

# **Political Institutions and Property Rights: Ancient China, Greece and Rome**

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**Abstract:** This paper documents a particular aspect of state formation related to political institutions and property rights. It is shown that property rights are extended to new groups in exchange for support of a new ruling group and that the previous privileged supporters resist this change. This is shown by comparing different cases of the state formation process in ancient China, Greece and Rome.

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## 1) Introduction

A fundamental issue in political economy is the relationship between political institutions and property rights. Historical studies providing analysis of this relationship tend to focus on early modern Western countries. This paper considers three major eras in ancient China, ancient Greece and ancient Rome. These cases have received very little attention and comparisons among them are few. In the comparison made here, a common feature of state formation is seen in all three cases.

In the ancient period, before states had contiguously divided up the continents, states were essentially city states or tribes centered on a town or village. The authority of the state did not extend much beyond the town itself. Although the data is thousands of years old, we are compensated by the fact that back then society was very simple compared to modern times. There are essentially only a handful of main social groups in the ancient period. This makes identifying the relationship between political institutions and property rights much easier. Fundamental changes and development of political institutions most often takes place during increases in the level of military threat. One of the most well known statements in political science is one made by Charles Tilly: “War made the state, and the state made war.”<sup>1</sup> In the case of the ancient era an increase in the level of military threat often leads to state formation, or to put it another way, changes in political institutions. These changes in political institutions entail changes in the property right system. This is the background and motivation for studying the ancient period.

This paper documents a particular aspect of state formation related to political institutions and property rights. It is shown that property rights are extended to new groups in exchange for support of a new ruling group and that the previous privileged supporters resist this change. This is shown by comparing different cases of the state formation process in ancient China, Greece and Rome.

Comparisons of the ancient period between the West and China are currently becoming more popular. An important early contribution in this direction was Victoria Tin-bor Hui’s *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*.<sup>2</sup> The impact of this book on political science and sociology has been to help open the doors to comparisons between ancient China and the West. There is a growing literature that makes comparisons between ancient China and ancient Rome and/or

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<sup>1</sup> Tilly (1975), p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Hui (2005).

ancient Greece.<sup>3</sup> There is also a well established literature in sociology and political science that makes numerous comparisons across countries which has touched on these three ancient periods.<sup>4</sup>

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Some basic concepts used in this paper are discussed in Section 2. Sections 3-5 cover ancient China, Greece and Rome respectively and Section 6 concludes.

## 2) Basic concepts

Fundamental changes and development of political institutions most often takes place during a period when the level of military threat is increasing. The basic reason for this is that the foundation of the state is the authority it holds over society. Since the state itself is an organized group of people, we are essentially talking about the authority one group has over society. What does authority mean? It can only mean that one group *limits their resistance* to the actions of the ruling group. That is to say one consciously allows a group to perform certain actions that may reduce one's liberties. Here lies the heart of property rights – restrictions on one's ability to use one's life and property to perform certain actions. The state may take some property or income, but as long it is conceded that the state has the authority to do so, individual and social resistance is reduced and the state successfully collects its taxes.

The authority of the state over society therefore puts various limits on different groups' ability to resist its actions. The relationship between the state and various social groups is the focus of this analysis. We will see that in the ancient era during times when the military threat is increasing state formation takes place. In particular the state or some other group will gain more authority in the sense that the effective military force has increased so that it can defend better against the increased military threat. This is accomplished by rearranging the various state-social group relations. The end result is that the state receives a net increase in support. Some groups may have their relations with the new state weakened while others will have theirs strengthened. Those that have their relations with the state weakened will be hurt by these changes because the nature of the relationship between the state and supporting groups is that it involves an exchange of support for rights. If one's support for the

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Kim (2009), Lloyd (1996), Martin (2010), Motomura (1991), Scheidel (2011) and Shankman and Durrant (2002). A major player in this movement is The Stanford Ancient Chinese and Mediterranean Empires Comparative History Project (ACME).

<sup>4</sup> See Hintze (1975), Mann (1986) and Weber (1997).

state declines, then the state's sanctioned ability to protect one's property rights is also diminished. Similarly, if one group's relation with the state is strengthened then they will be better off because the state will extend privileges and rights in exchange for the increased support. The losing group will resist these changes. The reason that they are not successful is the impending need of society to increase the effectiveness of their military, which often entails increasing the amount of resources allocated to warfare and possibly more efficient techniques of applying military force, e.g. new military tactics or weapons. It is because of the constitution of society that a new state emerges in this time of crisis. Various groups who were previously not willing to protest now find a situation where their effort to provide support to the state in exchange for privileges and rights can be accommodated so as to increase the military strength of the state, which is needed if the society wishes to live on. During this crisis then various groups compete to form relationships with the state and among themselves that be to their advantage while increasing the military strength of the state. Once the crisis is over, i.e. the outside military threat is more or less stable, the new political institutions become stable and there is little chance of major change, unless the ruling group and their supporters do not have a decisive military advantage over those under the rule of the state but offer little to the state. This is why in the ancient period serving in the military was a *privilege*. One has to condition one's thinking away from the modern period where military service is an obligation to be avoided if possible. Today, states collect taxes from every citizen directly via telephones, computers and cars. In the ancient period, without modern transportation and communication, people and orders could only travel as fast as a horse or boat and the state was forced to engage wealthy families to get access to use of the people and resources under their local control. Back in the ancient period the game was different and such that the local aristocrats and wealthy people tried to gain control of as much land and over as many people they could. In doing so, they effectively put themselves between the state and the use of these resources. When the state wanted the use of these resources they would require the consent of the local powerful people, who would exact a price for their use – privileges and rights.

