

A Study on the Battle of Changping

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Abstract

This article conducts a comprehensive study on the battle of Changping 长平 (260 BCE) between Qin 秦 and Zhao 赵 and challenges some traditional views on it. This article estimates the sizes and losses of the opposing sides and argues that although the number of losses of the Zhao army in this battle looks unreasonably large, it is too subjective to say that the history literature exaggerates the numbers because the definition of “soldiers” at that time was different from today. This article concludes that the reasons for Zhao’s defeat are not because of replacing an experienced chief commander with an inexperienced one or shortage in supply but because it was the relatively weaker side and more importantly, its long-term strategic planning and diplomacy were inferior to Qin’s. This article also argues that the influence of this battle is not as significant as claimed by some scholars.

Keywords

Battle of Changping – Zhanguo – Qin – Zhao

Background

In the eleventh year of his reign (771 BCE),¹ Zhou You Wang 周幽王, the twelfth Zhou Tianzi 周天子, was killed and Zhou's capital Hao 镐 (in today's southwest Xi'an 西安) fell in a barbarian invasion caused by a succession dispute.² From that time on, Zhou lost its authority and control over *tianxia* and Chinese history entered a well-known era of war, the Chunqiu Zhanguo 春秋战国 period (771-221 BCE),³ in which hundreds of states attacked and annexed each other until Qin 秦 finally unified *tianxia*. During the reign of Qi Huan Gong 齐桓公 (685-643 BCE),⁴ the state of Qi arose and became the first hegemon of *tianxia*.

¹ Due to the difference between the ancient Chinese and Western calendars, the eleventh year of Zhou You Wang does not completely match the year of 771 BCE, although it does overlap substantially with 771 BCE.

² Under the Zhou 周 feudal system, *wang* was the highest title, which was exclusively used by the Zhou Tianzi 周天子. (Tianzi means “the son of Tian.” Tian is usually translated as “Heaven,” which is inappropriate. Tian is the highest existence in ancient Chinese culture, like God and Allah in other cultures.) The Tianzi was the master of *tianxia* 天下, literally all under the sky, which refers to the human world, thus putting the Tianzi on top of all people. (But certainly, the human world understood by ancient Chinese only refers to the circle of ancient Chinese civilization and its surrounding areas.) However, with the decline of Zhou, more and more monarchs titled themselves *wang*. In middle Zhanguo, the monarchs of all major states claimed this title. After Qin had unified *tianxia*, since the title *wang* had already been abused, a new title, *huangdi* 皇帝, was created as the exclusive title used by the *tianzi*.

³ The year dividing Chunqiu and Zhanguo is still a matter of debate. Different versions vary from 476 to 403 BCE.

⁴ Under the Zhou feudal system, the direct vassals of the Tianzi were called *zhuhou* 诸侯, divided into five ranks (from high to low): *gong* 公, *hou* 侯, *bo* 伯, *zi* 子, and *nan* 男. All five ranks can be collectively referred to as *gong*. The traditional translations simply match them to the medieval European noble ranks of duke, marquis, count, viscount, and baron respectively. In addition, *huangdi* is matched with emperor, *wang* is matched with king, and *shi* 士 can be matched with knight. It seems that the Zhou ranking system can be perfectly matched with the medieval European one. However, the above matches completely ignore a noble rank between *zhuhou* and *shi*, *qingdafu* 卿大夫. If we have to compare the Zhou

After Qi's decline, a Jin 晋–Chu 楚 bipolar hegemony system was established and lasted for over a century. But afterwards both of them declined too. Jin was divided into the three states of Wei 魏, Zhao 赵, and Han 韩, which were known as “the three Jin” (*san Jin* 三晋). The three Jin plus Qin, Qi, Chu, and Yan 燕 are known as “the seven powers of Zhanguo” (*Zhanguo qixiong* 战国七雄).⁵ Wei Wen Hou 魏文侯 (r. 424-396) made his state the strongest power through maintaining a stable three Jin alliance and pioneering a series of internal reforms. However, his successors changed his diplomatic policy and made too many enemies. During the reign of Wei Hui Wang 魏惠王 (r. 370-319 BCE), the alliance of the three Jin completely broke and Wei was successively defeated by Qi on the eastern front, by Qin on the western front, and by Chu on the southern front. Wei then became a second-rate power while Qin, Qi, and Chu were the three top powers. In the late period of the reign of Chu Huai Wang 楚怀王 (r. 328-299 BCE), Chu was diplomatically isolated by Qin and then was defeated by Qin and Qi respectively, which caused it to be greatly weakened. In the 23rd year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang 秦昭襄王 (284 BCE), Yan allied with Qin and the three Jins to attack Qi. Chu and Lu 鲁 also took this opportunity to invade Qi, which was almost exterminated in this crisis. Although Qi managed to survive, it became a second-rate power.

ranks with the medieval European ones, it is more appropriate to compare *qingdafu* with duke, marquis, count, viscount, and baron and compare *zhuhou* with emperor and king. As for the Zhou *wang*, Europe does not have such a rank: emperors and kings are the rulers of a certain area and a certain group of people. However, as mentioned in the *Shijing* 诗经, the Zhou Wang is the ruler of the whole world and all people. The *Shijing* says, “All the lands under the sky are the Wang's lands. All the people from the lands and shores are the Wang's subjects” (溥天之下，莫非王土，率土之滨，莫非王臣). See *Mao shi zhengyi* 13.931. It is therefore questionable to translate Zhou Wang into “the king of Zhou.” Zhou is the name of a dynasty rather than a state. Zhou Wang designates the ruler of the whole world rather than a state called Zhou.

⁵ The geographical distribution of the seven powers is as follows: Qin was on the northwest, Zhao was on the north, Yan was on the northeast, Qi was on the east, Chu was on the south, Wei and Han were in the heartland.

Thereafter, the balance of power was completely broken such that Qin obtained overwhelming advantages over the six states of Shandong 山东.⁶ Qin then launched a series of offensives on Zhao, Chu, and Wei and took many of their territories.

The Battle of Changping

From the 42nd year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (265 BCE), Qin focused on attacking Han. In this year, Qin attacked Han's Nanyang 南阳 (around today's Jiaozuo 焦作 and Jiyuan 济源, Henan 河南 province), took Shaoqu 少曲 (in today's western Jiyuan, Henan 河南 province) and Gaoping 高平 (in today's northwest Mengzhou 孟州, Henan province), and controlled the western end of the Zhiguanxing 轹关陁 defile connecting Han's Nanyang and Hedong 河东 (the area surrounded by the Huanghe 黄河 river, the Qinhe 沁河 river, and the Huoshan 霍山 mountains).⁷ In the 43rd year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (264 BCE), Qin Wuan Jun 武安君 Bai Qi 白起 (?-257 BCE)⁸ took Han's Xingcheng 邢城 (in today's northwest Quwo 曲沃, Shanxi province) and its surrounding cities,⁹ beheaded 50,000 Han people, controlled the Linfen 临汾 basin (the main grain-producing area of Hedong), and built a new walled city

⁶ Among the seven powers of Zhanguo, Qin was the only one on the western side of the Xiaoshan 崤山 mountains. The others were all on the eastern side, so they are known as the Shandong states (states on the eastern side of Xiaoshan).

⁷ *Shi ji*, 79.2415.

⁸ In Western Zhou and Chunqiu, *jun* was a respectful form of address used for *zhuhou*. However, since many *zhuhou* titled themselves *wang*, *jun* became a noble title next to *wang*.

⁹ "Qin Benji" 秦本纪 of *Shi ji* says that Bai Qi took nine walled cities but "Bai Qi Wang Jian liezhuan" 白起王翦列传 of *Shi ji* 史记 records that Bai Qi took five walled cities. See *Shi ji*, 5.213 and 73.2331.

Fencheng 汾城 (in today's southwestern Xiangfen 襄汾, Linfen, Shanxi province) by the Fenshui 汾水 river to secure its left rear or flank. In the 44th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (263 BCE), Bai Qi invaded Han's Nanyang. In the 45th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (262 BCE), Bai Qi occupied Yewang 野王 (in today's northern Qinyang 沁阳, Henan province), a strategic place controlling the southern end of the Taihangxing 太行陁 defile. Han's Shangdang 上党 and its core area (around today's Zhengzhou 郑州, Xuchang 许昌, and Yanshi 偃师, Henan province) were divided by the Taihang 太行 mountains. The only path connecting them was the Taihangxing defile. Hence, for Han, the fall of Yewang meant that Shangdang had been isolated. In the meanwhile, Qin *wudafu* 五大夫 Ben 贲¹⁰ leading another army advanced to Han's Xingyang 滎阳 (in today's Xingyang, Henan province), the gateway to Han's capital Xinzheng 新郑 (in today's Xinzheng, Henan province), took ten walled cities, and besieged Xingqiu 邢丘 (in today's eastern Wenxian 温县). Figure 1 shows Qin's march routes.

