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Introduction

This book treats communication and cooperation in the function of political power in early imperial China, particularly under the short-lived Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE). In essence I am interested in the collective decision of a group to obey a government and respect its dominion. I argue creating common knowledge among the population through communication in multiple media was a necessary part of ruling processes in early imperial China and helped solve the coordination problem presented by the unified empire. Through their active and innovative communication, the Qin dynasty resolved these problems so well that the echoes of their success are still ringing today.

The Qin dynasty was the first imperial dynasty in China. The famous First Emperor of Qin (Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, r. 221–210 BCE) established the empire by uniting formerly separate polities to create a new state, a process that lasted years and ended in 221 BCE. He governed a territory much larger than any preceding sovereign of the area we now call China.[1] The rulers of Qin confronted a new situation, and they adapted existing practices and technologies to meet its exigencies.

The Qin were obsessed—already before unification—with making things as big as possible.[2] And during the reign of the First Emperor, the Qin were constantly *doing*. Their deeds were noticeable, and deliberately so. Mark Edward Lewis has written that the Qin were a model for later dynasties: "While the First Emperor's actions became a topic for later censure, they also provided an unacknowledged pattern for imperial power, an ideal type at the origin that later rulers emulated."[3] As such, I hope the Qin case will be amenable to comparison with later dynasties in future studies. If nothing else, the tireless activity of the Qin dynasty makes it an interesting case study.

Despite my primary focus on the Qin, I draw from texts dating to the time before and after that period. This is necessary and proper:

necessary because so little has been transmitted that links directly to the dynasty, and proper because the underlying ideas and forms of government inevitably grew out of what went before and reverberated in what came after.

The available sources do not directly relate the views of the common population, and as such the voices of ordinary inhabitants of the early Chinese realm are effectively lost. The study of material culture in conjunction with textual sources offers one way to counter the limitations of the textual record.[4] Yet there is no way to directly prove the degree to which the communication I propose was perceived by the population of the realm—if by proof one means a written attestation from members of the population or their representatives. In the past, scholars have often assumed little or no awareness of higher-level governance on the part of commoners, combined with a passivity that would have made such information irrelevant. The theoretical framework I lay out in chapter 2 shows that aspects of those explanations are untenable. It also provides a way to make reasonable inferences about the role of the common population in government, which required their cooperation in various forms as well as the necessity of specific kinds of communication for that cooperation.

This theoretically informed approach recognizes the necessity of cooperation, and not coercion, as the basis of human society. Each member of a cooperating group is a strategic decision-maker whose individual choices, together with the choices of others, translate into high-level effect.[5] Each individual member has power, which is limited and yet real. This was the case in early China as in other societies.

Theoretical work on communication, cooperation, and power allows me to draw new conclusions about what was going on during the years of Qin reign and explain the success, however short-lived, of Qin rule under the First Emperor. This analysis entails study of what Vivienne Shue refers to as the "*social intertexture* that forms the stuff of political life," encompassing all fields of the social sciences and requiring simultaneous attention to detail and to overarching pattern.[6] The conclusions I reach challenge current scholarly consensus on early China in significant ways.

Legacy Approaches

Previous accounts of imperial power in early China generally fall along a spectrum between two poles. At one end are those that stress the theoretically absolute authority of the ruler in imperial China. Those at the other end of the spectrum accept that proposition in the abstract, but they give

greater weight to the constraints, especially practical constraints, that inhibited the exercise of the sovereign's authority. Writers all along this spectrum present power in early imperial society as flowing from one part of society outward and downward.