In the analysis of property rights in this paper the concept of property rights is taken as a very general concept. It is not a patent or any written formal constitutional right as agreed to by all. It is rather the ability to perform – or get away with – certain actions. Even if merchants are despised as long as they are tolerated they enjoy certain property rights. In thinking about this general formulation of property rights avoiding the modern very clear formal distinctions of various rights is to be avoided. It's essentially about what you can get away with doing within a society. There may be

social resistance to your actions but as long as you can carry out those actions reasonably well, it is said here that you have property rights with respect to these actions. It may also be true that social resistance is overwhelming in which case it is said here that you do not have property rights with respect to these actions.

### **3) Ancient China**

The Western Zhou feudal system was established around 1100 BC in China. A king was set up at the capital and various lords were enfeoffed with regional fiefs in the surrounding areas. There were fair distances between the capital and the regions. The official titles and lands were hereditary in nature. The regional lords provided some taxes to the king and also provided military services, which were based on the army of the fief and under the authority of regional lord. The latter acknowledged the authority of the king and received royal benefits and privileges in return. Largely due to nomadic barbarian intrusions from the west and north the capital city was weakened and political dominance of the king had waned by the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.

In the early Western Zhou the heart of the state was its fortified capital and some surrounding satellite garrisons. The king was the leader of a group of nobles, who had claim to the highest offices of state. Some of these other noble groups were relatives of the king, while others were unrelated powerful local noble families. The residents of the capital included the army troops and their descendants who were led by the ruler and the elite. Members of this group were the rough counterparts to citizens of the city-state in ancient Greece. Civil and military obligations were assigned to this group and they were given the privilege of consulting on state affairs and emergencies on occasion. People outside of the capital city, in the surrounding countryside, lived in nearby villages enjoyed a degree of autonomy while providing taxes and various services. This basic political structure was emulated by the fiefs and their lords on a smaller scale.<sup>5</sup>

During the early years of the Western Zhou, royal customs and religion defined bonds among the elite. Around the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, the royal Zhou court began to lose power and authority devolved to the regional powers. In the following centuries as population grew conflicts increased among the regional lords. Conflict between these increasingly independent states led to the formation of coalitions. In the earliest stage the coalitions formed under the dominance of a hegemon, often in response to

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<sup>5</sup> See Hsu (1999), pp. 570, 572; Lin (1981), pp. 38 – 51.

aggression by a powerful state. For example, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC Lord Huan of Qi was the first major hegemon who protected the northern countries from the southern aggressor, Chu. After Lord Huan led an allied force that defeated Chu, the latter retreated and formed a southern alliance. For the next century and a half the military and political history of China was dominated by the conflict of these two coalitions, the northern alliance usually controlled by Jin and the southern alliance under Chu leadership.<sup>6</sup>

As conflicts increased among an increasing number of regional powers secondary feudalization began around the early 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. Secondary feudalization is a process where the regional lords of the original Western Zhou feudal system usurp power and begin to establish their own fiefs by bestowing lands to newly created branches of noble families and meritorious generals. The peak of secondary feudalization was the last quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, but thereafter few new notable families were established. Around the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, there was likely a scarcity of available land to distribute and this likely brought an end to secondary feudalization.<sup>7</sup>

In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, as power devolved from center to region, internal conflicts increased as well. The powerful ministerial families, who were in charge of the army, began to usurp power from the leader and civil wars became common.<sup>8</sup>

During this period of internal insurrection and civil war, covenants were increasingly used to create and reinforce relations between competing groups within a state. As Lewis explains it:<sup>9</sup>

*“Covenants were often sealed between families conspiring to arrange the selection of a particular prince as heir apparent, to seize the throne, or to destroy an enemy who seemed on the verge of seizing it himself. In some cases, such “private” covenants were likewise sealed between the current ruler of a state and parties whose support was essential to maintain his rule.”*

Here we see the beginning of the key exchange that takes place in the process of state formation. Covenants created bonds between two groups: a leader group and a

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<sup>6</sup> See Hsu (1965), pp. 53 – 54; Lewis (1990), pp. 43 – 47.

<sup>7</sup> See Hsu (1999), pp. 570 – 571.

<sup>8</sup> See Hsu (1965), pp. 56 – 58.

<sup>9</sup> See Lewis (1990), p. 48.

supporting group. The exchange involves the supporting group making commitments to the leader group. These commitments included the mobilization of both human and other resources in time of need. In return, the leader group extends to the supporting group benefits and protection, including protection of their liberties over their lives and properties as well as enhancement of their social status. At its most fundamental level we see the during the state formation process the exchange of support for property rights between groups, which creates new political institutions.

One noteworthy example is the capital populace (*guo ren*). During this period of increasing internal turbulence, as rulers and ministers competed for control they increasingly made moves to gain the support of the capital city inhabitants, who could be mobilized for military service or mob action. These residents were composed of the lowest level of nobility (*shi*) as well as merchants and artisans. The former were the primary constituent of the army. The inhabitants of the capital cities came to play a decisive role in the struggles between the rulers and ministers and often decided the succession to the throne. Therefore, ambitious men sought to win their favor and would seal a covenant with the capital populace. In this way, new social groups were drawn into the political order and bound to the emerging rulers.<sup>10</sup>

As the ruling groups in the rural towns solidified their positions by extending rights to groups previously excluded within the town, they also increased in competition with one another. This led the rulers to appeal to other previously disenfranchised groups in the town's hinterlands. Nearby rural villages were brought into relation with the ruling group through another exchange of support for rights.