¹⁰ In middle Zhanguo, Qin ranked the noble titles into twenty levels. *Wudafu* is the ninth level (with level 1 being the lowest and level 20 the highest). Ben is his given name. His family name is not recorded.

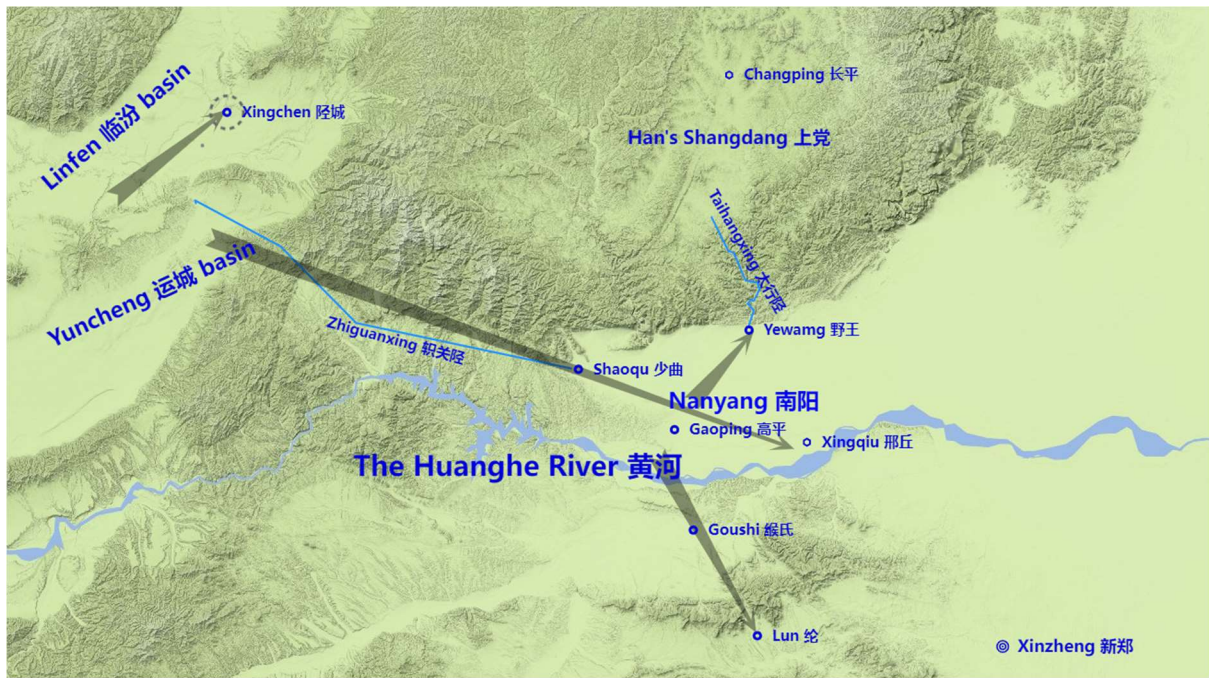


Figure 1: Qin army's march routes before the battle of Changping

Han Huanhui Wang 韩桓惠王 (r. 272-239 BCE) was forced to sue for peace at the price of ceding Shangdang to Qin. However, Han's Shangdang 上党 (around today's Jincheng 晋城 and western Changzhi 长治, Shanxi province) *taishou* 太守¹¹ refused to carry out this order. Hence, Han Huanhui Wang replaced him with Feng Ting 冯亭 but Feng Ting also did not want to surrender Shangdang to Qin. He said to the Shangdang people:

The path to Zheng¹² had already been cut off...The Qin army was drawing closer every day [but] Han was unable to cope with [it]. It would be better that [we] turn to Zhao with

¹¹ In Zhanguo, the Chinese states introduced the *jun-xian* 郡县 system, under which a state was divided into a number of *jun* governed by a *taishou* (also called *shou*) and a *jun* was divided into a number *xian* governed by a *xianling* 县令. Han's Shangdang *jun* had seventeen *xian*.

¹² Han's capital was Xinzhen. Hence, Han is also known as Zheng.

Shangdang. If Zhao accepted us, Qin certainly will be angry [with Zhao] and attack Zhao. Under [Qin's] attack, Zhao certainly will get close to Han. [If] Han and Zhao [unite] as one, then [they] are able to match Qin.

郑道已绝...秦兵日进，韩不能应，不如以上党归赵。赵若受我，秦怒，必攻赵。赵被兵，必亲韩。韩赵为一，则可以当秦。¹³

Feng Ting's plan might be as follows. If the Qin army attacked Han's Shangdang through the Taihangxing defile, Zhao would send reinforcements to help him hold Shangdang. Meanwhile, Han could attack Yewang to cut off the Qin army's retreat path. He then sent a messenger to Zhao to pass on his intention of turning to Zhao. *Zhanguo ce* records a story after Zhao Xiaocheng Wang 赵孝成王 (r. 265-245 BCE) received Feng Ting's request. He sought advice from other members of the Zhao royal family. His *shufu* 叔父,¹⁴ Pingyang Jun 平阳君 Zhao Bao 赵豹 opined that “*shengren*¹⁵ regard unjustified benefits as great calamities” (*shengren shen huo wugu zhi li* 圣人甚祸无故之利).¹⁶ He further argued:

Qin was nibbling at Han's territory [and] partitioning [it] into two disconnected parts. Hence, [Qin] thinks that [it] can get Shangdang easily. Moreover, the reason for Han offering [Shangdang] to Zhao is to shift its calamity [to Zhao]. Qin did the work, but Zhao gets the benefits. Even a stronger and larger [state] cannot take advantage of a smaller and weaker [state] [like this]. How can a smaller and weaker [state] take advantage of a

¹³ *Shi ji*, 73.2332-33. All translations in this article are my own unless otherwise stated.

¹⁴ *Shufu* means one's father's younger brother.

¹⁵ *Shengren* refers to extremely virtuous and wise people.

¹⁶ *Zhanguo ce*, 18.989.

stronger and larger [state like this]? How can it be justified [if] the Wang takes [Shangdang] now? Besides, Qin cultivates its farms with cattle [and] transports grains by water. All its fearless warriors are given fertile land. [Although Qin's] laws and orders are strict, they are well enforced. [We] cannot fight with [Qin]. Wang, please consider it.

秦蚕食韩氏之地，中绝不令相通，故自以为坐受上党也。且夫韩之所以内赵者，欲嫁其祸也。秦被其劳，而赵受其利，虽强大不能得之于小弱，而小弱顾能得之强大乎？今王取之，可谓有故乎？且秦以牛田，水通粮，其死士皆列之于上地，令严政行，不可与战。王自图之。¹⁷

However, Zhao Xiaocheng Wang refuted him by saying: “Attacking with a million troops over a year may not get one walled city. Now, [we] can get seventeen walled cities¹⁸ without using forces. Why not do it?”¹⁹ Pingyuan Jun 平原君 Zhao Sheng 赵胜, another of Zhao Xiaocheng Wang's *shufu*, and Zhao Yu 赵禹 also supported Zhao Xiaocheng Wang's opinion. Hence, the state of Zhao decided to accept Feng Ting's submission.

In this story, Pingyang Jun's opinion is that Qin was more powerful than Zhao, so Zhao should not provoke it. Some scholars think his opinion is correct because Zhao eventually lost the battle of Changping.²⁰ However, at that time, Qin's ambition of unifying *tianxia* was already clear. Even if Zhao did not provoke Qin, Qin still would attack Zhao. His attitude was

¹⁷ *Zhanguo ce*, 18.989.

¹⁸ The original text is “seventy walled cities” (*cheng qishi* 城七十). However, according to the annotations, “seventy” (*qishi* 七十) should be a miswriting of “seventeen” (*shiqi* 十七).

¹⁹ 夫用百万之众，攻战逾年历岁，未见一城也。今不用兵而得城七十，何故不为？ See *Zhanguo ce*, 18.989.

²⁰ For instance, see Yang 1998, 412.

too passive. If Zhao had done what he said, then Zhao would simply have awaited its doom. The ownership of Han's Shangdang was not simply about the gain or loss of seventeen cities but was closely related to Zhao's security. Shangdang was a strategic highland area shared by Zhao and Han. Han had the western and southern parts of it and Zhao had the eastern and northern parts (around today's eastern Changzhi, Zuoquan 左权, Heshun 和顺, and Yushe 榆社, all in Shanxi province). In order to gain advantages in Shangdang, Zhao and Han had engaged in a seesaw confrontation around Nie 涅 (in northwest of today's Wuxiang 武乡, Shanxi province), Tunliu 屯留 (in today's Tunliu, Shanxi province), and Changzi 长子 (in today's Changzi, Shanxi province). Because Han was a relatively weak state among the seven powers, the military pressure that Zhao faced in Shangdang was not too high. However, if Qin took Han's Shangdang, the situation would be totally different. Certainly, Qin's next move would be to attack Zhao's portion of Shangdang. After taking it, the Qin army coming down from the heights could advance eastward through the Jingxing 井陉 defile to attack Zhao's capital Handan 邯郸 (in today's Handan, Hebei 河北 province) located on the North China Plain and advance northward to attack Zhao's former capital and core city in the west, Jinyang 晋阳 (in today's Taiyuan 太原, Shanxi province) located in the Taiyuan basin. And Zhao would have no natural barriers to resist Qin's invasion. In such a case, Zhao's fall could be expected soon. Figure 2 shows Qin's march routes after the battle of Changping. It can be seen that Qin exactly followed the above plan. Hence, Zhao actually had no other choice but to do its best to hold Shangdang.

