UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

A Dissection of the Nanyue Identity: Moving the Frontiers of the Southern Han Dynasty

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL SATISFACTION OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE BACHELOR OF ARTS IN HISTORY

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I hope that this project is just a single step into a thousand mile journey of exploring early China, and that I have tossed enough building bricks to attract jades of further dialogue, discussion, and deliberation around the southern Han frontiers. Thank you!

Dynasties of China

Xia Dynasty (夏), c. 2070–1600 BC

Shang Dynasty (商), c. 1600–1046 BC

Zhou Dynasty (周), 1046–256 BC

- Western Zhou (西周), 1046–771 BC
- Eastern Zhou (東周), 770–256 BC
  - Spring and Autumn Period (春秋), 770–476 BC
  - Warring States Period (戰國), 475–221 BC

Qin Dynasty (秦), 221–206 BC

Han Dynasty (漢), 206 BC–220 AD

- Western Han (西漢), 206 CE–9 AD
- Xin Dynasty (新朝), 9–23 AD
- Eastern Han (東漢), 25–220 AD

Three Kingdoms Period (三國), 220–280 AD

- Wei (魏), 220–265 AD
- Shu (蜀), 221–263 AD
- Wu (吳), 222–280 AD

Jin Dynasty (晉), 266–420 AD

- Western Jin (西晉), 266–316 AD
- Eastern Jin (東晉), 317–420 AD

Northern and Southern Dynasties Period (南北朝), 420–589 AD

Sui Dynasty (隋), 581–618 AD

Tang Dynasty (唐), 618–907 AD

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period (五代十國), 907–960 AD

Song Dynasty (宋), 960–1279 AD

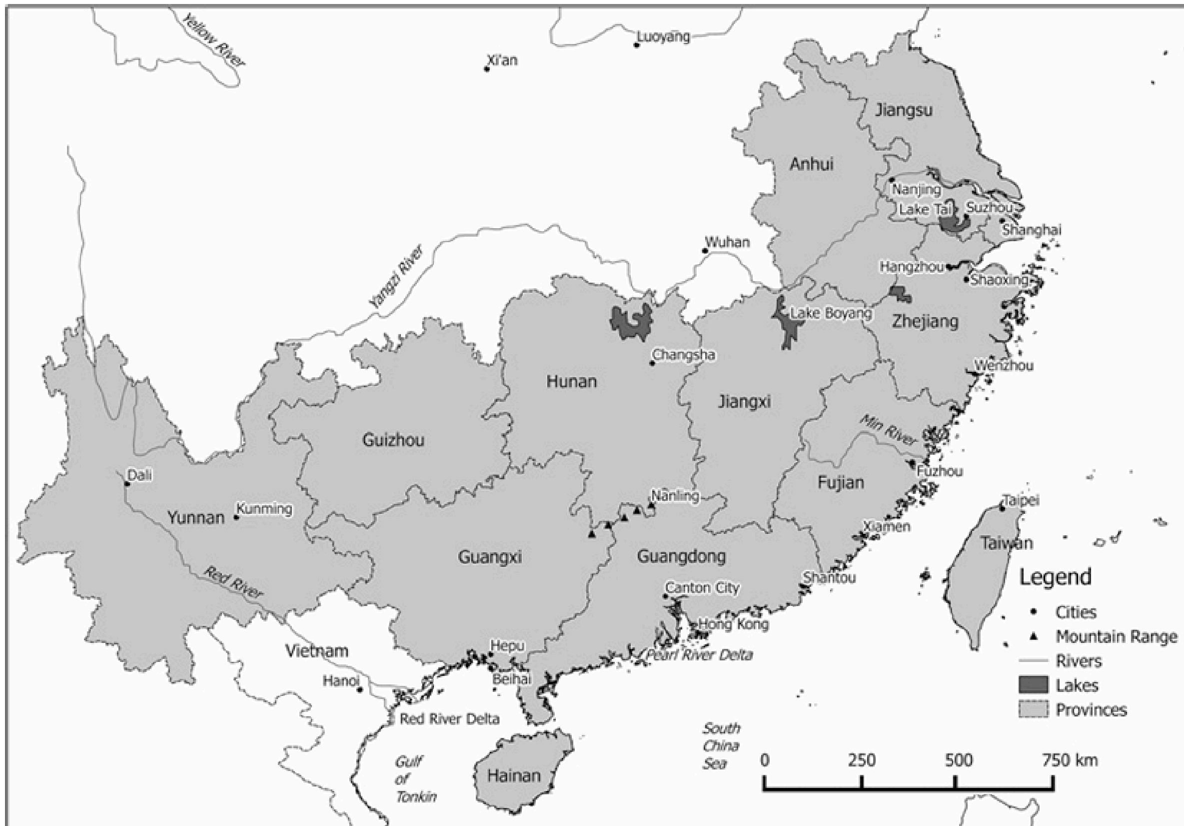
- Northern Song (北宋), 960–1127 AD
- Southern Song (南宋), 1127–1279 AD

Yuan Dynasty (元), 1271–1368 AD

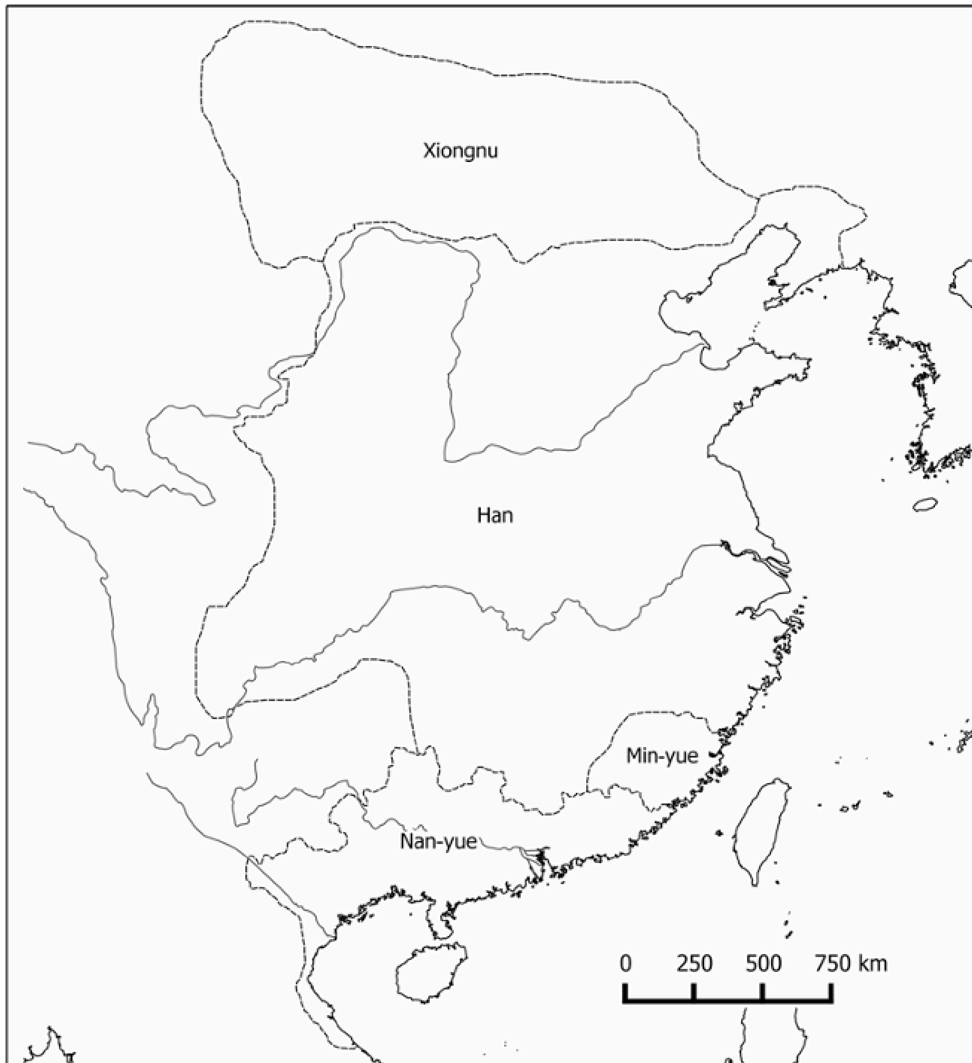
Ming Dynasty (明), 1368–1644 AD

Qing Dynasty (清), 1644–1912 AD

Introductory Figures

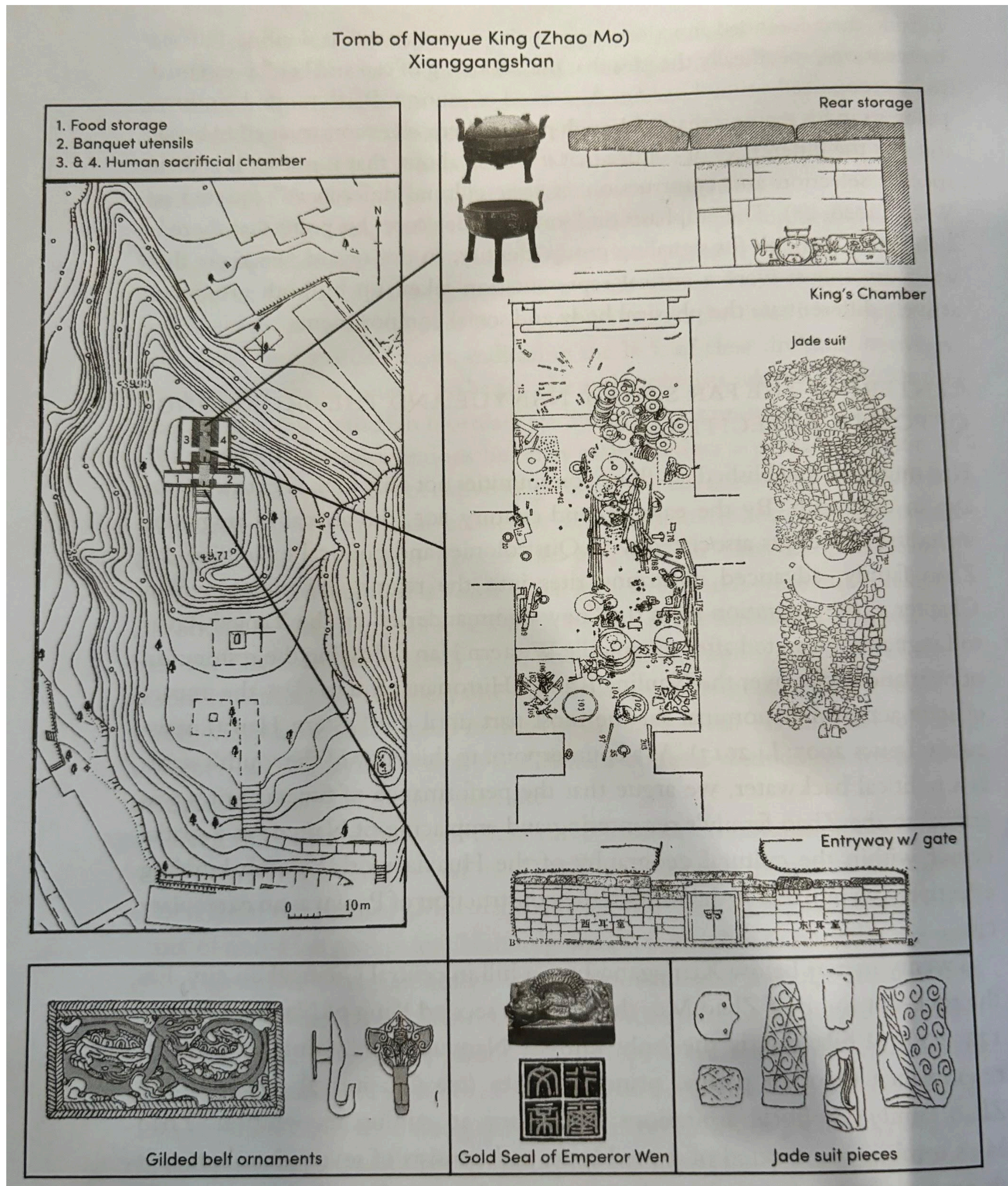


Map 1. Modern map of South China and Vietnam, split into provinces. Note the sites of Hepu (modern Guangxi), Guangzhou (Canton City; modern Guangdong), and the Nanling mountain range. Adapted from Erica Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue: Perceptions and Identities on the Southern Frontier, c. 400 BCE-50 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015): xx.



Map 2. Map of the early Han era (c. 200 - 111 BC), highlighting the Han and surrounding territories. Note that these borders are not clearly defined nor constant throughout the given time frame. Adapted from Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, xxii.

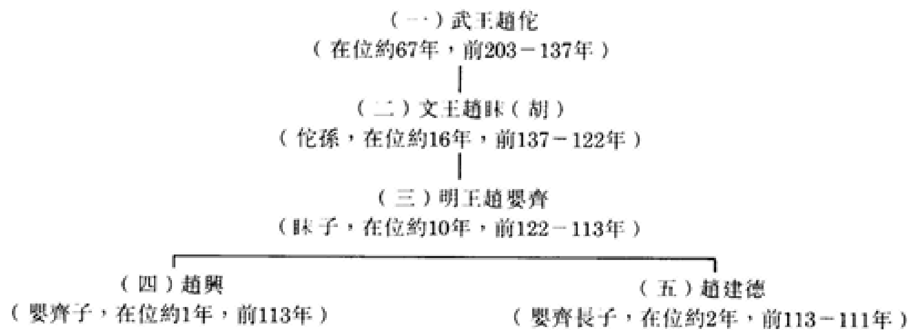
Map 3. Map of modern China, including all provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities, and special administrative regions, as recognized by the People's Republic of China. Sourced from Roland Blomeyer et al., "The Role of China in World Fisheries" in *Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies of the Directorate General for Internal Policies* (European Union, 2012): 17, figure 1.2. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/pech/dv/chi/china.pdf.



Map 4. Diagram of the Tomb of the Nanyue King [Zhao Mo]. Adapted from Alice Yao and Wengcheong Lam, *The Archaeology of Han China* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2025): 268.

南越世系表

（公元前203－前111年）



GENEALOGY OF NANYUE

(203 -111 BC)

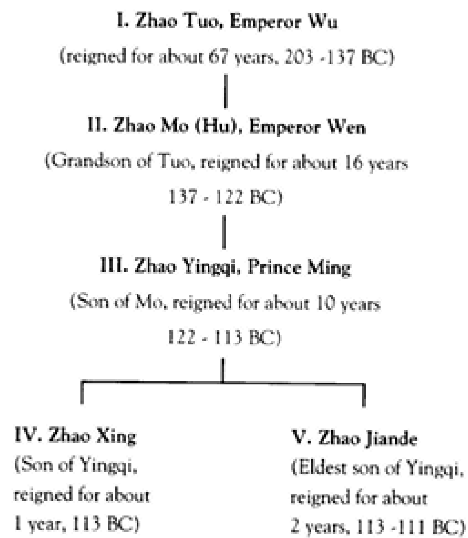


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Table 1. Family tree of the Zhao royal family. Adapted from The Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, *Jades from the Tomb of the King of Nanyue* (*Nanyue Wang Mu Yu Qi* 南越王墓玉器) (Hong Kong: The Woods Publishing Company, 1993): 21.

Western Han Ruler	Reign Dates	Nanyue King	Reign Dates
Gaozu (Liu Bang)	202–195	Zhao Tuo	204–137
Hui (Liu Ying)	195–188	Zhao Tuo	204–137
Empress Lü (Lü Zhi)	188–180	Zhao Tuo	204–137
Wen (Liu Heng)	180–157	Zhao Tuo	204–137
Jing (Liu Qi)	157–141	Zhao Tuo	204–137
Wu (Liu Che)	141–87	Zhao Tuo	204–137
Wu (Liu Che)	141–87	Zhao Mo	137–122
Wu (Liu Che)	141–87	Zhao Yingqi	122–115
Wu (Liu Che)	141–87	Zhao Xing	115–112
Wu (Liu Che)	141–87	Zhao Jiande	112–111

Table 2. Chart depicting the rulers of the Western Han and Nanyue. Illustration generated by ChatGPT, March 16, 2026, OpenAI, https://chat.openai.com/chat.

Introduction

Imaginations of the Other

On July 3, 2024, the accidental beginnings of this project were born. During my study abroad trip to China, I visited the city of Guangzhou, the land of my ancestors stretching as far back as the Han Dynasty, or so my family likes to say. I decided to visit a museum called the Western Han Museum of the Nanyue King, a mouthful of words that at the time held no particular significance to me. As the average historian enthusiast does, I spent far too long looking at artifacts and exhibits that by the time the museum closed, I had not yet explored it all. My photo album was filled with photos to the point that I had maximized my storage space and could not take any more, filled with two-thousand-year-old pots and shards that attracted puzzled looks from my family. To them, this was just another museum, but to me, it was the beginning of an interest into the Nanyue. To me, this was an exploration of a side of history I had only learned about from family, but never seen in textbooks. To me, this was about who I was: the history of my land, the history of my people, and the history of my identity.

When engaged in conversations about ethnicity and identity, most will point to ideals of the modern nation-state and the rise of nationality in post-Enlightenment thinking, but the roots of the two are entrenched in far more ancient histories. Identity and ethnicity are increasingly tied by historians to interpret premodern phenomena rather than simply "tying it to presentist questions of modernity, imperialism, capitalism, racism, and democracy."[1] However, understanding concerns between ethnic identities is exceedingly difficult to analyze in gauging the extent of ethnic consciousness and the degree or scope to which myths, stories, and cultures penetrated across social strata. Within any study of identity that attempts to quantify to what

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[1] Marc S. Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 1.

degree an individual or actor expressed an ethnicity, it is important to acknowledge the flaws that are highlighted in doing so. Firstly, and most obviously, it is difficult to determine how exactly any given actor understood the cultural milieu around him, or if our understanding of a premodern Chinese cultural milieu is correct in the first place. Secondly, as historian Marc Abramson puts it, it is best to consider "ethnic identities and taxonomies as forms of discourse engaged in a constitutive dialogue with material conditions and social phenomena, rather than as reflections of an objective, let alone timeless, reality."[2] In other words, ethnic markers and epithets are fickle and porous, not bound to one strict definition over time and space. However, in spite of these abstractions and potential generalizations, gauging a sense of identity in early China is feasible within the textual tradition.

This project explores ethnic identities and its effect on political decisions along the southern frontier of the Han Dynasty (202 BC - 220 AD), suggesting that the identities of figures along the southern frontier adopted a third, liminal identity outside of the simple binary of "Han" and "non-Han." I will specifically be using the Nanyue Kingdom (*Nanyue Guo* 南越國) as a case study to express this "third identity," which I thusly term the "Nanyue identity."[3] By utilizing evidence from Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* and other classical texts, as well as archaeological goods from the tomb of the Nanyue King, the Hepu tombs, and Luobowang tombs, I will contend that identities were far more complex than the traditional historiographic view of a black-and-white view of either Han or not Han. This paper will furthermore define a sense of "self", or "Han", as diametrically opposed to the understanding of the "barbarian", and will suggest that the two formed a direct binary that defined the other through its existence. The ethos of a Han "self" suggested the emergence of a cultural understanding of a "self" and an

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[2] Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China*, 5.
[3] Some authors choose to translate *Nanyue* as "Southern Yue," but I have left it as is.

"other" in Han China, itself likely constructed from past conceptions of the very same. Sima Qian's decision to distinguish between a Han "self" and a barbaric "other," as well as a lack of distinction between the barbarians themselves, speaks volumes towards his view of what constitutes a barbarian and what constitutes a Han Chinese. A homogenous group with barbaric practices and living in the swampy, destitute southern end of the world defined the Nanyue to Sima Qian. His narrative of these peoples both defined and reinforced the peoples of the region. It established the Nanyue political state for centuries to come, mitigating the role and importance of southern non-Han groups in the formation of early China, yet concurrently upheld centuries-old notions of cultural homogeneity between the different forms of the Yue state as southern practices distinct, and perhaps even contradictory, from those of the Central Plains.[4]

Methodology

When speaking on the study of the Han frontiers, there has been and remains a consistent focus on the northern and northwestern frontier. This is due in large part to the great emphasis, both in ancient sources and in contemporary literature, placed on the constant and violent encounters between the heartlands of the Han Chinese (or the "Central States" 中國) and the nomadic steppes of ethnic and political groups such as the Rong 戎, Di 狄, Xiongnu 匈奴, and far more. As such, painting a concise and wholesale picture of the southern frontier relies primarily on the limited and often biased sources arising from the Han perspective, and from the relatively far smaller cache of secondary literature on the Nanyue and surrounding groups.

[4] Different forms of "Yue" existed from the late 6th century BC until the consolidation of Nanyue 南越 and Minyue 閩越 by Emperor Wu of Han in 111 BC. That being said, it cannot be said that the Yue state of the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) was the same as the Ouyue, Yuyue, Minyue, Nanyue, or any other classification of the Yue. For a more detailed analysis, see Chapter I, Part II.

I have chosen to limit the scope of my examination on recent historiography, but the main themes of a classical interpretation of history has begun and continued with Sima Qian's *Shiji* (c. 109-91 BC). Within this narrative, Sima describes the Han takeover of the Nanyue in very binary terms, devoting far less time to his description of the event (and for that matter, the entire southern frontier). He writes from the perspective of the Han as the core centralizing, humanizing, and righteous conquerors of the southern backwaters, a narrative that sustained itself as the *Shiji* became the sola scriptura for Chinese history and imperial canon. In 1939, Xu Songshi wrote a history of three primary ethnic groups in the southern provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, linking these modern ethnic groups with the ancient Yue peoples that populated the region and forming the first foundation for understanding the South.[5] Later works by scholars such as Herold Wiens' *China's March Toward the Tropics*, C.P. Fitzgerald's *The Southern Expansion of the Chinese People*, and Wang Gungwu's *The Nanhai Trade: Early Chinese Trade in the South China Sea* espoused the traditional narrative of Han Chinese expansion into the South as primarily Sinocentric, albeit coming from the perspectives of dominant military might, gradual cultural diffusion, and economic maritime involvement, respectively.[6] In more recent times, authors such as Xiaotong Wu have argued for a more comprehensive understanding of the southern frontier, contending that identity and ethnic markers are far more fluid than the simple

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[5] Xu Songshi 徐松石, *Taizu, Zhuangzu, Yuezu kao* (Study on the Tai, Tong, and Yue Peoples) 泰族僮族粤族考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1946).

[6] Herold Wiens, *China's March Toward the Tropics: A Discussion of the Southward Penetration of China's Culture, Peoples, and Political Control in Relation to the Non-Han-Chinese Peoples of South China and in the Perspective of Historical and Cultural Geography* (Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1954); C.P. FitzGerald, *The Southern Expansion of the Chinese People: Southern Fields and Southern Ocean* (New York: Praeger, 1972); and Wang Gungwu, *The Nanhai Trade: A Study of the Early History of Chinese Trade in the South China Sea* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1988), originally published in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. See Erica Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 13-20 for a far more extensive historiography.

denotation of "us" versus "them" or homogenized understandings of someone who is "Han" and one who is "barbarian."[7]

Francis Allard's 2006 article "Frontiers and Boundaries: The Han Empire from its Southern Periphery" takes the classical approach into account, but contrary to the aforementioned sources, he begins to hack away at the crux of my paper's central theme, that being the changing nature of cross-cultural exchange and transformation of Han and Nanyue identities over time.[8] Allard argues that "Settlement and burial evidence both suggest a process of Sinicization…into cultural landscapes that had shed many of their native features to become…no more than regional variants of the metropolitan culture present in central and northern China at the time."[9] Here, Allard utilizes Sima Qian's official history of the Nanyue and a census from 2 AD (well after the fall of the Nanyue in 111 BC) to argue that Emperor Wu's expansionist policies were related to economic trade relations with ever more distant lands, with the incursion into Nanyue being fueled by commercial motives over civilizing agendas. With the census, Allard provides evidence of cross-cultural interactions between local officials of Yue origin and those of Han origin in order to watch over these backwaters.[10] Along a similar vein, he claims in his discussion of archaeological sources that changes in the funerary behavior of the Nanyue hastened the process of Sinicization, and local practices, while present, simply meant that Zhao Tuo's "implicit acknowledgment of China's cultural superiority."[11]

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[7] Xiaotong Wu et al., "Resettlement strategies and Han imperial expansion into southwest China: a multimethod approach to colonialism and migration" in *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences* 11 (2019): 6751-6781.
[8] Francis Allard, "Frontiers and Boundaries: The Han Empire from its Southern Periphery" in *Archaeology of Asia*, ed. Miriam T. Stark (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).
[9] Allard, "Frontiers and Boundaries," 234.
[10] Allard, "Frontiers and Boundaries," 237.
[11] Allard, "Frontiers and Boundaries," 244.

