

A Comparison of Republican Roman and Han Chinese Barbarian Relations

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For Melissa

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Introduction

It may be argued that in this modern era of computers, automobiles and terrorism there is no use for the past. It is seen as something that is either the dry plaything of academics or the weapon of foreign demagogues. The past is seen as something that is abstract and not applicable to the modern world. For example, how can the petty conflicts of long dead kings and emperors provide a lesson in an age where war is never declared, democracy is sovereign, and a single missile can annihilate an entire country? Surely our distance from the past prohibits any such parallels. History, with its dry musings about ruins and ‘-isms’, has faded into dull irrelevancy and historians with their ‘intellectual masturbation’ are only good for parlor tricks and ‘fun facts’ at parties and social gatherings.

Once I was speaking to a man about the current state of world affairs, particularly about the war in Iraq. I, an ardent critic of the war, argued that the United States should realize its mistake in the war and take action to withdraw honorably. I am not, nor was I ever, so naïve about that war that I would really suggest leaving; I was merely playing devil’s advocate to the obviously conservative man, the sort of Central Pennsylvanian Republican that surrounded my very Democratic, Western Pennsylvanian family. The man adamantly disagreed with my position. His response was not surprising but his reasoning was. Knowing that I was a History major, he felt that he should frame his argument in terms that I would understand. The United States needed to fight the ‘barbarians’ so they would not come to America and topple the shining beacon of civilization. He was thoroughly convinced that the United States was the new Rome and the Islamic extremists were nothing more than backward savages that could not bear to see the light of American achievement stand. To him, Americans have the duty to do

what the Romans could not do, that is, keep their empire together and prevent the world from plunging into darkness for a thousand years!

My companion's ill-informed opinion showed me two things that would eventually influence the writing of this paper. First, it demonstrated that history is still alive and relevant in the present. This man, who has a standard American public education, was dimly aware of the events that led to the fall of the Roman Empire. Not only did he know only the basic narrative of this complex historical process, but he also used that history to influence his own political mentality. Secondly, the concept of a modern barbarian was still alive outside the pages of R.E. Howard. Not only that, but these barbarians were not relegated to the wild places of the world, but constituted a large population in this man's eyes. Simply put, these barbarians were the enemy and needed to be stopped.

I had seen, in my lifetime, the American perspective of the Islamic east change from a land that supplied oil, to a savage land filled with wild-eyed Islamic terrorists. I had seen the process of a people being demonized with the use of history. American foreign policy with the Middle East had turned into American-barbarian relations. I saw the same things that I had always read about in my history books: rampant xenophobia, a divide and conquer mentality, and the rhetoric of 'civilizing' the barbarians, which now had been given a new name, 'democratization.' The US was not only undergoing these ancient processes, it also had to reconcile its new position with the millions of multi-ethnic Americans that made up its population. I recognized that if these things were happening now, it was worth investigating them in the past. However, it was not only

necessary to study such processes in the west; I needed to see such developments from another temporal/spatial perspective and, more specifically, a comparative one.

Focus of Research

The Late Roman Republic was an era of unprecedented expansion that brought the Romans into contact with many peoples that would eventually be conquered and subsumed within the greater Roman Empire. However, no foreign conquest would capture the minds of the Romans more than their interaction with the peoples of Gaul. The Romans had created their empire in the presence of the Gauls, whom they historically both feared and respected. Early conflict during Rome's early history and the willingness of the peoples of Gaul to participate in Rome's foreign wars and political strife created an image of ferocity and aggressiveness. This relationship created an interesting place for these so-called 'Gauls' in Roman society once they were conquered by Caesar during the 50s B.C.E.

Han China also is known famously within historical circles for its barbarian relations, particularly for its long conflicts with the Xiongnu, pastoralist peoples that inhabited much of the territory of modern day Mongolia. As the first long-lasting unified Chinese dynasty, the Han created what is known today as the Chinese empire. They dealt with the ideas of expansion and the problem of spreading Chinese influence over the entire area of East Asia. The Han were also known for the fact that they were strong-armed by the very peoples, such as the Xiongnu, they wished to conquer for a full sixty years.

Both Rome and China would eventually conquer and at least partially bring such neighboring peoples into their empire. While they both had a similar early relationship,

and conquered peripheral peoples in similar ways, the means by which they assimilated the conquered peoples was very different. This difference stems from the fact that each empire defined themselves and their people differently. Rome defined itself *legally* while China defined itself *culturally*. I propose that it was specifically these definitions that shaped each empire's relationships with what they considered to be barbarian populations on their periphery. Each culture reacted to the other according to their own self definition and identity, identities which were shaped through contact, exchange and at times warfare. As such, the influence and evolution of each empire's identity can be seen in each stage of the relationships they created with neighboring territories and their peoples.

Thesis Structure

I have divided the chronology of the stages noted above into three parts: 1) pre-conquest, 2) conflict, 3) and post-conquest. In pre-conquest relations, I will discuss each civilization's early relations with their barbarian groups. Both Rome and China encountered and interacted with aggressive neighboring populations before they became large empires themselves. The pre-conquest relations section seeks to analyze the structure and characteristics of these early interactions to determine how patterns of eventual animosity may have formed.

The conflict section focuses on the unique strategies that were employed by both empires to eventually conquer their neighbors. In this case, each civilization's conflicts with barbarians are an integral part of what may be called the barbarian relations *narrative* and as such reveals a great deal about each culture's attitudes and perceptions of their conquered neighbors. Moreover, by investigating the processes that led to the eventual conquering of such peoples, it is possible to learn about their social structure. In

much the same way as an engineer studies structural collapse, we can glean a great deal of information on a non-literate society's socio-political organization by studying how it shifted under pressure and eventually collapsed through interaction with powerful neighboring empires.

The assimilation section shows how each empire assimilated the conquered barbarians. This section aims to show that each empire assimilated barbarians according to their own identity. The Chinese sought to make the conquered 'Xiongnu' culturally Chinese, while the Romans sought to make the 'Gauls' legally Roman. By looking at how each empire assimilated its barbarian neighbors we can see how they defined themselves. Each phase of the narrative is brought together with a comparison section, where both cases are examined side by side.

Recent Trends in the Study of Identity and Culture Change

In researching such historical events and processes for this thesis, the topic of 'identity' and recent scholarship surrounding its interpretation was an important consideration. This topic has received a great deal of attention from scholars over the last decade.¹ In the modern age it is hard to imagine how ancient peoples defined themselves without the concept of the nation. There is no doubt that all human groups seek to define themselves and stand away from those that they consider foreign. It is a process that spans continents and millennia and can be seen from the earliest people of Eurasia, to the street gangs of modern cities. The human need for group cohesion and identity has motivated conflict and cooperation throughout human history. This process is never stronger than when a

¹ Sian Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1997)., Peter Wells, *The Barbarians Speak* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).; Peter S. Wells, *Beyond Celts Germans and Scythians*, ed. Richard Hodges, Duckworth Debates in Archaeology (London: Duckworth, 2001).; R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead, *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare* (Santa Fe School of American Research Press, 1992).

group is faced with a neighbor that is fundamentally different in some way.² Such ‘Others’ were frequently featured in the writings of many early civilizations. While many cultures fought, fraternized, and feared the Other they were inexorably linked, for the Other was often the catalyst for the formation of their identity. In the case of Rome and China this identity was precipitated by peripheral groups that were present in their early histories. Rome would create a legal and constitutional identity spurred on by their perceived governmental differences from the peoples of Gaul. China would create a cultural definition based on their lifestyle differences from the peoples called Xiongnu. Both empires would keep this early definition throughout their imperial history.

However, the formation of a group identity is not the end of the process. As these powerful groups emerged as empires, they would come to conquer and assimilate the very groups that had contributed to bringing them into ‘being’. After the conquest, they would bring these peripheral groups into the identity that they had helped create. Each empire assimilated their subjects according to their own group identity. The Romans would use citizenship as a powerful motivator for bringing the Gauls into the constitutional and legal entity that was the Roman Empire. The Chinese, on the other hand, urged and sometimes coerced the conquered Xiongnu into adopting the Chinese way of life. To do this, it was necessary for some Xiongnu peoples to abandon their nomadic ways of life.

This paper examines the process of barbarian relations and hopes to not only explore the historical events of each case study, but also to examine the anthropological process at work within barbarian relations. It can be seen in each case study that each barbarian group had an impact on the state society’s sense of collective identity and that

² Wells, *Beyond Celts Germans and Scythians*, 22.

each empire helped precipitate the formation of the tribal society's identity. Once formed, these identities clashed in open armed conflict. Once defeated, each barbarian group was brought into the identity of its conqueror differently according to the conqueror's identity. The Romans, who had defined themselves through their constitution and laws, absorbed the Gauls by incorporating their nobility into the Roman administrative framework. This administrative framework then facilitated natural Roman cultural assimilation. The Chinese, who defined themselves culturally, created a policy of cultural assimilation that facilitated the administration of the surrendered Xiongnu. By first assimilating the Xiongnu culturally, the Chinese were able to manage them with their normal administrative system and secure those lands that had been traditionally in Xiongnu hands. Identity plays a key role throughout such social and cultural change. However, it is not a one-way process as the barbarians had just as big a role in the formation of the state identity as the state had in the formation of the barbarian's identity.

This comparative study's large breadth and scope is at once a blessing and a curse for its undergraduate author. It is able to 'zoom out' and draw larger conclusions about the interaction between non-literate tribal societies and literate organized states as a broader historical/anthropological phenomenon. Also, when juxtaposed against a completely distinct society, new insights can be gained about both Rome and China that could not be learned from just studying them individually. Lastly, it draws inspiration from a number of sub-disciplines (i.e. Anthropology, Archaeology, etc.) in order to examine these important historical processes that both shaped the neighboring peoples and territories at the periphery of Rome and China, but also the empires themselves. Such a comparative approach, of course, has its definite disadvantages because of such a broad scope. For

example, during the research and writing of this paper, the author stumbled across the many nuances of steppe societies, fell into the study of Celtic and Germanic linguistics, and was caught in the crossfire of the Indo-European debate. One could very easily make an entire academic career exploring the topic of comparative barbarian relations! Nevertheless, through undertaking this comparative analysis, many important and complex processes associated with culture contact, historical change and the development of new socio-political structures were revealed to the author and the utility of such studies became acknowledged through the process of writing. In sum, it has been a very enlightening project.

Han and Xiongnu Pre-Conquest Relations

To better understand the relationship between Han China and its nomadic neighbors, it is necessary to look at the frontier as a geographical and cultural region. Owen Lattimore, writing in the 1930's, states that northwest China developed economically at the end of the Neolithic period, when many groups transitioned from hunting and gathering to either agriculture or pastoral nomadism.³ Lattimore suggests that the primary economic activity of a group was determined by the climate and suitability of the land for either farming or herding; the people of the Chinese plain, with its temperate moist soil adopted farming while the people of the Mongolian steppes adopted herding as their primary means of support.⁴ Christian suggests that pastoralists and agriculturalists differentiated at the end of the last ice age during the so-called "Neolithic revolution."⁵

³ Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 55.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ David Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 1998), 70.

Another theory suggests that the differentiation between Chinese agriculture and central Asian pastoralism arose as a result of desiccation of the northern reaches of the frontier. It is thought that the area that was the Chinese/Xiongnu frontier was suitable for intense agriculture until several centuries before written records. Climatic change then began to dry out the northern grasslands until people were forced to rely on their herds for their livelihood.⁶ This theory may explain the isolated pockets of agriculturalists deep within regions normally considered to be nomadic.

There is, however, no definite line that separates the pastoral peoples and agricultural peoples in Eastern Asia. The frontier is a gradual transition from agricultural plain to semi-arid steppe. Also, the transition is not uniform. The frontier region was a patchwork of varying climates that forced early communities to adapt to specific local conditions in order to survive. Some groups living there developed a mixed economy that included both agriculture and herding, thereby creating a cultural and economic zone that was neither Chinese nor barbarian. In fact, the people of this region were sometimes considered completely separate from either the Xiongnu or the Chinese.⁷

As the economic differences between the sedentary and nomadic societies of the northwest frontier became greater, so did their cultural differences. Culture is often defined by economic realities and local conditions that shape the way of life and customs of specific groups. In the case of the Han, and peoples inhabiting their northern borders, this difference arose out of their two vastly different ways of life.

⁶ Nicola Di Cosmo, "Ancient Inner Asian Nomads: Their Economic Basis and Its Significance in Chinese History," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 4 (1994): 1094.

⁷ Sima Qian, "Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II," (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 141.

Xiongnu Culture

The nomadic culture of the Xiongnu was one of power and movement. A nomadic society derives its wealth, power and lifeblood from the vast herds of animals that it shepherds from one grazing land to another; using them for food, clothing and shelter. A large herd of animals, which represents significant wealth for the owner, can be destroyed very quickly either by disease or famine. Also, herds are more easily stolen than sedentary forms of wealth, since they can move under their own power. As a consequence, nomad society put a heavy emphasis on mobility and the ability to protect the herds, which required horsemanship and martial prowess. The precariousness of the nomad economy created a culture that had very little use for luxury items. Land was not valued in the same way as in sedentary societies. Ownership of land was not important, but the right to move upon the land and extract its resources was of paramount importance. Pastoralist economies produced very few prestige goods.⁸ That being said, it does not mean that the nomad nobility did not partake in some of the finer things. These were, however, a means of showing power and influence. In order to both increase and sustain social power, nomad 'chiefs' held feasts and redistributed wealth. Such wealth often comprised non-local or prestige items that were not available locally. A steady supply of such wealth was required in order to maintain a foundation of political authority and social power. In the case of the Xiongnu, wealth was extracted from various weaker sedentary and pastoralist groups.⁹

⁸ Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*, 190.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Han Culture

Chinese culture was built around the large and productive fields that provided the subsistence base of millet and wheat that fed the Chinese state. Agriculture inherently puts a value on land and the skill and labor to work it. Agriculture differs from nomadism in that the products derived from farming can be stored for the long term. Grain could be put in silos for later use and did not need to be maintained once it was harvested. Agriculture was also more productive than nomadism, which allowed the Chinese to develop urban centers full of specialists who were free to pursue trades that were not involved with farming. These urban centers also became the nexus of political power in the Chinese state as lords in the cities administered the farming villages in the countryside. This system created a need for competent administrators and leaders to manage the large infrastructure that directed the distribution of food and other products. Often, the most competent managers were those who were older and more experienced. The old were also held in high regard as keepers of knowledge that made the fields productive.