Most historians agree that the emperor was theoretically the ultimate power and the wellspring of state authority in dynastic China. Ray Huang describes the emperor as residing atop a pyramid, "the source of power" and "the final authority on earth."[7] Benjamin Schwartz puts politics at the center of early Chinese society and the emperor at the center of politics. He notes that not all emperors engaged in the tasks of rule to the same degree but still posits the emperor's supremacy, calling him "the universal king . . . [who] comes to embody within his person both the supreme political authority and the spiritual-ethical authority of the entire society."[8] Wang Yü-ch'üan expresses this clearly when he says the Qin emperor "was the head of the state, and so to speak, the state itself. As the Emperor possessed absolute power over state affairs and the people, the government of Ch'in [Qin] was, to use a modern term, authoritarian in form."[9] This sort of conception underlies Liu Zehua's 劉澤華 assertions that "imperial power was superior to everything; there was no force that could restrict the ruler's power, and the entire apparatus of the state was an apparatus for the sovereign to manage affairs."[10] Wan Changhua 萬昌華 and Zhao Xingbin 趙興彬 assert the First Emperor, founder of the Qin dynasty, "hijacked" power, then set up a stratified bureaucracy to surveil his officials and ensure their compliance with his will.[11] Vitaly Rubin takes a similar view of the Qin regime, presenting it, before and after unification, as a "totalitarian state" in conflict with the rest of society.[12]

Victoria Tin-bor Hui has written about state formation under the Qin dynasty. She asserts that Qin imperial rule was theoretically absolute, but that the available technology prevented full realization of this theory. She further suggests that the First Emperor actively enlisted the aid of the populace before unification, when he needed their support. Afterward, she says, "the imperial court entered into a state of war with . . . society." Hui attributes tremendous influence to the changes carried out under the Qin, crediting them both with establishing a more unified culture as well as what she calls "the authoritarian tradition" in China.[13]

Michael Loewe, eminent historian of early imperial China, has written frequently on the power of Qin and Han emperors and the corresponding powerlessness of the common population.[14] Loewe describes the emperor as the foundation of all power in the first centuries of imperial governance, saying, "From the outset, it was accepted that the emperor held supreme

powers of government. . . . It was from him that all authority to govern the population and administer the land devolved."[15] Elsewhere he calls the emperor "the sole authority that could command recognition" and the "essential head from whom all power came."[16] Loewe acknowledges variations in the exercise of imperial power due to individual characteristics or other factors but insists that the person of the emperor was the foundation of the state. He emphasizes that the population of the realm was passive before the exercise of imperial power and played no active role in governance. [17]

Charles Le Blanc, like Loewe, notes that emperors differed in the ability to effect individual will; he furthermore distinguishes the limited power wielded by each emperor from the absolute power intrinsic to the position.[18] Le Blanc refers to Hans Bielenstein's work on Han bureaucracy, in which Bielenstein discusses institutional restrictions on the exercise of imperial power. Bielenstein asserts that one reason for this was the idea that "the empire belonged to the people, not the Son of Heaven." Yet when Bielenstein discusses the function of power, he portrays it as existing only at the highest echelons of society:

> Power flowed to and fro between the throne (empress or empress dowager) supported by the eunuchs, the cabinet . . . the imperial secretariat, and, when in existence, the regency. The relative balance between these institutions varied from period to period, depending on personalities, shifting alliances, and factional struggles.[19]

Bielenstein's conception attributes ownership to the common people but no power.

Historians have long stressed constraints on imperial power in China. Already in the nineteenth century, Thomas Taylor Meadows (1815–1868) wrote that the Chinese emperor was "autocratic" but not "despotic": although an absolute ruler, he was obliged to maintain broadly held standards of governance and behavior or face a rebellious populace.[20]

Similarly, Karl Bünger has asserted that the Qin "were absolute rulers" but that their version of absolutism did not accord with widely held conceptions of rule, which led to their overthrow.[21] Henri Maspero describes the emperors of Qin and Han as rulers whose power was "absolute, but not arbitrary," in that they were obliged to consult with the high officials at the top of the bureaucracy.[22] More recently, Enno Giele has written that the emperor was the theoretical head of the bureaucracy but that compulsory processes of deliberation and consultation checked the untoward exercise of

his power. Giele notes that others sometimes arrogated the emperor's powers, but when they did so, they acted—or claimed to act—in his name.[23]