One of the earliest reforms of this type took place in the country of Qi. The ruler of Qi, Huan Gong, and his main minister carried out a major political reform in 685 BC. The capital city was divided into 21 districts including 6 districts for merchants and artisans. Many other districts outside of the capital city in the surrounding countryside were also established. These districts were administrative units that organized collection of taxes and military service and served as an organizational unit for the army. District troops were grouped together in a hierarchy to form the army of Qi. This new army had a large number of standing troops. The provision of taxes and military service to the new political institution was one part of the exchange. The new groups brought into this system enjoyed the benefits of state registration and the protection that implicitly came with it. They also enjoyed

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<sup>10</sup> See Chao (1996), pp. 373 – 75; Chao (1992), pp. 20 – 22; Lewis (1990), pp. 48 – 49; Yang (1999), pp. 806 – 07.

increases protection of their property by the state and their social status. Another example, in 633 B.C. the country of Jin reorganized its military into three armies based on administrative regions and further increased its military in 588 B.C. to six armies. Jin accomplished this by extending military service to members of the countryside that had not previously been in the army.<sup>11</sup>

In 594 B.C. at a time when the country of Lu faced increasing external threats and internal power struggles, a new political institution emerged where taxes were levied according to the acreage of arable land. Previously, noble families contributed to state finances, but now new previously non-elite groups provided fiscal support to the state. In 590 B.C. military duties were extended to inhabitants of the countryside. At least a good share of the old elite had likely resisted these reforms as can be seen by the internal power struggles of this era.<sup>12</sup>

The height of the state formation process that dramatically increased the number of people previously excluded from political affairs in the exchange of support for property rights was the appearance and development of the county (xian). The county was a large formal administrative unit in which land was allocated to families in exchange for taxes and military service. While many countries of the Warring States period (453 – 221 B.C.) established counties, the country of Qin, a late-comer, was the most successful in instituting these political reforms. These reforms established the administrative support for a large army that eventually unified all of China for the first time in 221 B.C.

One eminent scholar views the expansion of the exchange of rights for support as a fundamental feature of the process of state formation of this period. According to Mark Lewis:

*“In the competition to mobilize ever larger bodies of men, various states began to claim the services of the populations of their rural hinterlands and the lower social classes, which had hitherto played no political role. These reforms involve the allocation of land – gained through the opening of new territories to cultivation or through conquest – in exchange for the payment of taxes and the provision of labor and military service. The process was progressively extended in various states, until it culminated in the reforms of Shang Yang in the Qin state, where the entire adult, male population was registered, ranked, and allocated land on the basis of military service.*

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<sup>11</sup> See Hsu (1999), p. 573.

<sup>12</sup> Hsu (1999), p. 573.



*Carrying out these reforms entailed the development of new administrative organs for effective local government throughout the territory of the state, practices for registering and policing large populations, and methods to measure and allocate land. These policies, originally designed for mass mobilization and the control of infantry armies, became the basis for control of the civil population.”<sup>13</sup>*

One of the most important events of the Warring States period (453 – 221 B.C.) was the miraculous rise of the relatively backward country of Qin, which has its beginnings as a fief of a royal horse breeder. In 361 B.C. a new ruler, Duke Xiao, ascended the throne in Qin. He announced that the government of Qin was seeking talented men to serve in his government. A young man named Shang Yang from the bordering state of Wei arrived seeking employment. Shang Yang advised Duke Xiao to implement a series of reforms, which were immediately opposed by many Confucian scholars in the Qin court. In many cases of this era, Confucian scholars essentially served as the conservative mouthpiece for the established nobility resisting change and honoring tradition. Eventually, Shang Yang was hired and convinced Duke Xiao to implement his reforms, which aimed to centralize taxation. Shang Yang ordered that all households be registered by administrators. This edict had been previously issued. The fact that he had to reissue this edict indicates that the powerful noble families had blocked the implementation of the previous edict. The first round of Shang Yang’s reforms was implemented with only limited success. In 350 B.C. the Qin capital was moved to Xianyang. This was a major strategic move for Duke Xiao and his reform minded advisor Shang Yang. The new capital area had fewer powerful families than the former capital. The region was more fertile and close to a strategic pass. In that year 41 new counties were established in the Qin domain. Each county had a salaried county magistrate who was appointed by the court. Border counties opened up new land and encouraged immigration of peasants from neighboring countries. Land was registered with the county magistrate and allocated to families in exchange for taxes, military service and other duties. This allocation of land included the state’s recognition of the registered owner’s right to use the property. Two types of counties developed – one with under 10,000 households and the other with more than 10,000 households. The new state that formed operated in a way that better implemented directives of the central authority. Households forwarded taxes to the county magistrates, who in turn followed orders and turned the taxes over to the court. The result was a massive increase in state funds and a large professional army emerged, which gave Duke Xiao the means to enforce his political reforms throughout the entire country. Qin’s army proved to be dominant and all the other

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<sup>13</sup> See Lewis (1990), p. 9.

major countries were eventually defeated by Qin. The defeated countries were divided into counties with centrally appointed county magistrates. Eventually the counties were grouped into prefectures, so that a two-tier regional government developed where prefects served as the administrative intermediary between the capital and its constituent counties. In 221 B.C. Qin conquered the last country and unified China for the first time.<sup>14</sup>

We see then in the transition from a feudal system to a unified empire during the 1100 – 221 B.C. period, when faced with an increasing military threat ruling groups or potential ruling groups sought out enough support from various groups in society to meet this increased threat. In exchange for support groups were given various privileges and rights. Foremost in ancient China's case was the right to own and use land, which was sanctioned by the state. This new support base for the state enjoyed more property rights as a result.

#### **4) Ancient Greece**

Tyrannies appear throughout much of ancient Greek history. Tyrannies are known to have existed from the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, when aristocratic governments began to weaken, to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, when Rome began to extend its rule over Greece. The traditional age of Greek tyrants, where the tyrants were widespread and commonly appeared in Greek cities, is about 650 B.C. – 500 B.C. It should be noted that tyrants did not only appear on the Greek mainland but also in colonies abroad such as Syracuse in Sicily.