Agricultural surpluses meant that large armies of peasant conscripts could be raised. Early on, it was discovered that martial skill could be overcome with sheer numbers. What greatly supports battles in a sedentary society is not the prowess of the individual soldier, but his ability to stay sustained in battle. The ability of the Han military generals was also an important factor. The most powerful members of Chinese society were those who could lead others and ensure the livelihood of the peasants under them. Luxury goods, while more abundant, were less important as a symbol of political power than in nomad society. Members of Chinese society who were prosperous were not necessarily politically powerful. For example, merchants commanded a great deal of

wealth in Chinese society. They were, however, kept out of positions of leadership during the Qin and Han dynasties. Land was a greater symbol of power in Chinese society. Whoever owned land not only possessed monetary wealth, but also the human labor that lived on their lands.

The ill-defined northern frontier presented a difficulty for the Chinese in setting a natural delineation between what was Chinese and what was not. Many leaders tried to initiate zones of ‘Chineseness’, which became gradually more ‘barbaric’ as the distance from China increased.¹⁰ The idea of these zones permeated the thoughts of Han policy makers. Han political policy differentiated barbarian groups into various categories based on their “nearness” to China.¹¹ These categories, in reality, had very little to with geography and physical distance and rather focused on the group’s relationship in terms of culture and friendliness to the Han government. Groups that had submitted to Han rule and taxation were considered “inner” barbarians while groups who were outside of the Han sphere of influence were considered “outer” barbarians.¹² By putting groups in these categories, the Han administration incited internecine conflict between various pastoralist peoples.¹³

Nevertheless, the Chinese “zone” model was not entirely accurate. While it was true that the frontier could be distinguished into zones, the frontier was not an even gradation. Even today the boundary between China and Mongolia is a not a steady gradation. It is, in many places, a patchwork of varying landscapes and climates. This patchwork further frustrated Chinese frontier policy makers in creating a secure frontier.

¹⁰ Yü Ying-shih, *Trade and Expansion in Han China: A Study in the Structure of Sino-Barbarian Economic Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1967), 66.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 67.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

Trying to distinguish what was Chinese and what was not was a task partly accomplished by the Great Wall.¹⁴ The wall, besides being a fortification, was a checkpoint and a very visible line of demarcation between what was considered to be civilization and what was thought of as barbarism. By building the Great Wall, the Chinese were able to create a physical and mental barrier between the often ill-defined regions of ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarism’.¹⁵ Nevertheless, mixed economic groups on either side of the wall would pass through it in order to graze their herds or trade with groups beyond the wall. This proved to be a problem in times of war, particularly when China was trying to stop the people on the frontier from aiding the enemy.¹⁶

China’s northwest frontier was a fluid, heterogeneous region that was a major factor in shaping Chinese frontier policy. The interface between nomadic and sedentary civilizations created an immense area that was very different from China proper. Its varied geography and its mixed economy created an administrative challenge throughout the Han dynasty. Despite the barrier of the Great Wall and a garrison of Chinese troops and friendly barbarians, the northwest frontier was porous and often allowed hostile tribes to raid Chinese territory. The Han dynasty’s greatest barbarian adversary, the Xiongnu, would use this open frontier to extort China for several decades prior to emperor Wu.

Even though the Chinese were aware of other pastoralist groups to the West and North, it was the specifically the Xiongnu confederation that Sima Qian focuses on in his account of the Han dynasty. In Sima Qian, there are several pastoralist groups mentioned

¹⁴ Pu Muzhou, *Enemies of Civilization: Attitudes toward Foreigners in Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 126.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Michael Loewe, *Records of Han Administration* 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 63.

in the areas that would be occupied by the Xiongnu, notably the Rong and Di tribes who were expelled from the region south of the bend of the Yellow river by Meng Tian.¹⁷ This being said, Sima Qian writes, shortly after mentioning the Rong and Di, that Meng Tian “had struck terror into the Xiongnu people”.¹⁸ This seems to indicate that the Chinese recognized the Xiongnu as a unified political force, but were also aware that they were a tribal confederation with distinct constituent parts. This is not surprising, since these pastoralist groups had been in contact with Chinese border states for centuries. To ensure a secure border and reliable mercenaries, Chinese rulers, whether from the warring states or the imperial court, would need to be keenly aware of the political situation in the steppes. However, Christian states that the Xiongnu confederation emerged around 200-133 B.C.E. This is too late to be contemporaneous with anything in the Qin dynasty (221-206 B.C.E.).¹⁹ It may be that Sima Qian is reading from a source that mentions the Rong and Di and just assumes that they were members of the Xiongnu confederation at the time. Nevertheless, he still recognizes these tribes as members of the “Xiongnu”. The Chinese knowledge of steppe polities can also be seen in later accounts of the Xiongnu. In these accounts other, non Xiongnu tribes are mentioned.²⁰ These are usually tribes that are potentially friendly to the Han court. It seems likely that the name Xiongnu was a generic term used to denote nomads that were hostile to the Han court. However, Christian suggests that the term Xiongnu recognized one of the three major pastoralist organizations of the period: the Xiongnu, Tung-hu and Yüeh-chih.²¹

¹⁷ Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin Dynasty*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 207-08.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁹ Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*, 184.

²⁰ Sima, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II*, 152-53. Here, the Hunye and Xiutu tribes are only considered distinct entities when they surrender to China.

²¹ Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*, 184.

The Xiongnu confederacy rose to power within Inner Mongolia around the same time as the Han dynasty emerged from the ashes of the fallen Qin in the early second century B.C.E. The nomads felt that there was a definite threat from a resurgent Chinese empire.²² As a result, the Xiongnu created a powerful nomadic empire – the likes of which would not be seen again until the Mongols and Genghis Kahn in the 13th century C.E. Through force and fear they would extort the Han government into an embarrassing treaty that would become a blight on Chinese foreign policy for years.

During the early years of the Han, the Xiongnu raided the frontier zone taking goods and killing Chinese citizens. To ameliorate the problem, the Chinese created the *Heqin* treaty to keep the barbarian raiders at bay. The treaty stipulated that the Han court would provide goods such as silk and grain, as well as a Han princess to go to the Xiongnu court as a hostage. In return, the Xiongnu would promise not to raid the Chinese frontier.²³

The *Heqin* treaty was thinly masked bribery, which was absolutely necessary for both the early Han government and the Xiongnu Empire. The Xiongnu posed a very real military threat to the Han government, which was weakened by years of civil war. At one point, a large Xiongnu raid managed to get within sight of the capitol.²⁴ According to Psarras, the Han had always had the resources, both military and economic, to deal with the Xiongnu.²⁵ However, those resources were tied up in huge infantry armies that were slow to muster and ponderous to command. These armies were well suited for the large set piece battles of the Warring States period (452-221 B.C.E.), but were unsuited for the

²² Cosmo, "Ancient Inner Asian Nomads: Their Economic Basis and Its Significance in Chinese History," 1093.

²³ Ying-shih, *Trade and Expansion in Han China*, 41.

²⁴ Sima, "Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II," 145.

²⁵ Sophia-Karin Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu," *Monumenta serica* 51 (2003): 64.

fast raiding warfare that the Xiongnu practiced. While armies in the north had cavalry, they were slow to deploy as well and were too small a force to be effective.²⁶ During the raid of 167 B.C.E., the Han mustered an army of 1,000 chariots and 100,000 cavalry.²⁷ While this may seem like an overwhelming military response, it must be remembered that military force means nothing if it cannot be both managed and applied in battle effectively. During this early period of interaction, the Han seemed to have trouble projecting power within Central Asia and their empire. A key difference between the Xiongnu cavalry forces and those of the Han is stamina. The vast majority of Xiongnu men were not only citizens, but soldiers always training to fight in the saddle, while the Han troops on the other hand were part-time conscripts. Xiongnu horsemen were always ready to fight either as an attack or defense force, while the Han cavalry had to be called up, organized, and then sent after the Xiongnu raiders. By the time the Han had organized the appropriate military response, the Xiongnu had completed their raid and were safely across the border. Han cavalry also needed a large baggage train for support and were a significant drain on the state resources when deployed. For this reason, pre-Wudi emperors would not keep the armies against Xiongnu raids in the field for long and would not follow the Xiongnu raiders across the border.

An interesting example of the pre-Wudi militaries cumbersomeness is reflected in Sima Qian's account of a large Xiongnu raid in 176 B.C.E.:

²⁶ Chun-shu Chang, "Military Aspects of Han Wu-Ti's Northern and Northwestern Campaigns," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 26 (1966): 167.

²⁷ Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu," 139.

Emperor Wen appointed the Palace military commander Zhou She and the chief of palace attendants Zhang Wu as generals and put them in command a force of 1,000 chariots and 100,000 horsemen...The *Shanyu* remained within the borders of the empire for a little over a month and then withdrew. The Han forces pursued him beyond the frontier but returned without having been able to kill any of the enemy.²⁸

During a raid, the Xiongnu would mass within their territory and across the border into the frontier region and beyond. There they would pillage and burn whatever they could. Once news arrived that a Chinese army was mustering, they retreated back across the border.²⁹ The raid was meant to be destructive and frightening, in order to intimidate the Han court. That being said, as Thomas Barfield argues, the Xiongnu had no intention to conquer China or dismantle the Han regime.³⁰ The Xiongnu needed the *Heqin* in order to keep tribute flowing and ultimately to retain strong political alliances with other tribal entities.

The Xiongnu system was a sort of “reverse feudal” system where the Xiongnu chief, or *Shanyu*, would distribute gifts to his immediate subordinates in order to ensure their loyalty. These individuals would in turn distribute some of these gifts down to their immediate subordinates. These gifts would trickle down from the *Shanyu*, all the way down to petty Xiongnu officials who held titles such as “Master of One Hundred” or “Master of Ten.”³¹ These titles were part of the highly organized decimal system that was created by the Xiongnu. Such a system was useful for administering smaller tribal units of a few thousand at the most, and was obviously very dependent on the success of

²⁸ Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II*, 145.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Thomas J. Barfield, "The Hsiung-Nu Imperial Confederacy: Organization and Foreign Policy," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 41, no. 1 (1981): 54.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

the *Shanyu* in acquiring gifts and wealth for redistribution.³² This is where the *Heqin* treaty became so important³³ and ultimately essential in two important ways: First, it created a steady supply of gifts that would not bankrupt the Chinese state, thus ensuring its continual supply. Second, it buttressed the *Shanyu*'s position as leader of the Xiongnu, demonstrating that he was powerful enough to force concessions from the mighty Chinese empire.³⁴ The *Shanyu* needed to prove that the *Heqin* treaty was a result of his power and authority. The periodic renewing of the treaty whenever a new leader came to power or after a violation on either side was not only a reaffirmation of goodwill between China and the Xiongnu, but an act of supplication in the eyes of the Xiongnu. The treaty was renewed when a new *Shanyu* came to power to show that the Chinese were bowing to his power, not to the power of his predecessor. The treaty was also renewed when a new Chinese emperor came to power in order for the *Shanyu* to show that he had this emperor under control in same way as the previous emperor. The Chinese viewed this as arrogance and would later use it as a rationale for their military campaigns. A famous quote from the Shiji, by Zhonghang Yue, a turncoat Han official, to the Chinese ambassadors illustrates this very well:

Not so much talk from the Han envoys! Just make sure that the silks and grainstuffs you bring to the Xiongnu are of the right measure and quality, that's all. What's the need for talking? If the goods you deliver are up to measure and are of good quality, all right. But if there is any deficiency or the quality is no good, then when the autumn harvest comes we will take our horses and trample all over your crops!³⁵

While it is true that the Shiji was written during the reign of Wudi and is to an extent a justification for Wudi's campaigns against the Xiongnu, it can be reasonably imagined

³² Ibid., 48.

³³ Ibid., 49.

³⁴ Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu."

³⁵ Qian, "Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II," 144-45.

that the *Shanyu* would act this way toward the Han envoys. The *Shanyu* needed to assert his dominance over the Han in order to assert his dominance over his subordinates. If the *Shanyu* did not show that he was in control, elements of his state would begin to fragment and initiate their own states independent of the *Shanyu*.

In 177 B.C.E., The Xiongnu official, the Wise King of the Right, led a massive raid on the frontier. The raid followed the standard Xiongnu pattern, with the Xiongnu retreating once a Han army had been mustered. The raid of 177 was different in that the *Shanyu* later apologized for the incident. The letter recorded in the Shiji is polite, tactful and almost penitent. In the letter the *Shanyu* assures the Emperor that the attack was not by his command and that the Wise King of the Right has been duly punished by reassignment.³⁶ The letter gives an interesting insight into Xiongnu state and its foreign policy.

First, it gives us a glimpse into how the Xiongnu state worked internally. The Wise King of the Right obviously disobeyed his leader, defied the *Shanyu*'s power and created a major diplomatic incident. It could be easily imagined that a modern nation would accuse such a man of treason. Nevertheless, the Wise King of the Right was given a relatively light sentence. He was sent to a far western region where he conquered the Yuezhi.³⁷ One would wonder why a rebellious noble like the Wise King of the Right would not be executed in a society where "in times of peace anyone who draws his sword farther than one foot from its scabbard is put to death."³⁸ The Wise King of the Right was one of the two subordinates directly under the *Shanyu* and was thus a very powerful noble. In the Xiongnu system, a tribal leader was most likely loyal to his immediate

³⁶ Ibid., 140.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 137.

superior, who provided him with the gifts and subsidies that kept him in his place within the pecking order. The Wise King of the Right had half of the Xiongnu state beholden to him. If the *Shanyu* would have moved to punish him, it could have caused a major civil conflict within the Xiongnu state. A civil war would have been disastrous for the Xiongnu, who needed to present a united front in order to extract the tribute from the Chinese which kept the Xiongnu Empire together. The possibility of civil war can be seen in the body of the letter itself. The Han government, once it was aware of the divide within the Xiongnu, patiently waited to see what would happen next. The *Shanyu* mentions this in the letter published in the Shiji:

The emperor has twice sent letters complaining of the situation and I have in turn dispatched an envoy with my answer, but my envoy has not been allowed to return, nor has any envoy come from the Han.³⁹

The Han were most likely waiting to see how the situation developed across the frontier. A split in the Xiongnu would allow the Han to break the Xiongnu power and shift the political advantage in their favor, as they would do during the later Han dynasty. The *Shanyu* defused the situation by reassigning the Wise King of the Right. In the West, he was out of the way politically and was kept busy fighting another tribe. The raid of 177 says a great deal about the nature of the *Shanyu*'s power. It shows that the Xiongnu state was a voluntary confederation, one that was very dependent on its leader's personality and management skills.

The letter in the Shiji also speaks volumes about the relationship between the Xiongnu and the Han. The letter shows how the *Shanyu* wished to reestablish the *Heqin*, once his domestic matters were resolved. With the same stroke of the pen, the *Shanyu* explained away the breach of the treaty and coerced the emperor to return to the status

³⁹ Ibid., 140.

quo. The *Shanyu* even used the punishment of the Wise King of the Right to his advantage and even described the Wise King's conquests with a touch of pride.