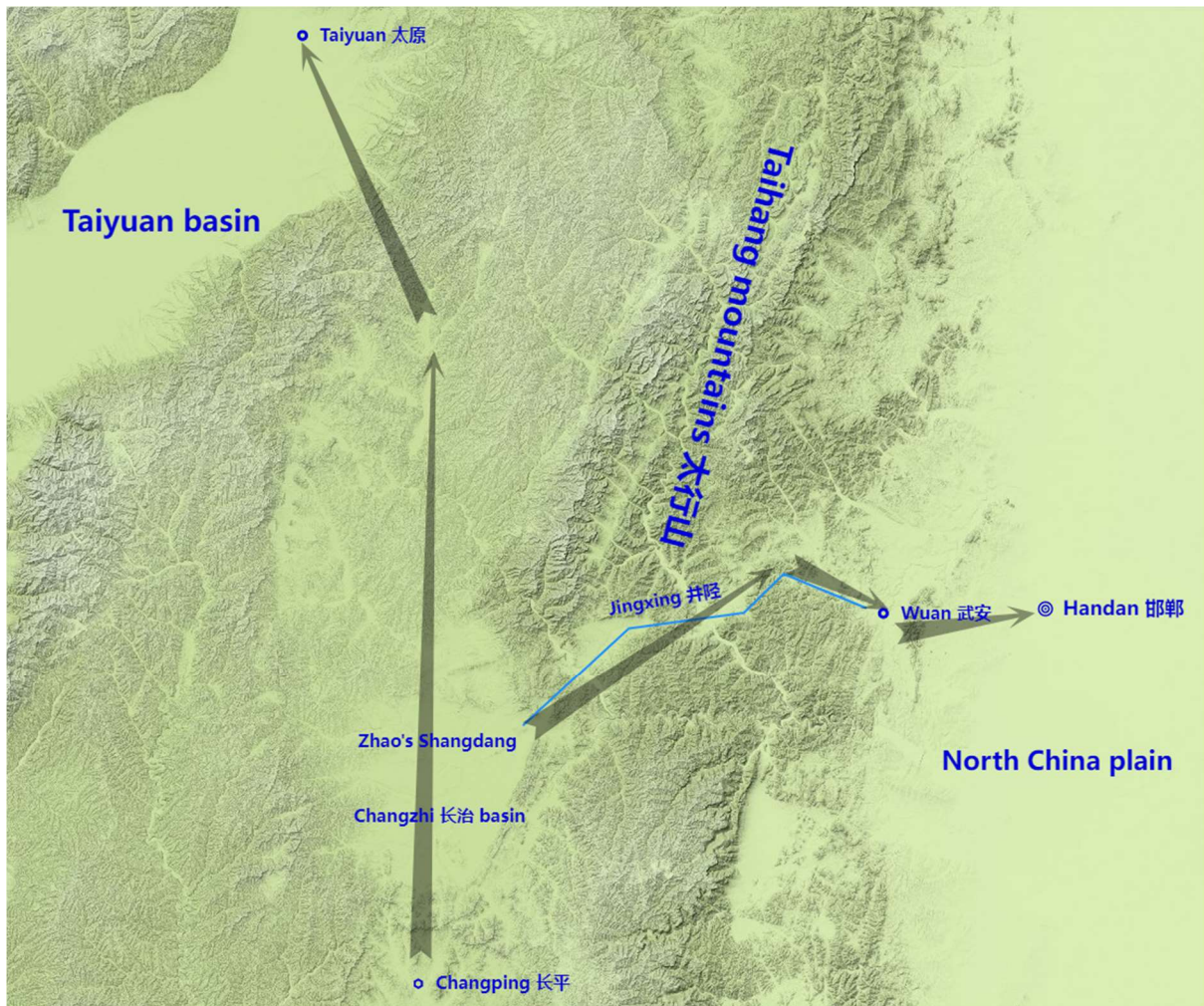


Figure 2: Qin army's march routes after the battle of Changping

Strangely, the arguments between the Zhao royals in this story don't mention the importance of Shangdang at all. There are two explanations for this. The first is that the Zhao royals were really all idiots. The second is that the story is made up to vilify them as idiots. If it is the second case, then the differences within the Zhao ruling family were probably as follows. One side believed that Zhao should take over Han's Shangdang and meet the Qin army there. Theirs was the more radical option. The advantages of it were that it could increase the depth of Zhao's defense and give Zhao possession of Shangdang (assuming, of course, that Zhao could hold Qin's attack). However, it would also lengthen Zhao's supply

line. The other side thought that Zhao should meet the Qin army at Changping 长平 (in today's northwest Gaoping 高平, Shanxi province), a strategic mountainous place controlling the entrance to the Changzhi basin, the major agricultural region in Shangdang. This option was more conservative. It gave up the opportunity of possessing Shangdang, but there were two advantages from it. First of all, Changping has the Danshui 丹水 river in front of it and mountains behind it, which made it a perfect place for the defenders (Figure 3 shows the terrain around Changping). Secondly, defending at Changping could shorten the Zhao army's supply line while lengthening that of the Qin army. Later events prove that Zhao adopted the second option because although it accepted Feng Ting's submission, Zhao neither sent troops to take over Shangdang nor rescued Shangdang when it was under Qin's attack. These developments also prove that Zhao's decision was correct because even though Zhao had adopted the conservative option, it still could not resist Qin's attack. If Zhao had adopted the radical plan, then its failure would have come even sooner.