This is where the crux of my disagreement with Allard's piece lies. To me, there is no doubt that Sinicization did occur, but the extent and scope that Allard claims it occurred in is not representative of the entire story. Take for example this quote from Allard:

> "By the early Eastern Han period, a new policy of Sinicization had been put in place with the hope of altering local customs and rendering the native population more amenable to Chinese control. However, uprisings, which continued until the fall of the Han dynasty, led to the abandonment of the policy. By the second century A.D., the business of administering Lingnan's commanderies had been left increasingly in the hands of local officials, who concerned themselves more with taxing the population and supervising commerce than with 'civilizing' the Yue. For hundreds of years following the fall of the Han dynasty, the texts continue to speak of the presence in Lingnan of various unassimilated groups who opposed Chinese rule. Such groups had not amalgamated into a single coherent political and military force, a feature reflecting in part the continued existence of a highly fragmented cultural landscape."[12]

Here, Allard highlights several interpretations of the Han-Nanyue relationship that I consider to be oversimplified at best and contentious at worst. Firstly, as established previously, the Han's so-called policy of "sinicization" is to me proof that the Han mission into the southern frontier was indeed a policy of civilizing the natives just as much as it was about fruitful economic endeavors, and no doubt fueled by an image of "a malaria-ridden cultural and political backwater, and a place where criminals were exiled and troops posted."[13] While he is

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[12] Allard, "Frontiers and Boundaries," 238.
[13] Allard, "Frontiers and Boundaries," 237.

commenting on the Eastern Han (25-220 AD), outside of my period of analysis, the topics at hand still are relevant conversations that can be applied to the treatment of the Nanyue in 111 BC. Allard highlights evidence of Han-Nanyue cross-cultural exchange, but the narrative proposed herein is skewed towards an interpretation of simple and swift colonialism. Allard brushes the groups away as simply "various unassimilated ethnic groups, some of whom at times battle one another and on occasions inflict losses on the Chinese."[14] It would be wholly incorrect to claim that this argument is fictitious, but it is oversimplifying the narrative of history to fit in with the traditionalist historiography that has been in place since Sima Qian's recording of the events mere decades after it happened. Allard's piece is thus a key summary and a crucial read towards understanding the Han empire within the southern frontiers, but not towards establishing an avenue to understand the complex ethnic and personal identities of the Nanyue or the Han. To me, this narrative of binaries is far too simplistic and not nuanced enough for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the Han core and its southern periphery. Furthermore, Allard's assertion that Sinicization was more of an economic impetus rather than an imperialistic one is not representative of the entire truth; both can be the case, and local officials (although they may have had different personal goals than that of the Han imperial agenda) could have also tried to "civilize" the Yue. Civilizing missions looked differently and were applied differently across space, time, and social situations, and to claim that the Han incursion was simply economic in nature is simply too facile to represent an appropriate reality.

However, it is also important to contextualize Allard's piece as clearly different from the works of previous authors, who stuck solely to an imagery of a conquering Han force that truly did *veni vidi vici*. Instead, Allard contends that empires do not clearly vanish into thin air following their defeat and dissolution, but rather leave "an indelible mark that is witnessed in

[14] Allard, "Frontiers and Boundaries," 250.

shared cultural values between former occupied and occupier and that may lead…to greater success in expanding the empire through the more effective economic integration of different sectors of society."[15] Allard does not stick to the image of Emperor Wen and his Han forces as a swift actor in taking over Lingnan's complex indigenous landscape, but acknowledges the gradual cross-cultural exchanges between the two over time. However, Allard's analysis still lacks in the fact that his focus is overly focused on both the process of Sinicization into the southern frontier, rather than the other way around, and a large focus on economic incentives as the core reason for colonialism, rather than a cultural, military, or political explanation for Emperor Wen's actions.

Conversely, Erica Brindley's *Ancient China and the Yue* analyzes the issue of Han and Nanyue identities in a far more comprehensive manner. Brindley recognizes the inherent problem of using "Chinese" or "Han" as ethnonyms to describe peoples who did not consider themselves as such, at least with the modern interpretations of those epithets. Instead, she argues that conceptions of the marginal "other" were constructed as contradictory and antagonistic to the Huaxia "self", and that the local peoples of the South that inhabited the Nanyue state were "powerful actors in the ancient past [that] serves as testament to the immense diversity and complex history of the East Asian mainland."[16] Instead, Brindley paints a picture of the southern frontier through an analysis of textual material, archaeological evidence, and lifestyle practices such as hairstyles and sitting styles to delineate an identity unique to the Han and to the Nanyue. She firstly notes that the binary between Han and Nanyue was far more complex than that of civilized and barbarian, conqueror and conquered. Not only were perceptions of the Nanyue

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[15] Allard, "Frontiers and Boundaries," 252.
[16] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*: xi-xiii. The Huaxia 華夏, or Zhuxia 諸夏, is a historical concept of the predecessor to the modern Chinese self, where ancestral populations of the Han that formed a confederation of tribes later became the Han Chinese people. It allowed for the creation of a Han ethos of a common cultural ancestor and thus providing structure to a sense of "self" within the Han imagination.

other far more complex than Allard's picture of a homogenous polity swallowed up by the bigger fish, but Han perceptions of the self were also more complex: Han identity varied across time, space, and social class, but uniformly as oppositionary to the barbarian. Using Sima Qian's work and several other ancient sources, Brindley describes how the Han "performed Huaxia," visibly connecting the Yue with "the extremity of common ideals, especially political ones and those related to diplomacy and warfare."[17] Brindley argues crucially that the Nanyue acted as an exaggerated reflection of the self or as a foil to critique or shed light on the self, or even as a definition of universality through the distinction of the self as the center.

Brindley challenges the traditional historiography of Allard, of scholars like Xu and Wiens, and the narrative of the *Shiji* by attempting to create a more comprehensive commentary around the southern frontier as a core in its own right. The south became a point of proliferation for goods, ideas, and cultures coming in from the Central Plains, Southeast Asia, and even as far West as Persia, becoming in its own right a polity defined by material and cultural exchange. Unlike Allard, Brindley comments far more on identity and ethnicity of the Nanyue, writing that

> "The process of incorporating native identities and cultural practices into the Han fold took thousands of years. This process was clearly not always one of sinicization, whereby native identities vanished without a trace and became Hua-xia in their stead. Even early descriptions of attempts to establish local control suggest that the process of cultural change was highly varied, and it did not involve wholesale substitution of one culture for another. Nor did such a process occur immediately, and especially not during the period

[17] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 122-125. Brindley connects this with philosophers from the Warring States such as Mozi, Mencius, Zhuangzi, and Guanzi.

> of Han colonial rule, despite the temporary obliteration of all the major Yue political entities."[18]

In this description, Brindley's work clearly paints a mural of a far more comprehensive image of Han-Nanyue relations, focusing on how military, economic, and political decisions fed into their individual identities. As such, her work forms a basis for understanding these relations in a binary form, although I want to consider Gloria Anzaldua's borderlands theory to suggest the creation of a third, liminal identity that was non-Han and non-Nanyue.

In analyzing the works of Francis Allard and Erica Brindley, we can see that the conversations around a unique southern identity along the Han frontiers have evolved greatly from the traditional narrative proposed from Sima Qian. While Allard does acknowledge the diversity along the southern frontiers, he does little to describe its nuance and instead agrees with Sima Qian in claiming that the Han frontiers expanded through a process of Sinicization and simple diffusion. He claims that Han incursions were not due to a desire to civilize the region, but rather through economic pursuits that were inherently top-down. While there is undoubtedly evidence of Sinicization into the region, there similarly is also evidence of trade, both material and cultural, out of Nanyue and into the north. To oversimplify and generalize who the Nanyue were through Sima Qian's eyes is to fall into what is essentially Han propaganda. In contrast, Brindley's work paints a far more comprehensive picture of Han-Nanyue relations. She challenges the traditional narrative supported by previous scholars, proposing the Nanyue not just as the periphery, but as a core in its own right. This, she argues, leads to a clearer image of Nanyue and Han identities. Thus, figures such as the Nanyue kings, who simultaneously acted as

[18] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 249.

subjects of the Han and as kings of their own polity, became representative of an identity that became both Han and Nanyue.

These two key secondary sources form the basis of my historical methodology. These two arguments are representative of the shift between traditionalist narratives and more comprehensive narratives, and will be the foundation of how I make my own contribution to this ongoing dialogue. I intend to see Han-Nanyue relations more as Brindley does, but I will argue in my paper that the people of Nanyue, from Zhao Tuo to commoners, identified themselves along a spectrum that did not slot them neatly into either an identity of being Han or of being Nanyue. With this analysis, I hope to shine a greater light on the Han southern frontiers as just as complex and valuable as the northern and western Han frontiers, but also introduce a western concept of borderlands into this ongoing dialogue.

Outline

In contradiction to the very defined notions of a Han identity and a Nanyue identity, I will further contend in this paper that the existence of a third, liminal identity that was distinctly non-Han and non-Nanyue also emerged along the Han frontiers. This builds off of the work of Gloria Anzaldua and related scholars, who suggest that the borderlands provides a heuristic for understanding how Nanyue operated as a site where imperial categories were negotiated rather than simply imposed. Like the Chicana borderlands described by Anzaldua, the Nanyue occupied a space of structural contradiction. Positioned between Han imperial authority and indigenous Yue traditions, it did not merely blend the two but generated a third political-cultural formation that destabilized the binary of center and periphery. Thus, rather than representing incomplete Sinicization, Nanyue may be better understood as a liminal polity that institutionalized ambiguity

as a strategy of survival. To properly understand the emergence of a liminal identity, it is first important to acknowledge the political and social background of the time. The history of the Nanyue has long since remained a mere footnote in the broader narrative of Chinese historiography. In order to provide proper contextualization for this time period, it is important to understand that the Nanyue state and Han state saw themselves both as subsidiary-master and as equals. The Nanyue state 南越國 (c. 204-111 BC) was merely one of the many polities, ethnicities, and civilizations within the umbrella term of Yue 越/粵, covering a undoubtedly vastly different sets of people ethnically, culturally, politically, and linguistically. As this paper will delve into greater detail later, the Yue formed a far more mysterious, ambiguous, and historically porous group to identify, and we have very little information about the names they called themselves, their customs, or ethnic and cultural distinctions they drew among themselves.[19] The understanding of the Yue peoples, whether it be Nanyue 南越, Ouyue 甌越, Minyue 閩越, or any other classification of these "barbarians", becomes a far murkier and far more biased discussion because of a necessity to rely on textual evidence from the conquering Han Chinese core. Thus, studying the identities of various groups along the southern frontier help to define not only the local, Yue sense of self, but also the Han (Sinitic or Huaxia 華夏) perception of the self.

This paper will firstly introduce topics of identity and ethnicity formation, providing theoretical constructs to understand the narrower question of its applicability towards the southern Han frontiers. Establishing definitions of identity and ethnicity are key towards not only understanding how these titles of "Han" and "non-Han" and their many variations formed, but also towards the continuation of a Han (or non-Han) cultural orthodoxy spreading from the core

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[19] Erica Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue: Perceptions and Identities on the Southern Frontier, c. 400 BCE-50 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 22.

of the Han capital at Chang'an 長安 to the southernmost commanderies at Jiuzhen 九真 and Jiaozhi 交趾.[20] Next, the paper will delve into applying these visions of identity and ethnicity towards the imagined communities of the "Han" and "non-Han", and attempting to reconstruct a small snippet of what it may have meant to hail from either the Central States or from deep in Lingnan. However, as with any hasty generalizations of identity and ethnicity, the image that we have of both Han and non-Han identities remains flawed, such that no matter how true it is that there may very well have been a Han cosmopolitan culture and a non-Han traditional culture, they are not entirely representative of a comprehensive truth (and in many ways never will be). Out of this construct of a "Han" and "non-Han" cultural core, the emergence of what I claim is a third, liminal identity can be seen through the case study of the Nanyue.[21] I decide to analyze the Zhao lineage of the Nanyue: Zhao Tuo 趙佗, Zhao Mo (Hu) 趙眛 (胡), and the remaining Zhao descendants (Zhao Yingqi 趙嬰齊, Zhao Xing 趙興, and Zhao Jiande 趙建德). These figures, as the highest echelon of political and cultural capital, thus helped to promote this Nanyue identity through a political interpretation of their identity and ethnicity, and also through the proliferation of this Nanyue culture onto their own lower aristocratic members. The next chapter is devoted to these members precisely, and focusing on how different members of the Nanyue aristocracy outside of the Zhao kings were able to make their own mark in replicating and again reduplicating these cultural markers of Nanyue identity, reaffirming the notion of a third, separate identity that evaded a homogenized or hybridized version of identity as so many other scholars of the southern Han frontiers have espoused. Lastly, I discuss broader implications of

[20] Jiuzhen 九真 and Jiaozhi 交趾 were both Western Han imperial commanderies centered in what is now modern-day Vietnam, along the Red River Delta. After the conquest of Nanyue in 111 BC, the Han under Emperor Wu established these two commanderies. These were alongside four other commanderies in the Lingnan region, namely Nanhai 南海, Hepu 合浦, Cangwu 蒼梧, and Yulin 鬱林.

[21] I have elected to describe this "third, liminal identity" as the "Nanyue identity" throughout this paper. This decision is not to homogenize all of the Han frontiers under the same means of expressing identity, but rather for simplicity's sake. I use the two terms interchangeably, but especially towards the second half of the paper, I begin to apply the latter term far more.

the term and the importance of this alternate view of the Nanyue as a case study into history as propaganda: how the narrative recorded over two thousand years ago by the “victor” has subjugated the “vanquished” to the footnotes of Chinese history. It is critical to present the comprehensive view of history (or, at least, the closest mimicry of such) to define the modern Chinese “self” and “other”, to elucidate the muddied waters of the Nanyue and borderland kingdoms of the Han frontiers, and to hopefully further the dialogue of the expanding field of Chinese borderlands studies.

Chapter 1: Discussions on Identity

What is Identity?

Definitions and Scholarly Consenses

The study of identity is a key driver to understanding, contextualizing, and broadening historical narratives and knowledge. To define the term, identity is the broader, fluid sense of self shaped by various ethnic, social, and historical experiences. Identity lends deeply to how we consider ourselves as both part of a collective whole (group identification), and unique from that collective (self identification). Cultural identity is also deeply tied with cultural memory, and the way that one expresses their being is ingrained within their memories and thus composite histories. Cultural memories prove important to any one group, and "encodes these memories into stories, preserves them as public narratives, and makes it possible for new members to share group history."[22] In this sense, the stories and lives of different groups reflect a national/ethnic identity on the one hand, and connect individuals to the group on the other hand.[23]

Ethnicity is the other side of the coin that is explored within this paper. The question of ethnicity itself is a question of boundaries.[24] Ethnic boundaries are determinants of belonging, and designate which ethnic categories form the criteria for individual identification across time and space. Ethnicity is also a negotiated and fluid ideal, not uniquely locked into place, and differs in meaning and scope for every individual. As social situations and strata evolve, ethnicity is thus "created and recreated as various groups and interests put forth competing

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[22] James Liu and Janos Laszlo, "Chapter 6: A Narrative Theory of History and Identity: Social Identity, Social Representations, Society, and the Individual" in *Social Representations and Identity: Content, Process, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 85-107.
[23] Liu and Laszlo, "Social Identity," 19.
[24] Joane Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture" in *Social Problems* 41, vol. 1 (Feb 1994): 152-176. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3096847.

visions of the ethnic composition of society and argue over which rewards or sanctions should be attached to which ethnicities."[25] Culturally speaking, ethnicity is an offshoot of one's own identity, and forms a core part of how that identity is both constructed initially and continually maintained or altered. Political definitions of identity, as it relates to modern understandings of nationality, strengthen these boundaries by becoming the bedrock to which discrimination and repression are tied, and both the collective emergence of ethnic boundaries and the individual adoption of ethnic identity can be seen as a political maneuver that translates into greater social influence.

There is no one way to discuss identity and ethnicity, as different scholars, both inside and outside of the field of history, have utilized these terms so loosely and frequently that the terms become mere buzzwords, half-beaten to death by various interpretations. Erica Brindley, taking inspiration from scholars such as Jonathan Hall, establishes ethnicity as grounding identity in a shared myth of descent and a shared association with a specific territory. She adds on this definition, asserting that a shared sense of culture also is entailed within ethnicity, and that "This way of understanding ethnicity renders problematic any conception of Chineseness as a primordial, essential, and indeed, biological marker of much significance."[26] Through this work, I will aim to view identity and ethnicity through the lens of viewing the Hua-xia and Yue (terms that I will breakdown later in the piece), discussing how these groups mapped on a group identity as a means to establish both Chinese-ness and a lack of it as an ethnic concept. I adapt Brindley's definition to better streamline a working definition of "identity" and "ethnicity" in relation to one another.

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[25] Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity," 154.
[26] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 6.

In the Chinese context, identity is furthermore not a singular ideal, but a longer discourse between a unified "us" and an othered "them" for much of its history. The politician Sun Yat-sen's nationalistic writings in the 20th century had strong distinctions between the Chinese self and the foreign other, and aimed to bring China into the fold of modernity and Western prosperity.[27] Identity, however, is not unique to revolutionary figures of the 20th century. The little known literati Cheng Yan 程晏 of the late 9th century wrote an essay titled the "Announcement On Drawing the Barbarians Inward" (*nei yi xi* 内夷檄), detailing a certain set of behaviors as being inherently civilized:

> 華其名有夷其心者, 夷其名有華其心者。是知棄仁義忠信於中國者, 即為中國之夷矣。不待四夷之侵我也, 有悖命中國, 專倨不王, 棄彼仁義忠信, 則不可與人倫齒, 豈不為中國之夷乎？四夷內向, 樂我仁義忠信, 願為人倫齒者, 豈不為四夷之華乎？記吾言者, 夷其名尚不為夷矣, 華其名反不如夷其名者也.

> There are people who are named Chinese but have barbarian hearts. There are people who are named barbarians but who have Chinese hearts. The former, who, though living in the Central Kingdom, have knowingly abandoned humanity, righteousness, loyalty, and honesty, are none other than barbarians of the Central Kingdom. There is no need for the barbarians to invade us. Those who disobey the orders of the Central Kingdom, who arrogantly act without authorization and do not accept royal authority, and who discard humanity, righteousness, loyalty, and honesty, are incompatible with social norms. How can they not be barbarians of the Central Kingdom? Those of the barbarians who look

[27] For more on Sun Yat-sen's writings, see G. Kentak Son, "Cultural Race and an Inclusive Nationalism Sun Yat-sen's (1866-1925) Nationalism during China's Modernization" in *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology* 17, vol. 2 (2020): 165-180. https://doi.org/10.3726/CUL022020.0013.

> inward and admire China, who delight in our humanity, righteousness, loyalty, and honesty, and who desire to be part of human society, how can they not be **the Chinese of the barbarians**? Mark my words. There are those called barbarians who are not barbarians. Then, there are people with the name of Chinese who fail to measure up to those called barbarians."[28]

In this piece, abstract cultural values and ultimately political loyalties demarcate the line between the Han self and the barbarian other. Immediately, Cheng Yan's writings dispel the correlation between identity and ethnicity with modernity, and shows that ideals of belonging and distancing were rooted in political discourse dating much further back than often believed today. Interestingly, Cheng seems to stress that the epithet of "barbarian" or "Han Chinese" was applied explicitly through the lens of a set of beliefs and a clearly demarcated culture rather than any binding of physical traits. To Cheng Yan, there is no such thing as a delineated "self" or "other", but rather that these terms could be used fluidly. Yet, despite this insistence, barbarians who take on "Han Chinese" traits are still only labeled as "the Chinese of the barbarians" (*si yi zhi hua* 四夷之華) rather than as full-fledged members of the in-group, showing the clear grey area between belonging to a "self" or "other" in ancient Chinese discourse. This transcendence of strictly ethnic differences as outlined by geographic and ancestral origins in favor of a shared recognition of good and bad culture betrays our understanding of identity and ethnicity in the Han Dynasty. While it is outside of the scope of this essay to discuss ethnic identity of the Tang Dynasty, it remains clear that key complexities in ethnic identity was a process of gradual development that was by the 800s already complex and contradictory in its understanding of a self and an other. This paper will argue that these complexities were rooted in the emergence of a

[28] Cheng Yan's "Announcement on Drawing the Barbarians Inward". Zhou Shaoliang 周绍良, *Quan Tang Wen Xin Bian* 全唐文新编 (Changchun: Jilin Wen Shi Chu Ban She, 2000): 821.10226. Translation adapted from Marc Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 181.

third, liminal identity that played out in the borderlands of previous dynasties, and the case study of the Nanyue is a perfect example of such.

Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands Theory

I will utilize Gloria Anzaldua's borderlands theory to challenge eastern scholarship and the insistence of the southern borderlands as a hybridity of culture, social life, and politics. Instead, I will suggest that a more useful perspective on these frontiers adapts a third, liminal identity that is neither Han nor non-Han, but a separate identity of its own. Anzaldua writes that communities on the frontiers are "in a constant state of non-belonging, of difference, and of alienation."[29] To Anzaldua, the borderlands act as a medium for new identities to emerge; identities that don't just conflate two identities into one, but rather blossom into an individualistic identity birthed from a state of alienation. The myriad cultures that met in the Nanyue state, and for that matter other borderlands in the Han peripheries, made these areas into hotspots of cultural diffusions. Thus, the traditional core-and-periphery model espoused by traditional historiography and even by modern historians cannot represent a comprehensive picture of the Han frontiers.[30] She writes that "the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy."[31] Thus, this is an almost grey-area part of the world wherein identities are not so much belonging to any one dominant group, but a third, liminal identity that is a unique version birthed from the two. While Anzaldua was a sociologist and scholar of Chicana

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[29] Gloria Anzaldua, "The New Mestiza Nation: A Multicultural Movement" in *The Gloria Anzaldua Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 2009).
[30] For more on the traditional historiography of Han-Nanyue relations, see Chapter III, Part A.
[31] Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), .

feminism, cultural theory, and queer identity, I find her work to be adaptable to the Han southern frontier. Anzaldua's assertion that Hispanic-Americans were distinct from either Americans or those from Hispanics, and those along the frontier uniquely distinct from Hispanic-Americans, is a model that I am interested in adopting to study the Nanyue. Adapting Western scholarship as a criticism of the traditional historiography of the Nanyue state is a new lens through which to view this issue, and will be fruitful for continuing the dialogue of Han frontier studies.

Identity of the Han and the non-Han

Han Identity

The usage of various terms that described the Han (*huaxia* 華夏, *zhuxia* 諸夏, etc) and the non-Han, barbaric out-group (*hu* 胡, *man* 蠻, *fan* 番, *yi* 夷, etc) initially transcended contemporary, political, or state groupings, and became instead a term used to indicate belonging, kinship, culture, and other identifiers and criterion of what we term "identity".[32] However, the roots of ethnicity as a political and cultural sphere of ritualized interaction in China emerged by the time of the Zhou period (1046-246 BC), although in varied ways. For example, most of the peoples inhabiting the Chinese mainland established themselves through their dynastic identities (Han, Tang, Song, Ming, Qing, etc), but the term "Han" appears first as a designation for an ethnic or cultural identity in the sixth and seventh centuries.[33] The idea of the *zhuxia*, *huaxia*, or even Zhou as denoting an ethnic and not merely a cultural or political branding is pulled most clearly in texts such as the *Book of Rites*:

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[32] Brindley, 5-6.
[33] Brindley, 8-9. The term "*Han ren*" 漢人, or Han people, generally was a political epithet and tied with the identities of those who worked or were physically under the fold of the Han Dynasty rather than as an ethnonym as it is used today. Anthony Barbieri-Low considers this to date to be pushed back even further, closer to the 4th-5th centuries AD (Anthony Barbieri-Low, personal communication, March 2, 2026).

> 中國戎夷，五方之民，皆有其性也，不可推移...南方曰蠻，雕題交趾，有不火食者矣。
>
> "Of the [distinctions between] the Central States and the *rong-yi*, they are inhabitants of each of the five directions, and have their own unique and unchanging nature…Those in the south are called *man*: they tattoo their foreheads and their feet turn inwards, [and they have] habits of not eating cooked foods."[34]

Thus, the idea of a sense of self, while not distinctly termed as "Han", clearly existed in the thoughts of policymakers even prior to the timeframe of this essay.

To characterize a Han identity, the plentiful textual and archaeological records show that, among other things, such an ideal was created early on by identifying with eminent figures of the Xia 夏(2070-1600 BC), Shang 商 (1600-1046 BC), and Zhou 周 (1046-256 BC) Dynasties. While this is a gross oversimplification, it can be said that Han identity is marked, generally speaking, by a) bureaucratic political order drawing from the great, storied figures of antiquity and from Confucian/Legalist traditions, and b) a consistent awareness of the barbarian "Other". The Han cosmopolitan center at the capital of Chang'an represented the core of what I term as "Han identity", and areas further away from the city saw less and less of its milieu developed under the scope of this cultural core.