Through the aid of heaven, the excellence of his fighting men and the strength of his horses, he has succeeded in wiping out the Yuezihi, slaughtering and forcing to submission every member of the tribe. In addition he has conquered the Loulan, Wusun, and the Hujie tribes, as well as twenty-six states nearby, so that all of them have become part of the Xiongnu nation. All the people who live by drawing a bow are now united into one family and the entire region of the north is at peace.⁴⁰

In this passage the *Shanyu* is not only saying that, after a brief interruption, the Xiongnu house is in order, but also that it is larger and more powerful than ever. The thinly veiled threat is followed by a commitment to peace, a desire to lay down arms and return to recent peaceful times, a time when petty Xiongnu kings knew their place, the inner barbarians didn't revolt, and the Han court paid their dues to the *Shanyu*. The *Shanyu* was back in a big way, and he wanted the Han court to know this. With the letter came a token gift of a few horses and camels.⁴¹

The deliberation in the Han court was brief and decisive. Sima Qian says that the decision was unanimous among the court advisors. It was better to make peace with the Xiongnu rather than attack them, a decision that was made partly out of fear and partly out of pragmatism. On one hand the Xiongnu were a solid threat again, a horse-mounted bully that was cracking its knuckles in front of the Han court after a brief illness. On the other hand the Xiongnu had nothing the Emperor wanted. Their lands were nothing but "swamps and saline wastes," not worth the manpower or the money required to conquer

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 141.

them.⁴² In the early decades of the Han dynasty, with its constant threat of rebellion, both needed to be used very wisely.

The *Shanyu*'s letter was reciprocated with a polite reply, saying that the *Shanyu*'s words were "the way the sage rulers of antiquity would have spoken."⁴³ The Emperor agreed with the *Shanyu*'s terms only contending one point; the assertion that the Han frontier officials were responsible for the incident. With the letter came a gift that far out-valued the gift given by the *Shanyu*. While it seems that Han had rolled over and submitted to the barbarian, it must be remembered they were in a very precarious position. The Han was still not settled as the ruler of all of China nearly a full fifty years after the end of the civil wars that spawned it. Indeed, the idea of a unified China was only about 100 years old. The threat of rebellions, whether from internal Chinese rebels or from the "inner barbarians" that encircled the empire, was ever present. A war with the Xiongnu was nearly an open invitation for dissidents within the Han Empire to rise up in rebellion. Throughout Chinese history, steppe nomads from the north have been used as tools by the various warring states. Before Qin Shihuangdi, the states bordering the territories that would eventually belong to the Xiongnu had used the nomads as mercenaries and constructed walls to defend against them. The thought of using the Xiongnu for political and military advantage had not died out after unification; it had just become more dangerous. A plot against the Han government in 154 is recorded in the

Shiji:

A year or so later the emperor Wen passed away and emperor Jing came to the throne. At this time Liu Sui, the king of Zhao, sent envoys in secret to negotiate with the Xiongnu. When Wu, Chu, Zhao and the other states revolted, the Xiongnu planned to cooperate with Zhao and cross the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 142.

border, but the Han forces besieged and defeated the King of Zhao, and the Xiongnu called off their plans for an invasion.⁴⁴

The threat of internal rebellion was one of the main reasons that the pre-Wudi Han emperors needed to appease the Xiongnu. The army needed to be close at hand in order to quickly squash internal rebels before they could solicit much Xiongnu help. The imperial response to the rebellion was swift and surgical. It was aimed at the head of the rebellion, the King of Wu, who had enlisted the aid of the other states as well as that of the Xiongnu. The swift, precise response to this rebellion stands in marked contrast to the slow, almost clumsy responses to the Xiongnu incursions. This reveals two things: Either the rebels were as slow to muster their forces as the Han government, therefore making the Han response seem swift, or the Han response was uncharacteristically fast given the dire danger of the event. Either explanation shows some interesting qualities of the Han/Xiongnu relationship. If the rebellion unfolded in the careful ponderous fashion of the warring states period, then the Xiongnu were biding their time during the Han civil strife in the same way that the Han sat back in 177. If the rebellion was a quick affair, then it shows that the Han responses to the Xiongnu raids were not slow and inadequate by incompetence and feebleness, but by choice. The Han knew that they were not able to respond quickly enough and therefore did not try to do so. The Han armies were a mere formality, the final message to the Xiongnu to get out of the imperial borders.⁴⁵ It seems that the former, rather than the latter, is the more likely explanation. The Xiongnu were not sure with whom to throw in their lot. This is further bolstered by the fact that the Xiongnu stopped their support of the rebellion once the king of Zhao was dead. The Xiongnu knew that their favorable treaty was negotiable if the Han government ever fell

⁴⁴ Ibid., 148.

⁴⁵ Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu," 64.

or was replaced with a new, more militarily proactive regime. All the accounts of treaty breaks and wars between the Han and the Xiongnu beg the questions: Was the *Heqin* treaty effective and beneficial to the Han? Did they keep renewing the *Heqin* because it was a satisfactory solution to the longstanding barbarian problem, or because it was necessary for the survival of the early Han?

Despite its being broken several times during its existence, the *Heqin* treaty gave many years of peaceful coexistence for both the Han and the Xiongnu. If the period of the *Heqin* from 200-133 B.C.E. is examined, it can be seen that there were only three major breaks, which were quickly mended.⁴⁶ From the Chinese point of view, these long periods of peace and cooperative trade must have seemed preferable to constant raids along the frontier. While it may have been preferable to have a steady bilateral treaty, the Han dynasty simply did not have the ability to force a better deal. The *Heqin* treaty was a settlement that was good for the time but could not be sustained, since there was nothing keeping the Xiongnu accountable for their end of the bargain. The Xiongnu knew this and used this to periodically attack to renegotiate the treaty.⁴⁷ Over the course of the *Heqin* treaty the Xiongnu become bolder and bolder in regard to their raids. What was once a treaty that required a Han princess and material tributes later came to include cash payments and trading rights. The Han government was being bullied into ever increasing tribute.

However, the biggest problem with the *Heqin* was not the economic concessions, but the language of political equality within the treaty. The treaty stipulated that the Han and Xiongnu were “brother” states. While the statement was worded in such a way that

⁴⁶ Ibid., 141.

⁴⁷ Yü, *Trade and Expansion in Han China*, 41.

the Han government was considered the “older” brother, it was still a political insult that was too much for the Han court to bear.⁴⁸ Chinese political theory dictated that Chinese culture and government was the pinnacle of civilization. By the time of Emperor Wu, the Han emperor, who was called the Son of Heaven, was thought to literally have a mandate from heaven. The tributary relationship of the Han government with the Xiongnu was incompatible with this superiority theory. There could not be two sons of Heaven, in the eyes of the Han court. The increased tribute paid by the Han court not only increased the economic burden, but also increased the shame of the arrangement.

The Xiongnu were not the only group of barbarians that offended the Chinese superiority theory. South of the Han empire was the kingdom of the Nan Yue. The province was conquered during the Qin dynasty, settled with convicts, and placed under the command of a military governor. When the Qin dynasty began to collapse, the governor of the territory did not take part in the civil war, but sought to expand his own territory in the south of China. Once the dust had settled and the Han had risen to power, the governor was enfeoffed as the King of Yue, pardoned for his previous aggression against southern China and given the joint tallies of a feudal lord. The move was appeasement and stalling in its finest form. Again, the early Han dynasty had other, more pressing internal troubles that prevented it from reigning in the errant province.

Allowing a barbarian kingdom led by a former Han official was never meant to be a permanent solution to the problem. Like the Xiongnu, the Nan Yue were offensive to the Han dynasty’s theory of political superiority. Unlike the Xiongnu, however, they were not a serious threat to the stability of the empire in the early years of the dynasty.

⁴⁸ Yü Ying-shih, "Han Foreign Relations," in *Cambridge History of China*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 386.

The Nan Yue's crime was that of inciting the ire of the Han court by flaunting their equality to the China, even going so far as setting up a parallel Chinese court in Yue.

Suma Qian describes the actions of the King of Yue:

He then began to ride around in a carriage with a yellow top, decorated with plumes on the left, and to call his orders "edicts" in imitation of the Han emperor, all of which were intended to show he was the equal of the ruler of China.

The kings of Yue managed to mock the Han court with imitation for many years until they were targeted by Emperor Wu's barbarian campaigns.

The Han decision to finally break the *Heqin* was part policy and part pragmatism. It was a decision that was a long time in the making, beginning during the reign of Wen-di.⁴⁹ Wen-di began a policy of consolidation and financial saving in order to shore up the empire to confront the Xiongnu.⁵⁰ However, he did not live long enough to see the policy go into effect. It would be up to his grandson, Wudi, to finally break the Xiongnu extortion.

At the beginning of his reign, Wudi, like many Han emperors before him, renewed the *Heqin*, following the advice of his advisors. He inherited from Wen-di a huge budget surplus and a China that had not been so firmly united since Qinshihuangdi. From the start of his reign, Wudi was determined to create a China that was the dominate power in the region, a China that had no equal. A year after he renewed the *Heqin*, he hatched a plot to ambush the *Shanyu* and his retinue, which probably contained some of his successors.⁵¹ The plan involved a Chinese merchant who would lure the *Shanyu* deep into Chinese territory where the Han forces would surround, capture, or kill the *Shanyu*.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 389.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Sima, "Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II," 149.

The intent was to decapitate the Xiongnu leadership and create a window of confusion that the Han would use to cripple the Xiongnu state.

The plan failed with the *Shanyu*'s discovery of the plan. The Xiongnu leader withdrew before the trap could be sprung. The botched ambush was not without consequence, however. It broke the *Heqin* permanently and launched the two empires into a war that would eventually reverse the tributary relationship between the Han and Xiongnu and would permanently fracture the Xiongnu state.

Han Xiongnu Conflict

The long wars between the Han and the Xiongnu raise a question in the context of the larger comparison to the Romans – was there a conquest? The wars present a problem in defining victory and defeat for either party in that they were low intensity, long term conflicts that did not have many stunning victories or defeats. Often, the Chinese would make an expedition into Xiongnu territory and would not even encounter the Xiongnu.

The problems that the Han faced in fighting the Xiongnu stemmed from the fact that they were fighting a nomadic enemy. The Xiongnu had no significant settlements and they carried their means of production with them. The Han needed to defeat the Xiongnu in a different way than a sedentary enemy. The Chinese would have to attack the Xiongnu's flimsy political structure in order to defeat them.

After the failed attempt at ambushing the *Shanyu* in 133 B.C.E., the Han fell back on the defensive for several years. Psarras attributes this to internal problems and famine in China.⁵² In 129 B.C.E., however, the campaigns began anew. The wars were not

⁵² Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu," 145.

glorious campaigns where the Xiongnu fell or fled from the mighty Han armies. On the contrary, for many years the Han lost all the engagements with the Xiongnu, often on Chinese soil.⁵³ For the purposes of this discussion, I will be using the data put forth by Psarras. I must use this since I cannot read classical Chinese. However, I can create an original analysis with the data provided. Psarras defines a victory as an engagement where the Han suffer fewer casualties than the Xiongnu and a defeat as where the Xiongnu suffer few casualties than the Han. Psarras also defines a draw as a Chinese expedition that encounters no Xiongnu. On the surface, it appears that the Han campaigns were marginally successful at best and quagmires that hemorrhaged men and money at worst. One must, however, look at the strategic goals of both sides before one can judge the Han campaigns as folly or vanity.

The Xiongnu were truly on the defensive in a highly mobile war. The *Shanyu* wanted to keep the status quo, the *Heqin* treaty that ensured tribute, trading rights, and his own power. It must be remembered that the Xiongnu state required the *Heqin* to provide enough Chinese tribute to maintain the Xiongnu leadership structure. The *Shanyu* is immediately at a disadvantage if he cannot provide enough goods to his subordinates. Once the *Heqin* was broken in 133, the *Shanyu* needed to resort to raiding to provide the requisite tribal fuel. It must also be remembered that by this time the Xiongnu had become somewhat dependent on Han finished goods and agricultural products. The final break of the pre-Wudi *Heqin* also meant that the frontier markets were closed to the Xiongnu. The Xiongnu's need for trade goods from Chinese markets can be seen by the fact that individual Xiongnu would immediately come to the Chinese markets if there was even a small lull in the fighting. The Xiongnu were bullies that were not ready for a

⁵³ Ibid., 147.

serious retaliation. All they could do was to try to keep their state together and weather the onslaught.

The Han needed to break the Xiongnu power, preventing the Xiongnu from ever creating a *Heqin* situation again. The Han needed to fight the Xiongnu in their own territory, destroying their armies and demonstrating that the *Shanyu* was incapable of fending off a concentrated Chinese assault. The Chinese had an important advantage in completing this objective; stamina. The Chinese had a greater number of resources at their disposal such as large cavalry armies that would mount expeditions into Xiongnu territory every year for nearly thirty consecutive years.

On the other hand, the Xiongnu did have an advantage over the Han troops. They were more experienced horsemen than the Han's peasant conscripts. The Xiongnu could choose their fight very carefully. If there was even a slight chance of Xiongnu defeat, they would simply not give battle to the Han armies. They could also mount raids of their own into Han territories. It was for this reason that the Xiongnu had more victories than the Han in most years. Unfortunately, the Xiongnu were playing a losing game. The Xiongnu wars can be compared to an earlier Roman conflict, the second Punic War. In that case, the Carthaginians would win battle after battle against the Roman conscript armies. The Carthaginians, however, lost in the long run because they could not turn their battlefield victories into any strategic gains. Hannibal, the Carthaginian general, was unable to take any Roman towns, and was eventually forced to retreat due to lack of supplies and support as well as a Roman attack on the Carthaginian homeland.⁵⁴ Much the same happened to the Xiongnu. They would maul Han army after Han army, but could not turn these victories into any meaningful conquest. The Han had enough men

⁵⁴ M. Cary and H. H. Scullard, *A History of Rome* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1975), 130-31.

and money to replenish their armies, season after season. This eventually wore down the Xiongnu, who saw that their efforts were not affecting the Han campaigns. For its part, the Han government kept up the pressure on the Xiongnu for a quite a few years despite some lingering internal problems and natural disasters. Wudi kept internal dissent down by exclusively taxing the nobility and merchants, while leaving the peasants largely unscathed.⁵⁵ The Han dynasty won the war not through superior generalship and military might, but through simple attrition. The Xiongnu could, and did, fight very effectively against the perennial Chinese expeditions. However, the constant pressure on the Xiongnu caused their political structure to splinter.⁵⁶ As early as 105 B.C.E., these stresses started to crop up in the form of rivalries and the minor coups within the Xiongnu elite. In the last decade of the second century B.C.E., the *Shanyu*, Zhanshilu'er, executed the Wise King of the Left for "plotting to assassinate him and surrender to the Han."⁵⁷ As long as the Chinese remained on the offensive and did not pay tribute, the *Shanyu* was in a precarious position. He was no longer seen as the great and powerful leader that could coerce China into obedience, nor was he providing the tangible evidence of that power; the gifts extracted from the Chinese as tribute. By refusing to knuckle under to the Xiongnu demands, the Han were robbing him of his legitimacy. As early as 96 B.C.E., factionalism had taken the 'teeth' out of the Xiongnu threat.⁵⁸ The war would go on for many years after Wudi's death, the main difference being that the Xiongnu would not only be fighting the Chinese, but also themselves. The Southern Xiongnu would

⁵⁵ Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu," 151.