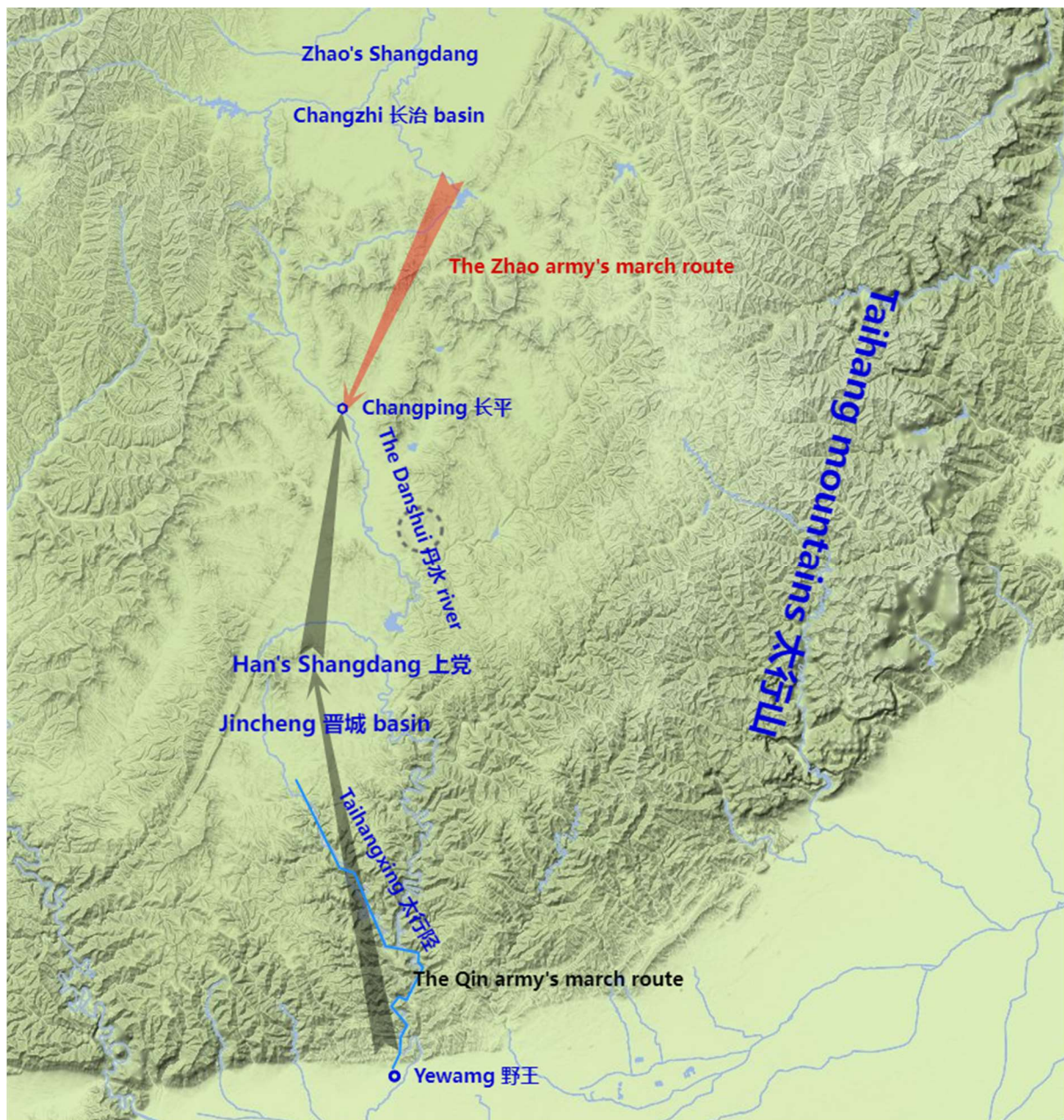


Figure 3: The battle of Changping

After isolating Han's Shangdang, Qin was in no hurry to take it. Instead, the Qin army marched to the south, crossed the Huanghe 黄河 river, and took Han's Goushi 缑氏 (in today's southeast Yanshi, Henan province) and Lun 纶 (in today's western Dengfeng 登封, Henan province) in the 46th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (261 BCE), which put Han's

capital, Xinzheng, under Qin's direct threat.²¹ This move secured the Qin army's rear and deterred Han from intervening in the upcoming war between Qin and Zhao. Hence, Feng Ting's plan could not be realized. On the other side, no records show that Zhao had sent troops to defend Shangdang. In the 47th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (260 BCE), Qin's *zuo shuzhang* 左庶长²² Wang He 王龁 attacked Han's Shangdang (nominally belonging to Zhao at that time). Han's Shangdang people could not resist and had to retreat northward. Wang He pursued them and met the Zhao army led by Zhao's *shangqing* 上卿²³ Lian Po 廉颇 at Changping in the fourth month of this year. The battle of Changping had begun.

The first engagement happened between Qin's scouts and Zhao's spearhead led by *pijiang* 裨将 (deputy chief commander) Jia 茄.²⁴ Probably because the Qin scouts were at a numerical disadvantage, the Zhao troops attacked first. But the Qin scouts won and beheaded Jia. The Zhao army obviously was shocked by the powerful fighting capability of the Qin troops and had to turn to the defensive. In the sixth month, the Qin army breached Zhao's first defense line, took two forts, and captured and beheaded four of Zhao's *wei* 尉 (*wei* was a high-ranking commander position next to *pijiang*). The Zhao army then retreated to its main defense line and strengthened its ramparts. *Shuijing zhu* 水经注 says that "the two armies drank the same running water" (二军共食流水).²⁵ The "running water" here refers to the Danshui river, across which the two armies confronted each other. The Qin army was on the

²¹ It seems that Qin did not take Xingqiu the year before. Hence, it chose to cross the Huanghe river further upstream.

²² *Zuo shuzhang* ranks at level 10 in the Qin noble system.

²³ In Zhao, *Shangqing* is a noble title next to *wang* and *jun*.

²⁴ Jia is his given name. His family name is not recorded.

²⁵ *Shuijing zhu jiaozheng* 水经注校正, 9.231-32

western bank and the Zhao army was on the eastern bank. The lengths of the ramparts of the opposing sides were over twenty kilometers from north to south and over eight kilometers from east to west. In the seventh month, the Qin army continued to attack, captured and beheaded two more of Zhao's *wei*, and took Zhao's western camp.

Because Lian Po had suffered repeated defeats, Zhao Xiaocheng Wang replaced him with Mafu Jun 马服君 Zhao Kuo 赵括. After learning this, Qin appointed Bai Qi to be its chief commander. Wang He, the previous chief commander, then became the second-in-command. Zhao Kuo did not know of Bai Qi's coming. In order to retrieve the situation, Zhao Kuo attacked the Qin army actively. The Qin army pretended to be defeated and lured the Zhao main forces, led by Zhao Kuo in person, to chase it. Bai Qi then sent two troops, one consisting of 25,000 soldiers and the other of 5000 cavalrymen, to cut off Zhao Kuo's retreat, dividing the Zhao army into two parts: one led by Zhao Kuo and the other one remaining behind the original Zhao defense line. In the ninth month, after having been besieged for 46 days and running out of food, the Zhao troops tried to break through. But they failed and Zhao Kuo was shot to death in this operation. Hence, all the Zhao troops, including those who had been besieged and those left behind the defense line, a total of about 400,000, surrendered. Bai Qi slaughtered almost all of them, releasing only 240 of the youngest ones. In this battle, Zhao had lost a grand total of 450,000 troops from beginning to end. Figure 3 shows the map of the battle of Changping.

The Sizes of the Armies and Their Losses

There are a few questions about the battle of Changping to be studied in this article. The first question the sizes and losses of both armies. *Shi ji* only records the numbers of the Zhao side. Although some scholars have adopted these numbers, others question their credibility. For

example, Derk Bodde compared the battle of Changping with Napoleon's Russian campaign and concluded that the numbers recorded by *Shi ji* are unreasonable because the Zhao army lost only 50,000 troops during combats lasting five to six months but suddenly lost 400,000 troops in the final stage. Moreover, he questioned the sizes of armies and the numbers of casualties in the Zhanguo period more generally.²⁶ Mark Edward Lewis also believes that the sizes of Zhanguo armies "appear to be notional figures" and the number given for Zhao's losses at the battle of Changping "is certainly exaggerated."²⁷ I think that we cannot simply conclude that the numbers in the ancient literature are unreasonable and exaggerated.

First of all, we need to understand that the concept of "soldiers" in the Zhanguo period is different from that of modern times. Zhang Yi 张仪 (?-309 BCE), a famous persuader of Zhanguo, once said to Han Xiang Wang 韩襄王 (r. 311-296 BCE): "[I] estimate that the number of soldiers of you, the great Wang, is no more than 300,000 in total, including those who are doing drudgery and logistic work."²⁸ It can be seen that the army's support staff, such as cooks, repairmen, stablemen, woodmen, and coolies responsible for transporting supplies and doing other menial jobs, are also included in the total number of soldiers. One of the Qin documents held by the Yuelu 岳麓 Academy, Hunan University, also records that a foot-carter (non-combatant) was called "soldier" (*zu* 卒) in the Qin army.²⁹ According to *Sima fa* 司马法, the combatant to support staff ratio was three to one in the Chunqiu 春秋

²⁶ Bodde 1986, 99-100.

²⁷ Lewis 1999, 626 and 640.

²⁸ 料大王之卒，悉之不过三十万，而厮徒负养在其中矣。See *Zhanguo ce*, 26.1491.

²⁹ Yates 2022, 7-8.

period.³⁰ In Zhanguo, the proportion of the support staff in the army should be much higher because the wars were much longer in duration, and the operational scope was much larger. *Mozi* says: “Supposing to mobilize an army at home, it requires several hundred of nobles, several thousand of common people, and a hundred thousand of supporting staff. Then an army can be formed and dispatched.”³¹ The nobles mentioned by *Mozi* should be appointed as commanders and officers while the common people were fighters. It can be seen that the non-combatant to combatant ratio is above 10:1. Interestingly, a modern campaign, the Huaihai campaign (November 1948–January 1949) shows a similar ratio. The regular armies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had about 600,000 soldiers. The number of the CCP’s local troops and militia was around 400,000, and the number of peasants providing logistical support was 5.43 million or so.³² The non-combatant to combatant ratio is above 8:1. By the Zhanguo standard, the total number of CCP “soldiers” participating in the campaign is nearly 6.5 million, which looks unreasonable and exaggerated. But if we understand the composition of it, we will know the number is reasonable.

In the second year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (305 BCE), Zhao launched a general offensive against the state of Zhongshan 中山 by mobilizing 200,000 men.³³ Between that time and the

³⁰ *Sima fa* 司马法, cited by Du Mu 杜牧 (803-852 CE) in his annotations of *Sunzi*. See *Sunzi*, 1.17-18.

³¹ 若使[国]中兴师，君子[数百]，庶人也必且数千，徒倍十万，然后足以师而动矣。See *Mozi jiangou* 墨子间诂, 5.144 and *Mozi jigu* 墨子集诂, 5.454-55. The original text is 若使中兴师，君子，庶人也必且数千，徒倍十万，然后足以师而动矣。 However, the annotators of both *Mozi jiangou* and *Mozi jigu* think that the characters 数百 are missing after the characters 君子. The annotators of *Mozi jigu* argue that the character 国 put at the end of the last sentence should be after the characters 若使.

³² Zhu and Hu 2020, 59-61.