A tyrant was a man who obtained the sole power of state and ruled in defiance of previous political institutions. Tyrants usurped power by force rather than rising legitimately within the existing traditions. Some tyrants were military men and many were aristocrats. One common characteristic of tyrannies is that they were reigns that clearly opposed the aristocratic rule and the exclusive privileges of the nobility. Indeed, tyranny was an important part of the transition from the aristocratic states of the early 7<sup>th</sup> century to the classical Greek democratic city-states of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The modern term “dictator” has only limited applicability here at best. The rule of a tyrant was not necessarily unpopular. The rule of an exclusive minority was being violated and rights and privileges were extended to other groups that were previously excluded from the political and social elite. In fact some tyrannies were very popular.

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<sup>14</sup> See Edwards (2003), pp. 114 – 136; Lin (1981), pp. 71 – 80, 181 – 83, 188 – 90; Wei (2003); Yang (2002), pp. 1 – 6.

Furthermore, tyrants often came to power during periods of political crisis. External military threats or internal chaos often provided the conditions that allowed tyrants to find sympathetic support for their rule and to seize the reigns of power. Thus, in ancient Greek history the title “tyrant” did not necessarily imply that the ruler was brutal or unwelcome.<sup>15</sup>

To understand the role the tyrants played in ancient Greek political development it must be kept in mind that the 650 – 500 B.C. period was a period of political transition. To appreciate this one needs to have a rough understanding of the political states before and after the transition. On the Greek mainland after the violent upheavals that swept the Mediterranean at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium local kingships slowly developed in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was during the 8<sup>th</sup> century that aristocrats wrestled away leadership from the kings and established numerous aristocratic states throughout the Greek world. These emerging cities were only small agricultural towns or settlements that would later develop into classical Greek city-states.<sup>16</sup> Hundreds of such cities emerged in the 8<sup>th</sup> century as power passed from kings to nobles.<sup>17</sup>

The Greek aristocracies were based on a tribal organization, which also persisted in various forms for centuries after the breakdown of aristocratic rule. The largest division was the tribe (*phyle*), whose names correspond to racial classifications. For instance all Dorian states included the three tribes Hylleis, Pamphyloi, and Dymanes. Athens and many other Ionian states included the four tribes Geeleontes, Hopletes, Aigikoreis and Argadeis. These tribes were likely divisions of original races that were in existence when major migrations or invasions penetrated the Greek peninsula. In each state the tribe was subdivided into phratries or “brotherhoods,” which contained smaller units called *genos* – clans or groups of families. This organization was largely kinship based, where a phratry or a tribe had a common ancestor. Yet fictitious kinship ties were probably not uncommon. The phratries thus shared a common cult, which provided some bonds among members.

This tribal organization was the political institution that provided the basis for the army as well as political, legal and fiscal administration. This system gave important political, legal and social privileges to the nobles, who led the cults of their kinship groups. The central authority of this tribal organization was an exclusive council of aristocrats, who often elected their magistrates. Hereditary rule by powerful aristocratic families was common within this political institution.

Various versions of the tribal organization were common in Greece around the

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<sup>15</sup> Andrewes (1963), pp. 7 – 9; Demand (1996), pp. 110 – 11; Martin (1996), pp. 79 – 81; and Murray (1993), pp. 137 – 39.

<sup>16</sup> Few walled cities existed before the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Fine (1983), p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> Fine (1983), pp. 53 – 61.

early 7<sup>th</sup> century. Over the course of the following centuries classical democratic Greek city-states developed. A developed city-state had an assembly of all full citizens, which included all free adult males. This contrasted to the previous councils based on noble birth. In principle this assembly handled all government affairs. All the qualified citizens that were willing and able to attend handled the proposals. There was no representative nature to the administration. However, the assembly could not initiate business. A smaller council was created and discussed public business beforehand. The proposals from the council were then put to the assembly for vote. The preliminary management of proposals was called *probouleusis* and functioned to reduce the unruliness of direct management by an assembly, which was too large to effectively handle detailed affairs. The council was composed of ordinary citizens chosen by lot for a term of one year.

The tyrannies of the period 650 – 500 B.C. thus can be seen as a form of government that was set against the aristocratic rule and privileges of the nobility, which was widespread in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century. During the reign of tyrants various rights and privileges were extended to groups that were previously excluded by the nobles. As the tyrants were eventually pushed out, the new political institutions that emerged retained many aspects of the changes introduced by the tyrants. In particular, political rights were extended to a much larger cut of society than had been previously known under the rule of aristocrats in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup>

The age of Greek tyrannies coincided with other developments that played crucial roles in these political developments. Arguably most important was commerce and trade, which had experienced increasing growth from the late 8<sup>th</sup> century through the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Coinage appeared in Greece around the last quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that tyrannies tended to appear in places where there were trading cities, such as in the seafaring states around the Isthmus of Corinth, suggests that a new group of rich families played an important role in these political developments. New families that made their wealth from agriculture, trade and commerce had the means to begin to challenge the privileged rule of the aristocrats. The increased size of this group likely played no small part in the political developments of this period, as the tyrants could expect many of this group to be sympathetic to their claims and to provide support for them. However, general unrest among these groups was not enough. A specific crisis was often the immediate catalyst to political change.<sup>19</sup>

This expansion in trade increased contacts with the Near East. The century from 750 to 650 B.C., the so-called Orientalizing period, was an era of increased contact with the Phoenicians. Greek culture interacted and evolved in response to

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<sup>18</sup> See Andrewes (1963), pp. 8- 16.

<sup>19</sup> See Botsford and Robinson (1969), pp. 71 – 2; Demand (1996), p. 110; Fine (1983), 98 – 9; Martin (1996), p. 58; and Sealey (1976), pp. 39, 43, 55 – 9.