There is also a long tradition of emphasizing practical limitations on the exercise of imperial power. Max Weber (1864–1920) argued that the lack of rapid transportation and communication prevented centralization of the early Chinese state.[24] Jacques Gernet says, "The emperor occupies in China a truly central position; he is the person around whom everything is organized." At the same time, Gernet points to limits on imperial power, distinguishing between the emperor, who was hemmed in by bureaucracy, and a state that was theoretically omnipotent while limited by concrete factors.[25]

This sort of approach also appears in interdisciplinary work like that of Norman Yoffee, who attacks depictions of early states as "totalitarian regimes" that consolidated large geographical areas. Yoffee describes both curbs on central authorities' power and the persistence of local diversity. He moderates his stance slightly when he writes that there were "linkages," which "are quite often weak in the earliest states and also that centrality is mainly concerned with the creation of new symbols of social identity, ideologies of power, and representations of history."[26] For Yoffee, those kinds of influence were of little real importance.

Historical research on later dynasties and modern times, too, often depicts checks on central authority. Leif Littrup has these checks in mind when he argues for the notion of "The Un-Oppressive State," saying flatly that in Qing times, "[t]he emperor could give orders but he and the bureaucracy did under normal circumstances not have the means to penetrate into the subbureaucratic level of local society."[27] John K. Fairbank argues that these limitations enabled imperial rule: he says that Chinese emperors were theoretically absolute, but their rule was possible "precisely because it was so superficial. The emperor remained supreme as a symbol of unity because his officials did not attempt to rule directly in the villages."[28] For Fairbank, nominal ascendancy did not translate into a reality of control.

The hindrance of central power forms a major theme of Shue's work on modern China. She rejects the idea of Chinese society as a "totalitarian monolith" and points to the lack of total control by its leaders. She considers specifically how central powers delegated authority to local authorities to act on their behalf, but those at the local level in turn used their power to thwart the state. Shue distinguishes between "modern states" and "classical states," arguing that premodern states did not seek total penetration in the manner of modern states. Rather, she suggests, premodern states sought only to exploit existing local structures, without significantly changing them.[29]

Although I challenge aspects of previous conceptions of power in early China, there have also been arguments made that bear similarities to my own. Herrlee Creel, for instance, noted that the Western Zhou did not rule its territory by military force alone but also through suasion. He gave credence to "the widely held conviction that the Western [Zhou] Kings could not, with the resources and the techniques available to them, organize and maintain a centralized administration. . . . But the [Zhou] rulers had one great advantage: they did not know this." In the end, Creel proposed that publicity in the form of declarations of authority was one means by which the Zhou succeeded.[30]

In his discussion of the emergence of the Chinese empire under the Qin, Robin D. S. Yates argues that the Qin dynasty sought to create "myths" across their territory, "the myth of cultural uniformity" and "the imperial myth."[31] I argue the Qin in fact created at least a degree of uniformity. In this regard, I am in agreement with Hui, who says, "The level of cultural homogeneity in present-day China is better understood as the product rather than the cause of Qin's success."[32] I show that the Qin dynasty communicated messages about their rule corresponding to Yates' imperial myth. But Yates deems these messages to have been myths and as such untrue. I do not disagree with Yates' critique of these assertions as they have featured in historiography. But I set aside the question of these claims' objective truth-value to consider how they worked to enable cooperation in the Qin case, and essentially made those claims become true.

Among the approaches I have described here, there are aspects that are conceptually similar to mine, though still different. Hui, for example, argues that the government of the state of Qin sought the support of its population, but this ended with unification. I will argue that the need for cooperation and communication only expanded with the founding of the realm. Giele talks about the movement of information, especially into the highest reaches of the bureaucracy, including the emperor; I want to reverse the flow and think about information that was sent out from the center, as well. Gernet speaks of the utility of "psychological factors, such as the consciousness of belonging to the same civilization," which is not far removed from the messages I propose the Qin broadcast. Gernet also says that the imperial state in China worked because it "took advantage of natural forms of social organization."[33] I accept this connection but reverse the chain of causation, proposing that governance was a highly developed outgrowth of natural human tendencies, not a wholly artificial and oppressive contrivance.