⁵⁶ Nicola Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies* (New York Cambridge University Press, 2002), 210.

⁵⁷ Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu," 154.

⁵⁸ Sophia-Karin Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu " *Monumenta serica* 52 (2004): 82.

eventually surrender to the Chinese, seeking aid for their fight against the Northern Xiongnu.

The Chinese also cleared areas of the Gansu corridor along the Silk Road, solidifying their conquests with a string of forts and garrisons. The Han government was never able to completely rid the conquered areas of Xiongnu. However, it was able to minimize Xiongnu influence in these regions with their own more solid but shorter ranged military influence emanating from the forts.

Out of this long and somewhat indecisive tale of lightning raids and endless cavalry charges comes the question: Who won, and was there a conquest? The answer becomes a little clearer when one looks at what each party got out of the conflict. The Chinese successfully broke the pre-Wudi *Heqin* for good.⁵⁹ They were no longer being extorted into paying tribute to the Xiongnu and had gained land as well as a client state, the Southern Xiongnu. While it is true that the Chinese would end up paying much more to the Xiongnu as a client state than as a “brother” state, it can be seen that they had achieved a great political victory. They had engaged in a terrible war with the Xiongnu who were of more or less equal military capability, and had survived the confrontation while the Xiongnu had not. This backed up the preexisting Chinese superiority theory.

The Xiongnu on the other hand, had failed to scare the Chinese into reestablishing the *Heqin*, and had fallen apart as an empire. The now fractured Xiongnu could not exert their political will over the Chinese and other nomad groups. The raids into China would continue for the rest of the Han dynasty, but would be much more minor than in the pre-Wudi days. Also, in the 60’s and 50’s B.C.E., the Xiongnu began surrendering to the

⁵⁹ René Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia*, trans. Naomi Walford (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 40.

Han in droves, becoming client “inner barbarians.” Once the Southern Xiongnu had surrendered, the Northern Xiongnu would continue to fight for much longer. The Xiongnu Empire fell with a ‘sickly sputter’. While it may not be as clear cut as Caesar’s campaigns in Gaul, the breakup of Xiongnu power and the dissolution of the *Heqin* show that there was, in fact, a conquest of a great many Xiongnu by the Chinese. These Xiongnu would, in time, abandon their nomadic ways and be assimilated into the Chinese empire.

Han-Xiongnu Post-Conquest Relations and Assimilation

It must be remembered when one is studying the Han-Xiongnu relationship after Wudi’s conquest, that the Xiongnu wars were still going on. While it is true that the Xiongnu began to surrender piecemeal during the wars, many Xiongnu continued to fight China long after Wudi. These Xiongnu would continue to fight the Han dynasty until its end. However, it is the Xiongnu, who surrendered to the Han, who are the focus of this paper. The surrendered Xiongnu began a long process of being taken into the Chinese empire. This assimilation shows not only how the Chinese dealt with peripheral groups, but also how the Chinese defined themselves. Before we discuss the cultural consequences of the conquest, it is necessary to look at some of its financial and economic effects.

The surrender of the Southern Xiongnu to the Chinese in 53 B.C.E., although a political boon, put a serious financial strain on the Han dynasty. When the *Shanyu*, Huhanye, surrendered to the Han, the relationship between the two states was renegotiated. Instead of only the Han sending hostages, the Xiongnu would also send

royal hostages to the Han. The *Shanyu* was also required to pay homage to the Han court on a regular basis. One thing that did stay in the post-Wudi treaties was the gifts that the Han gave to the Xiongnu.⁶⁰ Although instead of being tribute, it was more like foreign aid. It was imperative for the Han to keep the Southern Xiongnu in the years following the surrender. According to Psarras, the Southern Xiongnu were motivated to surrender to the Han government in order to gain support in the Xiongnu civil war.⁶¹ She also asserts that the terms of the treaty did not change; the only thing that changed was the political psychology of the Han.⁶² The Xiongnu, however, bought into the political reality as well, by their participation in the annual tributes. During one of the *Shanyu*'s trips to the Han court, the *Shanyu* not only received gifts from the Han, but had to participate in an audience where he was introduced as a "servant of the emperor."⁶³ Even though, in the early years after the surrender, the *Shanyu* was treated more leniently than the leaders of other states who had surrendered to the Han, this leniency should not be taken lightly. While it may seem like a small concession for such a large payoff, it must be remembered that this was a time when personal honor and 'face' mattered more than in modern times. The *Shanyu*, who would have grown up within the Xiongnu social and political structure where personal advancement was dependent on bravery in battle and a *Shanyu*'s power was dependent not only on tangible things such as money and sheep but also on intangible things such as one's valor and perceived power based on the power of one's enemies, would have known that an act of submission, no matter how slight, was

⁶⁰ Yü, "Han Foreign Relations," 395.

⁶¹ Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu ": 40.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 155.

⁶³ Yü, "Han Foreign Relations," 396. Ying-shih also quotes the gifts given to the *Shanyu* during his first visit to the Han court. These gifts included 5 kg of gold, 200,000 cash, 77 suits of clothes, 8,000 bales of silken fabrics, and 1,500 kg of silk floss.

deadly serious. Even though he was given a 'loose rein', the *Shanyu* would not have bowed his head and that of his state without knowing that he was receiving tangible and intangible benefits in exchange. The Xiongnu not only received foreign aid from the Han that would free them from the need to raid, they also received the backing from the Han government that would give them partial protection from their unsundered brethren to the north. The Xiongnu surrendered out of necessity, but stayed in the Han tributary system because it was continually advantageous to be part of the Han Empire. Psarras writes that the Xiongnu cooperated with the Han because cooperation was more profitable than remaining in the Xiongnu state.⁶⁴ On the other hand, Yu Ying-Shih, citing the Han Shu, argues that the Xiongnu surrendered because their state had been in decline since the days of Wudi.⁶⁵

The decision for the Xiongnu to surrender was one that was made in part out of necessity and part out of practicality. Huhanyeh knew that the Xiongnu state was collapsing under the weight of civil war, a civil war that was caused by Han economic and military pressure. In order to keep his state together, he needed the gifts to buy his subordinates and some sort of legitimacy, through warfare or otherwise. In bowing to China, he gained the gifts in the form of the Han foreign aid, and he gained legitimacy with the backing of the Han government. This legitimacy was not as powerful as that gained from fighting China, but was still potent nevertheless and was supplemented with gifts that exceeded the pre-Wudi *Heqin* treaties. In the fifty years after the surrender, the gifts given to the *Shanyu* of the Southern Xiongnu increased dramatically.⁶⁶ Also,

⁶⁴ Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu," 155.

⁶⁵ Yü, "Han Foreign Relations," 395. The Passage Yu cites is HS 94Bp. 3797.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 397. From 51-1 B.C.E. The imperial gifts to the *Shanyu* increased from 1,500 to 7,500 catties of silk floss and from 8,000 to 30,000 bales of silk fabrics.

Huhanyeh brought back from his first homage trip to China 680 kiloliters of grain.⁶⁷ Even if a person ate one liter of grain per day, this was still enough grain to feed nearly 2000 people for a year. The Xiongnu grain consumption was significantly lower than that of Chinese due to their nomadic lifestyle. This amount of grain probably could have supplemented the diets of many more Xiongnu during the year. The grain given to the *Shanyu* was less likely a personal gift to the *Shanyu* and more like a subsidy to the Xiongnu people as a whole. The Han were not only supporting the *Shanyu* and the Xiongnu nobility, they were also supporting Xiongnu in the lower ranks of society. Supporting the Xiongnu and other barbarian states became extremely costly over the years.⁶⁸ While it may seem that this was a useless drain on China's resources, it was, in fact, a means of holding and sinicising barbarians that would otherwise have been in almost constant conflict with China. Under the *Heqin*, the Xiongnu would not only extort the Han court into paying what amounted to protection money, they would also break the treaties that they forced on the Chinese at will. The *Heqin* was economically and political unsuitable for the Chinese government. Under the post-Wudi tributary system, the Chinese may have had to pay more than the *Heqin* treaty, but what they gained politically was far greater than the economic burden that they had to shoulder. As a tributary state the Southern Xiongnu were much more peaceful than they were as a "brotherly" state and were an effective border guard in their own right. The Han dynasty also settled its own inner need to know that it was the greatest power in the region.

The Han's generous policy towards the Xiongnu in the early years of the surrender also shows a deliberate policy towards bringing the barbarians more fully into

⁶⁷ Ibid., 396.

⁶⁸ Yü, *Trade and Expansion in Han China*, 61. In 50 C.E., when the imperial gifts to the Xiongnu were regularized, the amount given to the Xiongnu was 100,900,000 in cash.

the Chinese empire. During the last years of the former Han the *Shanyu* was spared the need to prostrate himself, while the newly surrendered Xiongnu were also more or less an independent state.⁶⁹ This policy was meant to ease the Xiongnu into the Han imperial system. The 'loose reign' would continue for the entirety of the former Han, its fall, and the restoration under the Later Han dynasty. The Later Han would tighten up its control on the Xiongnu and bring them more in line with the Han tributary system. They would begin treating the Xiongnu more like Chinese citizens as a whole.⁷⁰

The Chinese assimilation of the Xiongnu was a long process that was never fully completed.⁷¹ The story begins in the Later Han dynasty, when the tributary relationship between the Xiongnu and Han was regularized and tightened. The Xiongnu were marginalized politically; from the *Shanyu* officially becoming a vassal as well as the requirement that Xiongnu princes be rotated every year. Ying-shih suggests that this was an attempt to sinicize the barbarians from the inside.⁷² The *Shanyu*'s position as a vassal was further cemented by the fact that the Han would no longer allow the *Shanyu* to marry a Han princess.⁷³ The Han's increasing political control over the Xiongnu came in such small increments that it is doubtful that anyone noticed the changes. The increasing amount of Chinese political control over the Xiongnu could also be explained by an increased cultural similarity with the Chinese.

While the Xiongnu were becoming more politically beholden to the Chinese, they were also becoming more economically dependent on the Han government. As stated earlier, the Xiongnu political system needed a steady flow of Chinese goods to stay

⁶⁹ Yü, "Han Foreign Relations," 398.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 400.

⁷¹ Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu ": 75.

⁷² Yü, "Han Foreign Relations," 400.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 398.

together. These goods were needed to stabilize the leadership hierarchy and supplement the nomad economy with luxury goods. The tributary system dramatically increased the gifts to Xiongnu. This increase was initially meant to make sure that it was more profitable for the Xiongnu to stay with the Chinese than to rebel or join the Northern Xiongnu again. However, this increase had the unintended effect of making the Xiongnu economically dependent on the Chinese. This dependence was not fostered by the cattles of silken floss or gold given to the nobles, but by a substance that is poisonous to the nomad way of life, grain.⁷⁴

The Xiongnu's taste for agricultural products was nothing new at the time of the Latter Han. Di Cosmo states that the Xiongnu had always "incorporated under their political control numerous sedentary communities and states from the oases of the Tarim Basin to northern China and Manchuria."⁷⁵ The Xiongnu no doubt traded with these sedentary groups for grain and other things that the nomad economy could not provide. This taste for grain was, early on, most likely limited to the nobility as a luxury food. Eventually, the need for grain was soon more widespread and was incorporated into the *Heqin* treaties that the Xiongnu Empire had imposed on the Chinese. Now, under the tributary system, the Xiongnu needed grain to supplement their limited pastoral range and the weakened political structure. Early trade, especially in grain, was a very first step into sinicization. Pre-Wudi officials recognized that by creating a taste for Han goods, the Han could subdue the barbarians by making them Chinese. They hoped that the goods sent to the Xiongnu would create this need, which would cause the Xiongnu to settle down, become farmers, and stop the raiding and political extortion. It was too little

⁷⁴ Yü, *Trade and Expansion in Han China*, 87.

⁷⁵ Di Cosmo, "Ancient Inner Asian Nomads: Their Economic Basis and Its Significance in Chinese History," 1094.

at the time, however. The goods going across the border were enough to supplement the nomad economy, but not enough to supplant it. Since the *Shanyu* was still very much the head of the Xiongnu, he was the final arbiter of where the *Heqin* gift would be distributed. By keeping a tight rein on the distribution of the booty gained from China, he replaced China as the source of these gifts in the eyes of the Xiongnu nobles and people.⁷⁶ While it was ultimately unsuccessful, the attempt to sinicize the barbarians through the *Heqin* gifts is an early indication of a greater Chinese policy of attempting to culturally assimilate barbarians in order to make them part of the empire. The latter Han brought this policy of acculturation to its height. By slowly marginalizing the Xiongnu leadership and creating an economic dependence on Chinese goods, the Han Empire slowly assimilated the surrendered Xiongnu.

The Han hastened the assimilation of the Xiongnu through the forced migration of them to other parts of the empire and the resettling of Chinese citizens into former Xiongnu territory. Mixed barbarian-Chinese settlements appeared in the former frontier.⁷⁷ These Chinese citizens were meant to influence the Xiongnu into becoming more Chinese in their habits and customs. In time, the Xiongnu began to create an agricultural economy of their own and began working alongside the Chinese as serfs on the estates of powerful landlords.⁷⁸ The Xiongnu were also eventually held responsible for providing labor to Han construction projects, just like any Chinese province was expected to do.⁷⁹ The Chinese sent to settle among the Xiongnu were, however, not always loyal Han citizens. At times, they would rise up alongside the Xiongnu against the

⁷⁶ Barfield, "The Hsiung-Nu Imperial Confederacy: Organization and Foreign Policy," 59.

⁷⁷ Yü, "Han Foreign Relations," 401.

⁷⁸ Yü, *Trade and Expansion in Han China*, 87.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

Han government.⁸⁰ By the end of the Han dynasty, the position of *Shanyu* held almost no meaning.⁸¹ The Xiongnu had become sinicized, although not completely. There were still occasional rebellions and, in the records, the surrendered Xiongnu were still considered barbarians. However, it is reasonable to believe that the barbarians that had been completely sinicized were considered Chinese and thus disappeared as a distinct entity in the Chinese records. In the several centuries of the Han dynasty, the Xiongnu went from a politically powerful nomadic empire, to subjects of the Han Empire.

