至。爲此有道乎？

This statement is interesting because it presents us with an anachronistically strong Yue of the seventh century BC, suggesting an imaginative distortion of the region and its political prowess.⁶⁸ Because it lacks historical accuracy, it can be taken as a comment on the relative strength or importance of Yue in the author’s own time. It can also be read as the author’s exaggerated sense of a dangerous potency that lurks in distant regions. Since the author stresses difference in terms of extremes, the real difference between Yue and the Central States seems to be one of degree and not of kind.

⁶⁶ Sun, *Mozi jian gu* 19 (“Fei gong, C” 非功, 下), p. 134. Of these four states, the only state that does not lie on the periphery of the Zhou sphere and maintain somewhat questionable Zhou status is Jin.

⁶⁷ Yan Changyao 顏昌峯, annot., *Guanzi jiao shi* 管子校釋 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1996) 80, sect. “Qing zhong” 輕重 A, p. 596; slightly altered from W. Allyn Rickett, trans., *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China, Vol. 2* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1998), p. 454. The component chapters of the *Guanzi* might be dated from the middle of the Warring States through early Han.

⁶⁸ The military and perhaps even economic power of Yue is not attested until the 5th-c.

Other passages in *Mozi* support this view of Yue as a distant state that is equally as powerful and corrupt (if not more so) as the Central States. In one example, the king of Yue sends a Mohist disciple to invite the latter's master, Mozi, to serve as his own personal teacher. For Mozi's services, the king offers him an apportionment of the old state of Wu as a fief. Mozi's reply reveals what might have been a typical, Central States impression of Yue's distance from high civilization:

If the [king of] Yue does not listen to my words and make use of my Dao but I go nonetheless, then I allow justice to be bought off. To be captured for sale, this I can do in the Central States. Why should I need to go [as far as] Yue for it?⁶⁹ 抑越不聽吾言，不用吾道，而我往焉，則是我以義糶也。鈞之糶，亦於中國耳，何必於越哉。

This excerpt shows that Yue was not considered to be a part of the Central States, but that it participated in inter-state diplomacies and exchanges by inviting intellectuals to be a part of the advisory force of the state. It makes clear that while corrupt practices and diplomatic activity might equally occur in Yue as anywhere, Yue still occupied a position on the periphery of civilization and cultural activity.

One passage in the later chapters of *Zhuangzi* 莊子 stresses this sense of the periphery by speaking of exiles to Yue who feel affinity to any rare stranger who might recognizably be from their own, more familiar homelands.⁷⁰ Admittedly, the mere fact that people from the Central States could be exiled to Yue reveals the Central States' perception of Yue as an undesirable backwater far away from the center of civilization. That there might have been clearly identifiable physical differences between the peoples of Wei in the north, where the anecdote is situated, and those of Yue in the south also suggests distance and distinction, not closeness and solidarity.

In these examples, the state of Yue – though it formally did not belong to the geo-political category of “Central States,” is presented as a full contender for power in interstate politics of the late-Zhou period. Not only is its inclusion as a legitimate player confirmed through these statements, but its ranking as most aggressive, or most powerful among contenders is striking, and is generally not historically accurate. The distortion of Yue's power can be explained by the fact that to many Warring States authors, Yue was a legitimate foreign power

bc, when the state of Yue overtook Wu, allowing Yue's ruler, Gou Jian, to become protector-general of the interstate regions.

⁶⁹ Sun, *Mozi jian gu* 49 (“Lu wen” 魯問), p. 436.

⁷⁰ Guo, *Zhuangzi ji shi* 24 (“Xu Wu Gui” 徐無鬼), p. 822.

that was perceived to exist at the fringes of the known world. Perceptions of geographic extremity could easily be translated into a sense of cultural extremity, loss of control, and hence, danger. Yue's reputation as a daunting political and military power that threatened interstate order thus can be linked to its place in the Central States imagination right at the edge of the familiar – a liminal space somewhere between the incontrovertibly foreign and the vaguely understood.⁷¹

Is it possible to view these perceptions of Yue in terms of a concept of ethnicity? The authors mentioned so far certainly present us with accounts of the Yue that stress difference of some kind. But they do not give us enough clues about the possible concepts of ethnicity that might underlie their comments. The most one can say is that these passages use political, military, or geographic difference to underscore universal, human similarities. The fact that these authors identify Yue as foreign on the basis of universal similarities raises the question of whether there even existed a notion of Yue as an ethnic other at the time.