³³ *Zhanguo ce* 20.1086.

battle of Changping, Zhao had become much stronger by annexing Zhongshan and taking many territories from the northern nomads and its neighboring Shandong states. And at Changping, Zhao was the defender rather than the attacker. Hence, it is not surprising that Zhao could mobilize more troops. After the battle of Changping, Bai Qi ordered the massacre of the Zhao prisoners. The reason given by him is that “the Zhao soldiers are capricious. [I] am afraid that [they] will rise in revolt [if we] do not kill them all” (赵卒反覆。非尽杀之，恐为乱).³⁴ Why did Bai Qi say that the Zhao soldiers were capricious? I think it is because many of those “Zhao soldiers” were Han’s Shangdang soldiers and people. From Bai Qi’s point of view, they first disobeyed their monarch’s order to surrender to Qin and turned to Zhao. After the Zhao army had been defeated, they then surrendered to Qin. Hence, Bai Qi said that they were capricious. In Zhanguo, as war became much crueler, the Chinese states had to adapt themselves to a state of “total war,” in which the differences between military personnel and civilians were blurred. For example, according to *Mozi* 墨子, women, old people, and children all would be mobilized to defend their cities.³⁵ After the Qin army invaded Shangdang, Han’s Shangdang people ran away to Zhao and Zhao sent an army to station at Changping to settle them.³⁶ It is not surprising that these Shangdang people would support the Zhao army in the battle of Changping and be regarded as enemy soldiers by Qin. By today’s standard, most of the Zhanguo “soldiers” were just support staff and civilians. This could also explain why Qin could divide such a large Zhao army and cut off its retreat

³⁴ *Shi ji*, 73.2335.

³⁵ *Mozi jiangou*, 14.529. Modern scholars like Miyake Kiyoshi have also concluded that “farmer-soldiers were a prominent component of Qin’s expeditionary forces” (Miyake 2018, 135), which shows there was no clear boundary between soldiers and civilians at that time.

³⁶ *Shiji*, 73.2333.

using only 30,000 troops. It is also possible that the massacre was not limited to the Changping battlefield but extended to the non-combatant population of what had been Han's Shangdang area, now controlled by Qin.

The size of the Qin army is not recorded in the ancient literature. Modern scholars' estimates vary from 350,000 to at least one million.³⁷ Although it is impossible to obtain an accurate number, we can do a rough estimation according to the following deductions. Zhang Yi said that Han's total number of soldiers was no more than 300,000 and "excluding those guarding border posts and forts, the number of available forces is only 200,000."³⁸ About one-third of the Han soldiers were border and local guard troops and the other two-thirds of them were field forces, including supporting staff. The other states should have had similar ratios of field to border and local guard troops. For example, Qin had around one million troops in total.³⁹ In the 23rd year of Qin Shi Huangdi 秦始皇帝 (224 BCE), in order to exterminate Chu, Qin mobilized 600,000 troops – almost all its field forces – to attack Chu.⁴⁰ In the battle of Changping, the Qin army fielded 5000 cavalymen, which was half of Qin's total cavalry troops.⁴¹ Hence, I estimate that in this battle, Qin had mobilized about half of its field forces, which would be around 300,000 troops including supporting staff. Although

³⁷ For example, Jin Shenghe and Xie Hongxi believe that number of Qin troops was at least one million. Lu Yu and Teng Zezhi opt for over 500,000, Chen Wenfeng 陈文峰 says at most 500,000, and Wu Guoqing and Mu Zhongyue place the Qin army between 350,000 and 500,000. See Jin and Xie 1998, 26; Lu and Teng 2004, 48; Chen 2012, 35; and Wu and Mu 1985, 371.

³⁸ 为除守微亭鄣塞，见卒不过二十万而已矣。See *Zhanguo ce*, 26.1491.

³⁹ *Zhanguo ce*, 14.793 and 26.1491, and *Shi ji*, 70.2289 and 2293.

⁴⁰ *Shi ji*, 73.2340.

⁴¹ Qin had a total number of 10,000 cavalymen. See *Zhanguo ce*, 14.793 and 26.1491, and *Shi ji*, 70.2289 and 2293.

Qin's total number of troops was less than Zhao, it may well have had more combatants because the total number of Zhao troops should include Han's Shangdang residents and Zhao's residents around Changping, as I have already suggested.

The loss of the Qin army is not recorded either. Some modern scholars believe that Qin also suffered heavy casualties in the battle of Changping.⁴² The numbers vary from 250,000 to 500,000.⁴³ Their conclusions are drawn from Bai Qi's words: "At present, although Qin defeated [Zhao's] Changping army, over half of the Qin soldiers died" (今秦虽破长平军, 而秦卒死者过半).⁴⁴ However, Bai Qi uttered the above words in the 49th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (258 BCE), two years after the battle of Changping. According to the context, he was talking about the aftermath of the battle of Handan rather than the battle of Changping. The Qin army had besieged Handan since the year before but could not take it and suffered heavy losses. I think that in the battle of Changping, Qin's casualties should have been limited. The battle of Changping ended in the ninth month of the 47th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (260 BCE). In the tenth month, the Qin army continued to attack and took Zhao's Shangdang, Wuan 武安 (in today's southwestern Wuan, Handan, Hebei province), and Taiyuan (around today's Taiyuan, Jinzhong 晋中, and Lüliang 吕梁, Shanxi province) by the first month of the 48th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (259 BCE).⁴⁵ Obviously, the Qin

⁴² For example, see Miyake 2018, 143.

⁴³ For instance, Jin Shenghe and Xie Hongxi say the number of Qin soldiers killed was between 400,000 and 500,000; Chen Wenfeng says 250,000 to over 300,000. See Jin and Xie 1998, 4; Chen 2012, 35.

⁴⁴ *Shi ji*, 73.2336-37.

⁴⁵ The original words are "attacking Zhao's Wuan Pilao" (伐赵武安皮牢, *Shi ji*, 5.214). According to the Zhonghua shuju 中华书局 version of *Shi ji*, Wuan is an unwanted word and the correct expression should be "attacking Zhao's Pilao (in today's northeastern Yicheng 翼城, Linfen, Shanxi province)." However, Pilao was on Qin's supply line from Hedong to

army did not suffer such severe losses in the battle of Changping that it could not launch a series of attacks immediately afterward.⁴⁶

The Reason for Zhao's Defeat

A traditional view on the reason for Zhao's defeat is that Zhao Xiaocheng Wang replaced Lian Po, an experienced and capable commander, by Zhao Kuo, an inexperienced and pompous person.⁴⁷ Some stories in *Shi ji* support such an opinion. For example, one story

Shangdang. It does not make any sense that the Qin army returned to take it after the battle of Changping rather than taking it before attacking Shangdang. Wuan, however, was a gateway to Handan. The purpose for Qin to take Wuan was to prepare for attacking Handan. Hence, I think that the unwanted word is Pilao rather Wuan. "Qin benji" 秦本纪 of *Shi ji* says that "In the tenth month of the 48th year [of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (259 BCE)], Wang He led [troops] to attack Zhao's Wuan...In the first month, [the Qin] army returned (四十八年十月...王龁将伐赵武安...正月, 兵罢, *Shi ji* 5.213-14). According to the context, the "first month" should refer to the first month of the 49th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (258 BCE). However, then *Shi ji* says: "In the tenth month of the same year, *wu dafu* [Wang] Ling [王]陵 attacked Zhao's Handan. In the first of month of the 49th year [of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (258 BCE), Qin] sent more reinforcements to assist [Wang] Ling (其十月, 五大夫陵攻赵邯郸。四十九年正月, 益发卒佐陵, *Shi ji* 5.214). The above timeline is obviously problematic. "Bai Qi Wang Jian liezhuan" 白起王翦列传 of *Shi ji* has the same timeline problem (*Shi ji* 73.2335-36). This is caused by the different calendars used by Chinese states at that time. Zhao used the Xia 夏 calendar while Qin used the Zhuanxu 颛顼 calendar. The first month of the Zhuanxu calendar is the tenth month of the Xia calendar. The Zhuanxu calendar is thus three months earlier than the Xia calendar. *Shi ji* dates the events using the month of the Xia calendar and the year of the Zhuanxu calendar, which causes the confusion. The tenth month of the 48th year (四十八年十月) here should be the first month of the 48th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang according to the Zhuanxu calendar or the tenth month of the 6th year of Zhao Xiaocheng Wang according to the Xia calendar. The dates that follow later in this article also have the same problem.

⁴⁶ Miyake Kiyoshi believes that Qin "was devoid of any large-scale expedition" after the battle of Changping (Miyake 2018, 61-62). He probably confuses the battle of Changping and the battle of Handan.