The Power of the Common Population

All of the aforementioned conceptions put power in the upper echelons of society. The common people of the early imperial realm are tacitly or explicitly assumed to have been, in practical terms, without any real power. They are thought to have been passive—on the receiving end of governance—and so far removed from the world of imperial power that they hardly even registered as spectators. Most scholars have accepted that a political elite controlled the ordinary populace in early China.[34] From this conception followed the idea that commoners were utterly passive in matters like law, and that the common people were not the intended audience of things like public ritual.[35]

In many ways, these notions resulted from the historiographical problems presented by the silence of the common population in records of early China.[36] Historians have naturally focused on processes of writing and reading, from which most commoners were more or less excluded.[37] There has been little consideration of communication directed at the common people, within and beyond the borders of the written word, and limited contact with theoretical work in other disciplines that could support such consideration. There are exceptions, in the form of studies that acknowledge the power of the lower classes to determine the course of events and the limited ability of central powers to exercise power in the face of local-level resistance. But these have so far focused on later periods.[38]

Although many scholars have accepted the notion of a passive populace in early China, it has shortcomings, including one that is quite basic: research I discuss in chapter 2 shows that government is impossible without significant cooperation from a large proportion of the population. Interdisciplinary research also tells us that the function of power—including political power—always entails choice. In complementary ways, these two lines of argument reinforce the role of the individual person as actor in social situations, including under apparent political domination: a sovereign whom nobody obeys has no power and cannot rule, and obedience is ultimately a decision. The lasting tyranny of a single person or a small group is impossible without convincing (not forcing) most members of the society to comply.[39] Oppression of course occurs and has occurred, but it requires a much greater degree of persuasion and cooperation than has often been recognized. My analysis suggests the Qin rulers were aware of this and used communication to resolve the coordination problem that the unified realm presented.

In many ways, previous assumptions about absolute control by a sociopolitical elite were natural. In the absence of a conceived social contract or

participatory governmental system, as was the case in early China, it may be hard to imagine large groups of people working together except under compulsion. The existence of both penal systems and (of course) criminals only served to strengthen these assumptions. And such ideas were prominent in early Chinese discourse. Yet recent research in other fields offers a new perspective on these problems. My discussions furthermore show that those scholars who predicated limitations of communication on perceived techno-logical constraints did not take all communications media into account.[40] Political authorities in the early empire did communicate across the realm and with all levels of society.

K. E. Brashier has written about the deep-seated preference in West-ern scholarship for what he calls "adversariality," the tendency to perceive and focus on conflict and difference.[41] Brashier's context is early Chinese religion and intellectual history, and he concentrates his arguments there. Yet his observation surely applies more broadly. I would suggest that the tendency to concentrate on particular forms of conflict and perceptions of political structure that emerged from them has helped determine the forms of historians' research on early China, leading scholars to underestimate the importance of cooperation and ideas about noncoercive governance. Recent interdisciplinary theory provides a way of approaching the questions of imperial rule that simultaneously distinguishes my work from that of my predecessors and remains faithful to the available historical sources.

I do not contend that previous work on the political systems and thought of early China has been incorrect; rather, it has focused in cer-tain areas, on specific aspects of political theory to the exclusion of others. Researchers in early Chinese studies have left other areas relatively unex-plored—and it is those areas that I want to concentrate on. I build on pre-vious scholarship while bringing in an interdisciplinary research framework so as to approach my questions in a new way. I hope that this approach will interest not only specialists in Chinese history but also those in other fields who study communication and cooperation.

Cooperation

A major way my work differs from previous studies of early China lies in the weight I place on the role of cooperation. For, as research I discuss in chapter 2 shows, cooperation is at the core of how human societies work. Here I will just make a few general points by way of introduction.