2. *Culturally Not the Zhu-Xia*

Warring States sources sometimes distinguish self from other on the basis of what we think of loosely as culture.⁷² Some authors focus on linguistic difference while others stress habits and customs. Still others take interest in textual and ritual, or intellectual traditions. Despite this diversity of representation, there does appear to have been at least one manner of defining oneself ethnically, and it is not remotely related to being “Chinese” in any current sense of the term. A close look at these early writings demonstrates that there is no sense of “Chineseness” as an overarching, homogenous, ethnic identity. Rather, claims concerning “Chinese” identity should be qualified according to factors such as status and class, place, and time. According to such qualifications, we can say that some intellectuals of the Central States regions considered themselves to be members of an identity that transcended political boundaries and invoked a shared myth of descent. Who were these intellectuals, and how did they construe their ethnic myth of descent?

In Warring States sources, the terms most frequently used to refer to this ethnic group are “Hua-Xia” (華夏 “the blossoming, or efflorescent Xia [of the Xia dynasty]),” “*zhu* Xia” (諸夏 “the many, or various

⁷¹ This position resembles the position of Southern “barbarians” in Ming and Qing times who were labeled “raw” or “uncooked” by the Han peoples and government; Fiskesjo, “On the Raw and the Cooked,” p. 1999.

⁷² There are relatively few Warring States and Han references to the Yue that focus on its status as an alien cultural identity, as opposed to an alien and distant polity.

[descendants of] Xia),” or “Zhou” (周, referring to the cultural legacy of this dynasty). That these terms represent an ethnic, and not merely a cultural category can be most clearly seen in the *Analects*, which features two of these terms: *zhu* Xia and Zhou.

Certain passages in the *Analects* contrast the “various Xia” with the notorious “Yi Di” 夷狄 groups, who, “even with a ruler are not the equal of the ‘various Xia’ without a ruler” 夷狄之有君, 不如諸夏之亡也.⁷³ From this example, one senses that political order is not the only factor that distinguishes the “various Xia” from their alien neighbors to the east. According to this perspective, culture, as “*wen* 文,” that is, patterns or forms, was transmitted exclusively through Zhou traditions since the time of king Wen. This is especially clear in the following two statements: “Zhou looks back to the two previous dynasties [of Xia and Shang]. How resplendent is its culture! I support the Zhou” 周監於二代, 郁郁乎文哉 吾從周,⁷⁴ and “With King Wen, already gone, is not culture present with me?” 文王既沒, 文不在茲乎.⁷⁵

By declaring his admiration for the refined patterns of Zhou, Confucius stresses their transmission through the Zhou as well as their origins in the two previous dynasties. He intimates that cultural achievements are goods that are passed down and enriched from one civilization and one great person to the next. Thus, Confucius advocates not a myth of family or biologically inherited ancestry, but a myth of cultural descent from the time of Xia through the Shang to the present Zhou. This most precisely accords with our definition of ethnicity outlined above.

The ethnicity of the “various Xia” and “Zhou” also appears to be associated with a specific territory in the *Analects*.⁷⁶ For example, the Nine Yi peoples whom Confucius considers to be non-Zhou and, hence, not descendants of the patterned and civilized cultures from Xia through Zhou, reside in the eastern reaches of the more central Zhou states such as Lu, Song, Wei, Zheng, Deng, and Jin. Although it is unclear from the *Analects* exactly what the territorial boundaries of the “various Xia” might have been for Confucius and his disciples, or whether they considered the states of Qin and Chu to have been part of this cultural sphere, the Zhou states certainly do appear to have been clustered to-

⁷³ *Lunyu*, III/5.

⁷⁴ *Lunyu*, III/14.

⁷⁵ *Lunyu*, IX/5.

⁷⁶ Although the distinction between these two names is unclear in the text, one might speculate that they refer to the same group of people. The term Zhou perhaps serves as a more direct way to reference the dynasty and people who have carried on the traditions of Xia, while “various Xia” highlights their cultural origins.

gether in one more-or-less contiguous region around the Yellow and Wei River valleys.⁷⁷

An important aspect of Confucius' sense of ethnicity is that it can be acquired. Those who were unfortunate to have been born into base (*lou* 陋) civilizations can, through the moral example of the gentleman, learn to behold and transmit the patterns of the civilized Zhou. In one example, Confucius argues that the gentleman is capable of transforming the baseness of the Nine Yi peoples simply by residing among them 君子居之, 何陋之有.⁷⁸ In another passage, a boy of the alien locale Hu Xiang 互鄉 is accepted into Confucius' pedagogical care on the basis of his ritually acquired purity, and, presumably, his potential for change – not on the basis of his past connections to a sullied location.⁷⁹ All these examples provide a picture of an early Confucian concept of ethnicity as an acquired marker of distinction among different groups of peoples.