The Han dynasty's assimilation method speaks a great deal about the way the Han defined themselves as a state and the Chinese defined themselves as a people and as a culture. To be Chinese meant that one followed the customs and traditions of China, regardless of one's ethnic or racial background.⁸² Since China is a large and diverse country with a variety of people and climates, it was seen early on that there was not a Chinese "race" so much as there was a common way of life on the Chinese plain. The large agricultural states that arose out of what can be seen as China proper all had a similar language, religion and economy. Though they were separated politically until the Qin dynasty, they were unified in a common culture. This commonality in lifestyle was further bolstered by the fact that China was surrounded by regions of vastly different cultures: the steppe nomads to the north, the Nan-yue to the south and the desert nomads to the west and southwest. In the presence of the 'Other', the states of the Chinese plain saw more in common with each other than the barbarian groups which were often closer to them geographically. This cultural unity was eventually translated into political unity when Qinshihuangdi united all the states. With this solidarity came an imperial

⁸⁰ Yü, "Han Foreign Relations," 402.

⁸¹ Yü, *Trade and Expansion in Han China*, 85.

⁸² Pu, *Enemies of Civilization*, 33.

ambition towards all the peripheral groups just outside the empire. However, this ambition was not simply to exploit the conquered barbarians in support of the mother country, as so many empires before it and after it had done. The Chinese ambition was to make the barbarians ‘Chinese’. It was not enough for the barbarian lands to be under Chinese political control; it was necessary for the Chinese to civilize these lands as well. The Chinese Empire was not just a political hegemony or an economic monopoly; it was a cultural dominion.

Gallo-Roman Pre-Conquest Relations

The primary difficulty in describing Gallo-Roman pre-conquest relations is one involving identity. Unlike the Xiongnu, the people that the Romans called “Gauls” had no such identity. Moreover, the term “Celt” was a blanket term used by ancient authors to denote people living to the North and West of the Mediterranean cultures. Wells points out that Hecataeus was the first to mention the *Keltoi* in the sixth and fifth century B.C.E.⁸³ This and other Greek sources give very few if any reasons for their categorization of Iron Age peoples.⁸⁴ It was sufficient for them to simply lump all the northern non-Greek people in a category that distinguished them from the Scythians. The Romans would later attempt to establish a more complex taxonomy based on customs.⁸⁵ For example, Caesar and later Tacitus would attempt to put the northern Iron Age peoples into more useful categories, that is, more for the purpose of conquest and administration. For hundreds of years, these accounts have been taken by historians at face value. The truth of the matter is that the peoples of Iron Age Europe do not conform to the descriptions of Greek and Roman

⁸³ Wells, *The Barbarians Speak*, 101.

⁸⁴ Wells, *Beyond Celts Germans and Scythians*, 77.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

authors. Archaeology has shown that the area of Europe beyond Greek and Roman control was a mosaic of different groups that were ever shifting and reacting to Mediterranean contact. It can be seen through material culture data that these groups' identity did not match the descriptions of the Greek and Roman authors.

This presents a problem when considering the Roman relationship with the "Gauls" when in all actuality no widespread Gallic identity existed. It is clear that the Romans categorized the people between the Rhine and the Bay of Biscay as "Gauls" although those same people did not consider themselves part of that group. How does one study the relationship between two groups who make vastly different categorizations and assumptions about each other? The only thing that can be done is to go into one's analysis knowing the archaeological data do not always correlate with Roman written sources.

The geographic region which this paper examines, Gaul, was dominated by two artistic styles: that of the Hallstatt and La Tène cultures. Both of these cultures primarily occupied the area north of the Alps in areas that now comprise modern France, Germany, Spain, and Britain. The Hallstatt culture represented the first major proto-urban movement in temperate Europe. This group created some of the first hilltop settlements and large communities in temperate Europe.⁸⁶ Graves in the Hallstatt period were more lavishly adorned than in earlier periods and it was in this period that Mediterranean trade goods, such as wine amphorae, began to show up in burials and at settlement sites.⁸⁷ Trade between the Hallstatt zone and the Mediterranean basin primarily consisted of

⁸⁶ Wells, *The Barbarians Speak*, 38.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

northern forest goods for Mediterranean finished goods and wine.⁸⁸ The Hallstatt ‘chiefdoms’ also imported Mediterranean goods and culture as a means of supplying prestige goods for the local elite.⁸⁹ This can be seen in the variety of Mediterranean goods found in graves and several Greek style structures (such as walls) found within the Hallstatt cultural zone.⁹⁰

In the mid fifth century B.C.E., a new style and identity arose in the Rhineland. This culture, known as La Tène quickly replaced the Hallstatt in the archaeological record.⁹¹ At the same time, large, former Hallstatt centers began to collapse. There are several theories of why this collapse occurred, from trade disruption to popular unrest.⁹² Wells points out that the La Tène period was a time of “active emigration” to the southern regions of Europe.⁹³ It was during this time that Celts came to the Po valley in Italy and other regions, such as Galatia in Asia Minor. For example, it is believed that La Tène ‘Celtic’ groups were most likely responsible for the sacking of Rome.

While these groups were forming their own cultural identity, Mediterranean contact was shaping that identity and creating political identity. Wells explains the concept of a “tribal zone” or an area where indigenous, non state societies form concrete political units as a reaction to complex states.⁹⁴ These tribes established territorial borders and created a solid leadership hierarchy where before there had been none. The tribes that Caesar would eventually conquer were a product of these complex processes

⁸⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 41.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 44.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁴ Wells, *Beyond Celts Germans and Scythians*, 32.

of internecine warfare and tribal political cycling.⁹⁵ These Late Iron Age groups would play an important role in influencing populations in Italy and in turn being influenced by this region in the south.

In the early 4th century B.C.E. it may have seemed like a ridiculous proposition that the small village resting on the hills overlooking the Tiber would come to rule the whole Mediterranean world, especially considering its close and powerful neighbors. To the north were the Etruscans. They were early inhabitants of northern Italy in the modern region of Tuscany. The Etruscans had become very wealthy and powerful from trading metalwork for luxury goods.⁹⁶ Through trade the Etruscans had become thoroughly Hellenized. They took up Greek dress and had Greek manners, although in a distinctly northern Italian fashion.⁹⁷ The Etruscans were the closest to Rome and were the people with whom Rome had the most contact, be it hostile or friendly.

To the east, in and across the Apennine Mountains, were the other Italian peoples that were neither Etruscan nor Greek nor Latin like the Romans.⁹⁸ People like the Samnites or the Apulians who occasionally engaged with the Romans in petty war. Each group had its own towns and government that was distinct and independent from the two power players on the peninsula.⁹⁹ These people would eventually be completely absorbed into the Roman peninsular dominion.

Then, there were the Greeks. Once colonies of the Greek city states, they had either separated from the mother city, or had been severed by the Alexandrian empire that was fragmenting when Rome was rising. The Greeks had been in the southern third of

⁹⁵ Ibid., 113.

⁹⁶ Scullard, *A History of Rome* 26.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 13-15.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 15.

Italy for so long that the area was commonly called “Magna Graecia” (Great Greece). The Greek states were the real political power on the peninsula and had touched every group on the Italian peninsula. City-states and tribal groups on the peninsula adopted the Hellenistic tradition in terms of architecture, politics and warfare.¹⁰⁰ By the time Rome became the rising star on the peninsula, the whole of Italy was more or less Hellenized with the exception of the Gauls in the northern Piedmont region. This conquest, however, was cultural and not military. The Greeks had spread their culture through trade, an avenue the Romans would later use to spread their own culture.¹⁰¹ The Romans were among those that were Hellenized, early on adopting their architecture, politics and especially their method of war. The reason for this mass and voluntary Hellenization of the Italian peninsula can be likened to how modern-day, non-Western countries build western buildings, conduct their diplomacy in Western dress and have a military in the Western model. These countries imitate the West so they will be seen as modern and equal to the larger Western countries and be taken seriously in the international dialogue. The people of Italy adopted Greek customs for the same reason; they wanted to be taken seriously by the other larger powers in their region.

The spread of Greek culture was also the reason for the drastic cultural differentiation between the Romans and the Gauls, especially those Gauls who were across the Alps and those who were any distance from the Mediterranean shore. The early differentiation would, to a degree, supersede the Romans’ geographical proximity to even the Gauls of northern Italy and cause the Romans to align themselves with Greece and the culture of the eastern Mediterranean. However, the Romans who united the peninsula were not

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 26.

completely Greek. They were still native Italians due to the fact that they grew among and then absorbed the other native Italians and the Etruscans. This tempered the Romans and made Roman culture something that was neither purely Greek nor Italian. The new Roman state and its culture was very much Mediterranean and was markedly different than the Gallic culture across the Alps.

During Rome's early conflicts in Italy, a battle took place that would sear itself in the Roman mind for centuries, namely, the Gallic sacking of Rome in 390 B.C.E. The Romans had been in conflict with a Gallic tribe in northern Italy. After a brief but disastrous pitched battle, the Gauls came into Rome, sacking it and ransoming it for an immense amount of gold. This event is recorded in the histories of the author Livy.¹⁰² However, it must be remembered that Livy is a generation after Caesar's conquest and this event is mentioned in other pre-Caesar texts. The Gallic sacking made a great impression on the Roman people.

The next significant perceived slight that the Gauls perpetrated on the Romans was during the Second Punic War(218-201 B.C.E.). During Hannibal's crossing of the Alps, the Southern Gauls and those of Northern Italy joined Hannibal's armies against the Romans, who were nominally in control of the region.¹⁰³ Hannibal's army rampaged across Italy for fifteen years, until he was forced out due to the fact that the Romans sent an invasion force to attack Carthage.¹⁰⁴ The rampaging Gallo-Carthaginian army must have further instilled a fear of the Gauls in the generation that knew the horrors of the Punic war.

¹⁰² Titus Livy, "Ab Urbe Condita V", ed. R.I. Ross (Bristol Bristol Classical Press 1997), 30-38.

¹⁰³ Scullard, *A History of Rome* 130.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

The last major Gallic/Celtic invasion was only a generation before Caesar. For an unknown reason, two large tribes, the Teutones and the Cimbri, made a migration and invasion into Italy in 102 B.C.E.¹⁰⁵ Coming out of eastern and central Europe they crossed the Alps and came either to settle or pillage the entire peninsula with a two pronged attack. They were eventually defeated and scattered by Caesar's uncle, Gaius Marius.¹⁰⁶ This invasion most likely solidified the fear of the Gauls fostered by the other Gallic incidents in Roman history.

However, Gallo-Roman relations were not limited to the Romans sitting around waiting for the barbarians in the North to invade. By the time of Caesar, the Romans already had control of the Gauls of northern Italy and of the southern portion of Gauls situated around the Roman colony of Narbo. The area in Northern Italy was known as Cisalpine Gaul and had been a province in the Republic since 222 B.C.E. (Although not formally until after the social war in 87 B.C.E.).¹⁰⁷ The area in southern Gaul was called Transalpine Gaul and was founded in 121 B.C.E. in order to provide an overland means of communication between Italy and Rome's Spanish holdings, which Rome had taken from Carthage in the Punic Wars.¹⁰⁸ The colony Narbo, was founded with little trouble by the Romans because the Gauls in the south along the Mediterranean coast had already been Hellenized by the Greek traders several centuries before. Contrary to popular belief, Narbo was not an island of civilization among the savages. The Gauls, among which Narbo was founded, could read and write Greek, and their nobility were well accustomed to Greek and Roman luxuries such as baths and banquets. Within thirty

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 218.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth, ed., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 625.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 626.

years, Narbo was a reasonably sized Roman city; so much so that Cicero would call it a “watchtower of the Roman people.”¹⁰⁹ Rome had no trouble absorbing Gauls who had already been acclimated to Mediterranean culture by the Greeks.

There are many Roman authors, writing in both Greek and Latin, who mention the Gauls or comment on their culture and history. There are very few, however, that mention the Gauls prior to Caesar’s conquest. The most telling source that we have is Cicero’s defense of Marcus Fonteius, the governor of Transalpine Gaul. Fonteius had been accused of abusing the province which he had been given after his praetorship.¹¹⁰ This was nothing new for a Roman politician – in fact it was standard procedure. A Roman aristocrat, seeking political power, would rack up huge amounts of debt for his political campaigns. Once his term of office was over, he would serve a term as governor of a province, of which, by the 70s B.C.E, there were many. He would then proceed to milk the provincials with taxes until he had enough to pay off his debts and maybe have a little left over.¹¹¹ It seems that Marcus Fonteius had been a little too heavy handed with the taxes and the Gauls of Northern Italy took him to court over it. The sheer fact that this case was brought to Roman court reveals some important characteristics of Transalpine Gaul prior to conquest. First, it shows how assimilated the Gauls of the two provinces had become. If the Gauls under Fonteius’ rule were unassimilated, they would not have taken their oppressor to court. The mere fact that they were in court shows that the Gauls that Cicero was dealing with were not the Gauls that Caesar would fight a few

¹⁰⁹ Marcus Tullius Cicero, "Pro M. Fonteio," ed. Joan Garuti (Arnold Mondadori, 1967), 30. All Latin translations in this paper are my own.

¹¹⁰ Norman J. DeWitt, "The Paradox of Gallo-Roman Relations," *The Classical Journal* 37, no. 7 (1942): 399.

¹¹¹ Jean-Philippe Levy, *Economic Life of the Ancient World* trans. John G. Biram (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1967), 35.

years later in the Gallic wars. Secondly, the trial proves that the Gauls obviously believed in the efficacy of Roman justice. They would not have traveled the hundred plus miles from Transalpine Gaul to Rome in order to testify at the trial if they didn't believe that they had a chance of winning. The Northern Italian Gauls, who were testifying against Marcus Fonteius, had been living under the Roman system for many years and were most likely indistinguishable from any Italian non-citizen provincial.

Cicero preys on the Roman jury's innate prejudices towards the Gauls. He brings up the historical slights that Gauls perpetrated against the Roman people and their lack of culture and religion.¹¹² However, he emphasizes a more important deficiency in the Gauls, the fact that they were not Roman citizens. One of the key aspects of Cicero's defense that is often overlooked is his constant emphasis of the fact that not one Roman citizen had come to testify against Fonteius. While this is scattered throughout the text, a specific example can be found in Cicero's defense of the charge that Fonteius took an illegal loan:

By whom do they [the Gauls] say that a loan of such money was made?
By the Gauls? No. By who then? By the Roman citizens who conduct
business in Gaul. Why have we not heard their testimony?¹¹³

Cicero's emphasis on the provincial status of the Gauls shines a very strong light on the Romans' definition of themselves, in that they defined themselves more *legally* than *culturally*. Cicero may buttress his defense with reminders of the Gauls' historical slights and their lack of culture, however, he rests the weight of his argument on the fact that not one of the Gallic witnesses was a citizen. Cicero, a shrewd lawyer, did not do this

¹¹² DeWitt, "The Paradox of Gallo-Roman Relations," 400.