The word "cooperation" is hard to define and a thorough discussion of its meanings would exceed the scope of my work here.[42] Cooperation in the sense I apply it goes beyond the basic, dictionary sense of "working together towards the same end, purpose, or effect."[43] In abstract terms, cooperation denotes a situation in which one person bears a cost in order to benefit another. The costs need not be in terms of resources: expenditures of time, increased risk, and forgone opportunities are all costs. Often, the advantage gained from some cooperative act will benefit not just a single other individual but also a larger group, of which the cooperator is a member. An important part of research on cooperation is examining how the interests of the member and the broader group intersect. Yet researchers who study cooperation tell us it does not necessarily require or reflect a particular mindset or intent; nor does it imply an absence of conflict. Cooperative systems need not be—and often are not—egalitarian, and not all cooperators will benefit equally or in the same way. Power and cooperation are not mutually exclusive. Nor is direct coercion necessarily excluded from cooperation; it is simply not the primary means by which it functions. Coercive power in various forms can work to establish or maintain cooperation without becoming the sole means by which a given institution or practice functions.[44]

In chapter 3 I discuss an early Chinese argument about authority, which suggests that it "uses one to get ten."[45] Coercion is not absent from this conception of power and cooperation, but its role is limited: communication magnifies each instance far beyond its original scope without requiring its repetition. An accurate understanding of how power worked in early China calls for an understanding of this point and how such non-coercive methods worked.

Cooperative social function can rely on communication with far less content, far less intensity, than historians have often imagined. Fairbank calls imperial rule in China "superficial" and says it did not penetrate to all levels of society. But as I discuss in chapter 2, the power that elicits cooperation does not require perfect distribution of detailed information: it suffices for a simple message to be broadcast widely and effectively. Later chapters, especially chapter 6, show that in early imperial China the central authorities in fact penetrated all levels of society, not with highly detailed messages but with information-poor messages transmitted in multiple modes. These include the sort of messages that Yoffee mentions as the sole effects of empire. But these are far from inconsequential, as he implies: they constitute the necessary framework for cooperation.

Clarifications

As a final step before outlining the contents of this study, I want to make some clarifications about its relationship to other work in the field. The most important of these is the fact that an analysis focusing on communication and cooperation does not eliminate other causes and effects, which are often conspicuous and in many—but not all—cases provided the apparent impetus for a given course of action. For example, asserting that the standardization of weights and measures communicated, as I do in chapter 5, does not mean the change did not have other consequences. It surely eased trade and taxation, too. But it also communicated, and that is my focus here. Analyzing communicative aspects of the changes and other acts enhances understanding of those outcomes without diminishing their importance in other realms.

The second clarification concerns the degree to which the rulers of Qin consciously set out to communicate in order to create political power. The short answer is that there is little evidence available concerning intent: we know virtually nothing about what the First Emperor was thinking and little about most of his assistants' ideas. There are indications that they were acting deliberately: the conspicuous role of these things in political thought of the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), which I discuss in chapter 3, shows the requisite understanding existed at the time. And as I point out in chapter 4, the evidence shows that at least one of the measures—the imperial progresses—was recognized as a medium of communication in early times. Ultimately, however, the point is moot. As will be shown in the next chapter, neither intent nor self-consciousness is necessary for the effects I propose in the realm of political power to exist.

Finally, I must address the question of historical materials, above all Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE) *Historian's Records* (*Shiji* 史記), the most important transmitted source of Qin history. *Historian's Records*, along with its author and his motives, have long been the subject of scrutiny in and outside China. There is good reason for that. Like any historian—any author—Sima Qian had his reasons for writing; and like any ancient text, corruptions and interpolations have crept into *Historian's Records* over the centuries.[46] All of these matters are important objects of scholarly inquiry and deserve attention. But that does not mean that we should disregard *Historian's Records* as a source. Yuri Pines describes the difficulties Sima Qian faced when writing and concludes, "The result is not always satisfactory for the modern critical historian. Yet rather than ignoring Sima Qian's accounts or blindly following them, we should do our best to integrate

them with the newly obtained sources to obtain a better, less biased picture of the pre-imperial age."[47] In this book I attempt just this sort of integration. I draw from *Historian's Records* and other early texts, as well as the results of archaeology, including excavations and the paleographical materials they have provided. Many writers and scholars, from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) until today, depict the Qin dynasty and its founder as hubris-filled and obsessed with self-aggrandizement. My interpretation brings together transmitted sources, excavated materials, and interdisciplinary research to reconsider activities of the Qin dynasty and to propose what, in my view, the underlying causes were.