During the Warring States, Confucius and his disciples promoted a conception of ethnicity that distinguished between the culturally lacking other and the self as heir of civilized cultural patterns. This concept of ethnicity proclaims the superiority of Zhou cultural traditions and the people who possess them, whether such possession is acquired or inherited, over all other alien traditions and peoples. Non-Zhou peoples, in other words, would remain unworthy until civilized by Zhou customs. From this we can conclude that there existed at least one perspective on ethnicity – associated with Confucius' interpretations of Zhou culture – that held a degrading image of the other in opposition to the self. We are thus justified in translating the names of alien groups as “barbarians” in this context. But is this view limited to Confucian ideology? Do other Warring States authors share the same view as these authors?⁸⁰

There are indeed some cases in which authors who do not rally for a specifically Confucian cause also reveal a disdain for other groups unlike their own. In *Lü shi chun qiu*, for example, one author depicts the peoples from the “border areas around the Hundred Yue” as bestial and “having no ruler” 揚、漢之南, 百越之際多無君.⁸¹ Such peoples, this au-

⁷⁷ It is commonly understood that Confucius did not think much of the customs and political practices associated with the state of Chu, as seen in his comments in *Lunyü*, xiii/6 and xiii/7.

⁷⁸ *Lunyü*, ix/14.

⁷⁹ *Lunyü*, vii/29.

⁸⁰ While I will address these questions below, the extent to which this perspective on identity penetrated the majority of people – or even simply the majority of intellectuals – can and should be researched further.

⁸¹ Chen, *Lü shi chunqiu* 20, p. 1322.

thor contends, lack sages and a moral order that constrains the violent and powerful from taking advantage of the peaceful and meek:

Their peoples are like deer, birds, and beasts. The young order about their elders; the elderly fear the able-bodied; the strong are considered to be worthy; and the violent and proud are honored. Day and night they destroy each other, so that one finds not a moment of rest. In this manner they exhaust their own kind. 其民麋鹿禽獸，少者使長，長者畏壯，有力者賢，暴傲者尊，日夜相殘，無時休息，以盡其類。⁸²

Although it is questionable if the author is referring directly to the Yue peoples and not the many groups surrounding the Yue, there should be no doubt that he uses political and cultural criteria to denigrate the other. From the information given, one cannot ascertain whether these criteria fit into a larger concept of ethnicity. However, the values associated with one's self seem to correspond to the ritual norms and values inhering in the Zhou ways. This suggests a close affinity between various articulations of Zhou identity, as expressed in this passage, and Confucian thought during the Warring States.⁸³

One should distinguish between the conception of culture as *wen*-patterns, defined through the *Analects*, and "culture" as we often define it through such criteria as local customs, habits, mores, and language. Referring to differences in culture in the latter sense, many ostensibly non-Confucian authors from the Warring States actually do not posit a value-laden dichotomy between the good and refined, on the one hand, and the base and unrefined, on the other. By limiting themselves to simple comparisons between habits and customs and not focusing on the merits or demerits of whole traditions and lines of descent, these authors present the other in more neutral terms. An example from *Zhuangzi* illustrates this:

A man of Song who sold ceremonial hats took them to Yue. The Yue people, however, wore their hair short and tattooed their bodies, so they had no use for them. 宋人資章甫而適諸越，越人斷髮文身，無所用之。⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid. Translation adapted from John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei (Lü Shi Chun Qiu): A Complete Translation and Study* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2000), p. 512.

⁸³ The nature of "Confucianism" during Warring States times is indeterminate, and many questions arise when using the term to label modes of thinking at the time. Certainly, there were lineages that taught and transmitted Confucius' teachings and identified themselves as "Ru-ist 儒." However, as these teachings influenced and were influenced by other ways of thinking during the Zhou, it becomes difficult to apply the label "Confucian" without oversimplifying the matter considerably.

⁸⁴ Guo, *Zhuangzi ji shi* 1 ("Xiao yao you" 逍遙遊), p. 31.