As the Western Han Empire emerged from the Qin, a need for a "centralized administration that encompassed and incorporated all within its purview" became apparent.[35] To

[34] Description of the peoples of the Central States; adapted from *Liji zhushu* 禮記注疏, 12.247a–48b, in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Nanchang ed., 1815). Translation into English adapted from Victor Fong, "On the Generic Usage of *Yi* in Literary Sinitic" in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 145, vol. 3 (2025): 492. The *Liji*, traditionally considered to be written by Confucius (c. 551-479 BC) is one of the Classical Confucian texts, recording the social forms, administrative structures, and ceremonial rites of the Zhou dynasty as they were understood in the Warring States period.

[35] Robin D.S. Yates, "Qin and Han Political Institutions and Administration" in Zhixin Jason Sun, *Age of Empires: Art of the Qin and Han Dynasties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 13.

that end, building on the Qin's pre-established modes of scale and measurement, capital and corporal punishments, and other legal institutions, the Han constructed a sprawling bureaucracy that met the needs of a growing population. In an effort to control the population under a unified belief system and tradition, the Han court saw the foundational beginnings of a centralized political order, eminent social natural law, emperorship and the imperial institution, and a civil-servant bureaucracy based upon the ideals of meritocracy and equality emerge through the lens of ancestor veneration and from Confucian/Legalist traditions.[36] Take, for example, the layout of the capital city of Chang'an, itself inspired by the description of the "ideal city" to the Zhou kings Wen 周文王 and Wu 周武王:[37]

> 匠人營國。方九里，旁三門。國中九經九緯，經涂九軌。左祖右社，面朝後市，市朝一夫。

> "[For] artisans constructing the capital: [The walls] shall measure nine *li* on each side, and on each side there shall be three gates. Within the capital there shall be nine longitudinal streets and nine latitudinal streets. The longitudinal streets shall accommodate nine carriageways. The ancestral temple should be on the left [east], the altars on the right [west], the imperial court to the front [south], and the markets at the rear [north]. The markets and court should be one *fu* in size."[38]

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[36] Yongnian Zheng, *Civilization and the Chinese Body Politic* (New York: Routledge, 2023).
[37] Kings Wen and Wu of the Zhou were the father and son patriarchs of the Zhou Dynasty, and became classical symbols of virtue, Confucian righteousness, and the blueprint for the ideal ruler. For a riveting discussion of cultural memory as it relates to the two kings that is unfortunately outside of the scope of this thesis, see Maria Khayutina, "The Beginning of Cultural Memory Production in China and the Memory Policy of the Zhou Royal House During the Western Zhou Period" in *Early China* 44 (Sep 2021): 19-108. https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2021.10.
[38] Cary Y. Liu, "The Qin and Han Imperial City: Modeling and Visualizing Architecture" in Zhixin Jason Sun, *Age of Empires: Art of the Qin and Han Dynasties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 32. Self-translation of the *Zhouli Zhengyi* 周禮正義, ed. Yirang Sun 孫詒讓 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1987): 83.3423-3428. One *fu* (*yi fu* 一夫) is equivalent to a hundred *mu* (*bai mu* 百畝), with a *mu* being equivalent to one-fifteenth of a hectare.

Drawing from sources of antiquity and celebrated traditions politically justified the Han bureaucratic machine as righteous and destined for tenable success, and citing figures such as Kings Wen and Wu to create an image of ideal government and society modeled in the Confucian tradition. Forming a Han consciousness of a celebrated and united heritage through the sheer presence of several massive palace complexes laid out in the style of the ancients solidified a sense of “self” within the Western Han cosmopolitan center. Part of what it meant to be “Han”, therefore, centered around a bustling cosmopolitan center structured by a rigid bureaucratic system that itself tied back to tales of great kings of yore. In tandem with these historical kings, political thought itself also played a key role in determining Han society, formed through Confucian and Legalist lenses.[39] The *Discourses on Salt and Iron* (*Yantie lun* 鹽鐵論) give us a clear example of the concerns behind Han foreign policy, and the identities of Han/non-Han peoples therein:

> 大夫曰:「先帝計外國之利，料胡、越之兵，兵敵弱而易制，用力少而功大，故因勢變以主四夷，地濱山海，以屬長城，北略河外，開路匈奴之鄉，功未卒。蓋文王受命伐崇，作吧于豐;武王繼之，載尸以行，破商擒紂，遂成王業...管仲負當世之累，而立霸功。故志大者遺小，用權者離俗。有司思師望之計，遂先帝之業，志在絕胡、貉，擒單于，故未遑扣扃之義，而錄拘儒之論。」
>
> 文學曰:「此李斯所以折翼，而趙高沒淵也。聞文、武受命，伐不義以安諸侯大夫，未聞弊諸夏以役夷、狄也。昔秦常舉天下之力以事胡、越，竭天下之財以奉其用，然眾

[39] Confucianism and Legalism date back to the philosophers Kongzi (Confucius) 孔子 (fl. 551-479 BC) and Han Feizi 韓非子 (fl. 280-233 BC), with both ideologies shaping the political landscape of the Warring States (c. 475-221 BC) and Qin (c. 221-206 BC) periods.

不能畢;而以百萬之師，為一夫之任，此天下共聞也。且數戰則民勞，久師則兵弊，此百姓所疾苦，而拘儒之所憂也。」

The Imperial Counselor proclaimed, "…The late emperor (Emperor Wu) reckoned the wealth that could accrue from foreign countries and calculated the number of men under arms for the Xiongnu and the Hundred Yue tribes, concluding that the enemy armies were weak and easy to subdue, and that great success could be achieved with little expended effort. Therefore, he took advantage of changes in circumstances to dominate the barbarians of the four directions, bringing their territories that adjoined the mountains and seas within the Great Wall. To the north, he seized the lands beyond the bend in the Yellow River and carved out a passage into the Xiongnu heartland, but that accomplishment has not yet been successfully concluded. Indubitably, when King Wen of Zhou received the Mandate of Heaven, he led a punitive expedition against the polity of Chong, and established there his capital of Feng.[40] King Wu of Zhou inherited the Mandate and carried King Wen's memorial tablet with him on campaign. He destroyed the Shang, captured King Zhòu, and successfully established a dynasty…Guan Zhong carried the burden of the opprobrium of the age but still accomplished the feat of establishing Duke Huan of Qi as hegemon. Therefore, those with great aspirations neglect minor matters. Those who employ measures adapted to changing circumstances can break free from the constraints of traditional customs. Those in power contemplate strategies like those of Preceptor Wang, trying to complete the legacy of the late emperor,

[40] This sentence, and the next few following it, use historical examples to prove that "those with great aspirations neglect minor matters [expending large amounts of money to fight foreign powers]."

whose aspiration was to destroy the *Hu*, *Mo*, and capture the *chanyu* of the Xiongnu.[41] Thus, they don't have the leisure time to concern themselves with the suggestions offered by those outsiders who knock upon their gates nor to adopt the reasoning of conservative, pedantic Confucians."

The Literary Scholars stated, "This is the reason why Li Si had his 'wings broken' and Zhao Gao 'drowned in the abyss.'[42] We were taught that King Wen and King Wu of Zhou received the Mandate of Heaven and vigorously chastised the unrighteous as a means to pacify the regional lords and royal counselors. But we have never heard of exhausting the various Chinese states in order to campaign against the barbarians. In the past, the Qin emperors incessantly mobilized the labor of the entire empire to attack the Xiongnu and the Hundred Yue tribes and exhausted the material wealth of the world to cover the expenses. Even so, in the end they were not able to bring these campaigns to successful completion. Everyone in the world recognizes that they employed armies of one hundred thousand troops to perform a mission that could have been accomplished by a single man (i.e., a diplomatic envoy). Moreover, when one wages war repeatedly, the people become belabored; when armies remain in the field for a long time, the soldiers get worn out. This is what the common people are so miserable about and what worries us 'conservative, pedantic Confucians' so much."[43]

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[41] *Hu* 胡 is a term used to denote the Xiongnu alongside the northern border, and *Mo* 貊 refers to those east of the Xiongnu and into modern-day Manchuria. The *chanyu* 單于 is the term to denote the ruler of the Xiongnu. I have decided to leave these terms untranslated to emphasize the variance in identities along the Chinese frontiers, even though Barbieri-Low translates them as a collective: "northern barbarians."

[42] Another set of examples from historical precedent. Li Si (c. 280-208 BC) was a former chancellor of Qin 秦 that, as with the myth of Icarus, flew too high to success and had his wings broken. Zhao Gao (d. 207 BC) was similarly an official of Qin borne into what Barbieri-Low notes is a "liminal status of 'hidden office'" and thus likened to a hiding frog drowned by the swell of well water. See Barbieri-Low, *Debates*, 14-15, note 2-3.

[43] The *Yantie Lun*, Chapter 6: Returning to Antiquity" *fugu* (復古). Translation adapted from Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, *The Debates on Salt and Iron* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, forthcoming).

Here, the arguments presented by both the imperial counselor and the literary scholars both clearly bolster their arguments by referencing events of the past. The sage kings Wen and Wu, philosophers like Guanzi (Guan Zhong), and many other figures are brought up as argumentative ammunition against one another. This common act of ancestor worship and veneration framed the scholarly, decision-making foundation of the Han court, and thus spread in influence to the remainder of the empire.[44] The mere existence of the debates themselves are centered around foreign policy debates after the rule of Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141-87 BC), and the existence of different camps of thoughts (the imperial chancellors and the literary scholars) represent continued disagreements about the direction of foreign policy well into the Western Han period. The debates represented a further step in the subsisting dialogue around what it meant to be "Han", but it was at the very least clear by this time that a clear bureaucratic machine centered around a celebration of traditions had emerged.

The other thing that the *Yantie lun* makes abundantly clear is the second component of what I claim creates a "Han identity", the consistent awareness of the "other."[45] As with the previous point, the mere existence of the *Yantie lun* shows that foreign policy was a constant concern of the Han central government. The arguments of the Imperial Counselor hoist the late Emperor Wu as the epitome of imperialist success, having subdued the inherently weaker barbarians on all four sides of the Han cosmopolitan state. From the Legalist point of view, therefore, the inherently weaker barbarian is destined to be quashed by its binary, the inherently stronger "self" in history and in the present will always emerge victorious. From the Confucian

[44] In *Analects* 1.12, one of Confucius' disciples, Youzi 有子, claims that "The ways practiced by the ancient kings are excellent in quality, and in all things great and miniscule we must follow them. 先王之道斯為美，小大由之." These ideals, generally speaking, disseminated into Chinese society as a broader whole (*Analects* 1.6). Confucius, *Analects*, trans. Arthur Waley (New York: Grove Press, 1989).

[45] This is also an argument made by Moo-chou Pu, *Enemies of Civilization: Attitudes Towards Foreigners in Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005). I adopt a similar idea towards the Yue in this paper.

perspective, while they argue against the use of funds towards foreign battles, do not dispel the claims that these "barbarians" are just that: the "other" that remains in the background. The barbarians are hawks, falcons, snakes, and mice that encircle the safe nucleus of civilization, and are held in direct opposition to the goodness and cultured world of the Han. The constant reminder of the "other" is central to the understanding of the Han "self", and without the presence of a group to placate as this ferocious foreigner, the "self" cannot be defined.

Outside of the textual tradition, the lived reality of much of the Han inner circle reflected this constant awareness of the other. Funerary goods in various Han aristocratic tombs reveal a Western Han taste for exotic styles, as well as an adaptation for Han consumption (see Figures 1-3). Trade for exotic treasures for grain, textiles, and Central Plains crafts erupted in the Warring States Period and continued throughout the Han, and these treasures filled the tombs of Western Han princes. It is recorded that

> "Qihua Palace in the Han capital of Chang'an…boasted 'treasures from foreign lands in all four directions, including textile that is not flammable, knives that are sharp enough to cut jade, gigantic elephants, ostriches, lions, and Ferghana horses.' Shanglin Garden [*Shanglin Yuan* 上林苑] in Western Chang'an, on the other hand, was home to 'hundreds of rare and exotic plants, such as sweet flags, shellflowers, sugarcane, Rangoon creepers, laural, henna, lychee, longan, olives, betel nuts, cacti, and tangerines.' Indeed, texts that have come down to us report that this imperial garden once boasted more than three thousand types of exotic plants brought back from foreign lands by Han envoys and ambassadors."[46]

[46] I-Tien Hsing, "Qin-Han China and the Outside World" in Zhixin Jason Sun, *Age of Empires: Art of the Qin and Han Dynasties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 69. Hsing quotes He Qinggu, *Sanfu Huangtu Jiaozhu* 三輔黃圖校注 [*Maps of the Three Metropolitan Areas*], 2nd ed. Xi'an: Sanqin Chu Ban She, 1998.

This enthusiasm for exotic materials carried forward into the regional rulers and local elites, as seen through the construction of gardens similar to that at Shanglin Garden. By replicating cultural craze and cultural milieu, aristocrats could express a sense of self through the identification and awareness of the foreign other. For instance, Figure 1.1 depicts an incense burner in the shape of a celestial mountain, supported by an Atlas-like figure perched upon a fantastical animal. The figure holds up a world split into two registers: the upper register depicts mountain peaks emerging from winding clouds (enhanced by the actual incense smoke once used), and the lower register depicting the cardinal emblems of early Han art in the phoenix, tiger, camel, and winged dragon.[47] The depiction of the camel in particular reflects constant interaction between the Han and the foreign other, and its presence shows a very clear statement about the trade, raids, and war present between the two. The mountains and clouds atop the burner can also represent renderings of magical, faraway paradises such as Mount Penglai or Mount Kunlun, exoticizing the furthest edges of the empire as places of magic, fantasy, and ethereal spirits.[48] Figure 1.2 depicts the rhinoceros, which was nearly extinct by the Han Dynasty and cherished at the court for its rarity and exoticity as a Southeast Asian animal, and a groom accompanying it.[49] The occupier of the tomb, Prince of Jiangdu, Liu Fei 江都易王劉非, was known to have a lavish lifestyle and such a menagerie represented not only his princely status but also his power beyond the empire's borders. The groom itself is of particular interest because it retains non-Chinese characteristics, showing the diversity of Liu Fei's court.[50] Figure 1.3 depicts the seal of a surrendered Qiang chieftain, found in the Western Regions (*xiyu* 西域). The knob of

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[47] Sun, *Age of Empires*, 152-153.

[48] Mount Penglai 蓬萊仙島 and Mount Kunlun 崑崙 are both mythological mountains meant to resemble distant, exotic, and mysterious lands at the edge of empire, and thus at the edge of humanity.

[49] Sun, *Age of Empires*, 170.

[50] Sun, *Age of Empires*, 170. The groom is shown without a shirt on, and most grooms, servants, dancers, and figures portrayed in similar roles were often non-Han (Anthony Barbieri-Low, personal communication, March 2, 2026).

the seal depicts a ram, rather than the standard Han turtle-shaped knob, used for officials of non-Han origin.[51] This seal is in many ways a representation of the fluidity of borderlands identity, where the adoption of both Han and non-Han symbols and ritualistic materials created what Anzaldua claims is an identity separate from the two. These three funerary goods depict very clearly how the foreign other remained present in the Han imaginary in life and in death, and how the Han self was defined through the consistent presence of another binary, that of the other.

While these ornaments can all clearly be identified as Central Plains ornaments, it is still unclear as to "whether they were manufactured in Han imperial workshops and distributed to regional kings as gifts or commissioned directly by regional kings in local workshops."[52] Despite this, it is clear that though these works display a clear and pronounced nomadic style, they were very clearly produced in official Chinese workshops and representative of a Han trend to carry around exotic goods as fashion and status statements.[53] This popularity of foreign goods thus displayed both the constant awareness of the other, and within such, the richness of a Han culture dependent on retaining exotic items as keepsakes. The exoticization of the barbarian "other" acts as a mirror towards the Han "self". Cultural niches that could not be filled by Han orthodoxy in turn allowed the foreign object, no matter what it was, to become a familiar solution. Exoticization reinforced the sense of self as a comfort by creating a controlled difference, through a mocking or lionizing embrace, a digestible form of the foreign other. Thus, consuming the foreign became part of a Han self-fashioning; markers of taste and distinction that allowed exoticization to function as aesthetic capital, cultural capital, and social differentiation.

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[51] Sun, *Age of Empies*, 132.
[52] Hsing, "Qin-Han China and the Outside World," 67.
[53] Hsing, "Qin-Han China," 68. It is important to note that while one may make the argument that this trend was initiated by the regional princes and then later influencing the Han court, Hsing claims that "the individuals whose tastes influenced the proliferation of certain motifs were the elites, who commissioned such objects from official workshops." Thus, Hsing writes, the Han court likely initiated this craze for exotic luxuries.

Fig. 1.1. Incense Burner (*Boshan lu* 博山爐). Western Han Dynasty (206 BC - AD 9). Bronze, height 12¾ in., diameter of lid 5⅛ in., of tray 8¾ in. Excavated in 1968, tomb no. 2 (Dou Wan 竇綰), Mancheng, Hebei Province. Hebei Provincial Museum, Shijiazhuang. Zhixin Jason Sun, *Age of Empires: Art of the Qin and Han Dynasties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 153.

Fig. 1.2. Rhinoceros and Groom (left), detail (right). Western Han Dynasty (206 BC - AD 9), 2nd century BC. Gilt bronze, rhinoceros 7¾ x 3¼ x 3⅞ in.; groom 1⅞ x 1¼ in. Excavated in 2010, tomb no. 1 (Liu Fei, prince of Jiangdu, d. 129 BC), Dayunshan, Xuyi, Jiangsu Province. Held in the Nanjing Palace Museum. Zhixin Jason Sun, *Age of Empires: Art of the Qin and Han Dynasties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 170-171.

Fig. 1.3. Seal of a Surrendered Qiang 羌 Chieftain. Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 25-220). Bronze, 1⅜ x ⅞ in. National Museum of China, Beijing. Zhixin Jason Sun, Age of Empires: Art of the Qin and Han Dynasties (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 131-132.

This did not just exist within the Han imperial government, but this consistent awareness of the "other" became hyper-aware along the borders. Even as late as the Eastern Han period, the constant presence of the Xiongnu and similar "barbarian" groups were consistently on the minds of the Han, and for those who lived on the borders. Historian Wicky Tse writes, for example, that "The Hexi region was subsequently exposed to frequent raids by the Xiongnu and their Central Asian satellite states. During the reign of Emperor Ming (r. 58-75 CE), it was reported that the towns of the Hexi region had to shut their gates even in daytime to avert havoc."[54] Thus, within the structure of a Han cosmopolitan society centered around bureaucratic control and ancestral veneration, the looming presence of the "Other" remained core to how the Han defined who they were themselves, from the Emperor to peasants and beggars. Thus, as Nagel has suggested and as will arise again later on in this paper, the cultural identity and ethnicity of the "core" has spread its influence to the broader reaches of the empire, all the way to the borderlands.[55] As will again be presented later in this paper, however, the cultural identity of the borderlands is not just a syncretic mixture of Han and non-Han, but a more complex, third identity.

Non-Han Identity

A concrete discussion of a non-Han identity is far more scant in the historical trail, mainly because of a concerted erasure of the "barbaric traditions" mentioned in the *Yantie lun*, as

[54] Wicky W.K. Tse, *The Collapse of China's Later Han Dynasty, 25-220 CE: The Northwest Borderlands and the Edge of Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2018): 74. Translated from *Hou Han Shu* 87:2891.
[55] Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity," 162-64.

well as a lack of an archaeologically present written record. A concrete discussion of the South in particular is also impossibly fuzzy to fully digest, because of the lack of written sources from the Nanyue and an aggrandizement of Han or Chinese autonomy in the region in the two thousand years since the heights of the Nanyue. As such, it is difficult to erase the bias of the Han perspective from any sort of meaningful description of what a "non-Han identity" might be composed of. While throughout this section I have chosen to collectivize the non-Han voice as the barbarian, and logically should expand this argument to the reaches of the Han empire on all fronts, I will choose to define the non-Han voice through the southern frontier specifically because expanding this analysis to the northwestern or northeastern frontiers would be outside of the scope of this paper. Understanding the southern frontier as a locum for the broader "barbarian" identity collectivizes the latter into a distinct being, and while it indeed ignores the broader diversity of the various Han frontiers, I believe that the broader theme othering is present (though perhaps not to the same scope or degree) along the southern Han frontier and presents a fantastic segway into the discussion of the Nanyue Kingdom.

To further complicate our conversation of the Nanyue, the breakdown of the terms itself are inherent to who the Nanyue themselves are. Here, I choose to analyze the Nanyue both as a collective people (who) and as a political entity (what) that changed in definition over its roughly hundred years of existence. Nan (南) is a logograph meaning "south", and denoted the geographic location of the state itself. Yue (越), however, is a far more complicated term. There have been many states that have taken the name "Yue" across Chinese history. It is immediately clear that the Yue fought by Emperor Wu in 111 BC was not the same as the State of Yue in the Warring States Period. Along the same vein, we cannot say that the Nanyue were the same as the

contemporaneous Minyue, Yuyue, Baiyue, or the many other manifestations of "Yue" that emerged around the southern frontier during and after the Warring States Period. The Yue, depending on historical period and context, could refer to ancient peoples associated with eastern (*yi* 夷) or southern (*man* 蠻) tribes, nor do we have a clear picture of the ethnic makeup of the Lingnan 嶺南 region that they were said to have inhabited. We have no clear understanding of what the peoples inhabiting these lands called themselves, though we do know that they spoke languages and practiced cultures dramatically different from their Central States counterparts. Brindley notes that "The ancient expanse of peoples who were associated with the term 'Yue' is enormous, consisting in over 3,200 kilometers of coastline…such an expanse was home to a wide variety of ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse peoples."[56] She continues to write that "the literature from the period usually depicts Yue as an ascriptive, as opposed to a self-proclaimed, identity, [sic] or autonym."[57] Because of this, those who were being called "Yue" may not have seen themselves as such and would not have the same interpretation of their own identity as Central Plains authors did. The pure volume of people that this ethnonym covered makes Yue identity an evasive topic — over a dozen ethnographic compounds existed in early literature that referred to groups belonging to Yue communities and cultures.[58] The term "Yue" could encapsulate the Nanyue 南越, Western Ou 西甌, Ou Luo 甌駱, the Warring States-period state of Yue near modern Zhejiang Province, or the Eastern Han Kingdoms of Dongyue 东越, Dongou 东甌, or Minyue 閩越, which extended as far south as modern-day Hanoi.[59]

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[56] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 21.
[57] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 30.
[58] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 30.
[59] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 30-31.

In spite of the troubles of a non-Han identity, it is not impossible to assemble bits and pieces of the non-Han voice through their lens.[60] I argue that the Yue voice, and thus a generalized sense of identity for the non-Han peoples by the Han self, derives from older considerations of the Yue as distant, different, and peripheral. Because of the association with the South as a backwards and unfamiliar place, even along neutral discussions of the Yue as a political entity as seen with the *Yantie lun*, its status as the extreme "other" creates a distinctive binary between the centered self and the other. Articulations of the Han self and Nanyue other were motivated by an ethos of centrality that construed the self as central, primary, and normative in relationship to the peripheral, secondary, and morally deviant other. These views were cemented from constructions of the Warring States period state of Yue as an exotic and faraway land that served as the direct antithesis of the Han center at Chang'an. Let us re-examine the aforementioned quote from the Book of Rites, we can see that imagery of the non-Han barbarian was of a savage peoples living in both physical and moral depravation:

> 中國戎夷，五方之民，皆有其性也，不可推移...南方曰蠻，雕題交趾，有不火食者矣.
>
> "Of the [distinctions between] the Central States and the *rong-yi*, they are inhabitants of each of the five directions, and have their own unique and unchanging nature…Those in the south are called *man*: they tattoo their foreheads and their feet turn inwards, [and they have] habits of not eating cooked foods."[61]

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[60] Note that while I collectivize the non-Han voice as the barbarian, I will choose to define the non-Han voice through the southern frontier specifically because expanding this analysis to the northwestern or northeastern frontiers would be outside of the scope of this paper.

[61] Description of the peoples of the Central States; adapted from *Liji zhushu* 禮記注疏, 12.247a–48b, in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Nanchang ed., 1815). Translation into English adapted from Victor Fong, "On the Generic Usage of *Yi* in Literary Sinitic" in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 145, vol. 3 (2025): 492.