⁴⁷ Some modern researchers hold the same view. For example, see Tse 2005, 17-19.

says that Qin sent spies to spread rumors in Zhao by saying that the only thing Qin worried about was Zhao Kuo becoming the chief commander of the Zhao army at Changping. Zhao Xiaocheng Wang believed the rumors and then replaced Lian Po with Zhao Kuo.⁴⁸ This story is obviously not credible. First of all, Zhao Kuo was a very high ranking noble; Zhao Xiaocheng Wang and the Zhao royals must have known him very well. It does not make any sense that they needed to know if he was capable or not through rumors. Secondly, Qin had no motivation to do it. Since the battle began, the Qin army always had the upper hand. Some scholars believe that the battle was at a stalemate before Lian Po was replaced by Zhao Kuo.⁴⁹ However, that does not seem to be true. The Zhao army suffered repeated defeats even after it had been forced into a defensive posture. It had lost seven high-ranking commanders including the second-in-command, and its defense lines had been repeatedly broken through in around three months. Zhao Xiaocheng Wang's reason for replacing Lian Po should be very simple: it was because he was "angered that Lian Po's army had suffered heavy losses and had been repeatedly defeated" (既怒廉颇军多失亡，军数败).⁵⁰ As for why he appointed Zhao Kuo, I think that he was probably impressed by Zhao Kuo's proficiency in military theories and his smooth tongue. But unfortunately, proficiency in theories does not mean proficiency in applying theories in practice. And I don't deny that Lian Po was an excellent commander. However, sometimes even excellent commanders are unable to turn the tide. But if Lian Po had continued to serve as the chief commander, although the Zhao army would still have been defeated, it might not have been completely annihilated. We can say that Zhao

⁴⁸ *Shi ji*, 73.2334 and 81.2446.

⁴⁹ For example, see Miyake 2018, 129.

⁵⁰ *Shi ji*, 73.2334.

Xiaocheng Wang's decision to change the chief commander caused the complete annihilation of the Zhao army at Changping but not Zhao's defeat.

Another story says that Zhao Kuo's mother asked Zhao Xiaocheng Wang not to appoint her son as the chief commander because he was not competent to hold such an important position. After her request had been rejected, she then requested that if Zhao Kuo failed in his mission, she should not be involved and punished for it. Zhao Xiaocheng agreed and kept his promise. This story is also not credible. It indicates that according to the laws of Zhao, if a chief commander failed in a battle, then not only he himself but also his family members would receive severe punishments. However, as I will discuss in detail later, Zhao had rarely won in the battles against Qin. If the Zhao chief commander and his family had been punished after every defeat, then all the Zhao commanders would have been executed or imprisoned already.

Some researchers think that the supply issue was a key factor causing Zhao's defeat.⁵¹ According to *Zhanguo ce*, during the battle of Changping, Zhao had run out of its food supplies and had to borrow grain from Qi.⁵² However, the truth of this story is also questionable. In *Zhanguo*, the major powers like Zhao, Chu, and Yan all had ten years of grain reserves.⁵³ Although these figures might be exaggerated, it at least indicates that the *Zhanguo* powers did have large amounts of stored grain, which makes sense in an era of war. Besides, if Zhao had a food shortage after just three months of battle, then how to explain that before the battle of Changping, the war between Zhao and Zhongshan lasted for ten years from the 20th year of Zhao Wuling Wang (306 BCE) to the 3rd year of Zhao Huiweng Wang

⁵¹ For example, see Tse 2005, 15.

⁵² *Zhanguo ce*, 9.573.

⁵³ *Zhanguo ce*, 14.787, 19.1017, 29.1643-44.

(296 BCE), although there were temporary truces during that period?⁵⁴ And how to explain that after the battle of Changping, the battle of Handan between Qin and Zhao lasted for two years from the 48th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (259 BCE) to the 50th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (257 BCE)?⁵⁵ Although *Shi ji* clearly records that the battle of Changping started in the 47th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (260 BCE), Yang Kuan 杨宽 argues that the battle actually started in the 45th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (262 BCE). Hence, the battle of Changping had already lasted for three years rather than three months when Lian Po was replaced by Zhao Kuo.⁵⁶ Yang Kuan has given three reasons to support his opinion. The first is that *Shi ji* summarizes all the events of the battle that happened during three years in just one year for convenience. His second reason is that *Lüshi Chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 says, “Although Qin achieved a great victory at Changping, it took three years to decide” (秦虽大胜于长平，三年然后决), while Gao You 高诱 of Eastern Han’s annotation on this sentence is that “The Qin commander Bai Qi attacked Zhao for three years, buried 400,000 of its soldiers at Changping. Hence, it is called a great victory” (秦将白起攻赵三年，坑其卒四十万于长平，故曰大胜也). Yang’s third reason is that Zhao Xiaocheng Wang would not replace Lian Po, a famous commander, within just three or four months.⁵⁷ However, none of Yang’s reasons is tenable. With regard to Yang’s first reason, no evidence can prove that *Shi ji* has a custom of summarizing all the events that happened in several years in just one year for convenience. As for Yang’s second reason, he and Gao You subjectively think that “it

⁵⁴ *Shi ji*, 44.1811-13.

⁵⁵ *Shi ji*, 6.214.

⁵⁶ Yang 1983a, 57 and Yang 1983b, 55-58. Some other scholars have the same view. For example, see Lewis 1999, 640.

⁵⁷ Yang 1983a, 57.

took three years to decide” mentioned by *Lüshi Chunqiu* means “it took three years to decide [the result of the battle of Changping].” However, this sentence can also be interpreted as “it took three years to decide [the ownership of Shangdang].” In the 45th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (262 BCE), Qin isolated Han’s Shangdang by taking Yewang. In the 47th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (260 BCE), Qin defeated Zhao at the battle of Changping and then occupied Shangdang. The whole operation took three years. I think this interpretation is better because it perfectly matches the records of *Shi ji*. Yang’s third reason is also groundless. Lian Po did suffer repeated defeats, so Zhao Xiaocheng Wang had good reason to dismiss him. In short, I think Zhao’s failure was not caused by supply issues.

I think there are two reasons for Zhao’s defeat. First, Zhao was much weaker than Qin. Some scholars believe that Zhao had become strong enough to resist Qin after Zhao Wuling Wang’s reform in the nineteenth year of his reign (307 BCE).⁵⁸ For example, Lewis thinks that Zhao was Qin’s chief adversary after Qi’s decline and indicates that Zhao was able to match Qin in the field before its defeat at the battle of Changping.⁵⁹ Bai Shouyi 白寿彝 says that Zhao was Qin’s greatest obstacle to unifying ancient China.⁶⁰ However, this is not true. Table 1 summarizes the wars/battles between Qin and Zhao from Zhao’s reform until the outbreak of the battle of Changping.

Table 1: Recorded wars/battles between Qin and Zhao (306-261 BCE)

⁵⁸ In the same year, Qin Zhaoxiang Wang succeeded to the position of Qin Wang.

⁵⁹ Lewis 1999, 634 and 640.

⁶⁰ Bai 2004, 992.

Year – in the reign of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang	Attacking side	Defending side	Results
The 11th year (296 BCE)	Qi, Wei, Han, Zhao, and Song	Qin	The anti-Qin alliance defeated Qin and forced Qin to return Wusui 武遂 (in today's southeast Yuanqu 垣曲, Shanxi province) and its surrounding areas to Han, and Fengling 封陵 (in today's Ruicheng 芮城, Shanxi province) and its surrounding areas to Wei. ⁶¹
The 19th year (288 BCE)	Qin	Zhao	Qin took Zhao's Gengyang 梗阳 (in today's south Taiyuan, Shanxi province).
The 24th year (283 BCE)	Qin	Wei, Zhao, and Yan	Qin attacked Wei and approached Wei's capital Daliang 大梁 (in today's northeast Kaifeng 开封, Henan province). Zhao and Yan sent troops to rescue Wei, and the Qin army retreated. ⁶²
The 25th year	Qin	Zhao	Qin took two walled cities from Zhao. ⁶³

⁶¹ *Zizhi tongjian*, 4.116.

⁶² *Shi ji*, 5.212.

⁶³ *Shi ji*, 5.213.

(282 BCE)			
The 26th year (281 BCE)	Qin	Zhao	Qin took Zhao's Shicheng 石城 (in today's Lishi 离石, Lüliang 吕梁 city, Shanxi province). ⁶⁴
The 27th year (280 BCE)	Qin	Zhao	Qin took two walled cities from Zhao and beheaded 30,000 Zhao people. ⁶⁵
The 34th year (273 BCE)	Wei and Zhao	Han and Qin	Wei and Zhao attacked Han's Huayang 华阳 (in today's northern Xinzheng 新郑, Zhengzhou, Henan province). Qin sent troops to rescue Han, defeated the allied forces of Wei and Zhao, and killed 130,000 Wei soldiers and 20,000 Zhao soldiers. ⁶⁶
The 34th year (273 BCE)	Qin	Wei and Zhao	Qin took advantage of the victory at Huayang to take Wei's Juan 卷 (in today's Yuanyang 原阳, Xinxiang 新乡, Henan province), Caiyang 蔡阳 (in today's southwestern Shangcai 上蔡, Zhuma dian 驻马店, Henan

⁶⁴ *Shi ji*, 43.1820.