¹¹³ Cicero, "Pro M. Fonteio," 29.

because of his own peculiar prejudices about citizenship, but rather because he knew this would sway the jury.

While there were many Romans who held this view of the Gauls, even those who were living within Roman territory, DeWitt points out that there were many who had good relationships with individual Gauls.¹¹⁴ There were many Roman merchants that made their living by trading in Gaul. These traders were so prevalent that they sometimes even founded towns within Gaul.¹¹⁵ These towns would later pave the way for Romanization and would facilitate Roman administration after the conquest. These traders also brought Roman goods and Roman culture along with them. The goods were not only traded among the Romans and the Gauls, but between the Gauls themselves and beyond. The archaeological record shows Roman goods in places as far as Britain long before the conquest.¹¹⁶ This trade, like the towns founded by the traders themselves, was a vehicle for early Romanization. Unlike the trade China fostered with the Xiongnu, this trade was not a deliberate tactic to try to culturally change the Gauls to be more Roman. Rome needed the trade with its provinces and beyond to supply her with goods that she could not produce because of either climate or local resources. China, however, was a much larger territory that had very little need to trade for goods that they could not make themselves. The Romans, like the Chinese, had a longstanding relationship with their barbarian neighbors long before their eventual conquest.

Despite the Romans' reservation about the Gauls' perceived lack of civility and aggressiveness, many Romans also admired the Gauls as a people. To the Romans, the

¹¹⁴ DeWitt, "The Paradox of Gallo-Roman Relations," 400.

¹¹⁵ J. F. Drinkwater, "Lugdunum: 'Natural Capital' of Gaul?," *Britannia* 6 (1975): 134-35.

¹¹⁶ Greg Woolf, "Beyond Romans and Natives," *World Archaeology* 28, no. 3 (1997): 344.

Gauls seemed straightforward and truthful.¹¹⁷ It is not surprising that many Roman aristocrats, who took lying and political backstabbing from a necessity to an art form, admired this quality. There were even friendships between Romans and Gauls that have been recorded. One of the most notable is the friendship between Caesar and his Gallic interpreter.¹¹⁸ However, it must be noted that Caesar's interpreter was a Roman citizen of Helvetian parentage.¹¹⁹ DeWitt also says that Caesar speaks respectfully of the Gauls when he writes his commentaries.¹²⁰ It is clear that many were willing to put aside their jaded view of the Gauls in order to have good working relationships with them.

Politically, the Gauls were in a precarious position on account of both their geography and their social structure. The late Republic was a time of political maneuvering and immense personal ambition. Rival politicians fought each other in Rome, trying to keep the state going while trying to bury their political opponents. This is the way it always had been. Nevertheless, it became much more intense and violent during the late Republic. This environment existed mainly because Rome had become the major player in the Mediterranean basin. By the time of Caesar and Cicero, Carthage had been razed, the nearby successor states had been subdued, and Egypt had descended into such deep dynastic bickering that it could not muster any sort of political power. Rome was the major state dominating all of these places. There were very few states left to fight, much less threaten the Republic. Lacking any great crisis to the Republic that could bring them together, the individual senatorial families began squabbling among themselves for the spoils of empire. This was the age of the great upheavals, civil wars

¹¹⁷ DeWitt, "The Paradox of Gallo-Roman Relations," 400.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 403.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

and plots that would eventually destroy the Republic and see the Principate rise from its ashes.¹²¹ In the late Republic, senators would physically attack senators on their way to Rome, dictators would proscribe their political enemies and the Tiber would see the body of more than one fallen politician. If Italy was the grand stage of the self destruction of the Republic, then Gaul was the wing where the actors waited to come on. Gaul, especially Cisalpine Gaul, was a perfect place for a Roman politico to get away from the city and still be near enough to be involved in the politics of the city. Gaul was a coveted prize in the late Republic, and its assignment was often argued intensely. It was often given to powerful men who had finished their one-year consulship and wanted to keep an eye on the situation in Rome. Sulla was given command of Cisalpine Gaul in 80 B.C.E., which came after his march on Rome and his overthrow of the Senate.¹²² Caesar would later exploit Gaul as a welcome source of open land to conquer. Many provinces in the empire were not close enough to foreign territory or stable enough to provide a springboard for conquests. Gaul was perfect in that it was close to Italy and the resources and recruits that came with it. Gaul was also a country that was divided along tribal lines. Caesar was able to play off these divisions in order to fight only one tribe at a time.

Gaul was also a major political player in the late Republic because of its people. The Gauls, especially those of the non-Roman parts of Gaul, were often willing ‘muscle’ for Roman aristocrats who were plotting rebellion. One such aristocrat was Lucius Catiline. Catiline, drawing from the urban poor and the dispossessed rural landowners, hoped to stage a coup and make his senatorial faction the dominate power in the

¹²¹ Erich S. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1974), 1-3.

¹²² M. Cary, "Sulla and Cisalpine Gaul," *The Classical Review* 34, no. 5/6 (1920): 103.

senate.¹²³ Catiline was a bumbling, if not energetic, conspirator who not only counted on support from the throngs of debtors in Italy, but also had a trump card up his sleeve. While Catiline was stumping for plebian supporters in Rome, his agents were gaining the support of the Allobroges, a Gallic tribe whose territory was situated just outside Narbonese Gaul. His two principal representatives among the Allobroges were Titus Volturcius and Publius Umbrenus.¹²⁴ Volturcius would confess the plot to the senate in exchange for immunity.¹²⁵ His testimony presented some of the most damning evidence for Cicero to exploit during his unraveling of the conspiracy. Umbrenus was a freedman, presumably a businessman, who was one of the stronger contacts with the Allobroges.¹²⁶ Cicero mentions him in a laundry list of other conspirators who presumably did not throw themselves on the mercy of the consul.¹²⁷ Umbrenus' case is interesting in that it shows that the Roman traders that were in Gaul around the time of Caesar were not just petty merchants, but rich and powerful men who had the ear of the tribal chieftains. They could suggest a course of action to the chief and broker a deal between the chief and a non-governmental body in Rome. In exchange for support in his rebellion, Catiline offered the Allobroges debt relief.¹²⁸ The Allobroges knew that if Catiline's rebellion failed, their tribe would face a punitive expedition by the Roman army at best and the complete annexation of their territory at worst. However, the Allobroges would betray Catiline, and aid Cicero's ambush at the Mulvian bridge.¹²⁹ The Gauls, like the Xiongnu

¹²³ Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*, 424.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 421.

¹²⁵ Marcus Tullius Cicero, "In Catalinam " in *O Tempora! O Mores!*, ed. Susan O. Shapiro (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 26.

¹²⁶ Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*, 421.

¹²⁷ Cicero, "In Catalinam ", 28.

¹²⁸ Gaius Sallust, "Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*," ed. J. T. Ramsey (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2007), 41.

¹²⁹ Cicero, "In Catalinam ", 25-26.

in China, were intertwined with their imperial neighbor's politics. Often, it seems that the barbarian group was more involved in the empire's politics than the empire was involved in the barbarian's politics.

It was politics in Rome that prompted the conquest of Gaul. The conquest of Gaul was not conducted for the greater glory of Rome or some desperate necessity of state, but rather for the personal ambition and glory of Caesar. Caesar, who was proconsul after his consular term, needed to settle debts that he accrued over the course of his consular campaign. He had been given a very lucrative province. It was really two provinces – Cisalpine Gaul and Transalpine Gaul or Narbonese Gaul.

However, Caesar did not intend to simply milk the province for taxes and pay his debts. He intended to increase his political standing at home with a triumph, which was a formal ceremony where a Roman general was honored for a victory over a foreign enemy. A triumph granted huge political advantages at home. It could almost guarantee election to the consulship and provide a political boost for one's political associates. A triumph, however, was minor compared to the wealth that a successful conquest could bring in. In the past, a general could bring in tons of gold and silver, wealth enough to run for consul many times over.

The Senate did not necessarily agree with Caesar's ambition to conquer Gaul. While the Senate was interested in increasing the wealth and power of the state as a whole, they knew that Caesar would come back from the wars an extremely rich and powerful man. On top of that, he would have an army that was not only experienced, but also more loyal to him than the state. Under the army reforms instituted by Caesar's uncle, Marius, it was an army's general, not the state, who was responsible for paying the

army and providing for the soldiers after they were discharged. As a result of these reforms, the army consisted mostly of the urban and rural poor, people who joined the army in order to make a better living than they could make in civilian life. The average Roman soldier under Caesar was out for profit either through pay or the plunder of the enemy. Caesar was the man that they turned to in order to achieve their aims. Caesar would spectacularly conquer Gaul and become the political monster that everyone in Rome feared. Caesar would eventually bring down the Republic and usher in a new era not only for Roman Gaul, but for the entire empire.

Gallo-Roman Conflict

The Roman conquest of Gaul, when examined in light of the conflict between the Chinese and the Xiongnu, invites some interesting comparisons. First, the Romans, while they conquered their barbarian neighbor more quickly, were also fighting a sedentary enemy that could not run away from advancing Roman armies. Second, the Gauls were not nearly as politically organized as the Xiongnu. The Romans did not have to fight all of Gaul at once. At any one time, most of the Gallic tribes were collaborating with Caesar against the minority that was fighting him.

The most complete source regarding the Gallic wars, and indeed some aspects of Gallic life, is Caesar's own commentaries on the wars. This poses a problem: How can one trust the description of the wars written by the supreme commander of the Romans? Would Caesar not create a skewed picture in order to demonize the enemy to foster sympathy for his cause? While it must be remembered that Caesar is the author of the work and that the truth must make way for a good story, it can be seen that Caesar is

trying to maintain at least the illusion of complete objectivity. The purpose of Caesar's commentaries is to inform the people in Rome of his military actions. It needs to sound like a factual account in order to drum up support for his war effort. He must be very careful what he exaggerates. Caesar does not skew the major facts such as what battle took place and who he is fighting, which cannot be faked. What he does skew and misrepresent occasionally are his own motivations for action. Often Caesar claims that he is fighting the Gauls for Roman interests, while he is really fighting for his own. Caesar misrepresents these things in order to create a sense among the plebs in Rome that he is carrying out this war for them and for their benefit. Caesar often speaks highly of the Gauls, very rarely calling them *barbari*.¹³⁰ He does this possibly out of genuine respect for the Gauls or in order to make his conquest more admirable. A man is very powerful if he has powerful enemies. Caesar also takes time to write brief ethnographies of the peoples that he encounters in his campaigns. He writes ethnographies of the Gauls, the Britons, the Suebians, the Germans, and the Veneti. While some scholars doubt that these ethnographies were actually penned by Caesar himself, new studies have reason to believe that they are legitimate.¹³¹ These ethnographies seem to be the ancient form of National Geographic; they were Caesar's way of describing the exotic places people that he encountered to the general public back in Rome. It is obvious that Caesar is using second hand information to write some of the ethnographies. For example, in his description of the Germans, Caesar describes a type of deer in the German forests that has no joints in its legs and thus cannot lie down or stand up on its own. The Germans had devised an ingenious way to hunt this animal. They would cut into several trees until

¹³⁰DeWitt, "The Paradox of Gallo-Roman Relations," 401.

¹³¹Brice Erickson, "Falling Masts, Rising Masters: The Ethnography of Virtue in Caesar's Account of the Veneti," *American Journal of Philology* 123, no. 4 (2002): 605-06.

they were on the brink of falling. The deer, unable to lie down, would lean against one of these trees, which would buckle, thus causing the deer to fall down helpless. The German hunters would then come by and dispatch the creature at their leisure.¹³² Caesar describes this process so matter of factly that one cannot help imagining the future dictator of Rome busily writing the tale while his two German informants walk away snickering to one another.

Caesar's campaigns began with the migration of the Helvetians, a Gallic tribe that lived around the area of modern day Switzerland. The Helvetians wanted to migrate to the area of modern day Aquitaine. First they wished to go through Gaul Narbonese, but Caesar denied their passage. Then they decided to go through the territory of the Sequanians, a tribe whose lands bordered the Roman province. Caesar told the Helvetians that he would not allow them to go through the territory of a Roman ally, despite the fact that the Romans had never meddled in inter-Gallic conflicts before. The Helvetians decided to go through the Sequanian territory anyway, probably betting that Caesar would not make good on his threats. Unfortunately, Caesar did make good on his threats, using the reason that he was protecting a Roman ally. He defeated the Helvetians and forced them to return to their villages, which they had burned down in preparation for the migration.¹³³ Caesar had subdued a Gallic tribe under the guise of helping another. It was a tactic that Caesar would use many times to 'get his foot into' Gaul. Once he had defeated the Helvetians, Germans and the Belgians, he set his sights on one of the greatest propaganda victories of the late Republic, namely, an expedition to Britain. Caesar's expedition was the 'moon shot' of its day. Few Romans had been to Britain,

¹³² C. Iulius Caesar, "De Bello Gallico ", ed. Otto Seel (Lipsiae: 1961), 193. (BG 6.25)

¹³³ Ibid., 11-28.

which was considered by many Romans to be a mysterious, misty island filled with monsters and wild men that knew nothing of civilization. Caesar's British expedition was plagued with problems from the start and achieved very little, but actual conquest wasn't necessary.¹³⁴ The prestige of successfully leading an expedition to Britain was victory enough. In Gaul, Caesar tore through tribe after tribe, gaining triumphs as he went along. It was only a matter of time before the whole of Gaul was either conquered or an 'ally' of Rome.

The final drama of the Gallic War was played out on the stage of Alesia, where a Gallic coalition, lead by Vercingetorix, would be defeated between their own ramparts and those of the Romans. The surrender of Vercingetorix was probably as monumental of an event as Caesar and latter historians made it out to be. It represented the effective end of the Gallic resistance. Some tribes would remain unconquered even into the reign of Augustus, especially the mountain peoples of the Alps.¹³⁵ By the time that Caesar left Gaul in 50 B.C.E., most had concluded that it was a Roman province. Caesar had done what seemed impossible; he conquered vast swaths of territory in a relatively short time (58-51B.C.E.). After his proconsulship, his conquests were comparable with those of his principal political rival, Pompey Magnus. Caesar's sudden success must have strengthened a thought that he surely had, that is, a march on Rome and the dictatorship. Roman rule would be lifted for a time while Rome underwent a change of government and a bloody civil war.

So why did the Gallic tribes cooperate with Caesar in the first place? Vercingetorix could not have been the first Gallic leader to see the writing on the wall. It

¹³⁴ Ibid., 112-23.