This passage depicts Yue as an outside group that abides by different systems of behavior and methods of calculating utility and necessity. In typical Zhuangzian style, cultural difference is not evaluated but relativized, and evocation of the alien other helps Zhuangzi poke fun at entrenched assumptions and perspectives while putting certain, possibly Confucian, practices and norms back in their epistemologically relative place. For Zhuangzi, the habits and values of Yue are in themselves not of greater or lesser value than those of Song. Rather, the difference between them is such that the people of each culture know about and make use of different objects. The passage also points to an understanding of group identification according to the state in which one lives. Zhuangzi does not appeal to the traditions of Zhou to differentiate between “us” and “them,” but to the people of the states of Song and Yue. Furthermore, his non-judgmental style conveys no sense of cultural superiority. While he does expect his audience to identify with the man from Song and to assume that using ceremonial paraphernalia is the norm, Zhuangzi points out that this can be attributed to cultural difference between geopolitical units, not ethnic difference between the Zhou or many-Xia and the barbarians.

Other writings also do not evaluate self and other in terms of the civilized/barbarian dichotomy, even though the existence of this value-laden dichotomy might serve as the motivation for their arguments. The late-Warring States, early-Han text, *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, records an anonymous letter sent to the king of Yan, stating:

The Hu and the Yue peoples cannot understand one another’s language and cannot communicate their ideas and intents, but when mountainous waves arise about the boat they share, they go as far as to rescue each other as though they were one and the same. Nowadays, as for the allies of Shandong,⁸⁵ if Qin troops were to arrive while they were sharing a boat across a river, they would not rescue each other as though they were one and the same. Indeed, their wisdom cannot even match that of the Hu and Yue peoples 胡與越人，言語不相知，志意不相通，同舟而淩波，至其相救助如一也。今山東之相與也，如同舟而濟，秦之兵至，不能相救助如一，智又不如胡、越之人矣。⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Not referring to modern-day Shandong, but to an area east of the Taihang Mountains.

⁸⁶ He Jianzhang 何建章, annot., *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990) 30 (“Yen er” 燕二), p. 1110; trans. here adapted from J. I. Crump, *Legends of the Warring States: Persuasions, Romances, and Stories from Chan-kuo ts’u* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1998), p. 516.

Through this passage, we see that alien cultural practices were not necessarily evaluated according to an outright demonization of the other. The author discusses difference in terms of language, wisdom, and one's cultural penchant towards loyalty and cooperation. Outsider behaviors become different and even commendable. Nonetheless, this praise of the other is not intended to idealize the other so much as it is intended to criticize the self. It is founded on an assumption that the Hu and Yue people are supposed to be of lesser worth than the author's audience – presumably, the allies of Shandong. By elevating an inferior other momentarily above the self, the author incites his audience to change themselves and improve their ways.

For Confucius, his followers, and possibly other educated Zhou elite, the *wen*-patterns and cultural traditions of Zhou serve as bonafide markers of identity that set what is civilized apart from what is not. Since this type of marker implies the unabashed superiority of one cultural form over all others, we are justified in claiming that some early Confucian writings viewed others as barbarians. This view is echoed in writings that have no specified link to strict Confucian lineages of thought as well. However, it does not necessarily hold for all writers of the Warring States period. In some passages, Yue people are seen as possessing equally valid practices and systems of knowledge. They even have the ability to surpass people whom authors, writing as outsiders to Yue, associate with themselves. Such examples show us that Yue peoples were not invariably viewed as uncivilized barbarians of low worth, but as clearly alien groups who possessed ways of being that were in some ways comparable to that of the authorial self. They demonstrate that conceptions of the other differed with each varying presentation of the self and other, and that the distinction between *wen* (cultured) and *lou* (base) was not necessarily the only way to view the Yue.

3. *Environmental Determinism and Kinship-Based Ethnicity*

Writings that date from the Han dynasty (202 BC-220 AD) reveal changing frameworks within which authors viewed themselves and the Yue peoples. Unlike earlier writings from the Warring States, the authors of these texts do not primarily focus on political and cultural criteria in differentiating themselves from others. They begin to discuss otherness in terms of such standards as physical environment and kinship-based ethnicity.⁸⁷ These environmentally or innately determined

⁸⁷ One should distinguish between kinship-based ethnicity and simple lines of kinship. The examples below should make this distinction clear.

views of the other should be distinguished from claims for cultural difference. The former locate group difference neither in an acquired cultural good nor an acquired social habitus, but in relatively fixed natural environments. Sima Qian in particular uses the metaphor of clan affiliation to invoke a kinship-based sense of Yue ethnicity.