The rooted tradition of the non-Han to be viewed as having their own "unique and unchanging nature" suggests an inherent quality of backwardness that carried beyond the writings of Confucius and into Western Han authors. Take the famous example of rebel general Ying Bu 英布, nicknamed Qing Bu 黥布 for the penal tattooing that he had received before rising to military prominence.[62] Taking on the nickname "Qing" itself, either given as an epithet by others or being taken on by himself, signified a permanent marker of criminality that went directly against the Confucian worldview of the skin as sacred to the person.[63] The marker of a capital punishment being written off as a mere quality of the Yue thus exoticizes and fantasizes them as a unique other to the worldview of the Central States, and created a view of the non-Han that continued into the Western Han period (as will be shown later). At times, however, the Yue did not serve as an inferior or repugnant "other" that was distinctly differentiated from the authorial self, but also "served in varying roles as an exaggerated reflection of the self or instantiation of human existence at the remote corners of both the world and individual psyche…the Yue other appears to be a foil used to critique or shed light on the nature of the localized self."[64] We can see this in romanticized accounts of the Yue in the Eastern Han *Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue* (*Wuyue Chunqiu* 吳越春秋) and *The Glory of Yue* (*Yuejue shu* 越絕書), where stories such as the Lady of Yue 越女 exoticize the Yue and position them as a homogenized group with an excellent affinity for swords. As this story goes, King Goujian of Yue (r. 496-465 BC) was looking to attack his neighboring state of Wu 吳, and his political advisor Fan Li 范蠡 (fl. 5th century BC)

[62] Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian* [*Shiji* 史記] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1972): 91.2597. The process of penal tattooing on the face, *qing* 黥, was considered to be one of the five capital punishments, *wuxing* 五刑, of the Qin Dynasty.
[63] The Classic of Filial Piety, or *Xiaojing* 孝经, records that "The body, hair, and skin are received from the parents; one does not dare injure them — this is the beginning of filial piety. 身體髮膚, 受之父母, 不敢毀傷, 孝之始也." Zengzi, *The Classic of Filial Piety* (Ürümqi: Xinjiang qing shao nian chu ban she, 1996): 1.
[64] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 121.

had found a young maiden with excellent sword skills, and who may give him an edge against his opposition:

> 越王問曰:“夫劍之道則如之何？” 女曰:“妾生深林之中，長於無人之野，無道不習，不達諸侯。竊好擊之道，誦之不休。妾非受於人也，而忽自有之... 呼吸往來，不及法禁，縱橫逆順，直復不聞。斯道者，一人當百，百人當萬。王欲試之，其驗即見。” 越王大悅，即加女號，號曰越女。乃命五校之隊長，高才習之，以教軍士。當此之時皆稱越女之劍。

> “The king of Yue asked the maiden, “What, indeed, is the way of swordsmanship?” The girl answered, “I was born in the deep woods and grew up in the uninhabited wild. I have no access to learning and I am not known by the lords. Privately I am fond of the art of fencing so I study it consistently. It is not that I have learned from someone, I just acquired the art all of a sudden…In the space of a breath, advance and retreat, no law or regulation can detain you. Going left and right, back and forth, no one can hear you. Mastering this art, one can defeat one hundred men, and one hundred can defeat ten thousand. If Your Majesty wishes to test it, its effect will show immediately.” The king of Yue was greatly delighted. He bestowed the maiden with a title right away and called her the “Maiden of Yue.” He thereupon ordered colonels of all units and elite warriors to learn from her and then teach the soldiers. At that time everyone praised the Maiden of Yue’s art of the sword.”[65]

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[65] Jianjun He, *Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue: An Annotated Translation of Wuyue Chunqiu* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021): 226-228.

This thus forms an imagination of the non-Han cultural past as directly linked to the realities of the non-Han cultural present, in very much the same way that the sage kings of the Central Plains past created the orthodoxy of the Han cosmopolitan present.[66] The events of the people of Yue, and most especially King Goujian of Yue, are incorporated more as part of the Han self rather than a non-Han other. In other words, Goujian and the Lady of Yue become exoticized versions of the southern barbarians, yes, but in the same light they are considered to be underdog kings deeply invested in "express[ing] virtues (such as hard work and patience), and who vindicate their lots in life by transforming personal humiliation into undeniable, global success."[67] These imaginations of the Yue from its political past in the 5th century BC, through a transfer of cultural milieu from the Central States authors of the Warring States to that of the Western Han, created legacies of exoticization that carried into the Han understanding of the barbarian other, and thus their intrinsic understanding of self. The great irony that it took only several centuries for the barbarian Goujian to become centralized within the imagination of the Han show the fickle nature of identity and how, despite the very real foundations of a Han and non-Han identity, are also subject to blurring and altering across time and space. Thus, to the Han self, they envision themselves as the core of the world, and of the barbarians that exist in the south, they consider normal traits reserved to the worst of Han society. Other interpretations of the Yue other also serve to define the spatial universe of the edges of the universe in relation to the self, and thus positioning the Yue along the same plane as the celestial figures inhabiting the incense burner of Dou Wan (Figure 1.1).

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[66] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 137.
[67] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 137.

Other imaginations of the Yue existed in more cultural lenses. Brindley cites several key elements, including but not limited to an affinity for water-based lifestyles amidst a disease-ridden land, swords and knives, and for mystical creatures such as dragons and snakes.[68] While I choose not to cover it here, the interpretation of the southern non-Han barbarian was one who was acclimated with a warm and wet climate, wear short clothing and lived in high-rise stilt houses, don short hair or tie them up in knots, tattoo their bodies, and engage in ritualistic practices.[69] Firstly, the Yue along the south were tied very closely to the stereotype of aquatic superiority compared to their Han counterparts (of which is still true today). The area was very closely linked with the water from a geographical standpoint alone: the southern coast generated great amounts of resources and access to trade to southeast Asian empires and to other frontier areas, with even Persian artifacts being found along the shores of the Nanyue. For instance, we can see the presence of several artifacts speaking towards water-based travel and maritime trade in the Hepu 合浦 tombs (modern-day Guangxi Province).

[68] In order to not regurgitate Brindley's arguments, I have chosen to highlight several of her points in this brief description of non-Han identity. My description is not comprehensive, but underscores elements of what I believe to be crucial towards viewing the non-Han from their own lens.
[69] For a more exhaustive explanation, see Tian Jizhou, *Series of Chinese Ethnic History in Past Dynasties: The Ethnic History of Qin and Han Dynasties [Zhongguo Li Dai Min Zu Shi: Qin Han Min Zu Shi]* (Beijing: She Hui Ke Xue Wen Xian Chu Ban She, 2007): 258-265. See also Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 113-190.

Figure 1.4. Assembly of ornaments in the shape of animals. India or Southeast Asia, ca. 300-100 BC. Carnelian, each approximately ½ x ⅜ in. (1.4 x 0.9 cm). Excavated in 1975, tomb no. 2, Huancheng tangpai, Hepu, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum, Nanning, China. Sourced from Sun, *Age of Empires*, plate 110.

This bracelet, for example, composed of small carved-gem ornaments and comprising five birds and six wild animals, was struck from carnelian, a stone typically found in Rome and ancient Egyptian talismans. The birds seem to be swans or wild geese with flat beaks, long necks, and wings folded back into their tails, and the animals possibly lions or tigers with a broad muzzle, square jaws, and a long tail tucked behind powerful hind legs in a crouched position.[70] These sculptures are all three-dimensional and crudely cut, contrasting sharply with the contemporary production of similar ornaments in the Han area. It is suggested that these were imports from South or Southeast Asia, likely produced for Southeast Asian or Chinese markets by Indian craftsmen or by Southeast Asian craftsmen inspired by Indian technology. As a busy seaport,

[70] Sun, *Age of Empires*, 195.

Hepu would have been an ideal place for items such as this bracelet to have been traded for, showing the importance of maritime trade to the Nanyue. Waterways became a means to support life; not only was this attained through commercial and economic activity, but also as a military force that ancient sources considered to be very capable. The works of Guanzi, Mozi, and Zhuangzi, among others, further consider the Yue to be an expert naval force during the time of the Warring States period, but these mentions are limited to the mere fact that the Yue were "a culture that paid lots of attention to water and their ability to move about on it," and instead using their naval prowess as moralistic allegories and parables to comment on "a larger, often educational point about [military] tactics, logic, usefulness, and the likes."[71] Thus, the image of the Yue being situated alongside water-based environments created a perception of their exotic otherness through their marine faculty, highlighting it as strange and different in comparison to the land-locked Central States politicians and writers of the classical canon. In this sense, the military success and non-Han cultural ambiguity (as portrayed by Goujian and others) is tied intrinsically with an exotic non-Han ability to be adept around water, to succeed in naval warfare, and to be altogether different; their affinity to be civilized rooted in the idea that they were lesser to begin with. The development of a shipbuilding industry to complement a water-based lifestyle and constant rainfall, and the discovery of entire shipyards prove their presence.[72]

Alongside the image of a non-Han core centered around the water, it is also precisely this water that contributes to a general description of the South as "low-lying and wet" (*bei shi* 卑溼). The South was considered to be a wasteland that adversely affected the quality of life for its inhabitants, and was a diseased region that suggested the omnipresence of tropical diseases such

[71] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 173-175. See her work for the passages from Guanzi 管子, Mozi 墨子, and Zhuangzi 莊子.
[72] Tian Jizhou, *Series*, 258.

as malaria and dengue fever.[73] For instance, in the Eastern Han history *Book of Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書), the description of the south is littered with an association with its inhospitable environment and with deathly illness:

> 南方暑溼, 近夏癉熱, 暴露水居, 蝮蛇醸生, 疾癘多作, 兵未血刃而病死者什二三, 雖舉越國而虜之,不足以償所亡.
>
> The South is hot and wet, when summer approaches it gets bitterly hot. One is violently exposed [to the elements] and must live on water. There are vipers and snakes, and everything is [as if] fermented. Illnesses and pestilences abound, and soldiers die by the scores of disease without having to be killed by the blade. Even though one overtakes the Yue kingdoms and makes the people slaves, nothing can repay [those] losses.[74]

In this account, several things are suggested: that again, the south is a hot and wet wasteland filled with deadly creatures and that it is no place for the average northerner to live. The ideas of illnesses and pestilences create a vision of a Han imagination of a land that, while admittedly quite hotter and undoubtedly would have caused increased chances of diseases such as typhus, dengue fever, and yellow fever, it also tied the South to the label of a land of death. Interestingly, the *Han Shu* notes in its last sentence that the Yue can be overtaken and its people enslaved, but the losses are perhaps not even worth the effort to take the land. Ban Gu, writing in the Eastern Han (c. 9 AD - 220 AD), had access to imperial archives that would have allowed for first-person accounts of the Han colonial incursions into the South in 111 BC, and would have

[73] Brindley, 178-179.

[74] Ban Gu 班固, *Book of Han* [*Han Shu*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1995): 64a.2781, cited in and translated by Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 181.

thus pulled from the real words and thoughts of real participants into the soldiers on the ground. This inclusion of Yue being a place of simple ease to be taken over, therefore, signifies the land as a place of inferiority, both in military prowess and in environment. This again thus created an image of the average inhabitant of the Lingnan region to be backwards, lesser, and wholly deviant from the dignified and civilized Northern self.

A further consideration of the non-Han was both a perception of their culture as both "their ability to produce swords of excellent caliber, as well as the existence of talismanic knives that are linked to the birth of dragons and other amphibious creatures."[75] We see examples of snake patterns and dragons appearing all over Yue artifacts, found in early pottery, drums, swords, and daggers, whether for clan recognition, spiritual power, ancestral mythology, or otherwise.[76] For instance, the seals of Zhao Mo of the Nanyue (discussed in Chapter 2) show the inclusion of seals with different animals (Figure 1.5). These two seals suggest that the dragon, a shared symbol of Central States and ancient Vietnamese origin myths, created a tie between the Central States and the Han and connected the two to a shared ancestral claim. By doing so, Han sources were able to incorporate everyone in their known world, including their inferior, almost otherworldly counterparts, into the same lineage as the great Sage Kings of the past.[77] With this line of logic established, Han emissaries and diplomats were able to justify their civilizing missions into non-Han lands and attempt to reconcile the "lost" and "backwards" neighbors of their surroundings, and to claim rightful ownership over their lands after colonization. The fact that it is found in Zhao Mo's tomb suggests perhaps that this was also taking place through Mo himself: that the seal, carrying animals and signs pertaining to both Central States and Nanyue

[75] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 181-182.
[76] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 175-178. Her discussion of this matter is far more in-depth than the brief overview I provide here.
[77] These "great Sage Kings" discussed here include figures that predate recorded Chinese history and are considered today as purely mythological.

origin claims, give him the authority to act as an emperor to the lands of the south while currying favor from the overlords of the north. This sign of a non-Han background, therefore, is utilized by figures such as Zhao Mo to express their third, liminal identity of an in-betweenness, a status and identity that is afforded only to those along the borderlands. In regards to the swords and knives traits that are described of the Nanyue, the most glaring example is that of the Lady of Yue described above. Her image, alongside those of other Warring States works, suggest that the image of Yue swords and swordsmanship were more admired than brutalized, and the Yue were seen under Han eyes as capable of producing objects of great value to even the culturally superior Han. Thus, as Brindley suggests, the Yue sword "fit into a conceptual schematization of the world and its commercial objectification," with the Yue cultural center as having a specific commercial speciality that could lend value to the center.[78] The Yue sword therefore is a cultural encapsulation of a battle between the self and other, a "challenge [to] the self to manage, tame, and deal with the superiority, ferocity, craftiness, and power of the southern other."[79]

[78] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 182.
[79] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 185.

Figure 1.5. Nine seals found on the body of the King. Shown are two gold seals, "Administrative Seal of the Emperor Wen 文帝行璽 *wendi xingxi*" with dragon knob, and "Crown Prince 泰子 *taizi*" with a tortoise knob. Three jade and one turquoise seals are unsubscribed and three others are inscribed. All have square seal surfaces and topped with a platform-shaped knob with transverse perforation. Adapted from Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, *Jades*, 251, plate 16.

Due to a lack of recorded works from the Nanyue point of view, as discussed at length in the previous section, our analysis of the Nanyue as they viewed themselves during the Han period must either come a) from the convoluted version of Han classical sources, where tropes of the barbarian varied from physical to cultural aspects of identity or, more concretely, b) from an archaeological lens, looking at tombs and funerary rituals cultures that existed within the region. A non-Han identity, therefore, is sourced directly from classical antiquity, and it is reasonable to assume that the exoticization of the Nanyue in the Western Han drew from caricatures of the State of Yue in the Warring States period. The image of the "other" is therefore a lasting tenet of defining the southern border, and by establishing the Yue other as distinct from the Han self, the question of identity seems to poke forward as a clear black-and-white relationship. Yet, at the same time, identity remains fickle: interpretations of figures like King Goujian of Yue and the Lady of Yue transition away from being the non-Han other to central to Confucian doctrine by the Eastern Han, and it is undeniable that question of the "self" and of the "other" adapted over time. Despite this, however, I continue to posit that the distinctly Western Han cosmopolitan self and the barbarian other, centered within mysterious surroundings, are seen very much as the

antithesis of each other's existences. To create any semblance of the non-Han identity, despite a clear bias from Central States authors, we can categorize the non-Han to a) an affinity for water-based lifestyles amidst a noxious no-man's-land, b) an affinity for knives and swords, and c) an affinity for dragons and snakes, shown both textually and archaeologically. The goods at Hepu show extensive maritime trade and reimagine the Nanyue as a true center rather than a peripheral territory, and the Luobowan goods discussed here show clear signs of a Nanyue identity that emerged beyond what textual sources can provide us. It is clear that the image of a distinct "Han" and "non-Han" identity were framed as binaries of one another, and while any biases might taint a comprehensive interpretation of a true "non-Han" identity, the discussions later in this piece on archaeological evidence may present a hint of an overgeneralized view.

Problems with Homogenized Identities and Faults in Literature

While this argument is predicated on the ideal of a "Han" and "non-Han" identity being a solidified, homogenized concept that a borderlands identity emerges from, there are still glaring errors that emerge under a collectivization of the two identities. Firstly, as Nagel argues, identity and ethnicity are not concrete but instead free-flowing sluices, instead being changed dramatically over time and space.[80] In other words, through the lens of this paper, the labels of "Han" and "non-Han" are collectivized and generalized terms that certainly do not properly represent the mass imagination of identity that either group would have envisioned themselves belonging to. While it is undeniable that a person from Chang'an and a person from modern-day Hanoi would have seen each other as distinctly different from one another and lived within their own imagined communities, the image of a concrete "Han" and "non-Han" person is far too

[80] Nagel, "Constructing Identity," 154.

sweeping and homogenized, no matter how generally true it remains.[81] The great irony of texts like Yongnian Zheng's *Civilization and the Chinese Body Politic* is that the Chinese body politic, an imagery of the Chinese as steeped in Confucian tradition or constantly aware of the foreigner, did not adhere to these structures to a tee. Determining between a "Han" and "non-Han" identity is problematic because there is no singular baseline to define "Chinese-ness", "Han-ness" or the lack of such, and even using terms such as "Han" and "non-Han" itself precludes the existence of a third, liminal frontier identity that Anzaldua suggests. Indeed, it is why I believe that adopting the scholarship of Anzaldua, in spite of her focus on the frontiers on the modern US-Mexico border, is a very useful way of analyzing the southern Han frontiers.

Secondly, homogenizing identities results in the claim that a distinct "Han" ethnicity had arisen by the Western Han, and this is a direct contrast to the barbarian other, of which no other ethnicities or identities appear to exist. This is very much so not the case: in the previous example of the Lady of Yue, we can see that identities and a sense of belonging have changed dramatically over time from the backward outsider to the underdog insider. While I have espoused throughout this paper a core image of a Han cultural identity that directly contradicts a non-Han cultural identity, this not only does not mean that there were only two identities that one could identify with, but this also forms the crux of my argument: that the third, liminal identity of the southern frontier as embraced by the Nanyue is one alternative identity. This also does not preclude that there were only three identities that formed along modern-day China, nor were they the same across scope and extent: the understanding of a Xiongnu chieftain's sense of "self" and "other" is drastically different than that of the Nanyue kings. Because of the plurality of

[81] "Imagined communities" refers to what scholar Benedict Anderson terms as a socially constructed sense of identity, fabricated through a deep network of horizontal comradeship and social components of a connection. For more, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1983).

identities that would have dotted the southern landscape, as well as a lack of attention towards distinguishing these identities in the Central States literary tradition, it becomes difficult to draw distinctions between non-Han groups. From basic denominations like *hu* 胡, *man* 蛮, *fan* 番, *yi* 夷, and *rong* 戎, to the differences between groups such as the aforementioned Luoyue and the Ouyue, among others, the mere fracturing of non-Han groups and identities creates huge questions as to whether they viewed themselves as a united group within their own Han-given labels.

Thirdly, there are also extensive faults in the literature, of which I will introduce later. Intrinsically, and as I have emphasized several times, it is impossible to distinguish a clear-cut image of non-Han identity. Much of what we can pull comes from the Han perspective, and even the little snippets of Yue voices are mired by a filtered Han lens from over two thousand years of exoticization and oversimplification. There is little discussion of Nanyue identity in Chinese-only sources, because a) it happened so long ago, b) Nanyue (and for that matter the southern frontier as a whole) is not considered a very relevant area of study and thus historical narratives are repeated again without retrospection, and c) identity itself is not a primary focus in the study of Chinese history. Instead, identity remains an elusive topic within modern Chinese historical studies, because many authors will choose to proliferate the narrative of the Nanyue (and other frontiers) as the classical sources tell them.[82] Throughout the majority of Chapter 1, Erica Brindley has been the most effective source of Western discussion of identity among the southern frontier, and is a great source to describe the individual Han and non-Han identities. However, in light of the over ten years that have passed since the publication of her book, I find that my work can contribute some new findings to the discussion. I also wish to discuss identity

[82] Haifeng Huang and Xinsheng Liu, "Historical knowledge and national identity: Evidence from China" in *Research and Politics* 5, vol. 3 (2018): 2.

as an influence upon the politics of the Nanyue and the Han, which Brindley seldom scratches, instead sticking to the pure question of identity and ethnicity that I have outlined within this first chapter. Lastly, and most importantly, I find that Brindley's examination of the Han and non-Han and her adaptation of "an alternative model of understanding southern and Hua-xia interactions" is a useful stepping stone into the conversation, but her adherence to "delving into the concepts of…syncretism, hybridity, and syncretic/hybrid cultures in more detail" is not conducive to the historical reality of the area.[83] While it may be true that hybridization of culture did exist at some point, I prefer to adapt Anzaldua's point of view that identity along the frontiers is not just a mash of two larger, more mainstream identities, but instead supports the emergence of a third, liminal identity that moves not away but beyond a Venn diagram-esque model and towards a multisphere, multidirectional, and multidimensional understanding of cultural proliferation.

Throughout this section, we have defined Han identity through the lens of both a sprawling, complex bureaucracy legitimized through tradition, and a constant awareness of the other. In contrast, a non-Han identity is far more slippery, but looking solely at the southern frontier gives us a non-Han affiliation of the population with the water, a miasmic land, knives and swords, and dragons and snakes. Within this binary, the Han had a consistent awareness of the "other", and furthermore viewed them as a direct binary to the "self". While we have defined very clearly the Han "self" and the barbarian "other", the question of the borderlands as a grey area for cultural, social, and political diffusion still remains. How did figures like the Zhao kings of Nanyue represent this third, liminal identity of neither Han nor native traditions, and how did this influence the policies of the region? How are the borderlands an area of continual renewal and readaptation of cultural negotiation, forming a buffer zone where the traditional model of a core-and-periphery relationship is no longer tenable? How did social networks and flows of

[83] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, xiii.

information and goods within the borderlands position the Nanyue not as a peripheral state at the edge of empire, but rather a core within its own right? These are questions that I hope to explore within this next section, and break down the application of this "Nanyue identity" through the Zhao kings.

Chapter 2: The Zhao Royal Family

While I have provided a broad framework for understanding the rule of the Nanyue through Sima Qian's eyes, and thus through the lens of a traditional historiography, a reinvestigation of the Nanyue elites through the eyes of Anzaldua's borderlands theory is crucial for painting a more comprehensive picture of Nanyue-Han relations.

Historiography: Traditional Narratives

Sima Qian and the *Shiji*

Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145-86 BC) is noted as China's "father of history," and his pioneering work *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) is the foremost authority on the history of the world as told in the first century BC.[84] As a source, the story of the *Shiji* is not just an official court record and telling of historical events, but also a source muddled with contradictions and falsehoods. The miraculous births and deaths of heroes and villains are peppered throughout the text, and the historicity of accounts cannot be fully trusted. Sima Qian includes, for instance, extensive dialogues between characters that supposedly lived hundreds of years prior to his writings, and provides examples and parables that perhaps are a greater reflection of the imagined reality of the world around him through a historical narrative rather than a plain retelling of historical reality.[85] A snippet of the world around him includes his understanding of the foreign other, which he openly dissects as the antithesis of the self but also at times, like with the earlier interpretation of the Lady of Yue, as a point of emphasis in saying

[84] Esther Sunkyung Klein, *Reading Sima Qian from Han to Song: The Father of History in Pre-Modern China* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018): 1-6. In this paper, as does Klein, I will choose to use the terms "*Records of the Grand Historian*" and "*Shiji*" interchangeably.
[85] The question of Sima Qian's historicity is a riveting conversation that I do not have the space to get into here. For more, see Klein, *Reading Sima Qian*, 259-332.

that one's background would not define their potential, a surprisingly progressive point at the time. Take into account his last snippet of his Account of the Eastern Yue 東越列傳:

> 太史公曰:越雖蠻夷，其先豈嘗有大功德於民哉，何其久也！歷數代常為君王，句踐一稱伯。然餘善至大逆，滅國遷眾，其先苗裔繇王居股等猶尚封為萬戶侯，由此知越世世為公侯矣。蓋禹之餘烈也。
>
> The Grand Historian remarks: Although the Yue are southern barbarians [*manyi*], its former rulers must have treated the people with great wisdom and virtue. Otherwise how could their line have lasted so long? For generation after generation they held the title of chieftain or king, and Goujian even acted for a time as one of the Five Hegemons.[86] And although Zou Yushan, because of his flagrant rebelliousness, brought about the destruction of his kingdom and the resettlement of its inhabitants, yet other descendants of the same line, such as Zou Jugu, the king of Yao, are still enfeoffed as marquises of 10,000 households. The fact that the leaders of Yue have for so many generations been great lords is undoubtedly due to the merit which has come down to them from their distant ancestor, the sage Emperor Yu.[87]

[86] The five hegemons (*wu ba* 五霸) are in reference to several extremely powerful rulers, and the list changes depending on the author. Sima Qian, for instance, does not list Goujian of Yue but does include Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685-643 BC), Duke Xiang of Song 宋襄公 (r. 650-637 BC), Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公 (r. 636-628 BC), Duke Mu of Qin 秦穆公 (r. 659-621 BC), and King Zhuang of Chu 楚莊王 (r. 613-596 BC).

[87] Sima Qian, *Records*, 114.2984. Translation adapted, with slight corrections, from Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia UP, 1993): 224. Yu the Great 大禹 (d. 2025 BC) was the legendary first king of the Xia Dynasty 夏朝 and thus the trailblazer for China's dynastic system, and cited frequently throughout the last five millennia as a figurehead for the ideal philosopher-king, one whose political savviness aligns with their philosophical acumen.