Phoenician ideas, especially in the areas of art, religion and literacy. The Greeks adapted the Phoenician alphabet with the use of vowels to develop the earliest form of modern Greek script. During the century from 750 to 650 B.C. writing spread to a considerable share Greek society and by the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. the average Athenian male could read and write.<sup>20</sup>

An important development during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries in Greece was the codification of previously unwritten laws. The aristocrats had used their influence to interpret and apply unwritten rules in their interests. The reappearance of a written language in Greece contributed to the writing of the laws. It should be recalled that the syllabic Linear B script was lost after the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization. The Greek written language was invented around the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century along the Syrian coast and adopted aspects of the north Semitic alphabet. By about the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century this written language appeared in Greece. During the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries many cities had pressured the aristocrats to allow the laws to be written and to be made public. This contributed to the weakening of the aristocrats' legal and social dominance over local society.<sup>21</sup>

Lastly, it should be mentioned that the development of the hoplite army likely did not play a key causal role in the emergence of the Greek tyrannies of the 650 – 500 B.C. period. This view is commonly held and based on the fact that the hoplite equipment first appeared in Greece around the last quarter of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and organized hoplite phalanx has been established to exist from about 650 B.C. These observations seem to suggest that potential tyrants had many opportunities to appear in the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which does not agree with their known history.<sup>22</sup>

### *Argos*

The first known tyrant in Greece was Pheidon of Argos. He came to power sometime around 670 and about this time defeated the Spartans at Hysiae giving Argos control of the plain of Thyrea, which bordered the territories of Argos and Sparta. Pheidon then extended hegemony throughout the northeastern part of the Peloponnese, introduced standard measures to the region, and in a show of power imposed his presidency on the competition at Olympia in 668. Pheidon may have introduced some military innovations, which were helpful in bringing him to power at Argos.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Murray (1993), pp. 81 – 101.

<sup>21</sup> Fine (1983), pp. 100 – 04.

<sup>22</sup> See Sealey (1976), pp. 56 – 9; and van Wees (2000).

<sup>23</sup> Andrewes (1963), pp. 39 – 42; and Sealey (1976), pp. 40 – 45.

## *Sicyon*

Another tyranny arose in Sicyon around the early 6<sup>th</sup> century. To appreciate certain aspects of this and other tyrannies in the Peloponnese one needs to understand the racial situation of the era. A race of Greek peoples called the Dorians gradually moved into central Greece. Probably from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, small groups of Dorians migrated south into the Peloponnese. Descendants of the Mycenaeans, or their ruling class, were among the original non-Dorian peoples. Those non-Dorians that resisted the Dorian move into the Peloponnese were pushed to the west coast or into the Arcadian mountains. Many non-Dorians in the Peloponnese were conquered by various states and reduced to various types of surfs, most notoriously in Sparta. The tribes in many Peloponnesian states came to include three Dorian tribes: Dymanes, Hylleis and the Pamphyloi. The Dorians were in a position in which they needed to provide legitimacy for their rule over the non-Dorians. In an effective act of political propaganda the Dorians invented a legend of an ancestor, Heracles, who had held lands in the Peloponnese and that they were merely returning to reclaim the lands of their ancestors. By the end of the Dark Ages this legend had become widespread in Peloponnese. The tensions between Dorian and non-Dorian peoples in the Peloponnese had an important influence since within many states developed social gradations along racial lines. One effect of the tyrants in the Peeloponnese was to lessen or remove these social privileges that had arose from racial distinctions. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century, most Dorian states included, in addition to the three traditional Dorian tribes, a fourth tribe under various names that was composed of non-Dorian citizens.<sup>24</sup>

Around the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century Orthagas established his rule at Sicyon. At this time racial tensions seem to be absent in Sicyon. Over the next half a century a regional tension developed that involved Sicyon. Delphi was a town that had existed since the Mycenaean period. Although it had been destroyed in the Mycenaean collapse, it revived in the Dark Age and served as a local sanctuary. A nearby port city, Cirrha, along the northern coase of the Gulf of Corinth controlled the route from the sea to Delphi and was in a position to collect tolls from numerous traveling pilgrims. The city likely heavily influenced if not controlled Delphi's popular sanctuary. Cirrha's growing influence over maritime trade and over the Delphi's sanctuary put Cirrha in conflict with a number of Greek states, including Athens, Sicyon and Thessaly.<sup>25</sup>

Athens came in conflict with Delphi around 632 B.C. when Delphi had encouraged the attempt by Cylon to become a tyrant at Athens. Delphi had developed into a competing port city in the Gulf of Corinth for Sicyon and also had opposed

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<sup>24</sup> Andrewes (1963), pp. 54 – 5; Fine (1983), pp. 121 – 22; Martin (1996), pp. 34, 38; Oliva (1981), p. 63; and Sealey (1976), p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> Andrewes (1963), p. 57; and Fine (1983), pp. 114 – 16, 122)

policies of Cleisthenes at Sicyon. Thessaly had made several attempts to expand its influence into southern Greece, but Cirrha had offered resistance. This situation gave rise to the First Sacred War in ca. 595 B.C. A number of states, including Athens, Sicyon and Thessaly, waged war against Cirrha and Delphi for influence over maritime trade and control of the sanctuary at Delphi. The Thessalian forces played a major role and Alcmeon led a contingent of forces from Athens. The war became protracted and the later stages involved a siege of Cirrha. Cleisthenes from Sicyon raised a fleet and cut the flow of supplies to Cirrha. The city fell around 590 B.C. and Cirrha was razed. The First Sacred War was a turning point for Delphi. By around this time Apollo was made the god of Delphi, which over the next several centuries became a great Panhellenic center of Greek religion. A major festival was organized at Delphi to celebrate the victory of the First Sacred War, where these games achieved fame second only to the Olympic games.<sup>26</sup>