In Sima Qian's accounts of the Southern and Eastern Yue kingdoms during the Qin and early Han, he sometimes associates the natural geography and/or climates of the south with the cultural attributes and/or worth of its peoples. A faint sense of this association can be seen in the following quotation attributed to king Zhao Tuo of Southern Yue:

Of the Man and Yi peoples in the low and damp regions of the south, thousands of the Eastern Min-Yue people call me king, and those of the Ou Luo (Au Lac) naked kingdoms of the west also call me king” 且南方卑溼，蠻夷中間，其東閩越千人眾號稱王，其西甌駱裸國亦稱王。⁸⁸

This passage links geographical, climatic, and physical attributes of the land with a fixed set of peoples who reside there. Though Sima Qian establishes no causal connection between environment and people, the very juxtaposition of the two is revealing. It implies a one-to-one correlation; a fixedness of category; and an ineluctable sense that these physical attributes of the environment play a role in defining these people.

Other examples in *Shi ji* provide possible causal connections between environment and people, representing a simple form of environmental determinism. In 111 BC, emperor Wu issued an order for the military officials of Eastern Yue to resettle their people in the region between the Yangzi and Huai Rivers, thereby emptying the lands and withdrawing Han administration from the region.⁸⁹ A look at the rationale behind this large-scale operation is revealing. Emperor Wu purportedly stated: “The lands of Eastern Yue are narrow and full of obstructions, and people of Min-Yue are fierce and have shifted their allegiance on numerous occasions” 閩越悍，數反覆。⁹⁰ One possible interpretation is that the two phenomena are causally linked: “Because the lands of Eastern Yue are narrow and full of obstructions, the people of Min-Yue are fierce and have shifted their allegiance on numerous occasions.” According to this reading, environmental factors such as physical terrain and climate would be directly accountable for people's behavior. While there are many possible reasons for explaining shift-

⁸⁸ *SJ* 113, p. 2970.

⁸⁹ *SJ* 114, p. 2984.

⁹⁰ *SJ* 114, p. 2984.

ing allegiance, emperor Wu thus might have been blaming the effects that natural habitat had upon its people. However, one might just as well assume that emperor Wu's remarks about the lay of the land in Min-Yue were made from a consideration of the political exigencies: narrow passes and obstructions make it easier for a people to defend themselves and maintain autonomy in deciding on political allies. Because of the ambiguity of the emperor's statements in this passage, it is not possible to confirm the existence of a belief in environmental determinism.

Records linked to the Han-dynasty statesman Chao Cuo 鼂錯 (d. 154 BC) go further to provide a causal link between characteristics of a people and their environment: "The Yang and the Yue [peoples] have little *yin* and much *yang*. Their people have a thin skin, their birds and animals have thin furs, and their nature is to withstand heat."⁹¹ Here, the entire animal realm associated with the Yang and Yue peoples is causally linked to the hot atmosphere in which the *yang* force is in ascendance over the *yin* force. Yang and Yue peoples possess environmentally determined, and quite possibly inborn, characteristics that come to define them as distinct others.⁹²

Another example of this kind of environmental determinism can be found in the "Shui Di" chapter of *Guanzi*, whose date, though unknown, most likely falls within the years of Qin and early Han.⁹³ We read: "The water in Yue is muddy, heavy, and easily floods; therefore, its people are stupid, sickly, and filthy" 越之水濁重而洳, 故其民愚疾而垢.⁹⁴ This passage on Yue appears among a list of connections between the peoples of various states and the descriptions of their local water. While the author limits the scope of his determinism to the quality of water, he nonetheless views human difference as directly fixed and correlated to the environment.

⁹¹ *Chao Cuo ji zhu shi* 鼂錯集注釋 (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1976), pp. 15–16; cited in Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, p. 296.

⁹² While the exact date of this passage is not known, I find it difficult to believe that these were Chao Cuo's actual statements. The passage seems like later, Han, thinking attributed to Chao.

⁹³ Kanaya Osamu 金谷治, *Kanshi no kenkyū* 管子的研究 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1987), pp. 328–29, who dates the text to the Qin-Han interregnum (206–202 BC); Cited in Hal Roth, *Original Tao: "Inward Training" and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1999), p. 23. W. Allyn Rickett, on the other hand, believes the work might stem from the scholars at the court of Liu An (180–122 BC); Rickett, *Guanzi*, p. 100.