Here, Sima Qian embodies the virtues that I highlighted as central to the Han orthodoxical self: an appellation to the ancient traditions and peoples of the Central States, and a constant presence of the other. To start with the latter, Sima immediately differentiates Yue as a land of barbarians, and the consistent "other" that makes his next point, the fact that they could preach "great wisdom and virtue" to their peoples, all the more surprising. In this passage, Sima highlights these barbarians as certainly a group distinct from the self, but at the same time defends their redeeming qualities. While they still clear errors in moral judgment, such as with the given example of Zou Yushan, other descendants of the same line (in this case Zou Jugu) still retain an innate moral goodness, drawn from the incorruptible kings of classical antiquity. This again seems to make Sima Qian a narrator that, while clearly biased, is also a fairly level-headed author that critiques the self at times in favor of the other, or uses the other as proof of how to improve the self. Thus, the *Shiji* is very much a narrative of the Han Chinese perception of the self and the other, and a narrative of how to be an enlightened ruler: what mistakes to make, what not to make, and how those traits, innate or not, are obtained.

In a more apropos lens, Sima Qian's work forms a core primary source towards understanding the history of the Nanyue (Chapter [*juan* 卷] 113, *Nanyue Liezhuan* 南越列傳) as it was understood by the Central States' perspective, and thus the understanding of the identities that each body radiated through this short chapter.[88] As a primary source, the *Shiji* represents the Han perspective as it was almost contemporaneous with the rise and fall of the Nanyue. We can thus see the *Shiji* as a biography inlaid with steep propaganda that reveals both Han perspectives on the self and Han perspectives on the Nanyue. It reveals textually what the Han believed that the Nanyue, titled as the othered "barbarian," acted like within their political, social, and cultural environments, both corroborating and contradicting the archaeological evidence that we have in

[88] Sima Qian, *Records*, 113.2967-2978.

the present day. Despite being such a short chapter (eleven pages!) in comparison to chapters discussing the Han cultural core or discussing the Xiongnu along the northwestern frontier, it is a key insight into the development of identity and politics along the shrouded southern Han frontiers.

The Nanyue Kingdom (c. 204-111 BC), as told by Sima Qian

Sima Qian begins by introducing to us Zhao Tuo 趙佗 (c. 203-137 BC), the King of Nanyue (*Nanyue Wang* 南越王), as a native of Zhending (modern-day Hebei Province). At the time, Tuo was a magistrate of Longchuan in Nanhai Commandery, and helped to oversee the movement of condemned criminals into the area where they lived for thirteen years.[89] Upon the death of the military commander of Nanhai Commandery, Zhao Tuo gained power in the region and within short order of the fall of the Qin in 206 BC, had already proclaimed himself as King Wu of Nanyue.[90] After the creation of the Han Dynasty in 202 BC, Emperor Gaozu of Han (r. 202-195 BC) chose to not "punish Tuo to take care of internal affairs", but by 196 BC had sent the envoy Lu Jia 陸賈 to "unite the people of Yue in peace" and offer a lordship to Tuo.[91] After Empress Dowager Lü 呂后 prohibited trade between Nanyue and the Han several years afterwards, Zhao Tuo revolted on claims that "Empress Lü listens to her malicious ministers, and is discriminating against me, treating me as one of the barbarians and breaking off our trade in

[89] Longchuan 龍川 was one of six counties in the broader Nanhai Commandery 南海群, taken over by the Qin in 214 BC.
[90] Here, King Wu of Nanyue (南越武王 *Nanyue Wu Wang*) translates to the "Martial Emperor of Nanyue." Interestingly enough, *wu* 武 is also the posthumous name (and the name by which historians call him now) of Emperor Wu of Han (漢武王). Both names are references to the aforementioned King Wu of Zhou 周武王 (d. 1043 BC).
[91] Sima Qian, *Records*, 113.2967-2968. Interestingly, Sima writes that it is Emperor Gaozu who chooses to "not punish Zhao Tuo for his actions because of the hardships of the empire 高帝已定天下，爲中國勞苦，古釋佗弗誅" when Gaozu himself consolidated power in a similar fashion, and that Tuo should instead, seemingly on behalf of the righteous and benevolent ruler that Gaozu wanted to paint himself as, "unite the Yue in peace and not cause any calamities along the southern border 和集百越，毋為南邊患害."

iron vessels and goods." Eventually, the ruling Emperor Wen of Han (r. 180-157 BC) asked Lu Jia to once again go south and reprimand Zhao Tuo for his actions, to which Tuo submitted, but only on the surface, as he still referred to himself as a king. His grandson, Zhao Hu 趙胡, succeeded him and requested military assistance to repel invading forces from the neighboring Minyue 閩越. This Emperor Wen provided, and after the Minyue surrendered, Zhao Hu sent his son Zhao Yingqi 趙嬰齊 to serve as a palace attendant as a gesture of thanks, intending to follow up with a visit in person to thank the Son of Heaven. However, his ministers warned him against doing so, saying that it may cause great alarm and unrest in the kingdom, and that it would be better served should Zhao Hu stay behind. After his death, his son Zhao Yingqi returned home and ruled in his father's place, and brought with him a wife of the Jiu family in Handan.[92] They had a son named Xing 興, and later sent a letter to the Emperor requesting that his wife be formally declared queen and Xing to be designated as heir to the throne. Zhao Yingqi was prompted by his ministers to return to the capital to visit the emperor, but being accustomed to murdering people and giving free rein to his passions, he feigned illness to prevent being treated the same as other feudal lords and tried for his offenses under Han law. Zhao Cigong 趙次公, his second son, went in his stead as a court attendant. After his death, Zhao Xing took the throne, and his mother became Queen Dowager. The envoy Anguo Shaoji 安國少季, and a number of other skilled diplomats, were sent to persuade Zhao Xing and his mother to visit the emperor and conduct himself the same as the other feudal lords. With Xing still a young boy and his mother once having had an affair with Anguo Shaoji prior to her marriage that she continued once he came to Nanyue, the Han mission succeeded, much to the dismay of the people and especially the Prime Minister of Nanyue, Lü Jia 呂嘉. Lü Jia was an old man and over seventy members of

[92] The Jiu 樛 family was a powerful family in the city of Handan 邯鄲 (modern-day Hebei Province), itself one of the largest cities in the Central States region.

his family held positions of power in the state, and had great influence in the political affairs of the state and adored by the people. As the king was preparing to head to the Han capital, Lü Jia advised him against doing so, but the king would not do so. After surviving a surprise assassination attempt by the Queen Dowager, he began a revolt with the high ministers of the state. The Han Emperor by this time [Emperor Wu of Han], hearing about this, sent Hán Qianqiu and Jiu Yue with two thousand men to quell the rebellion.[93] Lü Jia, in his revolt, attacked the palace, killed Zhao Xing, the Queen Dowager, and the Han envoys, and set up Zhao Jiande 趙建德, eldest son of Zhao Yingqi by a Yue consort, as the king. The Han military force was also wiped out by Lü Jia. The Emperor, upon hearing this, enfeoffed Han Qianqiu's son and Jiu Yue's son as marquises. General Lu Bode 路博德, alongside several other generals of which included defected Yue natives, were sent to attack Nanyue. After waging battle, Lü Jia and Zhao Jiande escaped into the night and fled west with several hundred followers, but eventually were captured and killed. Those who were in charge of the attacks were enfeoffed as marquises, and the approaching Han forces summarily caused the neighboring kingdoms of Cangwu 蒼梧, Western Ou 西歐, and Luoluo 駱駱 to submit to Han rule and their chiefs made marquises. Thus ends the story of the Nanyue Kingdom, as told by Sima Qian.

Borderlands Theory

Zhao Tuo 趙佗 (c. 203-137 BC)

After recounting Sima Qian's narrative of the Zhao kings, I want to next analyze their position within the historical narrative as proof of what I title as the "Nanyue identity," a third, liminal positionality that is not a hybridization of Yue and Han traits, as other authors have

[93] Hán Qianqiu 韓千秋 was a former Prime Minister of the king of Jibei 濟北國 (parts of modern day Shandong and Hebei Provinces), which was ruled by sons of Han princes (nephews of the emperor). Jiu Yue 樛樂 was the brother of the Queen Dowager Jiu 樛王后, mentioned above as the mother of Zhao Xing 趙興 and Zhao Jiande 趙建德.

supposed. Instead, as supported by Anzaldua's writings, the Nanyue emerged as an identity of their own, shaped by the unique interactions afforded to them along the borderlands. Going through each king of the Zhao lineage, I find that Zhao Tuo was the first king, and perhaps the strongest of the bunch, to express this positionality.

Sima Qian firstly records that Zhao Tuo was a native of the town of Zhending 真定 (modern-day Hebei Province); rather than some offshoot king of a marginal kingdom, he was a Central Plains man who had usurped control in a time of great unrest. Afterwards, he chose to proclaim himself as King Wu 南越武王, or the Martial Emperor of Nanyue, suggesting a connection to the other great King Wu of Central Plains hegemony, the aforementioned King Wu of Zhou. Is this thus Zhao Tuo's expression of one of the central tenets of the Han orthodoxical behaviors that we defined earlier, the utilization of ancient figures of the Zhou to call power to his own newfound position? It is interesting to see that Zhao Tuo titled himself after the Zhou tradition, and thus appealing to the Central States means of naming himself. If Tuo has chosen to identify himself and draw power from the Central States kings, his identification of the Central States is highlighted here by Sima Qian as both a way for the former to express a very real connection with his former homelands and for the latter to express Zhao Tuo, the king of the barbarians, as still rooted within his Central States background. The usage of the term *di* 帝 (emperor) itself, rather than that of *wang* 王 (king), signfies "a relatively recent, northern vision of universal rulership in which the *di* was not native to the lands over which he ruled."[94] Zhao Tuo was proclaiming himself as akin to celestial authority and laying claim to a large swath of land, making his case known to both the Han emperor and to the Yue elites that he ruled. He simultaneously embodied the Han epithet of power and control and admitted his non-local status while asserting his authority as the supreme *di*, possibly inspiring others to think of him as a

[94] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 199.

native par excellence of the region. Thus, for Tuo, the very deification of *di* symbolized both a wedge between him and his family with the Yue elites and the common people, but still maintained a claim to power through a representation of himself as a perfect specimen of the native Yue, on par with their greatest ancestors and highest celestial beings.[95]

Noticeably, Sima Qian does not call Zhao Tuo as King Wen of Nanyue, like he does for Central States rulers, but instead by his given name. It is also important to acknowledge that Zhao Tuo's first named position in the Qin annals is as an officer overseeing the procession of criminals into the region. Sima Qian writes that Tuo, upon the consolidation of the area by the Qin, "moved the condemned Chinese into the area [to] mingle and dwell with the Yue natives for the next thirteen years 以謫徒民, 與越雜處十三歲."[96] Here, we see a close association between the Yue natives and the types of people coming into the region: condemned criminals who had lost favor in court, placed here as a debilitating punishment, and ridiculed for their mistakes. By placing them at the edge of the empire, in a land that we defined earlier as miasmic and thus a core fear in the eyes of Han statesmen, the Yue lands are defined as the antithesis of the central core: an exoticized, diseased, and detrimental place to live. When Empress Lü's forces were sent to attack Nanyue, they encountered similar situations:

> 高后遣將軍隆慮侯灶往擊之. 會暑溼，士卒大疫，兵不能踰嶺. 歲餘，高后崩，即罷兵。

[95] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 199. Here, Brindley asserts that "As the highest deity of the Shang, *Di* was associated with the greatest ancestors of the royal clan. As such, a *Di* could have been understood to be an original member of a lineage."
[96] Sima Qian, *Records*, 113.2967.

> Empress Lü dispatched General Zhou Zao, the marquis of Longlü, to attack Nanyue, but he encountered such heat and dampness, and so many of his officers and men fell ill, that his army could not cross the mountains into the region. After a year or so Empress Lü passed away and Zhou Zao's troops were thus recalled.[97]

The soldiers of the North, who had long been used to the temperate climates of the Han territories, were immediately desecrated from the South's inhospitable environment and illness. These comments, seemingly drawn from firsthand accounts of the event itself, seem to again reposition the South as the foreign other and thus make Zhao Tuo's position all the more interesting: he is a man of the Central States positioned in a no-man's land, in charge of the movement of soldiers from his past life into the environment of his present. It seems undoubtable that Zhao Tuo would thrive in this grey area, and utilize his opportunity to wield a dual identity (as both Han and non-Han) towards his political benefit. To provide a brief example, Empress Lü's story here is valuable towards understanding Zhao Tuo's wily nature as a king and thus the wielding of his dual identity.[98] After Empress Lü imposed sanctions on incoming trade, it is Zhao Tuo's protests that show an affinity to not want to be slotted neatly into any one identifier. In the original text of the *Shiji*, Zhao protests that "今高后聽讒臣，別異蠻夷，隔絕器物." Above, I have opted to translate this as "[Now,] Empress Lü listens to her malicious ministers, and is **discriminating against me, treating me as one of the barbarians** and breaking off our trade in iron vessels and goods." However, this could also be interpreted, and has in several texts, as

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[97] Sima Qian, *Records*, trans. Burton Watson, 208-209. For the original Chinese, see Sima Qian, *Records*, 113.2969.
[98] Empress Lü was the empress consort of the first emperor of the Han, Gaozu (r. 206-202 BC). Upon his death, she ruled as Empress Dowager and regent during the reigns of her son Emperor Hui (r. 195-188), Emperor Qianshao (r. 188-184 BC), and Emperor Houshao (r. 184-180 BC), though the latter two were puppet emperors. For more on Empress Lü, see Sima Qian, *Records*, j. 9, 10, 49. For a brief English language deliberation over China's first female ruler, see Hans van Ess, "Praise and Slander: The Evocation of Empress Lü in the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu*" in *Nan Nü* 8, vol. 2 (2006): 221-254. https://doi.org/10.1163/156852606779969824.

"Empress Lu is listening to her malicious ministers, **discriminating against the southern barbarians**, and cutting off our trade in goods."[99] In this interpretation, Tuo is referring to himself as a barbarian itself: rather than disparaging the Han treatment of him as one of the barbarians, thus implying belonging among the "self" and the othering of his subjects, he instead lumps himself in as a representative of the southern barbarians. According to our interpretation as readers, Tuo could shift between the identities of Han and non-Han. Thus, we can see Sima Qian, whether by accident or not, re-interpret Zhao Tuo's own identity as one that is far more fickle and transparent than a strict Han or non-Han designation. As a result of being on the borders, Tuo thus inhabits this liminal space that allows him to be fluid with how he identifies to better serve his interests, and flow between the two at his whim.

The other whim that Zhao Tuo takes on, and what makes the bulk of Sima Qian's narrative about Zhao Tuo, is his apology to Emperor Wen of Han (r. 180-157 BC) after an encounter with Lu Jia. While I have shortened the passage in my quick summary above, the longer text deserves a closer analysis to reposition Tuo within Anzaldua's framework:

> 及孝文帝元年, 初鎮撫天下, 使告諸侯四夷...詔丞相陳平等舉可使南越者, 平言好畤陸賈, 先帝時習使南越。乃召賈以爲太中大夫, 往使。因讓佗自立爲帝, 曾無一介之使報者。陸賈至南越, 王甚恐, 爲書謝, 稱曰:"蠻夷大長老夫臣佗, 前日高后隔異南越, 竊疑長沙王讒臣, ...以故自棄, 犯長沙邊境。且南方卑溼, 蠻夷中閒, 其東閩越千人衆號稱王, 其西甌駱裸國亦稱王。老臣妄竊帝號, 聊以自娛, 豈敢以聞天王哉！" 乃頓首謝, 願長爲藩臣, 奉貢職。於是乃下令國中曰:"吾聞兩雄不俱立, 兩賢不併

[99] The first interpretation is more common, as seen in Watson's translation and Tian Jizhou, *Ethnic History*, 251-252. The latter interpretation is in both Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 205 and in Hu Shouwei, *Pioneers of Nanyue: Zhao Tuo [Nanyue Kai Tuo Xian Qu: Zhao Tuo]* (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chu Ban She, 2005): 50. Scholars readily disagree on the interpretation of this passage, but perhaps that is Sima Qian's own brilliance.

世。皇帝，賢天子也。自今以後，去帝制黃屋左纛。” 陸賈還報，孝文帝大說。遂至孝景時，稱臣，使人朝請。然南越其居國竊如故號名，其使天子，稱王朝命如諸侯。

In the first year of Emperor Wen's reign (180 BC), because peace had only recently been restored to the empire, the emperor sent an announcement to the feudal lords and the barbarian chiefs…He then asked the chancellor Chen Ping and the other high officials to recommend someone to act as envoy to Nanyue. Chen Ping suggested Lu Jia of Haozhi, who had had experience under the former emperor as envoy to Nanyue. Emperor Wen summoned Lu Jia, made him a palace counsellor, and sent him off with instructions to reprimand Zhao Tuo for setting himself up as an "emperor" and at the same time failing to send a single envoy to report the fact to the Han court.

When Lu Jia arrived in Nanyue, Zhao Tuo, thoroughly frightened, wrote a letter of apology. Referring to himself as "Your aged subject Tuo, a barbarian chief," Zhao Tuo explained: "Some time ago, when Empress Lü cut off trade with Nanyue and began to discriminate against me, I suspected that it was due to the slanderous ministers of the king of Changsha …Therefore in desperation I dared to violate the borders of the kingdom of Changsha.[100] Moreover this region of the south is low and damp and inhabited only by barbarian tribes. To the east of me is the chief of Minyue who, with no more than 1,000 subjects, calls himself a king, while to the west are the lands of Western Ou and Luoluo, whose rulers likewise call themselves kings. So your aged subject, to

[100] The Kingdom of Changsha 長沙國 is a region that covers much of modern-day Hunan Province, occupying the south of the Han Empire's official borders. Interestingly enough, the first King of Changsha, Wu Rui 吳芮 (d. 202 BC), was himself an ethnic Yue.

gratify a whim, presumed in his delusion to call himself "emperor". Yet how could he dare to report such a fact to the King of Heaven?"

Zhao Tuo bowed his head and apologized, begging that he might be allowed to continue to serve the emperor as a feudal lord, rendering his tribute and labour services as before. He then circulated an order throughout his kingdom which read: "I have heard that two great men do not stand side by side, and two wise men never appear in the same age. The emperor is in truth a wise Son of Heaven. From this time onward, I relinquish the use of the words "emperor" and "edict" and the yellow covered carriage with plumes on the left side."[101]

Lu Jia returned and reported the success of his mission, which greatly pleased Emperor Wen. Thus, for the remainder of his reign, as well as for that of Emperor Jing [the next emperor], Zhao Tuo called himself a subject of the Han and sent envoys with tribute to the court in the spring and fall. However, he continued to secretly use the designations "emperor" and "edict" the same as before within his kingdom, and only referred to himself as a "king" and used the other terms appropriate to a feudal lord when he sent envoys to the rulers of the Han.[102]

Within even this short snippet, we see signs of a clear liminal third space that Zhao Tuo occupies. Firstly, his decision to apologize to the Han emperor is motivated by several clear factors: the

[101] Here, the "yellow covered carriage with plumes on the left side" (*huangwu zuodao* 黃屋左纛) is an idiom that refers to the emperor's carriage and thus the hypervisible symbols that give the emperor his pronounced power as a sovereign of the Central States.
[102] Sourced, with minor edits, from Sima Qian, *Records*, trans. Burton Watson, 209-210. See also Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 113.2972.

perceived benefits of easier relations with the Han, including better trade relations and military aid (of which the latter would prove helpful in the rule of Zhao Mo), allowed Tuo to more easily enter this official state of dependency to the Han. He further had to deal with the fact that Emperor Wen claimed to take care of his family back in the homeland of Zhending:

> 乃為佗親冢在真定，置守邑，歲時奉祀。召其從昆弟，尊官厚賜寵之。

> At the same time, learning that Zhao Tuo's parents were buried in Zhending, he [Emperor Wen] set aside one of the towns in that district to take care of their graves and offer sacrifices at certain times of the year. He also summoned Zhao Tuo's cousins to court and appointed them to high offices, treating them with great generosity.

Yet again, we see Zhao Tuo's liminal identity shining through: if he is willing to proclaim himself a ruler of his own independent kingdom and incur the wrath of Emperor Wen by acting as emperor and threatening military force, and thus separate himself politically with the Han, why still does he maintain ties to his homeland? Tuo, yet again split between the control of his own empire on the furthest extents of the world wrought about by his military might, and the tethers of his family and past homeland in Zhending, showcasing what Anzaldua notes as the borderlands identity. Only here, away from the Han cosmopolitan center and away from the backwoods of the barbarians, can a political subject feel such a divide that it strikes the core of who he is as a person.

Secondly, in this episode, he maintains his position as a politician to incur in favor of the Han, explaining his brash decision to proclaim himself emperor as "delusion" and performed

solely "to gratify a whim." He explains that as "Your aged subject Tuo, a barbarian chief", no man could stand as equal partners with the emperor, the "Son of Heaven." In the beginning, Tuo decides to play dummy and excuse his actions as desperation, taking on an identity as a diminutive old man that he is burdened to care for. As a "king of the barbarians", Tuo implicitly identifies the people under his watch as lesser than other Han subjects, calling the area "low and damp and inhabited only by barbarian tribes." By downplaying his subjects and using distinctly Han rhetoric of the Son of Heaven to ingratiate himself with the imperial court, his rule and power holds no cards to the might and strength of the Han central administrative body. In spite of this, however, Zhao Tuo also chooses to blame the incident on Empress Lü, proclaiming that his position as "barbarian chief" enabled him to act out of desperation. At the end of it all, Sima Qian notes that Zhao Tuo continued to abuse his power and proclaim himself as emperor and decree edicts just as before. In this reading, Zhao Tuo identifies himself explicitly as a ruler of barbarians, caring for their wellbeing and acting out to protect it as their representative in court.

This image of Zhao Tuo as a wily, conniving politician who uses his differences and liminal identity as both non-Han and non-Nanyue as a means to gain power and slight leverage over his far stronger adversary in Emperor Wen. Sima Qian, writing decades after the occurrence of the event, clearly told this story (whether apocryphal or not) as a means of establishing a distinct barbarian "other" that contrasted starkly with the normative "self", even if the definition of "barbarian" and "civilized" enters a murky gray area with Zhao Tuo and his descendants on the frontiers. As a court politician, Sima Qian does not immediately strike down Tuo's actions as clearly good or clearly bad in relation to the omnipotent Han emperors, but rather provides a moralizing story within: that Zhao Tuo and other frontier politicians could assume a sense of "otherness" as a means to challenge normative power structures. Zhao Tuo's actions became a

thorn to the Han king to the point of military action, showcasing the very real threat that the oft-neglected southern frontier could play in a burgeoning Han Empire. To Tuo, the very real exchange of nominal allegiance offered the much more preferred trade of relative freedom from an emerging Han military power and provided substantial economic benefits. While eventually Zhao Tuo's kingdom fell to Emperor Wu of Han in 111 BC, the sustained presence of his story in Sima Qian's History and for all subsequent historiographical tellings of Chinese history represents the shifting roles of peoples in ancient China. Zhao Tuo could not be confined to an image of a former Chinese official or a king of the Nanyue, but instead inhabits a third liminal imaginary that positions him as a fluctuating in-between figure fickle to the position he is put in. His claims to have "adopted Yue customs, married a Yue woman, encouraged Han men to do the same, and appointed Yue generals and officers" proved that he at times could flout Han suzerainty, yet when it appealed most to him, identified as a lackey of the Han in a way that no other figure outside of the borderlands could relate with.[103] Sima Qian's *Shiji* represents not only the sole textual representation of both Han and Nanyue "identity" contemporaneous to the event, but also represents the traditional narrative of Chinese history as a story of propaganda and narrative control where a dominant Han politic destroys a homogenized, uncivilized, barbarian other.

Zhao Mo 趙眛 (Zhao Hu 趙胡) (c. 137-124 BC)

A grandson of Zhao Tuo, Zhao Mo's story is recorded by Sima Qian as a committed servant of the Han, a vassal lord who continued to rule over his grandfather's lands in his own

[103] Allard, "Frontiers and Boundaries," 235. See also Hugh Clark, *The Sinitic Encounter in Southeast China through the First Millenium CE* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016): 26. Clark writes that "Stuck in this lonely outpost far from the Central Lands, Zhao increasingly adopted the local manners and dress and even married a local woman."

right as a King of Nanyue, but very much within the grasp of the Han bureaucracy. Zhao Mo, called in classical sources as Zhao Hu, is the name of the occupant of the Tomb of the Nanyue King 南越王墓 in modern-day Guangdong Province, and scholars generally take the two names to refer to the same figure.[104] According to Sima Qian, when the neighboring kingdom of Minyue attacked the Nanyue in 137 BC, Zhao Mo wrote to the Han Emperor and asked for assistance in repealing these advances:

> 胡使人上書曰:「兩越俱為藩臣，毋得擅興兵相攻擊。今閩越興兵侵臣，臣不敢興兵，唯天子詔之。」於是天子多南越義，守職約，為興師，遣兩將軍往討閩越。

> "Zhao Mo dispatched a messenger to the Han court with a letter to the emperor saying, 'Since the two kings of Nanyue and Minyue [Zhao Mo and Zou Ying, respectively] are both vassal lords of the Han, it is not right that they should arbitrarily call out their troops and attack each other. Yet now the king of Minyue has raised his troops and is invading my territory. I do not dare call out my own troops unless the Son of Heaven commands me to.' The emperor, much impressed by the fidelity with which the king of Nanyue had abided by his duties as a vassal lord, called up an army for his sake and dispatched it under the command of two generals to attack Minyue."