¹³⁵ J. J. Hatt, *Histoire De La Gaule Romaine*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Payot, 1970), 64.

would seem, from the writings of Caesar, that his Gallic allies were lapdogs willing to do his bidding. It is best seen in the death of Dumnorix, one of Caesar's allied leaders who suddenly decided to flee rather than be taken to Britain in Caesar's retinue.

.... and afterward he [Caesar] sent a large part of the cavalry to pursue him[Dumnorix], and he ordered that he be retrieved; if he should show resistance and not come forth, then he [Caesar] ordered that he be killed.... He, however, having called out, began to resist and to defend himself with his hand and to implore the faith of his own men, often shouting that he was free and of a free state. The men, as was ordered surrounded the man and killed him. Moreover, all of the Haeduian horsemen returned to Caesar.¹³⁶

While this is clearly a symbolic passage, (the Gaul serving Caesar surrounding and destroying the free Gaul) it does demonstrate the divided loyalties of the Gauls during the conquest. Caesar was able to play the different tribes off one another with one very important motivator, fear. At first, it was fear of external enemies, notably the Germans. Caesar allowed the *consilium Galliae* (Gallic council) to convene in 58 B.C.E.¹³⁷ The council asked Caesar's help in fighting the Germans lead by Ariovistus, who had recently crossed the Rhine. This allowed Caesar to gain the allegiance of the tribes that he helped protect.

Caesar's Gallic allies were also afraid of him and his legions. The battle with the Helvetians showed central Gaul what the Roman army could do to its enemies. This, combined with Caesar's victories against the Germans, put a choice in front of every Gallic leader – either cooperate with Caesar and remain prosperous and intact, or fight Caesar and risk having your villages burned and your people enslaved. For the tribes close to the Roman province the choice was clear. Even if the tribes could unite to fight the Romans, their lands would be the first to be ravaged. It was simply safer to cooperate

¹³⁶ Caesar, "De Bello Gallico ", 132.

¹³⁷ Hatt, *Histoire De La Gaule Romaine*, 59.

and hope that one's new masters were distant. Caesar and the Roman army conquered some tribes without even unsheathing their swords.

Caesar's conquest of Gaul was an act motivated out of political ambition, but an act that had profound implication not only for Gaul but for the entire Roman Empire as well. The plunder and veteran army that Caesar gained from the conquest would fund his march on Rome and subsequent civil war with Pompey. The Civil War would be the deathblow to the Republic and the birth of the Principate under Caesar's nephew Octavian, later to be called Augustus. Augustus would pick up where his uncle left off in the final subduing of the province and begin the process of Romanization that would bring people of the province into the empire not just as provincials, but as Romans.

Gallo-Roman Post-Conquest Relations and Assimilation

The process of Romanization in the provinces is a phenomenon that is difficult to fully describe but is undeniable in the historical narrative. As one of the new topics within Classical studies, gallons of ink have been spilled trying to define and explain the process in which an indigenous culture is supplanted by the culture of its conqueror. It is a monumental task. The difficulty lies in the fact that scholars are trying to explain a phenomenon that occurs at the level of the individual with sources that focus on states and tribes. Romanization was never something that was planned or coordinated by the Roman government, it just happened.¹³⁸ It occurred as a byproduct of the Roman solution to the problem of administering a huge empire.¹³⁹ It came out of the theory that by legally making the indigenous nobles Romans, they would rule their own people as an

¹³⁸ Alex Woolf, "Romancing the Celts," in *Cultural Identity Inthe Roman Empire*, ed. Ray Lawrence and Joanne Berry (New York: Routledge, 1998), 113.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

extension of the Roman administration. By giving the local nobility a stake in the greater empire, the Romans thought that administration would be easier.¹⁴⁰ Their solution to making the nobles Roman speaks volumes about how the Romans defined themselves. By giving citizenship to select persons within the process, the Roman government paved the way for Roman culture to filter into the province through trade and the example made by the nobles. The Romans, who defined themselves legally, used law to spread their culture, while the Chinese used their culture to spread their law.

The story of Romanization in Gaul began with Augustus. It was he who first organized the provinces into distinct administrative units. Gaul was divided into Narbonese, Celtica, Aquitaine and Belgium, with the frontier set at the military districts of Upper and Lower Germany.¹⁴¹ Any further plans for expansion were dashed on the military disaster of the Teutenburg Forest in 9 C.E., where three legions were annihilated by German tribes. The administrative divisions were divided along Caesar's original ethnographic lines that he put forth in the first lines of his commentaries:¹⁴²

All of Gaul is divided into three parts of which one lives the Belgians, another the Aquitainians, and the third which are called Celts in their language, and Gauls in ours. All these are different in language institutions and laws.¹⁴³

Although the Romans defined themselves legally, they did not ignore culture in their administrative planning. The administrative planning was probably ignored by the general populace in the province. It didn't matter what province they were part of, as they still had to pay taxes. Instead of a governor in the province, there would be several administrators based in the cities. The cities were another new

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 113.

¹⁴¹ Hatt, *Histoire De La Gaule Romaine*, 89.

¹⁴² Ibid., 90.

¹⁴³ Caesar, "De Bello Gallico ", 7.

form of administration. By basing the administration and civic functions in the few cities in Gaul, Augustus shifted the focus in the province from the rural to the urban. This shift was not so much of a paradigm shift for the people in the province as one might think. It must be remembered, that the Gauls lived in largely agrarian communities that were dominated by the upper class living in an *Oppidum*. Moving administration to the cities created a very similar structure to the native Gallic hierarchy.¹⁴⁴

However, the early Roman administrators did not have a blank check to reorganize the barbarian people and territory. It was necessary to be aware of and sometimes tiptoe around the Gallic sensibilities when setting up the administrative framework of the province. For example, Drinkwater points out that Lugdunum, modern Lyon, was probably chosen as the capital of the province because of its unimportance to the local tribes: the Aedui, the Averni, and the Allobroges.¹⁴⁵ Like the Chinese, the Romans had to rule with a light hand in order to keep their new acquisition pacified during the early years after the conquest, when the threat of revolt in Gaul was very real. Roman administrators had to make sure that the changes they were making did not offend too many people - at least not too many important people.¹⁴⁶

That being said, city building in the time of Augustus took place at a fevered pace. Roman cities modeled after those in northern Italy sprung up at or near the sites of preexisting *Oppida*.¹⁴⁷ The pattern of settlement shifted

¹⁴⁴ Woolf, "Romancing the Celts," 117.

¹⁴⁵ Drinkwater, "Lugdunum: 'Natural Capital' of Gaul?," 139.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), 113.

dramatically during the reign of Augustus as *Oppida* were abandoned while others were built into Roman cities and other colonies were founded away from established population centers in order to conform to the road network.¹⁴⁸ These colonies seem to be part of an overall imperial plan to install Roman administration for the purposes of taxation and census taking. Many of the cities were set down all at once with a consistent grid pattern and circuit walls.¹⁴⁹ This imposition of urban culture did not seem to incite any major riots or rebellion within Gaul itself. Cities were one of the major vehicles for Romanization, although it was not the most important means of Romanization that the Romans employed. What would eventually Romanize Gaul cost nothing and was completed instantaneously.

The granting of citizenship by the Roman government was the greatest contributing factor in the Romanization of Gaul. In the Gallic nobility, citizenship created a sense of solidarity with their conquerors. It enfranchised them in the Roman system where they were not just subjects, but community leaders and members of the greater Roman world. Through the granting of citizenship, Gallic nobles who were Romans politically became Romans culturally. Citizenship was the gateway into the Roman world, of which many Gauls took advantage.

Roman citizenship was something that was defined in the early days when Rome was nothing more than a village. It was an exclusive club that allowed its members to vote and be part of the political process. Citizenship could be bought,

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 115.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 119.

earned or inherited.¹⁵⁰ Most residents in Rome who were not slaves or freedmen were citizens. When Rome began to conquer the Italian peninsula citizenship was given to select Italian communities outside of Rome in order to cement alliances and pacify communities. Not all villages around Rome would receive citizenship, however. Some towns in Italy were given status as a *municipium*, an existing town that was incorporated into the Roman citizen body. The Romans also founded towns within Italy, called *coloniae*, which could vote.

Voting, however, took place only in Rome, which limited voting to those near the city and the especially civically minded. The advantage of citizenship did not lie in voting, however. Citizens were granted several rights that made citizenship worthwhile, such as immunity from torture and the right to due process. The most famous example of Roman citizenship rights is probably the trial of St. Paul. When the Roman governor accused Paul of treason he stated that he was a Roman citizen and that he appealed to Caesar.¹⁵¹ Since citizens had the right to be tried in Rome, he was taken from Asia Minor to Rome to be tried. Paul was most likely a noble or wealthy person in Tarsus who was given citizenship as part of Rome's conquest of Judea, similar to many Gallic nobles that were given citizenship after the conquest.

Citizenship could also be earned, most commonly through military service. A non-citizen who served a stint of 25 years in an auxiliary unit (the legions were for citizens only) was granted citizenship for himself and his

¹⁵⁰ Andrea Giardina, ed., *The Romans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 103.

¹⁵¹ Acts of the Apostles 22.25-28

posterity.¹⁵² He was given a bronze tablet stating his citizenship, a copy of which was stored in Rome. During the later Principate and the early empire, citizenship was one of the main recruiting tools in the Roman auxiliary. Soldiers would often settle next to their camps, creating a settlement of citizens wherever there was a camp.

Citizenship could also be bestowed for exceptional service to Rome in some other non-military way. Often this was connected with the military or campaigning. Sometimes provincial villages that aided the Roman army during a campaign would be given citizenship.¹⁵³ More frequently, however, was the practice of bestowing citizenship on individuals who were helpful to the Romans somehow, such as Julius Florus and Julius Sacrovir, leaders of a Gallic revolt following the death of Nero. Woolf points out that their *nomen* of Julius means that they were granted citizenship during Caesar's campaigns or during Augustus' reign.¹⁵⁴ The ancestors of these individuals were probably translators or some other Gallic support staff for Caesar's army. Another leader during that rebellion was Juilus Vindex. Presumably, his family was granted citizenship in the same way as the previous two examples. He was a second generation senator and the governor of Gaul in 68 C.E.¹⁵⁵ In a century, his family had risen in the Roman order to the point of being a senator and a provincial governor. It is an example of how completely citizenship could bring the Gallic nobility into the Roman system.

¹⁵² Giardina, ed., *The Romans* 33.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁵⁴ Woolf, *Becoming Roman* 21.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

The nobility was in a very precarious position in first century C.E. Gaul. It was very important that they maintained both their cultural Gallic identity as well as their legal Roman identity. Woolf states that the Gallic nobility's power "rested in their ability to act as mediators between Gauls and Romans."¹⁵⁶ They found themselves between two worlds, one native and the other Roman. The Gallic nobility's role as chief and senator would be instrumental in the cultural Romanization of Gaul. In the case of Gaul, legal assimilation preceded cultural assimilation. In the case of the Xiongnu, cultural assimilation preceded legal assimilation.

The cultural assimilation of Gaul is easier to trace than the legal assimilation. The material record provides more evidence of cultural change than the literary sources provide evidence for legal change. There is no doubt that urbanization brought cultural change. The new civic amenities certainly attracted many Gauls to the cities. Roman trade, which had brought many foreign products into Gaul before the conquest, was now an unabated flood. The new urban elite began to consume these products not only for their own personal comfort, but also to fit into the Roman imperial culture that was developing during the end of the Principate.¹⁵⁷ Things which we today associate with wealth and luxury began to appear in Gaul and the rest of the Roman provinces: fine jewelry, silver dinnerware, ornate furniture, and gaming dice.¹⁵⁸ These were appearing all over Gaul as a result of the new expectation that the Gallic nobility become Roman culturally as well as legally. This pressure was especially strong among the

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 22.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 169.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 172.

senators from Gaul, who needed to go to Rome in order to conduct business. They needed to maneuver within the extremely particular Roman social world. If one did not conform to the ever-changing cultural norms of the Roman elite, they could be denied opportunities, either politically or economically. The Roman social scene fluctuated more often in the early empire than in other periods of Roman history due to a dramatic increase in social mobility.¹⁵⁹ Provincial nobles had to keep up with these ever-changing tastes in order to be accepted outside of the province.

It was not only the Gallic patterns of consumption that changed dramatically after the conquest; religion also changed dramatically. The Gallic priestly class, the Druids, was suddenly threatened by the dramatic increase in literacy after the conquest. The Druids were the keepers of the Gallic oral religious tradition. Druid initiates would be required to remember all the legends and lore of the Celtic religion. With the rise of literacy, these traditions were being written down and made accessible to all educated Gauls. The Druids were losing their importance in Gallic society.¹⁶⁰ The rise of literacy was not solely responsible for causing the Druidic order to fade out, however, as DeWitt states that the rise of the Roman constitutional state and urbanization also served to distance most Gauls from the priests of their old religion.¹⁶¹

Gallic religion also shifted in its artistic expression. Gallic religious art before the conquest consisted of abstracted forms and figures. There are very few

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 170.

¹⁶⁰ Norman J. DeWitt, "The Druids and Romanization," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 69 (1938): 326.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 328.

representations of the older Celtic gods, due to Druidic prohibition of physical representations of the gods.¹⁶² This all changed with the Roman conquest. The Celtic gods were represented in much the same way as the classical gods, with sculptures and votives that were classical in style but very Gallic in form. The Celtic gods were also syncretized with the Greco-Roman pantheon. In his commentary, Caesar recognizes a striking similarity between the Gallic religion and his own. He states that the Gauls revered Mercury the most but also worshiped Apollo, Mars, Jupiter, and Minerva.¹⁶³ After the conquest, the Gauls began seeing the similarities themselves and began to make representation of their chief Celtic god as Mercury. The Gallic images of Mercury were unlike the classical images in that he is often depicted with a beard and accompanied by a nymph.¹⁶⁴ Cultural and religious adaptations like these were the final stages of Romanization in Gaul.

The Roman imperial identity was unique among ancient societies. It was a legal definition, a definition which was based on the idea that the *populus Romanus* was a group that, as Geary puts it, “had a shared history and lived under one law.”¹⁶⁵ Rome spread that idea among the various conquered peoples, enfranchising them and making them a part of the *populus Romanus*. This enfranchisement gave the Gallic leadership a stake in the destiny of their homeland. These enfranchised Gauls took part in the Romanization of Gaul as civic leaders and senators. Cities brought Gauls of moderate means into the

¹⁶² A. N. Newell, "Gallo-Roman Religious Sculpture," *Greece & Rome* 3, no. 8 (1934): 75.

¹⁶³ Caesar, "De Bello Gallico", 187.

¹⁶⁴ Newell, "Gallo-Roman Religious Sculpture," 77.