One specific issue concerning *Historian's Records* concerns the veracity of its accounts of the First Emperor's reign. Historians rightly question Sima Qian's descriptions of his ritual and other activities. In my discussions of early imperial examples, I strive to connect recorded history with the material remains of the Qin dynasty. Archaeologists have recovered paleographic documents, ancient buildings, and other concrete remnants from the time of the Qin and early Western Han that support conclusions about what happened. Archaeological results are, of course, far from transparent and unambiguous records, being themselves subject to interpretation. But such is the case for all aspects of intellectual inquiry. By connecting historical sources with archaeological research and interdisciplinary research, I hope to arrive at reasonable and reliable conclusions about early imperial political practices.

Preview of Chapters

Chapter 2. Communication and Cooperation: A Framework

In chapter 2 I present an interdisciplinary framework to support the analysis in later chapters. The first half of this chapter presents relevant theoretical and empirical research by anthropologists, economists, and others concerning cooperation, communication, and power in human societies. I begin with the central position of cooperation in all human groups, the evolved nature of our predilection to cooperate, and the difficulties inherent in working together. Cooperation in the form of social life is what enables humans to succeed so well; hence the drive to cooperate is an inherent part of humanity, and we have evolved capacities and abilities that support it. Cooperation offers benefits in situations where it may at first not be obvious; even enemies can cooperate for mutual benefit.[48] In a social system, leaders

and followers all benefit from cooperation, not equally, but in comparison to the available alternatives. The primary means for resolving the difficulties of cooperation is communication in different forms. The broadest of these is the transmission of culture, defined technically as "socially transmitted information."[49] A culture is a body of information, and although people are often unaware of it, it provides ways to achieve the goal of coordinated action. Culture provides ways for human groups to coordinate their actions, and one way it does that is through establishing what Thomas Schelling calls "focal points."[50] Just one characteristic defines focal points: they must be obvious to the people involved. Beyond that, virtually anything could potentially be a focal point. Economist and political scientist Michael Suk-Young Chwe has applied Schelling's concepts to concrete political situations.[51] Chwe considers political situations as "coordination problems," in which the decisions of each person involved depend on their perceptions of how others act and will act. Chwe treats matters like ritual and changes to communal praxis as means for communication and how these establish new focal points for cooperation.

Chapter 3. Communication and Cooperation in Early Chinese Thought

Chapter 3 relates early Chinese concepts of government to the ideas I explore in chapter 2. I bring in received sources and texts recovered by archaeologists in recent decades to show that early Chinese thinkers analyzed successful societies as functioning by means of cooperation. In this discussion, I take seriously things that others in the past have dismissed as idealistic. By connecting these ideas to interdisciplinary research, I show that these thinkers were not proposing a hypothetical possibility; they were presenting an understanding of how human societies work. Thinkers in early China recognized the importance of communication for the function of governance. I demonstrate the degree to which their analyses and arguments put perceptions, which depended on communication to the whole population, at the center of social function. The most salient aspect of this, for those writers and for me, was simple unity: communicating the presence of the single ruler, the ultimate focal point, and the unified realm was a key step toward realizing rule. The thinkers proposed the active promulgation—creating common knowledge—of the ruler's political self as stand-in for his dynasty, an image intended for reception across all levels of society. It is this sort of communication that the First Emperor of Qin and his cohort engaged in with such assiduity.