Here, Mo seems to be more open to taking on an identifier as a lackey of the Han rather than not, asking "the son of Heaven," Emperor Wen, as distinctly a "vassal lord" (*chen* 臣) of the Han to

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[104] I will refer to the second Nanyue King as Zhao Mo 趙眜, following in line with the consensus that the two were the same person, and in line with scholarly material produced by modern Chinese scholars. For a more detailed breakdown of the controversy behind the tomb occupant's identity, see Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 208, note 41.

invoke the prohibition against calling out one's troops without express imperial permission. Mo seems to be far more inferior to Tuo's manipulative behavior in this account, and there is good evidence to substantiate his allegiance with the Han far more than his grandfather's. For instance, Mo, in line with other vassals of the Han court, sent his own son Yingqi 嬰齊 to the Han court as a palace attendant, and out of a debt of gratitude claimed that "Death could not repay the debt of gratitude which I owe him 死無以報德."[105] His impeccably polite behavior displayed here, alongside the immense courtesy he showed Han envoy Zhuang Zhu 莊助, showed that Zhao Mo likely did treat his Han overlords more so as such.[106] Even upon his death, the amicable relationship with the Han court afforded him the title of the "Civil King of Nanyue" (*Nanyue Wen Wang* 南越文王).[107]

At the same time, however, Mo also continued Tuo's insistence on identifying as a *di* of the Nanyue, and ruler in his own right. Rather than make a trip in person to the Emperor, as he had promised, his ministers instead advised him to stay behind and plead ill rather than pay his respects:

> 其大臣諫胡曰:「漢興兵誅郢，亦行以驚動南越。且先王昔言，事天子期無失禮，要之不可以說好語入見。入見則不得復歸，亡國之勢也。」
>
> Zhao Hu's high ministers reprimanded him for making such a commitment, saying, 'We have just recovered from the excitement caused by the Han armies which came to punish Zou Ying [of Minyue]. Now, if you should leave the kingdom and journey to the Han

[105] Sima Qian, *Records*, 113.2971.
[106] Sima Qian, *Records*, 113.2971.
[107] Brindley notes that this was a result of his peaceful and cooperative relationship with the court. This is not suggested in Sima Qian's original account, where he simply writes that "[After] Hu died, he was conferred the title of Civil King 胡薨，謚為文王." Note that his title of *Wen* again matches up closely with the near contemporaneous Emperor Wen of Han, and as with Wu before him, drew from Emperor Wen of Zhou 周文王 (fl. 11th century BC).

> court, it would cause great alarm and unrest in Nanyue. Moreover the former king used to say that in serving the Son of Heaven, all that was necessary was to avoid a breach of etiquette. The important thing is not to be taken in by friendly words to the point where you commit yourself to a journey to the capital. If you ever go to the capital to visit the Son of Heaven, you will never return again! It will mean the downfall of the kingdom![108]

Yet again, as with Tuo, Zhao Mo chooses to not go to the capital and instead pleads ill, heeding the advice of his presumably loyal Yue elites rather than visit the Han Emperor. Here, historians are caught at a bit of a predicament in deciding Sima's underlying tone here: is he judging Mo for being too close to his malicious ministers, just as Zhao Tuo complained of? Is he indeed a victim of circumstance, wanting to visit the Son of Heaven but instead caught up by ministers or by genuine concern over the welfare of his Empire, so that he was forced to plead illness? Or would this be better viewed as Mo using his ministers and countries to not commit to a relationship that he viewed purely as diplomatic courtesy to ensure continued trade, peace, and goodwill? We are not sure, and that perhaps is all at once the genius of Sima Qian, the pitfalls of ancient texts, and the liminality of Zhao Mo. The answer to these questions, however elusive, resulted in the same answer: that Mo continued to practice the same liminality, and thus express the same identity, as his predecessor. Whether out of coercion from nature, coercion from his ministers, or because of his own free will, the Second Emperor of Nanyue's ultimate decision about his compliance with Han suzerainty demonstrated that it was not as binding as with later generations. Mo, as well as with Tuo, effectively remained a facile respondent to Han superiority and Nanyue belonging, but remained an elusive intermediary between outright Han or non-Han identification.

[108] Sima Qian, *Records*, trans. Burton Watson, 211.

While we have been analyzing the unfortunately flawed textual tradition of Sima Qian for both Tuo and Mo, we are able to create a firmer case for Zhao Mo's liminality through an examination of his tomb, found on Xianggang Hill 象崗山, modern-day Guangdong Province in 1983. It provides a wealth of information into both the lived practices of Zhao Mo and his chosen, curated presentation of his legacy: one that continued to show a push-and-pull relationship surrounding his Han and non-Han identity, and one that attempted to continually broker political power as the Han Empire burgeoned into the political and military power it is known for today. While all the burial goods within the tomb are far too expansive to provide a detailed analysis of each one, this discussion will center around the various jades found on and around the occupants, the seals carrying their names, and various other paraphernalia that we can use to compare against Han tombs of the same era.

Firstly, approaching Zhao Mo's tomb itself is itself a daunting task. Twenty meters below the city center of Guangzhou, constructed of stone blocks with seven chambers split along an axis running eleven meters long by twelve meters wide, the tomb of Zhao Mo is comparable to other palatial princely tombs, such as that of Liu Sheng.[109] Complete with space for stables and chariots, storage rooms and kitchens, Zhao Mo's body lay in the center, complete with a jade suit that rivaled the ones of other Han princes (Figure 2.1).

[109] Alice Yao and Wengcheong Lam, *The Archaeology of Han China* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2025): 267.

Figure 2.1. Left: Silk-threaded jade suit from the tomb of the king of Nanyue, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, Western Han Dynasty. Length 1.73m (5.7 ft). Right: Gold-threaded jade suit from Mancheng tomb 2, the tomb of Dou Wan, Mancheng, Hebei Province, Western Han Dynasty. Length 1.72m (5.6 ft). Images sourced from Miller, *Kingly Splendor*, 175-176, Plates 4.12 and 4.14.

Ten complete or nearly complete jade suits like the ones of Liu Sheng and Zhao Mo have been excavated that date to the Western Han, and an additional twenty-seven have yielded jade pieces that formed part of a full suit or jade mask.[110] Used consistently by the royal family from its introduction until the dynasty's end, and typically an extravagant tomb accoutrement only reserved for the imperial family, Zhao Mo's possession of a jade suit raises "interesting questions about the family's engagement with sumptuary prescriptions."[111] Jade suits themselves were considered luxury items because of their immense cost to produce (especially with foreign jade, which was the standard), their purported protective quality, and ability to reflect the status of the wearer. To the imperial family, a jade burial suit was one way to convince the population of one's central authority and make hypervisible one's former grace over the empire by allowing it to prosper economically, and continued political control over the empire through a maintained public image of austere sovereignty. Jades were even considered metaphors for the refined individual and symbols of their benevolence; as jades are stones cut and polished to highlight natural color, patterning, and translucence, the jades worn by a ruler would highlight their natural

[110] Allison R. Miller, *Kingly Splendor: Court Art and Materiality in Han China* (New York: Columbia UP, 2021): 147.
[111] Yao and Lam, *Archaeology*, 269.

virtue, commitment to status, and authoritative hue.[112] It is unlikely that such an honor would be bestowed upon any Nanyue king, not only unrelated to the imperial family but only mere vassals at best and renegade fraudsters at worst. The jade suit of Zhao Mo likely was acquired through less formal means: the jade pieces were roughly assembled and not of the same caliber as those of Liu Sheng's, likely suggesting that these jade suits were produced locally by kings. Mo's jades were likely sourced from modern-day Xinjiang, over 4,000 km away, and of a lower quality standard than those found in Liu Sheng's tomb.[113] Additionally, pseudo-jades (*jiayu* 假玉) strewn along the chest portion of the suit were tied together with ribbons rather than being stitched together as with the other suits, suggesting either Mo's premature death (hinted at us by his pleads for illness in the *Shiji*) or an inability to source better-quality jades at a consistent enough rate.[114] These fake jades, some of which were pasted onto linen rather than sewn together, alongside differences in drilling and threading, suggest that Zhao Mo's attempt to replicate the political strength, credibility, and pedigree of the Han emperors overlooked corporeal preservation and showcased the flaws of replication. As a representation of the status of the wearer, the jade suit of Zhao Mo simultaneously flexed the innovation of his local craftsmen and continued developments of counterproduction compared to the imperial capital, and at the same time a close identification with the Han metropolitan and cosmopolitan core. Zhao Mo attempted to bridge the divide between Han and Nanyue in the ultimate status symbol: donning the cultural symbols of Han suzerainty in death. It was a veiled image of the Han expression of his supposed power over the Nanyue; yet, with non-Han influence bleeding through, it is a glaring representation of Zhao Mo's Nanyue identity.

[112] Miller, *Kingly Splendor*, 164-167.
[113] Miller, *Kingly Splendor*, 173-174.
[114] Miller, *Kingly Splendor*, 173-174. Miller notes that these pseudo-jades are sourced from the Guangning 廣寧 region.

Outside of the jade suit, his tomb was also filled with jade pectorals for himself and his entourage into the afterlife, stored in the Eastern Annex of the tomb.[115] Composing this entourage were four wives, namely the Concubine of the Left 左夫人, Concubine of the Right 右夫人, the Grand Concubine 泰夫人, and another concubine, of which we have no name.[116] There were also three pectorals given to sacrificial victims, a burial practice of former dynasties, totaling eleven pectorals. The very practice of sacrificing wives was something of an antiquated practice, or as Anthony Barbieri-Low notes, perhaps more of a Southern Chinese tradition than that of a Northern Chinese one.[117] The tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng (fl. 5th-century BC), for instance, contains examples of sacrificial funerary rites that by then had been already waning in practice in the north of China, and by the time of the Han, had altogether been outlawed and taken as a backwards, antiquated practice that was reserved for backwards, antiquated people. The *Shiji* notes that the practice had already been outlawed by the reign of Duke Xian of Qin 秦獻公 (r. 384-362 BC), and that by Qin Shihuang's reign (221-210 BC) the sacrifice of his concubines had already been seen as a cruel Legalist practice than a normalized or standardized one in other parts of the Warring States.[118] Zhao Mo's choice to bury his concubines, therefore, could be seen as a continuation of either southern Chinese regional practices that Zhao Tuo may have picked up in the Qin, borrowed from the previous state of Chu and its surrounding areas (which made up the kingdom of Changsha), or wholly a barbarian practice that Zhao Mo decided to pick up. In the latter case, this could be interpreted as a means for Zhao Mo to express this regional identity

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[115] Pectorals (*peishi* 佩飾) are ornamental jewlery pieces lain on or around the body of the deceased during the time of burial.

[116] Huang Zhanyue 黃展岳, "Silu yuyi he zuyipei 絲縷玉衣和組玉佩 (Jade Shrouds and Pectorals)" (Beijing: Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 1991) in The Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, The Art Gallery of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Kau Chi Society of Chinese Art, *Jades from the Tomb of the King of Nanyue [Nanyue Wang Mu Yu Qi]* (Hong Kong: The Woods Publishing Company, 1991): 64-65.

[117] Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, personal communication, March 16, 2026.

[118] Sima, *Shiji*, 5.XX.

along the borderlands: that by being along a cultural hotspot of Han and Nanyue identity, Mo could pick and choose what practices would best serve his interests and promote his power the most, in turn creating and proliferating a Nanyue identity.

This Nanyue identity is again highlighted in several features of the pectorals of the Concubines of the Left and Right. Sima Qian gives us no information about the wives of Zhao Mo, but the pectorals of the Concubine on the Right, likely a figure named Zhao Lan 趙藍, show us a glimpse into what life as an imperial consort for the Nanyue may have looked like (Figure 2.2). Her set of pectorals were composed of twenty pieces, most eye-catching of which is the double dragon pendant, highlighted above. The central motif of this piece is "a pair of rampant dragons sharing a common arched body of interlocking spirals. The dragons are flanking a stylized monster mask with a mushroom-like long tongue and a club-shaped crest on the head."[119] This motif, very clearly a tie to the heritage of dragons and mystical elements of the Nanyue, likely borrows from local practices that Zhao Lan herself may have come from.[120] We do know, however, that Zhao Lan's name was also inscribed on her seal (Figure 2.3), typically a feature afforded only to the Han imperial family.[121] In this case, Zhao Mo and Zhao Lan express themselves as holding the same power as the family and on Han terms: they use the ranking system of concubines that the Han use, they copy the seals that the Han use, providing a cheaper copy of Han imperial symbolism that allowed the Zhao kings to express a feature of their own, unique identity. And as with the jades, Zhao Mo interestingly engages with a non-Han practice of

[119] The Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, *Jades*, 268.
[120] Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, personal communication, March 16, 2026.
[121] Yinghao Mai et al., *Tomb of the Nanyue King in Guangzhou [Guangzhou Nanyue Wang Mu]*, ed. Qixin Zhu and Limei Wang (Beijing: Xin Zhi San Lian Shu Dian, 2005): 89.

marrying someone with the same surname and propelling them to the highest concubinal office.[122]

Figure 2.2. Left: Full pectoral of the Concubine of the Right, Zhao Lan 右夫人趙藍. Right: detail, pendant in the shape of a double-headed dragon.

[122] Mai, *Tomb of the Nanyue King*, 89. It is suggested that Zhao Lan's marriage to Zhao Mo could have been a result of either political necessity, intermarriage with the Yue (as I believe), or that Lan was a noblewoman of the Han and took her husband's surname.

Figure 2.3. Top: Seals found on the body of Zhao Lan, Concubine of the Right. Bottom left: Gold seal of the concubine of the right. Bottom right: Ivory seal, depicting the phrases "*you fu ren xi* 右夫人璽" and "*Zhao Lan* 趙藍."

Under such circumstances, Zhao Mo's marriage to Zhao Lan would secure his position among the Yue elites and act as a political marriage, yet also allowed for this Nanyue identity to continue to develop. It thus makes all the more sense for this double-headed dragon emblem, the likes of which are not found in other tombs of the Western Han, to be found laid upon the body of a foreigner and claimant to a throne through cultural means that are not hers.

The pectorals of the Left Concubine (Figure 2.4) and that of the unnamed concubine (Figure 2.5) have a different means of expressing their Nanyue identity, aligned with that of the king (Figure 2.6): they all include small figurines of servants that fit in between their jades.[123]

[123] Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, *Jades*, plates 52-59.

Being another non-Han element, the inclusion of smaller figurines would have represented either servitude or take the place of human sacrifice; yet, as we discuss above, human sacrifices are present, so the latter conclusion is more likely.[124] Zhao Mo himself has the most figures, and their positioning suggest that they are kneeling, hands clasped with oval, rounded faces, starkly different from those found in imperial tombs. Adorned between jade pendants in the shapes of animals (dragons, phoenixes, and rhinoceroses), the figures themselves seem to be caught frozen in time, symbols of Zhao Mo's power and his diverse court. By displaying his court on top of his body, including rarer animals that only men of his status would be able to attain such as rhinoceroses and phoenixes, Zhao seems to mock the Han king as his equal. The figures split a procession of animals across his chest, all kneeling to the man they lie upon. In comparison, the Left Concubine and unnamed concubine both have only one dancing figurine respectively, placed between a relatively simple assortment of jades.[125] The concubine of the left's dancing figure depicts a dancing woman in a long gown and long sleeves caught in motion, her floral extensions flying about and a pectoral about her waist jangling. For the unnamed concubine, however, the figure is crudely carved in the same position, seemingly an unfinished (either purposefully or not) jade copy of the concubine of the left. This may suggest a difference in status between the two, or may purely be an unfinished jade that was included in the burial proceedings after Zhao Mo's death in 122 BC. Furthermore, we can compare the dancing figures to one found in a separate part of the tomb (Figure 2.7), showing a far more picturesque figurine in a similar position. With her hair tied up into a conch shell-shaped knot, mouth open as if singing, and long sleeves draped across her body like the wind, the figure likely represents a Yue lady performing Han-style dances.[126] While most Han-era jade dancing figures were represented

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[124] Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, personal communication, March 3, 2026.
[125] Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, *Jades*, plates 141-142, 152.
[126] Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, *Jades*, plates 234-235.

in silhouettes, this figure is fully three-dimensional, and thus forming a very unique piece. Regardless of the quality of the piece, the figure appears to be caught in a uniquely Yue dance, and the fact that this exact dancer position appears several times may suggest yet again the presence of a local workshop familiar with Yue fashion trends, dancing movements, and unique styles. Zhao Mo's inclusion of jades crafted for him and his family through local means, as we have suggested above, can be seen as a proclamation of his authority over the region, and the pride in local industry that supported the Nanyue economy and Nanyue identity. The dancing figures not only show Zhao Mo's interpretation of enjoyment and leisure at his court, but also were poignant reminders of his power over the Nanyue, copying elements of both Han and non-Han cultures to create an expression of his own.

Figure 2.4. Full pectoral of the Concubine of the Right. Sourced from the Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, *Jades*, plates 133, 141, and 142.

Figure 2.5. Full pectoral of the unnamed Concubine. Sourced from the Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, *Jades*, plates 149 and 152.

Figure 2.6. Full pectoral of Zhao Mo, King of the Nanyue. Sourced from the Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, *Jades*, plates 52 and 59.

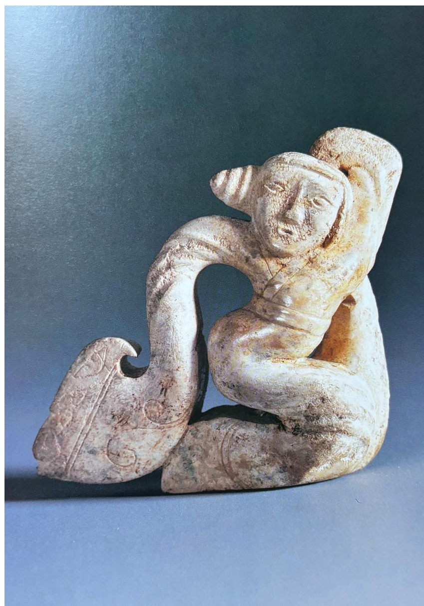

Figure 2.7. Dancing figure found in the eastern annex. Sourced from the Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, *Jades*, plates 234 and 235.

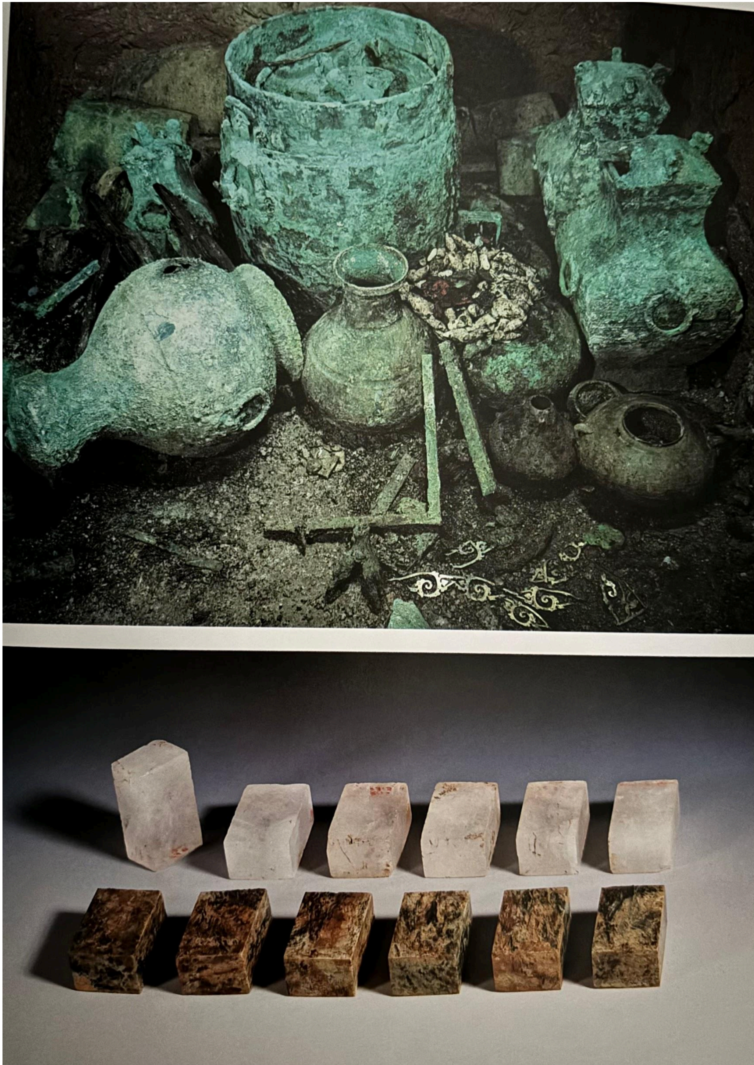

Figure 2.8a-b. Above: *Liubo* 六博 chess set found in the tomb of Zhao Mo, stored alongside bronze wine vessels. Below: *Liubo* chessmen. Sourced from The Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, *Jades*, plates 166-167.

Another element of leisure that we see in the form of jades is a *liubo* set pulled from the eastern annex of the tomb (Figure 2.8a-b).[127] Made of jadeite and buried among wine vessels, it

[127] Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, *Jades*, plates 166 and 167. Liubo 六博 was an ancient Chinese board game popular during the Han, but the rules have since been lost. The pieces shown in the bottom

is a common tomb good of the Western Han imperial family, and the game was massively popular with the Han imperial family.[128] As such, we can surmise that Zhao Mo yet again wants to claim a connection with his Han roots: by enjoying the same games and modes of luxury that his counterparts did, he was able to present an image of similarity between the Han Emperor and himself. At the same time, his pieces are made of jadeite, compared to other Han examples made from wood, pottery, stone, bronze, and a multitude of other materials. This is what I perceive to be Zhao Mo flaunting his power and wealth within the kingdom, as well as his pride in local craftsmanship. Time and time again, as we have seen with his jade suit, jade pectorals, and now the jade *liubo* set, we see Zhao Mo and the broader Zhao family continually identify closely with the metropolitan core in both an effort to replicate imperial identity as a grab for power and include cultural elements of their own surroundings to differentiate themselves. For a vassal state to continue to claim legitimacy through classic symbols of sovereignty such as the suit, yet adjusting bits and pieces to fit their own wants and needs, the ideal of "being in the know" heightened the Zhao family's legibility in their own base of power and solidified their political heritage. In a broader sense, this was Zhao Mo's attempt to reclaim his position of power as the "core" in a multifocal world; an attempt to spotlight Nanyue as a political center. By doing so, as with Tuo before him, Zhao Mo is able to establish a sense of Nanyue identity: the liminal space in the borderlands that allows him to remain in flux between a state of Han and non-Han introduced in the limited textual evidence that we have, and proven true with the archaeological material found at Xianggang Hill.

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picture are the six main board pieces that players would move, with engravings on the front depicting which piece is which.

[128] One story, for example, denotes that the son of Emperor Jing of Han was killed over a *liubo* game, causing a great political crisis known today as the Rebellion of the Seven Princes (154 BC), in turn leading to the massive expansion of Han imperial power.

Sima Qian paints the image of a Zhao Mo that continued being just as fickle of a ruler as Zhao Tuo, although to a far lesser extent. His subservient behavior, such as gifting exotic animals or nearly giving up his leverage to visit the capital, purports him to be a potentially sickly emperor who was too soft on his position in comparison to his father. The archaeological evidence to support the creation of this third identity are immense, and provide tangible support to the claims brought forward by Sima Qian. Zhao Mo's tomb spoke greatly to the family's political aspirations and attempts at gaining recognition from both their stronger Han neighbors and with their trading partners elsewhere. The discussion of jades are of special significance, because they can display very clearly how systems of trade proliferated material goods and cultural ideas between centers of influence. Similar jades are also present throughout the Han Empire, popping up in contemporaneous tombs in the kingdom of Chu (tomb of Liu Wu) and throughout the pectorals and shrouds of burial finds in the tombs of Han princes. Comparing the jade shrouds between that of the Nanyue and with the jades found during the reigns of Emperors Wen, Jing, and Wu show that there was a distinct change between the jade itself, substances used, and styles adopted. This, alongside other funerary goods, suggest both an appeal to Han authority in the usage of jades but also inclusion of more localized traditions and customs.[129] Additional archaeological studies from Huang Zhanyue and Wen Guang suggest that parts of these jades were mined from local tombs from a local workshop in the region, and that the jade suit itself may have been fabricated. Within Zhao Mo's tomb also lay ceramic storage urns and nine tripods to replicate the rituals of the Han state, showcasing how Nanyue elites sought to define "peripheral" identities through the political and ritual centering of their funerary

[129] Huang, "Jade Shrouds and Pectorals," 68-70, and Wen Guang 聞廣, "Xihan Nanyue Wangmu Yuqi de kaogu zhi xue yanjiu 西漢南越王墓玉器的考古地質學研究" (Geological Studies on the Jades from the Tomb of the King of Nanyue) (Beijing: Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 1991) in The Museum of the Western Han Tomb of the Nanyue King, The Art Gallery of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Kau Chi Society of Chinese Art. *Jades from the Tomb of the King of Nanyue [Nanyue Wang Mu Yu Qi]*. Hong Kong: The Woods Publishing Company, 1991: 71-75.

arrangements. Furthermore, elaborate graves in Guangzhou suggest that the people buried there had strong ties to "much-maligned merchant class, [so] it is possible that these diasporic groups were able to entertain new commercial opportunities on the frontier."[130] Though the archaeological analysis of Zhao Mo's tomb provides a brief glimpse into the Nanyue identity that I purport throughout this paper, further research is required into the architectural and textile representations of this identity, particularly in the Palace and Royal Garden of the Nanyue itself. There are other goods and items that are present throughout the palace and throughout the tomb that I did not have space to elaborate on, which mandates a more comprehensive outlook in future research.