⁶⁵ *Shi ji*, 15.741-42 and 43.1820.

⁶⁶ *Zizhi tongjian*, 4.184.

			province), and Changshe 长社 (in today's Changge 长葛, Xuchang, Henan province), and Zhao's Guanjin 观津 (in today's Wuyi 武邑, Hengshui 衡水, Hebei province).
The 38th year (269 BCE)	Qin	Zhao and Wei	Qin attacked Zhao's Yanyu 阏与 (in today's Heshun 和顺, Shanxi province). Zhao sent reinforcements to Yanyu and defeated the Qin army. ⁶⁷ Wei did not participate in the battle but sent troops to contain Qin by threatening the Qin army's rear. ⁶⁸
The 38th or the 39th year (269 or 268 BCE) after the battle of Yanyu	Qin	Wei and Zhao	Qin attacked Wei's Ji 几 (in today's Daming 大名, Handan, Hebei province). Zhao sent reinforcements and defeated the Qin army. ⁶⁹
The 39th year (268 BCE)	Qin	Wei, Zhao, Qi, and Chu	Qin attacked Wei and took Wei's Huai 怀 (in today's southwestern Wuzhi 武陟, Jiaozuo, Henan province). ⁷⁰ Although Zhao, Qi, and Chu all sent reinforcements and approached

⁶⁷ *Shi ji*, 5.213.

⁶⁸ *Zhanguo ce*, 20.1097.

⁶⁹ *Zhanguo ce*, 20.1097.

⁷⁰ *Shi ji*, 44.1854.

			Huai, their troops didn't take any substantial action and just let the Qin army take Huai. ⁷¹
The 42nd year (265 BCE)	Qin	Zhao and Qi	Qin attacked Zhao and took three walled cities from Zhao. Qi sent troops to rescue Zhao, and the Qin army retreated. ⁷²

Table 1 clearly shows that Zhao was no match for Qin at all. The only time Zhao dared to attack Qin was by joining the anti-Qin alliance led by Qi before the collapse of the Qi-Qin bipolar structure. After that, Zhao was always on the defensive and was repeatedly defeated by Qin. The battle of Yanyu and the battle of Ji are the only two recorded victories obtained by Zhao. But in both battles, Zhao was on the defensive side and was assisted by Wei. Obviously, Zhao was incapable of resisting Qin alone.

The second reason for Zhao's defeat is its unwise long-term strategy. The long-term strategy adopted by Qin is known as the *lianheng* 连横 strategy. Literally, it means horizontal alliance and essentially it is a strategy of dividing the opponents and gradually weakening them one by one. In the long term, Qin could insist on the *lianheng* strategy for generations until eventually annexing the Shandong states. And in the short term, Qin could flexibly switch its targets according to the situation. For example, in the 23rd year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (284 BCE), Qin joined the anti-Qi alliance led by Yan to attack Qi and hit it hard. Qi was greatly weakened and became a second-rate power. In the next year, Qin held two

⁷¹ *Zhanguo ce*, 19.1030.

⁷² *Zizhi tongjian*, 5.163-64.

summit meetings with Chu and then attacked Wei.⁷³ Obviously, Qin's purpose for holding two consecutive summits with Chu was to secure its southern borders by maintaining a friendly relationship with Chu. Hence, Qin could concentrate its strength to hit Wei. Qin's offensive was irresistible and soon the Qin army approached Wei's capital Daliang. Zhao allied with Yan to rescue Wei.⁷⁴ The Qin army then retreated, which was a wise move to avoid fighting too many enemies at the same time. A reason for Qin's success is that it usually would not risk a battle when the situations was disadvantageous. Instead, it would temporarily step back and patiently wait for the next opportunity. In the next year, Zhao attacked Wei and took Wei's Boyang. Qin caught this opportunity to hold two summits with Wei and Han respectively to improve its relationships with them while dividing the three Jin. Hence, between the 25th and the 27th years of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (282-280 BCE), Zhao had to resist Qin's attacks alone and suffered repeated defeats. However, during the Qin-Zhao war period, the inter-state situation changed. Chu had partially recovered and planned to attack Qin. Zhao returned Boyang to Wei to restore its relationship with that state. If Qin continued to attack Zhao, it might cause the re-alliance of Zhao and Wei. Moreover, Chu might attack Qin, which would force Qin to fight two fronts. Hence, Qin reached a peace agreement with Zhao at the summit of Mianchi 澠池 (in today's western Mianchi, Sanmenxia, Henan province) in the 28th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (279 BCE). During the truce with Zhao, Qin struck Chu preemptively and hit it hard. Chu's capital Ying 郢 (in today's Jiangling 江陵, Jingzhou 荊州, Hubei province) was breached by Qin and hundreds of thousand Chu people died in the war. After that, Chu was no longer an important power

⁷³ *Shi ji*, 5.212 and 40.1730.

⁷⁴ *Shi ji*, 5.212.

able to contain Qin. The balance of power had further broken down, and Qin's advantages over the Shandong states had further expanded.

For Zhao, the only feasible strategy to use against Qin's *lianheng* was the *hezong* 合纵 strategy. Literally, *hezong* means vertical alliance and essentially it is a strategy of allying the weaker states against the strongest one to maintain the balance of power. However, Zhao adopted a different strategy instead. Table 2 summarizes the wars/battles between Zhao and the other five powers of Shandong from Zhao Wuling Wang's reform until the outbreak of the battle of Changping.

Table 2: Recorded wars/battles between Zhao and the other five powers of Shandong (306-265 BCE)

Year(s) – in the reign of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang	Attacking side	Defending side	Results
The 17th year (290 BCE)	Zhao and Qi	Han	The allied forces of Zhao and Qi approached Han's Luguan 鲁关 (in today's southwestern Lushan 鲁山, Pingdingshan 平顶山 city, Henan province). ⁷⁵
The 28th year	Zhao	Qi	Unrecorded. ⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *Shi ji*, 43.1816.

⁷⁶ *Shi ji*, 43.1816.

(287 BCE)			
The 20th year (286 BCE)	Zhao	Qi	Unrecorded. ⁷⁷
The 23rd year (284 BCE)	Yan, Qin, Wei, Zhao, and Han	Qi	Qi was defeated by the anti-Qi alliance and almost exterminated. ⁷⁸
The 24th year (283 BCE)	Zhao	Qi	Lian Po took Qi's Xiyang 昔阳 (in today's Gaocheng 藁城, Shijiazhuang 石家庄, Hebei province) and Yangjin 阳晋 (in today's western Yuncheng 郛城, Heze 菏泽, Shandong province). ⁷⁹
The 25th year (282 BCE)	Zhao	Wei	Zhao attacked Wei's Boyang 伯阳 (in today's Cixian 磁县, Handan, Hebei province). Zhao must have taken Boyang because it returned Boyang to Wei in the 27th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (280 BCE). ⁸⁰ But it is not clear whether Zhao took it this year or the next year.

⁷⁷ *Shi ji*, 43.1816.

⁷⁸ *Zizhi tongjian*, 4.225.

⁷⁹ *Shi ji*, 43.1820, 81.2439.

⁸⁰ *Shi ji*, 43.1820.

The 26th year (281 BCE)	Zhao	Wei	Unrecorded. ⁸¹
The 27th year (280 BCE)	Zhao	Qi	Zhao took Qi's Maiqiu 麦丘 (in today's Shanghe 商河, Jinan 济南, Shandong province). ⁸²
The 28th year (279 BCE)	Zhao	Qi	Zhao attacked Qi and defeated a Qi army. ⁸³
The 31st year (276 BCE)	Zhao	Wei	Lian Po took Wei's Ji 几. ⁸⁴
The 32nd year (275 BCE)	Zhao	Wei	Lian Po took Wei's Fangzi 房子 (in today's southwestern Gaoyi 高邑, Shijiazhuang, Hebei province) and Anyang 安阳 (in today's Anyang, Henan province). ⁸⁵
The 33rd year (274 BCE)	Zhao	Qi	Zhao took Qi's Changcheng 昌城 (in today's northwestern Jizhou 冀州, Hengshui 衡水, Hebei province) and Gaotang 高唐 (in today's

⁸¹ *Shi ji*, 43.1820.

⁸² *Shi ji*, 43.1820.

⁸³ *Shi ji*, 43.1820, 81.2444.

⁸⁴ *Shi ji*, 43.1821.