⁹⁴ Yan Changyao 顏昌峽, annot., *Guanzi jiao shi* 管子校釋 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1996) 39 ("Shui di" 水地), p. 352.

So far, I have given examples that suggest an emergent Han-era association between fixed environments and behaviors, cultural characteristics, or even inborn physical human and animal traits. I do so in order to claim that we might see something new in Han writings on the Yue peoples – an environmentally linked or determined conception of the other. Do such environmentally determined views of the other also delineate ethnic difference? Unfortunately, the scant information provided in these passages does not allow us to determine whether such views form part of an ethnic realization of the other. From Sima Qian's own hand, however, we find another type of deterministic view that clearly constitutes an ethnic identity.

Related to the environmentally determined view just mentioned above is the notion of an ethnicity based on kinship, and not defined through a "myth of cultural descent," as was the case for certain writers of the Warring States period. An ethnicity based on kinship differs from simple kinship insofar as the former includes an entire group of people, ostensibly unrelated except for a few distant ancestors.⁹⁵ Sima Qian places Yue people in a direct lineage with the great ancestor Yu the Great – the founder of the Xia Dynasty, who also happens to have been the ancestor of the Zhou peoples (hence, the name "various Xia").⁹⁶ This is stated in his account of the great Yue king, Gou Jian:

Gou Jian, the king of Yue, was the descendant of Yu and the grandson of Shao Kang of the Xia. He was enfeoffed at Kuaiji and maintained ancestral sacrifices to Yu. [The Yue] tattooed their bodies, cut their hair short, and cleared out weeds and brambles to set up small fiefs. 越王句踐，其先禹之苗裔，而夏后帝少康之庶子也。封於會稽，以奉守禹之祀。文身斷髮，披草萊而邑焉。⁹⁷

In this statement Sima strongly associates a Yue people defined through habits and customs, on the one hand, with a Yue defined through in-

⁹⁵ That is, the people of such a group share ancestral founders; they do not share the same immediate relatives.

⁹⁶ As Wang Mingke points out, it was common from as early as the Spring and Autumn period for the noble elites of civilizations on the peripheries of the Hua-Xia to fabricate claims of their own Hua-Xia ancestry; Wang, *Hua-Xia bianyuan, lishi jiyi yu zuqun rentong* 華夏邊緣歷史記憶與族群認同 (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua, 1997), pp. 272–84. I have not found any evidence that the reference "various Xia" includes the people of Yue, even though the Yue come to be associated with a Xia ancestry. In fact, the exclusion of Yue from the more geopolitical identity of "Central States," which appears to be loosely associated with the concept of "various Xia," suggests to the contrary that though the Yue might have claimed such a lineage, they were not actually considered by others to be a part of the "various Xia" ethnicity. Wang Mingke states that new claims regarding one's ancestry will not be fully accepted until both outsiders and insiders lose memory of the difference; Wang, *Hua-Xia bianyuan*, p. 283.

⁹⁷ S7 41, p. 1739.

herited descent, on the other. This type of ethnic conceptualization is distinct from Confucius' cultural perspectives on ethnicity, in which he based a "myth of shared descent" on cultural transmission and acquisition, and not exclusively on kinship.⁹⁸

Sima Qian underscores this kinship-based ethnic identity in his postscript to the accounts of the Eastern Yue peoples. He states:

Although the Yue are considered to be southern (*man* 蠻) barbarians (*yi* 夷), is it not true that their ancestors had once benefited the [Yue] people with their great merit and virtue? 越雖蠻夷, 其先豈嘗有大功德於民哉.⁹⁹

Here, Sima does not confine the Yue merely to one clan – that of the ruling house. Yet he relates them all through kinship. The merit and virtue of past Yue ancestors lends value to the current Yue peoples on the basis of group lineage. Such a relationship goes further than demonstrating shared, cultural descent that might be acquired through intellectual transmission or guided, studied acquisition. It posits an in-born ethnicity that defines descent in terms of ancestral lineage.¹⁰⁰ As such, this vision compares nicely to Han-era visions of the other, which also tend to associate group identity with inborn or environmentally determined traits – traits that are not entirely within an individual's power to change.