Descendants: The Beginning of the End (r. 122-111 BC)

Lastly, I want to return to Sima Qian's account of the Nanyue within its last eleven years, starting with the investiture of Zhao Yingqi onto the throne. These last several monarchs (Zhao Yingqi, Zhao Xing, and Zhao Jiande) are what I term to be Han puppets: born and raised in the Han motherland and maintaining close ties to the Han cultural milieu and thus the Han identity that we highlighted in Chapter I, these emperors marked the beginning of the end for the Nanyue Kingdom. Gone were the days of Zhao Tuo and Zhao Mo explicitly expressing their Nanyue identity, and in their place was a cultural waning of their willingness to live within this third identity. While it did exist to some degree among their actions, I see the last three kings as embodying the Han cultural core, perhaps superficially so out of a push to save the empire, but their roots in the Han lifestyle and environment distinguish them from Zhao Tuo and Zhao Mo.

[130] Yao and Lam, *Archaeology*, 273.

Firstly, Sima Qian records Yingqi "hiding the old seal which Tuo had used when he called himself by the title 'Emperor Wu.' 嬰齊代立，即藏其先武帝璽."[131] As his first act, Yingqi thus immediately acts to destroy the seals of his forebears, perhaps to destroy evidence that they had dared oppose the superiority of the Han Emperor that he had grown used to attending in the north. He also sent "special exotic gifts to the Han court, such as a trained elephant and a talking bird," and most importantly, married a woman from the Central States.[132] This is one of the most central pieces of evidence of Yingqi's adherence to Han suzerainty: unprecedented to the Nanyue, he brings back a token of his time as a palace attendant to the Han emperor, marrying into a Han family with great local power in Handan. As a ruler of his own kingdom, this move can suggest several things: a) Yingqi was greatly influenced by the Han and thus took on a Han wife and a Han lifestyle, identifying more with the Han than with his Nanyue roots, or b) Yingqi was attempting to curry favor with the Emperor, and could more easily do so with a Han wife and thus a connector to the Han self over the barbarian other. Crucially, Yingqi "sent a letter to the emperor requesting that his wife be formally declared queen and his son Xing designated as heir to the throne 上書請立樛氏女為后，興為嗣. With such a move, Yingqi betrays the practices of his predecessors, who as autonomous rulers chose to appoint their own heirs, instead recognizing his inferiority and inability to declare a clear heir in his own right, leaving the final word to Emperor Wu.

On the other hand, however, Yingqi's act could be seen as following the footsteps of his careful predecessors in straddling the fence between submitting to Han authority and identifying fully with his Nanyue subjects. By perhaps taking this act as a means of submitting to the Han but without fully meaning to disconnect his authority over his Nanyue subjects, of which he still

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[131] Sima Qian, *Records*, 113.2971.
[132] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 214.

yielded control as his own autonomous leader, Yingqi continued the legacies of Tuo and Mo. Sima Qian records another event where Yingqi yet again disregards Han encouragement to visit the capital and thus recognize his vassalship to the Han Emperor:

> 漢數使使者風論嬰齊，嬰齊尚樂擅殺生自恣，懼入見要用漢法，比內諸侯，固稱病，遂不入見。遣子次公入宿衛。

> Zhao Yingqi was accustomed to doing as he pleased, murdering people and giving free rein to his passions, and he was afraid that if he went to the capital he would be treated the same as the feudal lords of the Han and tried for his offences under Han law. So he kept insisting that he was too ill to make the journey and never went to the capital, instead sending his second son Zhao Cigong to be an attendant at court.[133]

Here, we are yet again met with a king pretending to be sick and sending a son in his place, an exact copy of the moves his own father pulled for him. Yingqi also is noted as being accustomed to do as he pleased, murdering others and indulging in passions. What exactly these killings were carried out for, whether they were presumptive or not, or the degree to which punishments were dealt is not clear to us: Sima here could be embellishing a picture of a rogue king who by committing to a barbarian way of life, just as other depraved rulers of yore, caused them to be intent on indulging in sin and thus could not commit to ruling their territories.[134] Whether these claims were true, exaggerated for dramatic effect, or entirely apocryphal in signposting the end

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[133] Sima Qian, *Records*, trans. Burton Watson, 211-212. See also Sima, *Shiji*, 113.2971.
[134] A famous example is that of King Zhou (Di Xin) of Shang 商紂王 (r. 1075-1046 BC), the last emperor of the Shang dynasty. He was known for, among others, wasting the country's resources on lavish goods and sexual pleasures, and his disastrous rule struck the knell of the Shang Dynasty.

of the Nanyue, it is evident that Yingqi still tried to remain elusive under the grasp of Han law. His familiarity with Han politics after having grown up in the region and recognition of his special position as a king with his own autonomous region, yet never going as far as his predecessors to label himself *di* and still being accustomed with Han ways of life, marrying a Han woman, and sending lavish gifts to the Han, Yingqi very clearly maintains his hold over the Nanyue identity. The burgeoning growth of the Han Empire as a military, political, social, and cultural threat to the empires on its frontiers, and most especially the miniscule, Han-oriented Nanyue Kingdom, allowed for this Nanyue identity to wane in expression over time. Yingqi was not the same snaky and fickle ruler as his great-grandfather, but still not as removed from native customs, or at least a recognition with such, as his two sons.

Zhao Xing and Zhao Jiande were very much raised as puppets of the Han Empire, due in large part, in my eyes, to the control of Queen Dowager Jiu. Nanyue autonomy and independence, and in a broader scope the Nanyue identity that I have outlined here, began to change markedly in 113 BC under Emperor Wu's more aggressive push towards colonizing the frontiers. Zhao Xing, son of the former king Yingqi, inherited the throne young and as has been the case for millenia of history before and since, the kingship was heavily influenced by cronies around the king. Persuaded by the Queen Dowager and by several Han envoys, including a former lover of the Queen (Anguo Shaoji), the king made drastic changes to Nanyue policies:

> 即因使者上書，請比內諸侯，三歲一朝，除邊關 ... 除其故黥劓刑，用漢法，比內諸侯。使者皆留填撫之。王、王太后飭治行裝重齎，為入朝具。

> "The king asked the Han envoys to forward a letter to the throne requesting that he be treated the same as the feudal lords of China proper and promising to journey to court once every three years to pay his respects. He also asked that the customs barriers on the border between his kingdom and China be removed…The old punishments of tattooing and cutting off the nose were abolished and the Han laws put into effect, so that the kingdom would be governed the same as those of the inner feudal lords. The envoys from the Han court were to remain in the kingdom to see that no trouble occurred. The king and the queen dowager then set about getting their baggage together and selecting a number of rare gifts to be presented to the emperor when they made their trip to the capital."[135]

Here, we see Zhao Xing rescinding many native practices and yielding to Emperor Wu far more than any of his predecessors did with their Han counterparts. Xing, under the influence of his mother and the Han envoys, vouched for open barriers, the removal of Nanyue laws, and a promise to visit the court every three years, even though his ancestors tried their best to avoid visiting the Han imperial court. By removing Nanyue laws and any association of local practices, the Han was attempting to wash out the Nanyue through strengthening their economic ties and removing Nanyue authority from the legal sphere. In this case, we see a stark divide between the puppeted Zhao Xing and the remainder of his court — the Nanyue elite — that sparked a very real reason for revolt. Zhao Xing also interestingly asks the king (rather than granting it himself) the same treatment as the feudal lords of the Han in an attempt to be the same as the "inner feudal lords" (*nei zhu hou* 內諸侯). We can surmise that Xing and his mother wanted to remain subservient to the Han emperor, and by relinquishing the decision-making power to Emperor Wu

[135] Sima, *Records*, trans. Burton Watson, 212. See also *Shiji* 113.2973.

and diminishing the autonomy of Zhao Xing, this act further cemented the beginning of the end for the Nanyue.

Queen Dowager Jiu herself is a very interesting case study in analyzing the Nanyue identity. By sending a former lover of Queen Dowager Jiu to pressure Zhao Xing into submission, the machinations of Emperor Wu here seeded what Sima Qian describes as distrust and discord across Nanyue. Jiu is said to have continued this illicit relationship, and because the people of the Han knew of this on top of her already disqualifying trait of being a woman of the Central States, the Queen Dowager had little to ingratiate her to the Yue ministers and elites. Resultantly, the people began to pay far more allegiance to the Prime Minister Lü Jia, leading to a revolt that was eventually suppressed by incoming Han forces. In doing so, Queen Dowager Jiu takes on a very different kind of liminal role. As Queen of Nanyue but without enough authoritative power among her native population, Jiu instead turns to an undertaking as Han through and through. Her position in Sima Qian's tale as a maneuvering and crafty ruler who manipulated Han rulers into placing her into power is very reminiscent of the former Empress Lü, who also did the same with the Han roughly seventy years prior. Both women were described as cold and calculating, and while maintaining absolute power, they did so because of their own skill and smarts. However, Sima sees her as more of a cheaper copy of the former Empress. Queen Dowager Jiu, for instance, moves secretly to try and kill Lü Jia, yet fails to do so time and time again, while Empress Lü is wildly successful at putting down her enemies. [136] She is just as guileful, but her comparison to Empress Lü is a unique gendered lens into the liminality of Han-Nanyue relations.

[136] One of the more famous accounts of this is Empress Lü's killing of Consort Qi 戚姬. Sima Qian records that she cut off her limbs, gouged out her eyes, cut off her tongue and ears, ingested her with potions to make her mute and dumb, and called her a "human swine (*ren zhi* 人彘). Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 9.XX.

Zhao Xing continues to defy his administration and most especially his Prime Minister, Lü Jia (discussed at length in Chapter 3). Upon revolting, Lü Jia murders Xing, Jiu, and the Han envoys, instead placing Zhao Jiande, a brother of Zhao Xing, as the king. Jiande, in contrast, was already enfeoffed as a marquis and considered perhaps more appealing to Lü Jia and his fellow countrymen, as his mother was a Yue woman. Here, Lü Jia seems to suggest yet again a difference between the Han and the Nanyue, highlighting the stark divide between the two now that the Nanyue identity had been deteriorating. Jiande became the more appealing choice not because of his skills, talents, or merits, but because of his identity as a Nanyue "self" rather than a Han "other." Jiande's reign only lasted for as long as the Nanyue rebellion, and as the cities continued to fall to Han forces, Zhao Jiande and Lü Jia were captured and killed by 111 BC. We cannot say that either Zhao Xing or Zhao Jiande were attempting to replicate the duplicitous allegiances of his forefathers, and proclaim themselves *di*, but rather shows that Xing no longer presented himself as Yue or aligned with Yue elitist interests. Instead, both Xing and the powerless Jiande exemplified the identity of the loyalist Han minister, and tolled the bell of the Nanyue Kingdom.

I want to end with my section on the Zhao kings with an analysis of Sima Qian's own summary of events. He records that

> "尉佗之王，本由任囂。遭漢初定，列為諸侯。隆慮離溼疫，佗得以益驕。甌駱相攻，南越動搖。漢兵臨境，嬰齊入朝。其後亡國，徵自樛女；呂嘉小忠，令佗無後。"

> "It was through Ren Xiao that Zhao Tuo originally got to be a king, and when the Han came into power, he ranked among the feudal lords. Because Zhou Zao's men were

> halted by dampness and disease, Zhao Tuo grew more arrogant than ever. Western Ou and Luoluo fell to fighting, and Nanyue was filled with unrest until the Han troops appeared on the border and Zhao Yingqi was sent to the capital to attend the emperor. The downfall of the state in later days came about through the queen dowager, a daughter of the Jiu family. Lü Jia also, because of his lack of loyalty, caused Zhao Tuo's line to perish."[137]

Sima Qian's own summary reveals a clear difference between the Han self and the Nanyue other. Zhao Tuo is only afforded his position as a king through luck, and his behavior is left simply to be described as "arrogant." Zhao Mo deserved no mention, and Yingqi's only mention was his role as a palace attendant, not as a king in his own right. The nation fell because of the queen dowager, without mention of the Han envoys or any other figures that contributed to the end of the Kingdom. Lü Jia is only mentioned not as a regional hero or a filial minister just like those in similar predicaments (Bi Gan of the Shang, for example), but instead the kingdom fell because of his lack of loyalty. Zhao Xing and Zhao Jiande are not even mentioned. Qian seems to suggest that the Nanyue were only able to afford their positions as kings and keep it through the machinations of Tuo, who himself was only able to get his territory through luck and affronting behavior. Zhao Mo is not considered important enough to mention, but his greatest accomplishment is simplified to a period of unrest only vanquished by the grace-giving presence of the Han troops. Zhao Yingqi's only mention follows that, seen only as an object of transitory exchange and invisible diplomacy, and there is no mention of his strengths as a king and only his strength to the Han as a cultural plug. Lady Jiu and Lü Jia are blamed for the fall of the empire, though Sima Qian seems to push the question of wrongdoing onto Lü Jia rather than the Queen.

[137] Sima Qian, *Shiji*, trans. Burton Watson, 217. See also *Shiji*, 113.2978.

The Queen's acts may have led to the end of the empire, but Lü Jia's unfilial actions and betrayal of the Confucian grand order was paramount to failure. Seen almost as rogue and fringe figures on the furthest extents of the known world, Sima Qian relates these faux kings to pricks in the side of the Han rather than, as we have explored textually and archaeologically, a core in their own right. The Nanyue identity is thus a hidden, liminal niche cached only within the frontiers, and invisible to either the Han self or the Nanyue self. The Zhao kings, for the most part, did show this sense of Nanyue-ness that separated them from Han, Nanyue, or an amalgamation of either. Instead, as we have explored, they take on Anzaldua's *mestiza* identity of a third, frontier being separated from any individual slotting of identity.

Chapter 3: Outside of the Royal Family

Throughout the last chapter, we have aimed to highlight the presence of a liminal, third identity that separated itself from the strict confines of a "Han" or "non-Han / barbarian" identification, through the myriad textual and archaeological references. However, it still can be considered that such an identity, because of its limits in the historical record to the Zhao kings, is therefore a fringe ideal that only occurred through their lineage. In other words, the Zhao kings were able to identify as such because of their prestige status, and hybridized parts of culture that existed in Han and non-Han circles, as present in their textual expression of identity and their burial goods. However, as I have strived to express in my work, the expression of this identity went further than a simple model of hybridization, but instead permeated into the lifestyles of the Zhao kings themselves. It became, in essence, a unique identifier for those on the borderlands: that they were able to express a fluid identity that made them not quite Han, not quite non-Han, but instead a third identity both birthed and divorced from the ashes of the larger two. An additional factor that I believe solidifies this argument is the proliferation of the culture beyond the rulers themselves, namely onto the remainder of the aristocratic class and into the merchants, soldiers, and exterior figures of the Nanyue Kingdom that we have records of. The next section, focused on a textual analysis of the two external political figures Lu Jia of the Han and Lü Jia of the Nanyue, as well as an archaeological deep dive into several other funerary goods at Hepu 合浦 and Luobowan 羅泊灣 (both in modern-day Guangxi Province) that followed the deceased lower political figures of the Nanyue into the afterlife. Through this section, I aim to position the proliferation of the Nanyue identity as a further tenet into a) the presence of the identity as a

whole, and b) the influence of the identity across time, space, and social class, forming a unique Nanyue cultural core that itself became a hub of material trade and cultural connectivity.

Lu Jia 陸賈 **and Lü Jia** 呂嘉

We can further see this liminal identity through the presence of figures such as Lu Jia and Lü Jia, who are secondary characters in Sima Qian's narrative. Lu Jia, the politician and Western Han envoy tasked with persuading Tuo to submit to the Han, exemplified the Huaxia identity that I claim to be the antithesis of the barbarian identity, which is exemplified only partly by Lü Jia, prime minister of Nanyue. While he is thoroughly identified with the barbarians, the fact that he is described with a Chinese name suggests that other elites also harbored a liminal identity between Han and Nanyue. In Sima Qian's records, Lu Jia is portrayed as a hero of the Han who made a feisty and unruly subordinate keel to Han superiority, while Lü Jia is portrayed as a villain who, while loyal to the Nanyue state, framed the actions of the last empress dowager to be traitorous.

Lu Jia's story within the *Shiji* is not only confined to the Account of the Nanyue. Within *Shiji* 97, titled "The Biographies of Li Yiji and Lu Jia 酈生陸賈列傳," we see an image of a skillful speaker and rhetorician, and a devoted envoy to the Han Empire. As a stalwart diplomat and skilled politician, Lu Jia represents the great traditions of Yao and Shun and the tenets of Confucian orthodoxy laid out in Chapter One. A loyal subject of the Han, Lu Jia's position in the government allowed him to have close access to the emperor as a core advisor and even "travelled in a comfortable carriage drawn by a team of four, accompanied by ten attendants who sang songs, danced, and played the drums and a variety of lutes 陸生常安車駟馬，從歌舞鼓琴瑟侍者十人."[138] Lu Jia, a man that was emblematic of the Han through and through, made that

[138] Sima, *Records*, trans. Burton Watson, 227. Also see *Shiji* 97.2699.

presence known when meeting with Zhao Tuo, the record of which is expanded on in this Account. Zhao Tuo, who meets Lu Jia "in audience with his hair down up in the mallet-shaped fashion of the natives of Nanyue and sprawled on his mat 陸生至, 尉他魋結箕倨見陸生," is greeted by a harsh reprimand from the haughty Lu:

> 足下中國人,親戚昆弟墳在真定。今足下反天性,棄冠帶,欲以區區之越與天子抗衡為敵國, 禍且及身矣 … 君王宜郊迎, 北面稱臣, 乃欲以新造未集之越, 屈彊於此。漢誠聞之,掘燒王先人冢,夷滅宗族,使一偏將將十萬眾臨越,則越殺王降漢, 如反覆手耳。
>
> "Your majesty is a man of the Central States; your kin and brothers are all buried in Zhending. Now your majesty goes against that nature that Heaven has given you and abandons the cap and belt. If you desire with this far-flung land of Yue to rival the Han and become an enemy state, then you will meet with disaster…It would be appropriate for Your Majesty to welcome me in the suburbs and face north to announce your submission as a subject. Yet, here you wish to tempt your fate with this newly created and scattered kingdom of Yue. If the Han gets word of this, they will dig up and burn your ancestors' graves, laying to waste the remains of your lineage temple. The Han would but need to call upon a single general to gather up a force of 100,000 troops and face them against Yue, and the Yue people would commit regicide and surrender to the Han. This would be as easy as flipping one's hand."[139]

To Lu Jia, the greatest affront that Zhao has taken on is Zhao Tuo's disloyalty to his homeland and his clear flouts of the Han-ness that Lu Jia so clearly seems to represent. While Sima Qian is

[139] Sima, *Records*, trans. Erica Brindley, 206. Also see *Shiji* 97.2697.

also clearly using this dialogue to make a biased charge of cultural superiority and foretold military triumph, there also is a clear distinction that Lu Jia represents over his non-Han counterparts, who he very much considers Zhao Tuo to be. It is not Zhao Tuo's hairstyle or barbaric manner of sitting that angers the emissary, but rather the adoption of alien customs to spurn the ritual norms of the Central States, not to mention in the face of a man who represented abhorrence to anything non-Han. Here, Zhao Tuo very clearly signals an intention to maintain his independence and keep great distance from the Han Empire to the north, and what Brindley comments as "the flagrant rejection of one's homeland and ritual propriety, an open rejection of the self and its values."[140] Lu Jia was a very successful diplomat that efficiently and effectively influence Tuo's complete turnaround from a wayward renegade and into a "man of the Central States" once again, even if the latter tried to subdue a Han identity and indirectly creating a Nanyue identity. As a politician, Lu Jia was able to secure the political and ritual submission of the Nanyue kings to the Han empire, and also allowed Zhao Tuo to make a forthcoming revelation about the inferiority of his life amongst the Yue. A true Ruist, Lu Jia was therefore able to complete not just his political duties but also his personal responsibilities as a Confucian: to inspire inner realization and transformation rather than outward compliance. This passage, and the remainder of the Account of Li Yiji and Lu Jia, paint a picture of a Han loyalist and thus a clear representation of the Huaxia identity that so contradicted the non-Han Zhao Tuo and his entourage.

In parallel with the image of the loyal Lu Jia, his Nanyue counterpart in Lü Jia represented the barbarian way of life in the *Shiji*. A career politician and diplomat, it is recorded that

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[140] Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 207.

呂嘉年長矣，相三王，宗族官仕為長吏者七十餘人，男盡尚王女，女盡嫁王子兄弟宗室...其居國中甚重，越人信之，多為耳目者，得眾心愈於王。

"Lü Jia was an old man and had served as prime minister to three kings of Nanyue. Over seventy members of his family held high posts as officials of the state. His sons were all married to princesses and his daughters all married to men of the royal family…He therefore wielded enormous power in the kingdom. The people of Yue trusted him, and many of them were happy to act as ears and eyes for him; he had a firmer hold on the hearts of the multitude than the king himself."[141]

Here, it is yet again intriguing to see Lü Jia act as a core representation of the Nanyue identity taken on by the Nanyue kings: he has taken on a Han surname and given name that fit with the naming conventions of the time, yet was well-situated in the politics of the state and his family immersed within all levels of society and government. By taking on a Han surname, we can interpret this as Lü Jia attempting to fit in within a changing political and social landscape.[142] As a career government official, his position allowed him great influence within the Nanyue inner workings, allowing the local elites to bridge the gap between the more Han-representing Zhao Xing and Zhao Jiande and the interests of the populace. This is where Lü Jia tends to carry far more of a Nanyue representation over any other one. In his revolt against Zhao Xing and Queen Dowager Jiu, Lü Jia's decree to justify his actions are most representative of a purely "barbarian" undertone:

[141] Sima, *Records*, trans. Burton Watson, 213. See also *Shiji* 97.2972.

[142] Alternatively, we can interpret this as a Han transliteration of a Nanyue name, although the surname (Lü 呂) and given name (Jia 嘉) do fit into Chinese naming conventions, where the surname follows that of the family and the given name often represents the character or virtue that the named individual would ideally carry forward. For instance, Han general Huo Qubing 霍去病 (140-117 BC) was given the surname Huo 霍 and given name Qubing 去病, or "[to] be free of sickness."

「王年少。太後，中國人也，又與使者亂，專欲內屬，盡持先王寶器入獻天子以自媚，多從人，行至長安，虜賣以為僮仆。取自脫一時之利，無顧趙氏社稷，為萬世慮計之意。」

"The king is very young and the queen dowager is a woman of the Central States. Moreover she has had immoral relations with one of the Han envoys. Her only thought is to make the kingdom a part of the Central States. She intends to take all of the precious goods and vessels of our former rulers and present them to the Son of Heaven in order to curry favour with him, and as soon as she reaches the capital, the numerous attendants in her party will be seized and sold as slaves. In her haste to snatch a momentary advantage for herself she disregards the sacred altars of the Zhao family and gives no thought to the future of the state!"[143]

Within his impassioned monologue, several key points stick out. The Queen is firstly identified as a "woman of the Central States" and a clearly distinct "other" as opposed to Lü Jia's Nanyue self. In order to justify the rebellion, Lü Jia appeals to the Nanyue self and position the Queen as a vile usurper attempting to return the heritage, tradition, and histories of the Nanyue into Han hands. The Zhao family, and therefore the paramount representation of Nanyue identity and the state of being liminally a third identity, was in danger of being subdued and eliminated. In this case, Lü Jia plays an ironically very Han trope of the wise old sage attempting to save a doomed empire. Similar examples in Central States history feature similar figures attempting to resolve a great conundrum that threatens their ultimate existence, and fail to do so, being lauded

[143] Sima, *Records*, trans. Burton Watson, 214. See also Sima, *Shiji*, 97.2974.

as a hero in Chinese history. A premier example is the story of Bi Gan (d. 1046 BC), Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Shang to King Zhou of Shang (1105-1046 BC). In this version, Bi Gan strongly criticized the actions of the King, known for being cruel and wasteful, and later died at the hands of the King when his heart was cut open to see if a sage's heart really had seven apertures. Lü Jia is ironically juxtaposed with this exemplar of the loyal advisor granting advice to a doomed ruler, yet interestingly is positioned as one of the inferior barbarians that Sima is so against. This callback to historical precedence, in spite of the association with barbarian culture, allows Lü Jia to exist within the liminal Nanyue identity that the Zhao kings also exemplified. Compared to his Han counterpart in Lu Jia, they are a foil for one another: both represent the pride, history, rituals, traditions, and identity of their respective territories, and are dutifully loyal to the interests of their state. While Lu Jia remains steadfast in his Han identity, Lü Jia takes on the Nanyue identity that the rulers of his territory espoused.