Chapter 4. Mass Communication and Standardization

Chapter 4 begins the study of the Qin case by examining the standardization of weights and measures, which the Qin dynasty carried out immediately after unification. I show how the text commanding this change also advertised the First Emperor's achievement and that there is evidence indicating the Qin actively disseminated this text across the realm. Archaeologists have recovered numerous clay vessels, bronze plaques, and other implements bearing this text. The wide geographical distribution of these finds demonstrates the extent to which the Qin spread this message across their territory. The near ubiquity of these objects reinforces the mass communication aspect of their creation: the text was everywhere and on media of varying prestige, implying an audience of commensurate universality. This change must have touched the general population of the realm and created common knowledge of the instituting power, the Qin dynasty. I also discuss precedents for this sort of communication, concentrating on the potential for text, especially reproduced text on various media, to communicate among a group and create common knowledge. Evidence shows that people in pre-imperial China recognized this potential yet used it only in limited situations and to reach limited groups. The Qin rulers built upon existing ideas and processes to resolve the unparalleled problems they faced.

Chapter 5. Progress and Publicity: Qin Shihuang, Ritual,
and Common Knowledge

Beginning soon after his accession to the throne, the First Emperor of Qin performed five tours around the realm. My analysis treats these progresses as public rituals that communicated the existence of the emperor—and, by extension, the empire—to the populace. These tours demonstrated the unchallenged position of the emperor in the realm before the audience of the general population and did so in a way that was sure to spread beyond the immediate audience of witnesses. In conjunction with the five tours, the First Emperor and his collaborators actively carried out a number of changes to the landscapes they passed through: they put up inscribed stone slabs, knocked down walls, constructed new ritual centers, and more. By doing these things, the First Emperor and his assistants ensured that the messages they were sending about the emperor and the empire persisted beyond the moment of the progress and into the future. Reasoning in terms of political communication permits me to show the connection between the progresses

and other events of the same time and to give all these their proper importance. Seen thus, some of the most famous but frequently doubted events of the progress, like the putative punishment of a mountain, no longer seem incongruous or ludicrous but rather appear as well-designed signals that continue to capture the imagination and generate publicity today.

Chapter 6. Roads to Rule: Construction as Communication

The Qin dynasty made changes to modes of transportation that had communicative effects. In and around the imperial capital, the Qin constructed raised ways and walled roads that shielded and elevated the emperor away from contact with the common population. But even as they hid his person, they advertised his presence by changing the face of the city through permanent construction. While the emperor was concealed, his otherwise ephemeral path through the capital became a durable sign of his political self. Around the same time, the Qin created a highway system based on roads that already existed. But the Qin instituted rules to establish a lane marked off with trees and reserved for the emperor everywhere the road ran. Like roads and elevated ways in the capital, this lane turned the highway network into a constant reminder of imperial presence and power. The second part of this chapter takes up one road in particular, the Qin Direct Road (Zhidao 直道), which they created around the same time as the highway system. The Direct Road stretched from the area of the Qin capital at Xianyang 咸陽 (near modern Xi'an) to the northwest border region. This road communicated to the people living on and around its course, including the semi-nomadic tribes living to the north of the Qin realm. Both its endpoints had established political and religious significance, and the mountaintop course of the road likely built on existing conceptions of mountain spaces as well. As such, the Qin Direct Road was a case in which religious connotation worked to augment transmission and reception of the imperial message.

Chapter 7. Law, Administration, and Communication

The rulers of the Qin empire developed and expanded existing bureaucratic structures and practices in innovative ways to meet the needs of the empire. This chapter examines two examples. First is the system of universal registration of the populace, by which the Qin both amassed information about the realm and came into contact with each subject of the polity. This universal contact, I argue, turned the collection of information into

a means of communication. In the second part of this chapter, I consider activities connected with the law. Qin and early Western Han statutes and ordinances were themselves the subject of much communication, as their deterrent purpose required. Records from Qin and Han times show that legal procedures and changes to the law functioned as media for communication, especially for the transmission of messages of political power. This final case shows how systems of control and compulsion—in ordinary function, in periods of interruption, and when changed—worked to create common knowledge and as a way to broadcast claims to power.