⁸⁵ *Shi ji*, 43.1821.

			southeastern Yucheng 禹城, Dezhou 德州, Shandong province). ⁸⁶
The 34th year (273 BCE)	Wei and Zhao	Han and Qin	Wei and Zhao attacked Han's Huayang 华阳 (in today's northern Xinzheng 新郑, Zhengzhou, Henan province). Qin sent troops to rescue Han, defeated the allied forces of Wei and Zhao, and killed 130,000 Wei troops and 20,000 Zhao troops. ⁸⁷
The 36th year (271 BCE)	Zhao	Qi	The Zhao army approached Qi's Pingyi 平邑 (in today's northeastern Nanle 南乐, Puyang 濮阳, Henan province). ⁸⁸
The 42nd year (265 BCE)	Zhao	Yan	Zhao took Yan's Zhongren 中人 (in today's northeastern Tangxian 唐县, Baoding 保定, Hebei province). ⁸⁹
The 42nd year (265 BCE)	Zhao	Han	Zhao took Han's Zhuren 注人 (in today's western Ruzhou 汝州, Henan province). ⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Shi ji*, 43.1821.

⁸⁷ *Zizhi tongjian*, 4.184.

⁸⁸ *Shi ji*, 43.1821.

⁸⁹ *Shi ji*, 43.1824.

⁹⁰ *Shi ji*, 43.1824.

Table 2 clearly shows that Zhao's policy towards the other Shandong states was very aggressive. Zhao frequently attacked its neighbors and had overwhelming advantages in the wars and battles against them. The only battle Zhao lost was the battle of Huayang, in which Qin had intervened. After Qi's decline, Zhao probably became the second strongest power next to Qin. However, it was still much weaker than Qin. Zhao's strategy was to compensate its losses caused by Qin's invasion by attacking other states. After the decline of Qi, clearly no single state could resist Qin. The only chance for the survival of the six powers of Shandong was to establish a stable anti-Qin alliance to maintain the balance of power. Otherwise, sooner or later, they would be annexed by Qin one after the other, which is exactly what happened. However, as the strongest of the six powers of Shandong, instead of trying to establish an anti-Qin alliance, Zhao chose to avoid confronting Qin but to attack its weaker neighbors. From Table 2, it can be seen that Qi, Wei, and Han were Zhao's main targets. Wei and Han were close to Qin, so they were also Qin's main targets. Hence, Wei and Han were under attack at the same time from Qin and Zhao, the two most powerful states, which significantly weakened them. The greatly weakened Wei and Han in turn made Zhao more vulnerable to Qin's invasion because they were incapable of containing Qin. Hence, Qin could concentrate its strength to attack Zhao in the battle of Changping. Qi was far away from Qin's core area and was less threatened by Qin. For Qi, its major enemy was Zhao rather than Qin. Hence, Zhao could hardly count on Qi's help when it was in danger. Zhao's strategy benefited it in the short term. In the long term, however, such a strategy eventually exposed Zhao itself to Qin's massive attack alone, which caused Zhao's defeat in the battle of Changping. The summit of Mianchi clearly shows that Qin's strategic vision was more remarkable. In the short term, both Qin and Zhao benefited from the agreement. Qin avoided fighting on two fronts and could concentrate its strength to deal with Chu. And Zhao's western border with Qin was temporarily safe so that it could focus on attacking its weaker

neighbors like Qi and Wei to compensate for its losses caused by Qin. In the long term, however, the agreement further expanded the advantage of Qin.

It is noteworthy that Zhao defeated Qin twice in the 38th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (269 BCE). But these two victories did not mean that Zhao was strong enough to confront Qin alone. First, Wei assisted Zhao in both battles. Second, the two battlefields were far from Qin's core territory but much closer to Zhao. In any case, Zhao's victories still inspired the other Shandong states. Hence, in the 39th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (268 BCE), when Qin attacked Wei again, Zhao, Qi, and Chu all sent troops to rescue Wei. It seemed that a new anti-Qin alliance was forming. But these troops just let the Qin army take Wei's Huai. Why did Zhao's rescue operation for Wei succeed the year before but fail in this year even with the assistance of Qi and Chu? As I have mentioned before, in the 38th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang, the battlefield, Ji, was far from Qin's core territory but close to Zhao's capital, Handan. Hence, Zhao could gather a relatively larger army than Qin. In addition, because Ji was close to its capital, Zhao definitely could not tolerate Qin's military presence there, so it took firm action to drive off the Qin army. However, in the 39th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang, compared to Ji, the battlefield at Huai was relatively closer to Qin but far from Handan. Zhao probably had no advantage in forces and no strong desire to save Huai. Hence, the Zhao army acted passively. Because Zhao was the strongest among the Shandong states, if Zhao's attitude was passive, Qi and Chu would not take any actions either. Finally, Qin took Huai and Zhao lost its last opportunity to form an anti-Qin alliance before the battle of Changping. Before the outbreak of the battle of the Changping, Qin had continuously attacked Han for five years, and Zhao did nothing to help Han during that period. And in turn during the battle of Changping, Han had already suffered heavy losses and was unable to support Zhao. Zhao's failure at Changping had been determined before rather than during the battle. *Sunzi* 孙子 says: "The best way in warfare is to strike [the enemy] through stratagems and the second

best is to strike [the enemy] through diplomacy” (上兵伐谋，其次伐交).⁹¹ The main reason for Zhao’s thorough defeat at the battle of Changping is that its long-term strategic planning and diplomacy were far inferior to Qin’s.

The Impact of the Battle of Changping

Some scholars believe that the battle of Changping caused Qin’s unification of ancient China. For example, Lewis opines that after the battle of Changping, “no single state could match” Qin and “there was no mechanism to hold together a multistate alliance against” Qin “for any period of time.”⁹² I think that they overestimate the impact of this battle. First of all, there was already no single state that could match Qin after Qi was heavily defeated by the five-state alliance, which was twenty-three years before the battle of Changping. Secondly, it is also incorrect to say that “there was no mechanism to hold together a multistate alliance against” Qin. In the tenth month of the 48th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (259 BCE), one year after Qin had annihilated the Zhao army at Changping, Qin attacked Zhao’s capital Handan. The siege of Handan lasted over two years, but Qin still could not take the city. Qin’s intention to exterminate Zhao raised alarms in other states. Chu and Wei sent reinforcements to rescue Zhao. In the twelfth month of the 50th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (257 BCE), the allied forces defeated the Qin army and repelled it back to the west bank of the Fenshui river.⁹³ Qin almost lost all the territories it had gained in the last eight years. In the third year of Qin Zhuangxiang Wang 秦庄襄王 (249 BCE), the Shandong states of Wei,

⁹¹ *Sunzi*, 1.28–29.

⁹² Lewis 1999, 641. Jin Shenghe and Xie Hongxi hold a similar view (see Jin and Xie 1998, 5).

⁹³ *Shi ji*, 5.214.

Han, Zhao, Yan, and Chu allied again, defeated the Qin army, and chased it until they approached Qin's Hangu guan 函谷关 (in today's Lingbao 灵宝, Sanmenxia 三门峡, Henan province).⁹⁴ From the above records, it can be seen that after the battle of Changping, the Shandong states still could resist and even defeat Qin if they banded together. But unfortunately, such an anti-Qin alliance was always unstable and temporary. Once the direct military pressure from Qin had been reduced, the Shandong states would attack each other again. For example, in the 51st year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (256 BCE), Yan attacked Zhao.⁹⁵ In the 56th year of Qin Zhaoxiang Wang (251 BCE), war broke out again between Zhao and Yan and lasted for three years.⁹⁶ In the second year of Qin Zhuangxiang Wang (248 BCE), Wei and Zhao attacked Yan.⁹⁷ And although Zhao had suffered heavy losses in the battle of Changping, the defeat was not to be fatal. Otherwise, Zhao would not have been able to hold Handan for two years, considering that the siege of Handan came just one year after the battle of Changping.

The reasons for Qin's unification are complicated. But as I have already suggested, it is more appropriate to say that Qin's remarkable long-term strategic planning, practical diplomacy, and flexible short-term strategic adjustments are the key factors that caused its victory in the battle of Changping and its unification of *tianxia*.

Conclusion

⁹⁴ *Shi ji*, 77.2384.

⁹⁵ *Shi ji*, 43.1827.

⁹⁶ *Shi ji*, 43.1828.

⁹⁷ *Shi ji*, 43.1829.

This article conducts a comprehensive study on the battle of Changping and makes the following conclusions. For the sizes and losses of the opposing sides, it is too subjective to say that the recorded numbers for this battle are unreasonable and exaggerated, because the Zhanguo period's definition of "soldiers" was different from, and much more inclusive than, today's definition. The main reasons for Zhao's defeat are not the replacement of the chief commander and shortage of supply but because it was weaker than Qin and its long-term strategic planning and diplomacy were inferior to Qin's. The impact of this battle has been overestimated. Qin eventually unified *tianxia* because it could insist on the *lianheng* strategy and flexibly applied it for generations rather than just through one or two decisive battles. The battle of Changping is just one of a series of battles launched by Qin to gradually weaken the Shandong states.

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