In Sicyon a tyrant, Cleisthenes, came to power and ruled about 600 – 570 B.C. Cleisthenes had played a major role in the First Sacred War and was a leading figure in Greece in the first quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. He established a festival at Sicyon with the spoils from the war. Cleisthenes, who was likely a grandson of Orthagoras, had also led Sicyon in war against Argos. Around the time of his ascension Cleisthenes stirred up resentment against Argos and the Dorians. Cleisthenes pursued anti-Argive policies at Sicyon. He changed the practices of the cult of Adrastus, a hero of Argos, by replacing the worship of Adrastus with Melanippos, the legendary enemy of Adrastus. He restricted the use of some Homeric poems, which celebrated the achievements of Argos. Most importantly, Cleisthenes made a major reform in the tribal system.<sup>27</sup>

Before the rise of Cleisthenes, there were three traditional Dorian tribes at Sicyon, which also existed in Argos. The three traditional Dorian tribes were Dymanes, Hylleis and Pamphyli. During his ascension Cleisthenes clearly appealed to non-Dorian elements of the population for support. The anti-Dorian sentiment was exploited and Cleisthenes carried out a major reform of the tribal system. The names of the traditional Dorian tribes were changed to Choirentas, Hyatai and Oneatai, which were less than flattering names popular among non-Dorians. A fourth tribe, which Cleisthenes belonged, was named Archelaoi (or rulers). This reform was a major internal reorganization must have caused a local upheaval. This reform was the basis of Cleisthenes' power. This tribal reorganization persisted for some time after Cleisthenes' death.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Andrewes (1963), pp. 47, 59 – 60; Fine (1983), pp. 115 – 18; and Sealey (1976), p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> Andrewes (1963), pp. 58 – 60, 65; Fine (1983), pp. 115, 122; Osborne (1996), p. 282; and Sealey (1976), p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Andrewes (1963), p. 59; Fine (1983), pp. 121 – 22; Osborne (1996), p. 282; and Sealey (1976), pp.

In the Olympic games of 576 B.C. Cleisthenes won the chariot race. At this event he invited potential suitors for his daughter, Agariste. Many cities sent a suitor to Sicyon and two arrived from Athens. Cleisthenes chose Megacles, the son of Alcmaeon who had commanded the Athenian forces in the First Sacred War. The marriage of Megacles and Agariste led to two notable descendants. Their son, Cleisthenes, named after his grandfather, established the tribes and democracy for the Athenians. The great Athenian statesman Pericles was a grandson of Agariste.<sup>29</sup>

The tyranny at Sicyon lasted for some time after the death of Cleisthenes. About 550 B.C. the Spartans rid Sicyon of its tyranny and put the Dorians back in power. The Dorian tribe names were changed back to Hylleis, Pamphyli and Dymanatae and the fourth tribe was named Aegialeis, which was the name of the legendary son of Adrastus.<sup>30</sup>

While there were many factors that contributed to the rise of tyranny at Sicyon, internal problems were probably most important. If external threats were the main cause Cleisthenes would have required the support of the Dorian tribes and would likely not have marginalized them as he did. He clearly played to anti-Dorian sympathies in his rise.<sup>31</sup> [The following is me:] Cleisthenes' tribal reorganization likely involved a change in the right of appointment of tribal leaders – otherwise such derogatory names would not have been accepted. With the gain of the power of appointment also came a realignment of the base of support.

*Corinth* (Cypselus ca. 658 – ca. 628, Periander ca. 628 – ca. 588,  
Psammetichus ca. 588 – ca. 585)

Corinth was a city located near the isthmus separating the Gulf of Corinth from the Saronic Gulf, which connected the Greek mainland with the Peloponnese. The natural advantages in maritime trade that Corinth possessed were not seriously exploited until the rise of the Bacchiad rule. In the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, Corinth was ruled by a monarchy, whose royal family included the Bacchiad clan. Around the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Bacchiad clan overthrew the monarchy and established its rule. The main change in political institutions was that the chief power no longer was held by a hereditary king but rather in a larger clan, which annually selected a chief magistrate. Other features of the political institutions largely remained unchanged. There were also assisting officers and a council. The power of the Bacchiads came

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<sup>29</sup> Andrewes (1963), p. 61; Fine (1983), pp. 118 – 19; and Sealey (1976), p. 46.

<sup>30</sup> Andrewes (1963), p.61; Fine (1983), pp. 123 – 24; and Sealey (1976), p. 45.

<sup>31</sup> Andrewes (1963), p. 59.



from the wealth derived from their lands and from their noble family tradition.<sup>32</sup>

Under the Bacchiads in the later half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Corinth experienced an expansion in western trade and contacts with the Near East. Bacchiad nobles were sent out with groups of settlers to establish two Corinthian colonies. One colony was established at Syracuse in 733 B.C. on the island of Sicily. Another colony was set up at about the same time at Corcyra in the Ionian Sea to serve as a stop for ships heading west. These colonies played an important role in the westward extension of Corinthian trade, which was predominant in the west during the late 8<sup>th</sup> century. Contacts with the Near East stimulated the development of Protocorinthian pottery in the last quarter of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. A new style of warship was developed at Corinth and some were sold to a foreign power engaged in a war. The development of trade likely increased the duties collected by Bacchiads in Corinth.<sup>33</sup>

In the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century Bacchiad rule experienced a series of setbacks. Megara had recovered some land that had been appropriated previously by Corinth. Under the tyrant Pheidon, the expansion of Argos' power may have come at the expense of the Corinthians around this time. In the 660s Corinth fought a naval battle with Corcyra, which resulted in a loss of some control over the colony. These setbacks in foreign relations most likely had a detrimental effect on Corinthian trade. In addition, these incidents contributed to the growing resentment of Bacchiad rule in Corinth.<sup>34</sup>