Does Sima's conception of kinship-based ethnicity demonize the Yue? Sima noticeably couches his compliment of Yue lineage and ancestral virtue in a statement that qualifies them as "Man Yi" (standard terms for foreigners of Southern origin). Such a phrasing justifies that we understand Man Yi as imparting information about the status as well

⁹⁸ Arguably, the phrase, "Zhu Xia" implies kinship-based ethnicity that identifies one's original ancestors in the Xia Dynasty. Since, however, Confucius does not exclusively define it as such, it is best not to refer to it as kinship-based ethnicity.

⁹⁹ *SJ* 114, p. 2984. It is likely Sima Qian speaks here of the Yue ruling class. Since we cannot assume a direct correlation between the ancestry of the ruling class and that of their subjects, it is impossible to know much about the people of Yue from these statements. One would surmise that over the course of centuries of Yue rule, this aristocratic lineage would have come to adopt certain customs and traits of the peoples of that region. They also would have helped populate the areas with descendants of their own who likely had interbred with the original leading clans of the region. Over time the interrelationships between the ruling elite and a certain portion of their subject population would have become quite deep and extensive, so that we might indeed be justified in speaking about a Yue group of considerable size.

¹⁰⁰ The Yue ancestors' great merit and virtue of which Sima Qian speaks in this passage cannot manifest itself without the aid of proper and continuous ritual sacrifices on the part of the descendants. Identity is therefore not innate in a biological sense. It is partially realized through the commitment of whole communities and families to the ritual practices that fulfill their ancestors' merit and virtue.

as the identification of the other – a lower status than that of Sima’s expected audience. It thus appears to be somewhat derogatory in nature, and can be translated as “southern barbarians.”¹⁰¹ In addition, Sima’s description of their habits and ways of living is not entirely favorable. Tattooing one’s body, cutting the hair short, and living among weeds and brambles certainly did not agree with Han-time concepts of ritual propriety, which dictated that men do not tattoo themselves and that they maintain long hair bound up in proper fashion. That Sima does nothing more than mention and describe these differences is indeed noteworthy. He appears to be denigrating the Yue only implicitly.

On the other hand, Sima explicitly praises certain Yue individuals and their ancestry. In the chapter on king Gou Jian, Sima presents his leading Yue protagonists, the king and his minister Fan Li 范蠡, as great men deserving of praise.¹⁰² Sima’s final statements on the Eastern Yue, as well, do not demonize them as a ruling class, or implicitly, as a people. Like many of the examples shown above, he wishes to highlight their strengths, praise their virtues, and in this case, even remind his readers of their esteemed ancestry. In such a manner, Sima Qian imparts a more nuanced judgment upon the ethnic other: though they might not always demonstrate it, Yue peoples at least have the potential to act in a civilized manner. They do not need to transform themselves into members of Zhou civilization in order to serve as legitimate custodians of power; they can act civilized in their own right. To this extent, the Yue are not demonized barbarians as much as they are generally less civilized others. A sense of superiority is indeed present in Sima’s phrasing and descriptions, but to a much lesser extent than the dichotomy “civilized” vs. “barbarian” suggests.

CONCLUSION

The category of Yue in early China has a deeply confusing and entangled history. From its initial use as a referent for an ancient, southeastern kingdom and its peoples to its proliferation as a reference for many of the states and peoples across southern China and northern Vietnam during the Han, the term is transmitted, reified, and reused

¹⁰¹ I translate “Man Yi” above as “Southern barbarian,” and not just as the Man and Yi peoples, because it is clear that Sima Qian does not think of them as two distinct groups. Rather, it appears that the term Yi does not point to any particular group (as it did in the *Analects*) but to a vague category of degraded other. Man, on the other hand, denotes not the specific name of the group (“Yue”) but the general southern location of this specific derogatory other. In the literary tradition, the four directions (north, south, east, west) are linked with four general categories of identification denoting a derogatory other (*di, man, yi, rong*).