¹⁶⁵ Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* (Princeton and Oxford Princeton University Press, 2002), 50.

Roman way of life. With legal enfranchisement came cultural change. Trade brought Roman products and Roman culture to Gaul. The appetite for Roman products increased dramatically during the Principate and early Empire. Roman civic improvements, such as aqueducts and baths, made the Gauls as ardent urban dwellers as people in Italy.

By the end of Roman Gaul, in the 5th century C.E., the people who were conquered by the Franks and other, newer barbarians bore very little resemblance to the Gauls who Caesar put under Roman rule. They were urban dwelling, Latin speaking, and wine drinking Romans, bearing few differences to the Romans in Rome, or any other province for that matter. In fact, when the Franks conquered Gaul in 486 C.E., they let the Roman administration run unmolested for a decade or more.¹⁶⁶ In Gaul, Rome had come with sword and shield, but stayed with bronze tablet and wine goblet in hand.

Pre-Conquest Comparison

There are two factors that make Roman and Chinese pre-conquest barbarian relations unique: the organization of their barbarian neighbors and the environment in which they became empires. These factors created very different trajectories of early barbarian relations for each empire. China, who was strong armed by the Xiongnu until very shortly before the conquest, was a victim of the Xiongnu's organization and their own coming together as an empire. The Romans, on the other hand, had comparably

¹⁶⁶ J. B. Bury, "The End of Roman Rule in North Gaul," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 1, no. 2 (1924): 201.

unstructured barbarian relations with the peoples of Gaul due to the loose tribal organization of these groups and the dynamic situation of early Italy.

China coalesced from various strong, warring states that were all of similar culture. The idea of China as a whole cultural region predates the idea of a politically unified China. For the entirety of the Warring States period, nomads from Central Asia had been involved in the conflicts of the warring states as auxiliaries. Some of these groups would come together to form the Xiongnu confederation around the same time that the Han were rising from the ashes of the Qin dynasty. The Xiongnu confederation was held together by a system of tribute where the *Shanyu* would buy the loyalty of his subordinates with material gifts, while the subordinates would buy their subordinates' loyalty and so on. The *Shanyu's* position was also later secured by his perceived resistance to China. Unfortunately, the state size that this system was able to support was dependent upon the amount of gifts that the Shanyu provided. As the Xiongnu confederation increased in size, the amount of gifts increased to the point where normal trade was not sufficient. The Xiongnu resorted to massive raids on China in order to acquire the required goods. To supply a steadier stream of gifts the Xiongnu managed to force the Han government into the *Heqin* treaty, which forced the Han government into providing tribute to the Xiongnu. The Han government was unable to resist these treaties due to potential internal problems. It would be many decades until the Han were able to break the *Heqin* and reverse the tributary system on the Xiongnu.

The Romans became an empire amid the different cultures and politics of early Italy. Early Rome was sandwiched between the Etruscans in the north, the Greeks in the south and other Italian peoples in the east. Rome grew among these different cultures

and political systems, swallowing them and assimilating them as she grew to encompass the entire peninsula. Roman constitutional identity formed because there was no unifying culture in the early Roman Republic. People who were considered Roman could be culturally different. The only thing unifying the various 'Roman' groups was the set of laws that emanated from Rome, which everyone in the empire obeyed. However, the Romans were more receptive to some cultures than others. For example, after the Romans had been Hellenized, they were more likely to accept peoples who were at least partially Hellenized themselves, such as the Gauls of Northern Italy and Southern France. Roman control before the conquest was limited to these Hellenized Gauls.

Gaul as a province was very good geographically for the bitter politics of the late Republic. Proconsuls could serve out their terms while being reasonably close to the politics in Rome. Gaul was also a reasonably lucrative province for a provincial governor, not as lucrative as some in the east, but lucrative nevertheless. On the stage of the late Republic, Gaul was an exceptionally valuable staging area for political intrigue. Gallic tribes could be involved in the internal politics of Rome or provide a threat to Roman interests. Catiline was trying to bring in the Allobroges in his coup attempt. By the Ciceronian Age, however, unless they were aided by Roman force, the Gauls could not provide a significant threat to Rome due to their disunity.

The pre-conquest relationship of both empires with barbarians was fundamental in providing a foundation for their foreign policy towards barbarians once they had become empires. In the case of the Chinese empire, the Xiongnu's aggressive tactics would humiliate the Chinese into attacking the Xiongnu, conquering them and destroying their confederation. For the Romans, their early

development as a state created the identity that would eventually assimilate their Gallic neighbors. Both empires would eventually conquer and assimilate their barbarian neighbors, but they reached that point in very different ways.

Conflict Comparison

The methods of conflict are sometimes overlooked in history. It is often seen as inconsequential to the overall historical narrative. However, in the case of the comparison of the Chinese and the Romans we can glean some valuable information regarding the barbarian relations of the two empires by examining the conflicts that they had with their barbarian neighbors. While the conquests were motivated for different reasons, they had similar goals and used roughly similar methods to subdue the peripheral peoples around them. Nevertheless, these peripheral groups forced each empire to adapt their tactics and equipment significantly, such as how China included large numbers of cavalry in their northern armies and the Romans adopted the Gallic helmet.

China's conquest of the Xiongnu was largely motivated by their political humiliation at the hands of the Xiongnu and their *Heqin* treaty. Chinese political theory dictated that China needed to be the dominate power in the region. The Chinese did not want the Xiongnu to stand beside the Han court as a "brotherly" state. The Chinese needed to break the Xiongnu power base in order to get out of the embarrassing Heqin treaty and to make sure that the Xiongnu were 'knocked down a peg' politically. The Chinese were at a disadvantage due to the fact that they needed to fight an enemy in their home territory with the weakest wing of their armed forces. They would need to adapt in order to achieve their goals against the Xiongnu.

The Romans, particularly Caesar, were motivated to conquer Gaul for pure personal ambition. The unstable political situation in Rome, Gaul's strategic position in Italian politics, and the quest for personal military glory were important issues that motivated men like Caesar to attempt such conquests. Caesar's task was not to burn the entire region to the ground; rather, it was to bring each of the tribes in Gaul within the Roman sphere of political control either through diplomacy or armed conflict.

The Chinese, who had not only a nomadic enemy, but also one on unfamiliar territory, fought with one clear advantage over the Xiongnu - vast reserves of resources. China simply challenged the Xiongnu year after year with well supported invading armies. In the long run, it mattered very little that the Xiongnu could flee from unfavorable military situations if the Chinese could easily replace the losses they sustained. The Xiongnu could not endure this consistent military threat, which lasted for decades of annual invasion, as they simply did not have the resources to compete with it. These Chinese invasions, though tactically unsuccessful, made significant strategic progress. The strain placed on the Xiongnu by the Han armies began to wear on the Xiongnu's political hierarchy, which partially depended on resistance to China for stability. The once solid Xiongnu confederation began to show cracks as the war progressed, finally fragmenting in the 60's and 50's B.C.E. The surrender of the Southern Xiongnu was a landmark for China in their foreign policy with the nomads of the north and west. The new treaties with the surrendered Xiongnu were much more costly financially for the Chinese, but were politically ideal. In the end, China had fractured and subdued its largest barbarian challenger.

Caesar was facing much the same problem in Gaul. Although the Gauls were not unified in the same way as the Xiongnu, they had the potential for consolidation. Caesar did not have the luxury of attrition as his army of approximately 60,000 was large by the standards of the time, but was woefully inadequate to conquer an area that contained millions of people. Caesar had to make sure that he did not spark a pan Gallic resistance, which would spell defeat for him in the field and serious legal and political consequences at home. Caesar played off the Gauls' inherent division to make sure that he was only fighting one or two tribes at a time. He did this by taking advantage of the already friendly and allied tribes. He created the belief that his friends were well treated and that his enemies were sacked, enslaved, or worse. The Gallic tribes drew up along sides, with many on the side of Caesar. Once Caesar had a solid base of loyal Gallic tribes, it was only a matter of stamping out the scattered resistance. Each tribe that Caesar subdued increased his allies' loyalty, or at least their fear of destruction at his hands. Although fighting a different enemy, Caesar's campaign against the Gauls had similar goals and achieved similar results to the Chinese campaigns against the Xiongnu.

These two conquests are classic examples of a large imperial state fighting less organized tribal societies. They both encouraged and then utilized disunity in their enemies in order to gain an advantage – with the result being that each brought a significant new population under political and economic control and subsumed new groups within the empire's borders. These unassimilated barbarians would eventually become integral parts of their parent empire and would eventually become absorbed both culturally and legally and acquire a new identity as either Romans or Chinese. The conflicts that brought these barbarians

into 'civilization' are vital parts of the historical narrative which make up Roman and Chinese barbarian relations.

Assimilation Comparison

The assimilation of conquered peoples is a problem that all ancient empires had to face. Both Rome and China needed to bring the barbarians that they had conquered into their empire. Each empire's policy is a reflection not only on their views of barbarians, but of their own identity.

At first, immediately after the conquest, both empires used a light hand in administering freshly conquered barbarians. They needed to do this to make sure that the barbarians stayed conquered. Being too heavy-handed at the onset would simply drive the peripheral groups back into the periphery. In the case of China, they were exceptionally lavish with the surrendered Xiongnu. When dealing with a conquered population that could simply get on their horses and ride away, it was necessary to be very generous. The Han were making it more profitable for the Xiongnu leaders to stay with China. While it may have been a greater financial burden, it was by no means a failure. The post Wudi barbarian policy (it was not at all a *Heqin*) achieved all the goals the Chinese set out for it. It pacified the surrendered Xiongnu, strengthened part of the frontier, and weakened the political status of the Xiongnu from "brotherly state", to a tributary state. The latter was necessary for Chinese imperial political theory. The Han emperor needed to be the most powerful political force in the region and therefore could not allow the Xiongnu to exist as a brotherly state.

Rome's methods were somewhat different due to the different nature of the barbarians they were pacifying. As an urban empire, the Romans not only needed to assimilate the people of the Gaul, but the territory of Gaul itself. The Romans urbanized Gaul through a massive building program, replacing Oppida with cities or supplanting them with sites elsewhere. However, the Romans could not set up their administration without considering the sensibilities of the major tribes of Gaul. At times they would select inferior sites for provincial capitals in order to avoid setting off the tribes.¹⁶⁷ This allowed the Romans to set up their extensive administrative framework, which they used to provide Roman goods that slowly made the Gauls culturally Roman.

The Chinese program of assimilation was aimed at making the Xiongnu culturally Chinese citizens, who then could be ruled by Chinese laws. They did this through the forced migration of Chinese from other parts of the empire into the conquered Xiongnu areas and by pushing Xiongnu into other parts of the empire. The theory was that the Chinese citizens would civilize the barbarians with their superior virtue. It was thought at the time that only one gentleman could civilize an entire tribe of barbarians, that is, if he could keep his virtue resolute!¹⁶⁸

In Roman Gaul, cultural assimilation was a byproduct of Roman legal and administrative control. Rome was concerned with putting the Gauls under Roman law. Cultural assimilation followed legal assimilation. The Gauls became Roman first legally, and then became Roman culturally through Roman material culture

¹⁶⁷ Drinkwater, "Lugdunum: 'Natural Capital' of Gaul?," 139.

¹⁶⁸ Confucius, "The Chinese Classics; with a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes.," ed. James Legge (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 122.

and the need to fit into the larger Roman imperial culture. By including the Gauls under Roman law, Rome was subsuming the Gauls within their constitutional identity.

Both empires molded their barbarian neighbors into their own image. Their methods of assimilation showed a great deal about what they thought of themselves and what it meant to be 'Roman' or 'Chinese'. By no means were these methods of assimilation definitive or even intentional, but their comparison demonstrates things that are not otherwise apparent in their singular study.

Conclusion

The political domination of one people over another has occurred not only throughout time, but also throughout the world as well. Rome and China provide two examples from two different continents. While these two roughly contemporary empires had very little contact with one another, their methods for dealing with peripheral barbarian groups that they considered uncivilized are similar in many ways. Where they differed was in the way they assimilated their barbarian neighbors, which was due to their different means of self identity.

In this age of global trade and terrorism, cultural interaction and change is still relevant today. As transportation improves and populations become more mobile, cultural interaction will only increase. The assimilation of foreign people will be a problem that every industrial nation will continue to face in the future. By understanding the processes that took place during the ancient periods of cultural interaction, we can better understand them as they take place in our modern world. Within this thesis we have traced the process of how a large state

society interacts with and eventually absorbs a smaller indigenous society. This has been achieved through the analysis of two well known case studies. Through such studies, it can be seen how indigenous groups solidify their leadership hierarchy and their territory in the process of tribalization. Once these groups have solidified their own cultural identity, that identity is used to interact with the state society that had precipitated such cultural change in the first place. Eventually the tribe and the state come into conflict, accelerating the formation of identity on both sides of the frontier. Military conflict forces both sides to alter their tactics and organization in order to successfully conduct a campaign. In both case studies, these military conflicts resulted in the significant portions of the non-state societies being absorbed into the larger empire. Here the process of cultural assimilation is completed by the different administrative policies of each empire.

The Romans, who defined themselves through their law rather than their customs, assimilated the Gauls by incorporating the local nobility into that Legal definition. Incorporating the local nobility into the Roman legal identity allowed Roman culture to complete the permeation it had begun during the Iron Age. Cultural assimilation in Gaul, therefore, can be seen largely as a byproduct of Roman administrative practices.

The Chinese, on the other hand, defined themselves by their culture. The Chinese attempted to use their culture to aid their administrative structure. By moving large numbers of pastoralists to agricultural areas, the Chinese were causing the surrendered Xiongnu to not only become culturally Chinese, but also to act as effective border guards during the process of their cultural assimilation.

These different methods of assimilation are a result of each empire having a different means of identity.

The subject of identity has been dealt with in various places in this paper. The understanding of the formation and the maintenance of identity is key in understanding the interaction between state and non-state societies in either case study. Both the empire and the tribe were irrevocably changed by this interaction. That is, the tribe was instrumental in the formation of the empire's identity while the state was the driving factor in the formation of the tribe's identity. These forces influenced the pre conquest relations, conflict and assimilation that characterize Roman and Chinese barbarian relations.

Asymmetric political relations and the concept of the 'barbarian' are issues that will never disappear from human society. It is necessary to study these forces in the past in order to understand them in our modern world. Whether it's the American war in Iraq or the Chinese political control of Tibet, these processes shape culture and human life. Like the man that provided motivation for this study, we all use history and our own cultural biases to shape our world view. To be good global citizens, we must not only understand current events at face value, but also understand the historical and anthropological processes that drive them. Today, the Romans and the ancient Chinese seem so distant from us. We must learn from their example if we are to understand our own politics and interactions. We must understand the past if we are to move the human community into the future.

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