The development of trade increased the wealth and prosperity of the Corinthians, many of which were outside the Bacchiad clan. This group of local powerful families resented the exclusive rule and privileges enjoyed by the Bacchiad clan. As a number of excluded families gained wealth and a following of local residents they also gained the means to resist and challenge Bacchiad rule, which was increasingly viewed as an oppressive oligarchy.<sup>35</sup>

The Bacchiads were an exclusive clan to the extent that they prohibited marriage outside of their clan. An exception was made for one Bacchiad woman, Labda, who was lame. She married a man Aetion, who was not from the Bacchiad bloodline. Their son, Cypselus, grew up on the fringe of the political elite. Later he likely gained the support of powerful families, which were excluded by the Bacchiad clan, in the villages surrounding Corinth. Cypselus politically made use of his partial noble bloodline and appealed to the resentment of powerful families outside the Bacchiad clan and gained power. In ca. 658 B.C. Cypselus killed the last reigning Bacchiad ruler and established a tyranny at Corinth, which entailed many major

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<sup>32</sup> Andrewes (1963), pp. 43, 48; and Fine (1983), p. 109.

<sup>33</sup> Andrewes (1963), pp. 43 – 4; Fine (1983), p. 109; and Sealey (1976), p. 50.

<sup>34</sup> Andrewes (1963), pp. 43 – 4; and Fine (1983), p. 109.

<sup>35</sup> Andrewes (1963), p. 44, 49; and Sealey (1976), p. 58.

changes. Cypselus killed or exiled many supporters of the Bacchiad regime. Among the exiles, according to tradition, settled in Etruscan Tarquinii whose son later ruled Rome as Tarquinius Priscus. The property of these supporters were confiscated and redistributed to the supporters of Cypselus. His rule was mild toward those other than the Bacchiad clan and their supporters. In addition to the support of the powerful families that had been previously excluded by the Bacchiad clan, he gained many supporters who had debt. He recalled those who the Bacchiad rulers had exiled. Not only did the property right system dramatically change during the rise of Cypselus but the system of political rights also experienced radical change. The exclusive monopoly on political power by the Bacchiad clan was broken. Members of Cypselus' council and minor officials were drawn from a new class that had previously been restricted from government affairs. Hoplite infantry may have also gained a degree of political power under the tyranny of Corinth, as Cypselus had the support of his army. However, the role of any organized hoplite troops in the rise of tyranny at Corinth appears not to have been substantial. In short, the tyranny of Cypselus at Corinth was fairly popular.<sup>36</sup>

After ruling Corinth from ca. 658 to ca. 628 B.C. Cypselus died and his son Periander became tyrant of Corinth. At the onset of his reign ca. 638 – ca. 588 B.C., Periander likely lacked the support that his father had enjoyed and in order to secure his position turned against powerful people who opposed his tyranny. His rule was less popular than that of his father and no doubt at times brutal. Nonetheless, Periander was an able and energetic ruler, who was more militarily active than his predecessor. A few years after the death of Periander the tyranny at Corinth came to an end. The tyranny was replaced by an oligarchy, which was much more broadly based than that of the Bacchiads.<sup>37</sup>

Under the Corinthian tyranny many policies were pursued more vigorously than under Bacchiad rule. Numerous colonies were established and Corinth was active in foreign policy, particularly under Periander. The tyrants encouraged commercial trade and supported a program of public construction.

Both Cypselus and Periander founded colonies on the northern shore of the Corinthian Gulf, along the northwestern coast of Greece as well as in other places. These colonies served several purposes. In some cases they allowed the tyrants to send their political enemies abroad. They served as ports for traveling ships to the west and also to support a modest fleet to protect the seas from pirates. In addition, they increased opportunities for trade with the mainland. For instance, Periander established Poteidaea in part to open up trade with Macedon. Under the tyrants,

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<sup>36</sup> Andrewes (1963), pp. 43 – 9; Fine (1983), pp. 109 – 11; and Sealey (1976), pp. 48 – 9, 53 – 58.

<sup>37</sup> Andrewes (1963), pp. 50, 52; and Fine (1983), pp. 111 – 12, 114.

Corinthian wares were exported more than those of other Greek city-states of the time.<sup>38</sup>

In foreign policy the tyrants were active, particularly during the reign of Periander. Delphi had supported the rise of Cypselus against the Bacchiade (??). Cypselus made dedications at the Delphi sanctuary and built a treasury for the offerings. Delphi and Corinth enjoyed good relations during Cypselus' tyranny. The rise of tyranny in the Isthmus states around this time weakened the influence of Argos, which it had previously enjoyed. Alignments among the great Greek city-states changed in accordance with their interests. Under Periander Corinth and Athens became closer allies in part because a common enemy emerged. Periander maintained relations with powerful rulers outside of the Greek world as well. The Corinthian tyrants also commonly participated in Panhellenic festivals.<sup>39</sup>

The tyrants relative to their predecessors vigorously supported commercial trade. One major public construction project that Periander undertook was a runway across the isthmus. Ships on rollers could cross the isthmus moving from gulf to gulf and avoid the long voyage around the Peloponnesus. Both Cypselus and Periander likely pursued a large construction program at Corinth. Streets, drains and fountains were built in the city. The construction projects also served as a method of providing employment for many local inhabitants. Periander prohibited the acquisition of slaves in part to increase employment opportunities for the free population. The Corinthian tyrants maintained an ostentatious court and were patrons to various artists and poets. The active pursuit of foreign expansion through diplomacy, the establishment of colonies and increased trade as well as political change and city improvements all combined to bring greater prosperity and influence for Corinth than previously known.<sup>40</sup>

After the death of Periander, a nephew Psammetichus became ruler but was killed within a few years thus bringing the era Corinthian tyranny (ca. 658 – ca. 585 B.C.) to an end. The Bacchiad clan had raised Corinth to prominent city for the first time in Greek history and the tyrants built themselves and the city to a great position in the Greek world. Periander's active foreign and domestic policies likely overstrained his support in Corinth and this set the stage for the early fall of his successor.<sup>41</sup>

The rise of the Corinthian tyrants and the events leading to it offer an important episode for political economic historians to consider in studying political and economic rights. The state formation process at work in Corinth is clearly related to

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<sup>38</sup> Andrewes (1963), p. 50; Fine (1983), p. 112; and Sealey (1976), pp. 51, 52, 55.