¹⁰² *SJ* 41, pp. 1739–47.

in a variety of ways. Indeed, without considering the specific contexts in which it is used, one cannot assume to understand its historical meaning. In this paper I have looked at several specific contexts of the term Yue. Through a close reading of a variety of passages, I investigated whether or not it might meaningfully refer to an ethnicity, and if so, what such a notion of ethnicity might have been. In addition, I discussed the extent to which certain conceptions of Yue represent a demonized, or debased conception of the other. This allowed me to evaluate whether or not the dichotomy “civilized vs. barbarian,” often used by scholars as a blanket description of Chinese attitudes towards outsiders, is a valid one.¹⁰³

I highlighted three main viewpoints toward Yue found in Warring States and early-Han sources. The first sees the Yue as equal yet distant political players in an interactive multi-state sphere of the late-Zhou period. Statements stemming from this perspective are interesting not because of their specific formulation of ethnicity, for they are not identifiably ethnic in orientation, but because they reveal an attitude towards this distant other that complicates the notion that the Yue are barbarians or in any way degraded. In an effort to ascribe universal traits to all human beings, authors reveal their beliefs concerning just who fits into the category of “human.” The authors we looked at accept the Yue as humans like everyone else – weaknesses and all. Sometimes they depict the Yue as more extreme or powerful than themselves, and so the Yue are perceived to be a potential threat that needs to be overcome.

Another view of the Yue peoples portrays them as members of alien cultures who may or may not have been on equal footing with those writing about them. I differentiated between two conceptions of culture: the early Confucian concept of culture as *wen*-patterns and traditions passed down through the Zhou; and our own, more general concept of culture as habits, language, and customs. My analysis of the early-Confucian concept of culture locates it within a larger definition of ethnicity as “shared cultural descent” delineated in the *Analects*. The Confucian distinction between the “various Xia” or “Zhou” peoples and the outside others is, I claim, based on a belief in the superior ethnicity of the former. This ethnicity is culturally transmitted and acquired.

Having delineated a clear conception of ethnicity in early China, I judged that there are indeed instances when the language of “civilized vs. barbarian” can be justified. Moreover, the degraded view of

¹⁰³ Wang Gungwu, “The Chinese Urge to Civilize: Reflections on Change,” *Journal of Asian History* 18.1 (1984), pp. 1–5.

the other, though clearly associated with early-Confucian views of the self, are not necessarily limited to the Confucian tradition. One sees the influence of these views, and perhaps others like them, in later Warring States textual passages that depict cultures associated with the Hundred Yue in a demonizing way. The passage I invoked to demonstrate this point compared peoples near the regions of the Hundred Yue to animals, by the absence in them of proper ritual norms and procedures.

This demonized view of the other does not prevail completely in Warring States times. Some authors such as Zhuangzi convincingly relativize the cultural differences of the other, including the Yue. Zhuangzi humanizes outside groups by suggesting that they possess equally valid epistemologies and modes of behavior. He depicts others not in terms of the Confucian conception of culture – wrapped up so tightly with ethnic identity – but in terms of habits and customs. This demonstrates how authors could define identity in many, not necessarily ethnic, or even hierarchically bifurcated, ways.

Lastly, I have pointed to seemingly new frameworks within which Han-era authors talked about the Yue. Certain passages in Han texts hint at a new awareness of how natural environments influence and sometimes determine the characteristics of their peoples. This points to an orientation towards the other that is based on more fixed, natural criteria for difference. In this context, I showed that Sima Qian's vision of the Yue clearly constitutes an ethnic vision based on mythical kinship. While certainly kinship has served throughout the history of China as an important criterion for identity, the association of all or many Yue peoples with a shared myth of kinship seems particular to Sima's vision of ethnicity.

Sima's presentation of the Yue is also more nuanced than what the simple dichotomy of "civilized vs. barbarian" would suggest. Though he most assuredly denigrates the Yue by calling them "Man Yi" – the equivalent of "southern barbarians" – and comparing their customs negatively to those of his own Han, he counterbalances such language and descriptions by proving the honor of Yue ancestry and certain of its individual members.

Much scholarship dealing with the relationship between self and other in Chinese history assumes a simple bifurcation between civilized Chinese or Han peoples and the barbarian other. In this analysis of the concepts of the Yue and Yue ethnicity, I show that such a simple and value-laden categorization did not always exist, and that some early authors differentiated between themselves and others in a

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much more complicated and, sometimes, conflicted manner. Because my analysis focuses on outsiders' views of the other, it sheds light upon how in general authors simultaneously construct and reify notions of themselves. The selves that manifest in these writings take on a variety of identities, many of which are not mutually exclusive of each other. Amid these identities is the ethnic conception of the "many-Xia" and/or "Zhou," which, though certainly not equivalent to the expansive, modern notion of the Chinese, does seem to transcend state boundaries and apply to a variety of people both in and beyond the Confucian lineages of thought.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SJ *Shi ji* 史記