This exemplification of the Nanyue identity can be marked as such because both fit the mold of Nagel's descriptions of cultural construction and ethnic mobilization. In Lu Jia's case, "The expropriation and subversion of negative hegemonic ethnic definitions and institutions is an important way that culture is used in ethnic mobilization around the world."[144] In other words, Lu Jia diminished the role of Nanyue identity as inferior in each and every way, and one must imagine that the Nanyue responded in kind with similar rhetoric. For his part, Lü Jia similarly mobilized against the Han through the construction of a continued history as a specific ethnic group defined in presence by its difference from the other. Thus, because "Cultural constructions promote collective mobilization when they serve as a basis for group solidarity, combine into symbolic systems for defining grievances and setting agendas for collective action, and provide a blueprint or repertoire of tactics," the emergence of a Nanyue identity allowed for a new and

[144] Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity," 166.

alternative route for the construction of a political state and a social identity. Not only was this identity then mapped from one Zhao king to the other, but also welled deeply into the gentry that surrounded their daily lives.

Tombs of Other Nanyue Elites

Outside of the textual examples of Lu Jia and Lü Jia in the *Shiji*, the textual record of other Nanyue elites often go cold or are mentioned briefly and in passing, often as side notes or as points of comparison to the broader, often Han-centered text alongside it. One of more notable inclusions of interest lies in the Account of the Nanyue, after General Lu Bode was appointed the General Who Calms the Waves (fubo jiangjun 伏波將軍) upon Emperor Wu's declaration to invade the Nanyue, we see that it was not only the Han that were present in this invasion:

> …故歸義越侯二人為戈船、下厲將軍，出零陵...使馳義侯因巴蜀罪人，發夜郎兵，下牂柯江...
>
> "Two men of Yue who had surrendered to the Han and had been made marquises were appointed as General of the Daggered Ships and General Who Descends the Torrents respectively and sent out of Lingling…Another native of Yue, the Marquis Who Hastens to Duty, was ordered to lead a band of criminals from Ba and Shu and, mobilizing the troops of Yelang, to descend the Zangge River."[145]

[145] Sima Qian, *Records*, trans. Burton Watson, 215. See also *Shiji* 113.2977.

Several immediate points jump out at us. Firstly, within these two sentences, we are met with three Yue soldiers fighting on the side of the Han, presumably offered the riches, prestige, and more importantly Han identification that came alongside the title of marquis. Lu Bode likely decided to invite the men of Yue to surrender and present those who did with the seals of marquises, and in persuading more to surrender, a makeshift band of Yue soldiers fighting for the Han emerged (although we cannot be sure of how many there were). In this bit, we meet two who had seemingly been freshly appointed, and one who had already held the title of the Marquis Who Hastens to Duty (chiyi hou), suggesting that there had already been an exchange of identity that had gone on at a lower level for quite a while. Further, taking on the epithets of marquises named in the Han style and giving them militarily authoritative names showed the influence of a Han title over likely lowly Nanyue soldiers: Sima Qian paints an image of the Nanyue commoners as plain and simple-minded, yet at the same time speaks on what was likely a very real ideal, that the mighty title of marquis had enough sway to influence soldiers to switch to the Han side. Later, even, it is revealed that

> 以其故校尉司馬蘇弘得建德，封為海常侯;越郎都稽得嘉，封為臨蔡侯。
>
> “A colonel named Sima Suhung succeeded in capturing Zhao Jiande, for which he was enfeoffed as marquis of Haichang, and Du Ji, a palace attendant of Yue, captured Lü Jia, for which he was enfeoffed as marquis of Lincai.”[146]

In this passage, the identities of “Han” and “non-Han” are stripped to its bare forms, away from opulent beads and shining jades. To these soldiers, a consideration as Han or not was

[146] Sima Qian, *Records*, trans. Burton Watson, 216. See also *Shiji* 113.2978.

more of a matter of survival and thus a very fickle thing, and as borders ebbed and flowed alongside the way the wind blew, so did frontier identities. Thus, the very ability to have this state of in-betweenness made these low-class soldiers very much the same as the king they were enlisted to fight against. All of these figures were able to express a sense of belonging when it best suited them, and therefore maintained a unique identity of thirdness, exclusive to those along the frontiers. To Sima Qian, these may have been inferior imposters only pretending to hold a candle to the Han self, but to us, they are a very vivid representation of the existence of the Nanyue identity along the southern Han frontiers.

Hepu Tombs

These points are reinforced alongside two tombs of interest in digs at Luobowan 羅泊灣 and Hepu 合浦, both in modern-day Guangxi Province. In these two tombs we find members of the wealthy class that held power and prestige locally, such as those of the passage above. These were often wealthy merchants, local elite members, and high officials deeply involved in the maritime Silk Road trade that we outlined in Chapter 1. In the tombs at Hepu, for instance, we find a great number of foreign goods that suggest a large maritime trade network that brought foreign goods in and out of the seaport. Hepu itself, situated at the easternmost end of the maritime trade route between China, India, and the Mediterranean in Han and subsequent periods, was a rich commandery and home to wealthy merchants, local elites, and high officials in the maritime Silk Road. Previously believed to have been a Roman import, the glass bowl in the upper left (3.1a) was proven materially to have come from southern China, likely part of a local effort to copy Mediterranean craftsmanship. This bowl, alongside the one below it (3.1b), also point to a thriving glass industry surrounding this busy seaport, helping to produce and

proliferate a number of beads, jades, and other glasswares. These production centers supplied not only Han markets, but also that of South and Southeast Asia, as exemplified in related examples found alongside coastal Vietnam and India. Alongside this thriving market included a tendency for jade to be utilized as an imitation material of other works in other media, as with the wine bowl in 1.4b. These bowls have only been found among coastal regions in southern China, and its production in jade rather than the glass examples showcase its creation from an exotic material and its reinterpretation as a novel style. We can further see a foreign influence from the beads located to the left of these two bowls (3.1c-h). These six gold beads vary in size and shape, but are very intricately crafted, taking on styles such as those seen in numerous ancient sites in Pakistan, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, and China. While these date to the Eastern Han, their presence in maritime trade show connections between the officials at Hepu and regions as far as Pakistan and Afghanistan, as these beads were likely made in Taxila, a junction between South and Central Asia where a large amount of these beads have been recovered. Among these archaeological materials, we see a clear connection between the water and the people of Nanyue: that these goods arrived at and through the hands of a people greatly connected with the water for commercial and economic purposes. Politically, Hepu played a crucial role in the formation of the Nanyue identity: as a commandery of great economic influence, the local elite were able to amass great political control over the busy port and showcase their amalgamation of cultural identity through these burial goods.

Figure 3.1a-h. Jewelry at the tombs at Hepu. Sourced from Sun, *Age of Empires*, plates 112a-f, 114 and 115.

Figure 3.2. Figurines Representing Foreigners. Unearthed at Tangpai M1 and Liaowei M13B, Hepu, Guangdong Province. Adapted from Zhaoming Xiong, Hepu Han Tombs, trans. Michele Demandt (Springer, 2022): 206.

Several other notable pieces that I would like to highlight here are the two above figurines found in the Hepu tombs, both representing foreigners. The figurine to the left has raised eyebrows, small eyes, a high nose, deep-set eyes, a round face, and whiskers, caught mid-dance and holding a harp-like instrument, possibly that of an Indian bow harp. The figurine on the right features a seated figure with similarly deep-set eyes, a high nose, pointy chin, full beard, and hair tied up into a knot on top of his head (like Zhao Tuo!) Zhaoming Xiong amounts this to representations of the native population of Indonesia, West Asia, or the east coast of Africa, though it is possible that these are representations of local laypeople as well that featured in and around Hepu.[147] Regardless of whether or not this is the case, it is evident that the foreign was always present in the minds of Hepu, and the internationalization of the port city allowed for the cultural hybridization of the Nanyue, Han, and other populations that peppered the region, itself forming a distinct identity outside of its own.

Drawing Differences

I wish to end this section with a revisit to the Account of Li Yiji and Lu Jia in the *Shiji*, after Lu Jia explains to a perturbed Zhao Tuo that the Han Dynasty is unprecedented “since the creation of the Heaven and Earth 自天地剖泮未始有也”:

“今王眾不過數十萬，皆蠻夷，崎嶇山海閒，譬若漢一郡，王何乃比於漢！”

[147] Zhaoming Xiong, *Hepu Han Tombs*, trans. Michele Demandt (Springer, 2022): 207.

> "'Now your [Zhao Tuo's] people do no number over a few thousand, and all of them are barbarians, crowded awkwardly between the mountains and the sea. Such a kingdom would amount to no more than a single province of the Han empire! How can you compare yourself with the emperor of Han?'"[148]

Throughout this section, we briefly explored expansions on the Nanyue identity beyond the royal family, of which it is mainly considered in modern academia. Not much literature is produced on the expansion of a liminal identity beyond the royal family and into the aristocracy, even if there is literature on the Nanyue identity to begin with. The *Shiji*'s records of other minor officials in the Nanyue, although brief, still contain valuable information about the lives and livelihoods of the gentry class at the time. The parallels between Lu Jia and Lü Jia reinforce the existence of both the Han and Nanyue identities that we explored throughout Chapter One and Two, and details a clear through line between ruler and subjects. This continues even into the very soldiers that took part on either side of the brief Nanyue rebellion; though a blip in Sima Qian's records, his words carry valuable information into exploring alternate identities and the often elusive, fickle self that these "barbarians" would have taken on. A further reinforcement is present in the immense archaeological material that litters the tombs of Hepu and Luobowan, and it is especially present in the numerous jewelry found with origins in foreign areas. The connection of Nanyue as a port city that attracted foreign influences therefore created an empire under the control of liminal figures that, contrary to the Han orthodox narrative, were more of the core than the periphery in their own right. The references to a sense of Nanyue "being" in the bells at Luobowan provide an understanding of the "other" as the "self" among the elite buried there, and a clear mixing of different cultures that itself blossomed into the Nanyue identity. In the example

[148] Sima, *Records*, trans. Burton Watson, 226. See also *Shiji* 97.2698.

of the burials at Hepu, we see clear liminality in the example in the foreign jewelry and foreigner figurines, demonstrating yet again this clash between "self" and "other" that deepened the extent of the Nanyue identity into otherwise nameless, faceless aristocratic figures.

In an attempt to draw differences between the royal family and the local officials of the Nanyue, the most valuable takeaway is the differences in the extent of engagement with the Nanyue identity between these two groups. The royal family viewed themselves as a categorization outside of the simple binary of "Han" and "non-Han", instead constructing a third, liminal identity that allowed them to switch between the two when it was convenient. This existed for both Zhao Tuo and Zhao Mo, although Han sources suggest that the latter Han Kings became far more associated with a "Han" identity rather than the native identity. For those outside of the royal family, the textual tradition and archaeological tradition seems to disagree. The textual tradition (clearly biased) reveals that figures such as Lü Jia were painted as firmly non-Han (even though they took Han surnames). The archaeological evidence suggests that this was far more complex; that a blend of Han and non-Han traditions were utilized, thereby suggesting that the lower aristocracy may have also followed the royal family in the maintenance of this third, frontier identity. This, while again a fair generalization because of the lack of tombs that have been discovered in both groups, seems to suggest a far deeper and far more complex relationship with identity that the Nanyue kings and that their surrounding subjects have than most modern historians will grant them. The histories of these groups are important to shine some light on, and giving voices to otherwise mundane objects weave a more comprehensive framework to understand Nanyue and Han relations more broadly.

Conclusions

Figure 4.1. Statues of Zhao Tuo. Left: Statue of Zhao Tuo in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province. Right: Corresponding statue in Heyuan, Guangdong Province. Source: Wikipedia.

I begin this section with these two pictures of our familiar friend and dear conqueror Zhao Tuo. We have picked apart and reimagined away from the inferior subject of the Han suggested in Sima Qian's account to a wily, conniving politician that identified away from the strict Han or non-Han identities supposed in Chapter 1, instead forming a unique Nanyue identity that existed in its own right. On the left is a statue of Zhao Tuo from Hebei Province, a marker of his roots of Zhending and of the Central States, and thus through a long and twisted hereditary route, Chinese identity and belonging. On the right is a statue of Zhao Tuo, sword in one hand

and a forceful gesture in the other, stuck in interpretation. Is he piloting troops to conquer the hinterlands of the barbarian Yue, the inferior and backwards people of the southernmost extent of his homeland? Or is he raring his horse to defend his newfound territory away from the probing and nettlesome juggernauts of the north, a group that dares to extinguish the celebrated traditions of his subjects among his current home, hand raised as if to motion that the buck stops here? In truth, the mere fact that these two statues are in two different places of the then far more fractured Han Dynasty show the fluidity and fickleness of the identity of the Nanyue. Zhao Tuo in the modern Chinese eye is a longer product of historical telling and retelling. He is simultaneously both representative of the strong traditions of the Han cosmopolitan center at Chang'an that his former state of Qin was centered in, and representative of the more mysterious, historically elusive, yet all the same relevant barbarian centers that peppered the south Chinese coastline. This is not to mention his presence in the Vietnamese dynastic histories, where he is seen as the progenitor of the founder of the Trieu Dynasty, or as a foreign usurper from the north. He is represented differently in different cultures, and they all respectively have their own stories and myths of his origin, contributing all to what Anzaldua terms as the borderland identity.

In her seminal work *Borderlands/La Frontera: A New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldua writes:

> "The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country — a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place

> created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal." Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens — whether they possess documents or not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only legitimate "inhabitants" are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with tithes. Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger."[149]

Throughout the course of this thesis, I hope to have laid out a further stepping stone into the wealth of information and discourse around the southern Han frontiers. I have attempted to reframe the understanding of Han and Nanyue relations, and thus the intricate political, social, and cultural ties that the two share with one another, in the framework of Anzaldua's borderlands theory. We cannot posit that the two were necessarily a hybridized, syncretic amalgamation of two cultures into one, but rather out of the ashes of two dominant, clashing cultures, a carefully formulated and calculated liminal identity taken on by the Zhao kings. These kings, spearheaded by Zhao Tuo but extending into the lower aristocracy with figures such as Lü Jia, formed the border culture that Anzaldua describes. Along these borders are not hybridized versions of Han and non-Han culture at the most surface level, but instead, Nanyue cultivated a third political-cultural formation that cannot be reduced to either Han imperial orthodoxy or indigenous Yue identity.

[149] Anzaldua, *Borderlands*, 3.

In order to begin to understand the nuances of this "Nanyue" identity, we first explored the core identities of Han and non-Han. For a generalized view of a Han cosmopolitan identity, we defined it as a) collectivized as a bureaucratic machine that appealed to classical tradition and b) a constant and consistent presence of the foreign "other" to help define the "self." The strong textual tradition that scholars of the Western Han cited from, such as the *Book of Rites*, *Analects*, and others, helped to define the orthodox belief systems of the day. This lends itself to what Pu-Moo Chou describes as an omnipresent and omnipotent presence of the "other" in definition against the "self". The presence of the other in textual tradition from the Warring States period helped to create an imaginary of the extent to which backwardness and primitivity that the Western Han "other" lived in, and this is corroborated by the extensive archaeological material that we see arising from the Han cultural core. Contrarily, but through a similar vein, we also constructed a version of the non-Han identity. Textually speaking, the vision of a non-Han identity is misconstrued by the Han, who stereotype the group as having a strong affinity for a water-based lifestyle, a disease-ridden no man's land, a strong tradition with swords and knives, and a great presence of snakes and dragons, among others. While certainly exaggerated, either to distance the Han "self" from the "other" or in some instances to bridge the gap between the "self" and "other", this is rooted in reality. Archaeological evidence such as funerary goods demonstrate the prevalence of either Southeast Asian (primarily Đông Sơn) cultures to the non-Han imaginary, and the importance of the region as a primary receiver of culture from all over the world, from Persia to Han China, shows how the traditional model of core-periphery fails when applied to the non-Han. We then discuss key issues with generalizations of the Han and non-Han, and while we critique the application of it, it necessitates a basis by which to present the next stage of my argument.

We next turned to the crux of the paper, which was to delve in-depth into the Nanyue identity that is supported by Anzaldua's thesis. In this section, we chose to highlight the emergence of a hybridized culture that existed uniquely among the borderlands, and that was agreed upon (albeit to different extents on an individual basis) by different people across time and space. This thus moves beyond not only the core-periphery model, but even transitions beyond the hybridity or syncretism model supposed by Brindley, suggesting that a third, liminal identity existed and flourished across the hundred years of Nanyue identity. In essence, this is what Benedict Anderson's imagined community is predicated upon: the presence of a shared social identity when groups of people, unbeknownst to one another, uphold the same cultural values that define who they are. We explored this through the lens of each ruler of the Zhao royal family, separating this analysis into three distinct divides: the reign of Zhao Tuo, the reign of Zhao Mo, and the reign of their descendants: Zhao Yingqi, Zhao Xing, and Zhao Jiande. The presence of Tuo's back-and-forth with Emperor Wen shows the fickle nature of his identity, and the beginnings of the emergence of this Nanyue identity. His interactions with Lu Jia, the Han politician who gained Nanyue's so-called "submission," show us that he is a far more conniving character than Sima Qian's narratives grant him credit for. The next king, Zhao Mo, continued the pattern of his father's willingness to rule within a grey zone. The interactions between Mo and King Wen upon invasions in 135 BC, for instance, show us that the Nanyue still relied upon their northern brethren for help, yet continued to disidentify with them when it became convenient to do so. His tomb provides a wealth of information into the dual nature of the Han and non-Han identity conflict, and it is here that I assert is the climax of the Nanyue identity. The dual presence of burial goods that reflect non-Han and Han culture at the same time show a mashing of cultures that thus created a baseline for a Nanyue identity to emerge in its own right.

Zhao Mo's claim to power as the ruler of Nanyue not only politically secured his position amongst who he viewed as his contemporaries, Emperors Wen and Jing of Han, but also the assertion of political (and thus sociocultural) power among his subjects, which solidified a Nanyue culture. This distinction from the Han cultural core and the non-Han cultural core, and the willingness to live in the grey zone, dissolved with the remaining Han rulers. The three remaining rulers were effectively puppets of the Han, and created the basis for Sima Qian's description of Nanyue as far more tied with the Han core than with the non-Han core. The increased sinicization of the Nanyue court eventually led, in the words of Sima Qian, to the downfall of the political state by 111 BC, and with it the Nanyue identity as expressed by Zhao Tuo and Zhao Mo. It is inevitably obvious that this identity remained within local aristocrats or with local rulers after the Han takeover, as Nagel suggests, but this is not ever seen again for all of Chinese history in the same scope and extent. In a broader sense, the Zhao kings show us that the Nanyue identity did exist and that it was not a hybridization of culture, as Brindley and others suggest, that played out along these frontiers. It was instead a strong cultural diffusion that took place from the kings to the remaining aristocracy that we focus on in the next section. Here, we explore the dichotomies of the Han diplomat Lu Jia and the Nanyue politician Lü Jia, and their roles in disseminating their distinct cultures as lower governmental officials. The latter is a very interesting case, because he espouses both traditions of his northern counterpart, yet draws distinct differences between him when revolting against the Han. We also discuss several instances of Han aristocratic tombs displaying Han and non-Han cultural artifacts, most convincing of which is the Hepu tomb finding of the "foodstuffs from the Central Han." Here, most crucially, we find that the Han aristocratic tombs also uphold the same Nanyue identity that the Zhao kings did as well, showing that cultural representations of the Nanyue remained

consistent across time and space and by definition creates Anzaldua's borderland identity: the third, distinct, non-Han and non-barbarian liminal identity. However, as a point of nuance, it is all the more important to note that in broader contexts, Nanyue identity was not universalized across the entire area (because of the muddiness of our understanding in the region) nor was it representative of all frontiers in the South or across all of the Han empire. Using this line of logic, similarly, the idea of a Han cosmopolitan identity and a non-Han barbarian identity also are greatly fragmented beyond my initial generalization as a collective identity. In other words, this is not to say that they don't exist, but that it is far more complicated of an issue that most authors care to delve into.

We can also apply this "Nanyue identity" model into the other frontiers of the Han Dynasty. The northeastern frontier, for example, was Wiman Choson (194-108 BC), a kingdom situated in modern-day Korea and ruled by a former military general of the Central States that carved out his own empire, only to be swallowed up in a little under one hundred years of existence by the expanding Han empire. The parallels to the Nanyue are crystal clear: this is the same story but on a different coastline, and thus we might assume that a distinct Wiman Choson identity may have emerged on that end as well, but this is a topic of future research. The emergence of a unique frontier identity also may have looked different, but still present, with the Xiongnu in the northwest, who is described at length in the *Shiji* as extremely important adversaries of the Han government, and thus threats to the Han cultural core. While it is outside the scope of this paper to explore every single aspect of Han frontier culture, and there are scholars who devote their careers to doing such, it is more useful to perhaps pose several questions that hopefully can prompt further exploration: How do influences from other frontier cultures define the "other"? How can we reimagine the periphery as core, and more importantly,

how can we both unfurl and preserve new lenses to understand history that challenge our traditional views?

Lastly, as I have aimed to emphasize again and again, I hope that this project can (to use a popular Chinese idiom) throw out a brick to attract a jade to further the discussion of the existence of "third identities" along these frontiers. Francis Allard and other sources that I critique in Chapter 2 are important stepping stones and foundations to pry open the traditional narrative that has been told and retold for two thousand years, but I think that their analyses can go further. In analyzing the work of Sima Qian and the textual tradition of the *Shiji*, we can see the emergence of a formulated, liminal identity that emerged with the Zhao kings. Tuo, as a ruler of Nanyue, took on this identity that allowed him to not identify strictly with a Han self or a barbarian other. Instead, Tuo was able to act in a position that allowed him to switch identities, and thus allegiances, far more porously than his contemporaries. By presenting the case of Zhao Tuo, we aimed to challenge traditional interpretations of history and subvert the notion of Nanyue as inferior. The groups that composed the borders of the well-defined Han Empire are portrayed as backwards and given far less attention than they deserve credit for, and the formation of a complete history can only be attained if we tell all sides of the story. Traditions of storytelling, as with the case of Sima Qian, are often used for state propaganda, and to stay truthful and fair to reality is to prevent the muddying of a comprehensive picture of history.

With this point in mind, I finally want to stress this project as an example of the perenniality of history as propaganda. To the modern reader, the story (fanciful oral legacy) of the two over thousand year old Nanyue Kingdom is not the history (stuffy factual interpretation) of the Nanyue. It is an ancient apologue that is a drop in the bucket of the larger Chinese historiography, but one whose story is crucial to today's political leaders. Identity and culture are

key building blocks of political usage that were used just as much in the past as they are today, and the faster that we come to realize the importance of continuing such discussions about the rightful representations of identity, the more effective modern political froufrou can better function to serve the constituents that create what it is. I hearken back to one of the first articles that I read in my year-long pursuit of the historical truth with this project. Historian Diana Lary, writing during growing calls for a return of Hong Kong to the modern nation-state of China because of a cultural tie with Chinese history and the celebration of the traditions (such as the Nanyue) that made Cantonese culture what it is today, claimed that Zhao Mo's tomb represented the cultural backbone of the modern Cantonese's heritage.[150] While admittedly the Cantonese people (if such a term can exist in its own right) is not by blood the same with the ancient Nanyue Kingdom of two thousand years ago, we can still see that modern identity derives its authenticity from historical ones.[151] We imagine ourselves as carrying the torch of our forefathers, and having them live through us by retelling their stories. That is why it is all the more important to tell it as comprehensively as possible, and to revisit topics of identity: it, as Nagel puts it, a (re-)construction of the ways we think, act, and are.

[150] Diana Lary, "The Tomb of the King of Nanyue - The Contemporary Agenda of History: Scholarship and Identity" in Modern China 22, vol. 1 (1996): 3-27. https://www.jstor.org/stable/189288.
[151] It is generally considered, for a wide range of reasons, that the inhabitants on Earth two thousand years ago share little genetic connection with the inhabitants of Earth today. While people still make this claim today for yet again a multitude of reasons, scientific fact disproves any direct biological continuity between ancient peoples and us. For more, see Chang et al., "Editorial: The genetic history of human populations along the ancient silk road." *Frontiers in Genetics* 14 (2023): 1-3. https://doi.org/10.3389/fgene.2023.1130104.

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