<sup>39</sup> Andrewes (1963), pp. 47 – 51; and Sealey (1976), p. 57.

<sup>40</sup> Andrewes (1963), pp. 50; Fine (1983), pp. 112 – 14; and Sealey (1976), pp. 51 – 2, 54 – 8.

<sup>41</sup> Andrewes (1963), p. 52.

the changes in the distribution among the populace of both political and economic rights. The rise of Bacchiads in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century very modestly expanded the political power under the monarchy by replacing a hereditary king with an exclusive oligarchy. The Bacchiad clan monopolized the most important offices and annually selected the chief magistrate. For a half a century, the Bacchiads dominated political life yet allowed the expansion of some trade. For nearly a century under Bacchiad rule, trade and limited agricultural improvements increased prosperity among the Bacchiads and other local notable families. Over this period the power of the state likely became somewhat more diffuse in the system of coercive force at Corinth. The military force at Corinth was likely little more than a collection of small private forces, each controlled by a powerful family in the city proper or in the nearby dependent villages. By the second quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, many rich and powerful families had come to resent the exclusive nature of Bacchiad rulers. They were ready to improve their social standing by seizing political rights and exercising more economic liberties, all of which were restricted by the Bacchiad clan. Cypselus' social position on the fringe of the ruling elite provided him with a political opportunity, one that he exploited in his own interests. Cypselus appealed to the resentment of Bacchiad rule by the excluded rich and powerful families at Corinth. Their support and Cypselus' background allowed the tyrant to wrestle away legitimate rule from the Bacchiad clan and remove them from power. The Bacchiads lost all political power and their economic rights were infringed upon through confiscation of their property, exile and in some cases loss of their life. New powerful groups and others were given new political rights such as serving on the council or as an assisting officer. These new groups now found their interests tied to the new regime and also in the repression of the supporters of the previous rulers. This was a major change in the system of political and economic rights at Corinth. The tyrants had increased the power of the state by obtaining the support of a more numerous group with wealth. Both force of arms and political support were required to prop up the tyrants and maintain their rule of Corinth.

The main factor that seems to have been at work in the rise of tyranny at Corinth was the spread of wealth and power to a wider share of society beyond the Bacchiad clan. Although the Bacchiads were Dorian, anti-Dorian sentiment does not seem to be an important factor. Rather the exclusive nature of Bacchiad rule appears to be the main social tension. National sentiment against Pheidon of Argos may have contributed some to the rise of Corinthian tyranny as well. The development of hoplite troops and tactics may have taken place around this time, but its role in the rise of tyranny does not appear dominant. Rather, I see the development of hoplite warfare around the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries as playing a more important role in retaining

the political and economic rights gained under the tyrants after the collapse of tyranny at Corinth. The relatively greater share of rich and powerful families that had been extended political and economic rights under the tyrants along with the hoplites had gained sufficient cohesiveness to obtain similar rights under the oligarchy that replaced the tyrants. The new oligarchy was based on much wider support and was far less exclusive than the Bacchiad clan had been. This broader support can also be detected in the fact that Corinth maintained control over many of its colonies after the collapse of tyranny.<sup>42</sup>

### *Megara*

Around the 630s a tyranny began in Megara under Theagenes, who led a revolt against some rich local families. Theagenes had a son-in-law named Cylon, who he attempted to set up as a tyrant at Athens. In 632 B.C. when Cylon tried to seize the acropolis, Theagenes sent him troops.<sup>43</sup>

In sum, we can see that during the period 1000 – 500 B.C. many states went through a period of state formation. Largely because of the period of prosperous trade that occurred in trading cities, new wealth was gained by families outside of the ruling elite. This group of wealthy non-aristocrats formed a group that was willing and able to realign itself with the state. In the case of ancient Greece, the increasing military threat was may have been minor in many cases. The development of a powerful group that wanted change in their interests probably played a more important role in this case. The appearance of tyrants and their changes in political institutions was key to the process of state formation. In exchange for support tyrants offered both property rights and also political rights. But political power is also a form of ability to protect one's property rights.

## **5) Ancient Rome**

This part of the paper has not been completed yet. It will highlight the reforms in Rome on the eve of the Roman Republic.

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<sup>42</sup> Andrewes (1963), p. 49; Fine (1983), pp. 112 – 14; and Sealey (1976), pp. 54 – 8.

<sup>43</sup> Andrewes (1963), p. 49; Fine (1983), pp. 108, 124 – 25; and Sealey (1976), p. 56.

## **5) Conclusion**

This paper compares the process of state formation in three different cases: ancient China, Greece and Rome. As new states form in each case we see new political institutions develop. Fundamental to these political institutions are the relationships between the state and various groups in society. It is clear that as the state enters new relations with a group an exchange takes place. The group offers support to the state, usually in the form of taxes and/or services (commonly military service), in exchange for an increase in their privileges and rights, most notably property rights. In the case of ancient China it is clear that this exchange is one involving support for property rights – usually land. In the cases of ancient Greece and Rome, the exchanges involve support for political rights. However, in a comparison of all three cases, we see that the common factor is property rights. This is true since political rights can be used to expand one's ability to use property, but the reverse is not true in principle. Thus I conclude that at its most basic level, the state extends property rights to new groups in exchange for support as states begin to form.

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