

§24. The Value of the Chūn/Chyōu

The Spring and Autumn period (08th through 06th centuries) is of interest for Chinese history, and also for ancient history in general. We here argue that the Chūn/Chyōu (CC) or “Spring and Autumn” *text*, a Lǚ court chronicle contemporary with the events it records, together with archaeological evidence, is also the best source for the Spring and Autumn *period*.¹ We dispute the claim of the Dzwǒ Jwàn (DJ), which some have considered to be a more complete, and a more accurate, account of the period.²

Linguistic and Social Data

Speeches. CC entries are terse.³ DJ, in its comments on CC, and even more in the narratives which some believe are based on archival records,⁴ uses extended prose of a type unknown before the 04th century, the time when many agree it was compiled.⁵ What could be the model for these speeches? For speeches recorded on Jōu inscriptions, it suffices to suppose a court scribe taking things down on bamboo at a stylized court session, with a list of gifts given a warrior by the Jōu king, and a final wish that he may enjoy the presentation drinking vessel “unto sons’ sons and grandsons’ grandsons.” The DJ speeches are radically different. In length, they can run to pages. And for them to be equally stenographic, we would have to assume an army of scribes, equipped with limitless bamboo, and stationed in every chariot at a battle, by every roadside *between* battles, and up certain trees during the epic wanderings of Chúnġ-ǎr 重耳. Some of these long speeches cannot have been *overheard*, let alone *transcribed*, at the time. They can only be inventions.

¹The idea that Confucius wrote CC as a set of coded moral judgements appears in the DJ itself (Chvng 14:4); it has tended to discredit CC as a historical source. That the CC is merely the chronicle of Lǚ was discussed by Gù Jyé-gāng and Chyén Sywǎn-tung in 1925 (GSB 1/275f). The judgement theory of CC was refuted by Kennedy **Interpretation** (1942); the reinstatement attempted in Gassmann **Cheng** (1988) tends to prove the opposite. For judgements made by the Lǚ court *of the time*, which are thus properly reflected in CC, see Defoort **Words** and Brooks **Distancing**.

²One influential statement of this view is Hsu **Ancient** (1967) 184-192. Hsu **Spring** (1999) 547 wholly ignores the CC as a source, as does Gù **Chūn/Chyōu** (2001) 3-14.

³The text average is 8.64 characters per entry.

⁴The most extreme position is that of Pines **Foundations**, which holds that not only the information in DJ, but the wording of its speeches, has transcriptional veracity.

⁵Karlgren **Authenticity** 65 gives the limits 0468 “the last year treated in the work” and 0300 (since its language is different from Karlgren’s common 03c Chinese). Watson **Tso** xiv n4 mentions Kamata (who suggested c0320) and Yáng (0403/0389). For a closer estimate, based on parallels in the Mwòdz and other 04c texts, see now Brooks **Heaven**. The DJ is a growth text; it does not have a *date*; it occupies a *span*.

Grammar. CC shows grammatical evolution over its three-century time depth, while the grammar of DJ is largely homogeneous. One change *within* CC is the ratio between postverbal and preverbal placement of certain adverbs, such as the phrase *dž Jìn* 自晉 “from Jìn.” These adverbs of “place from which” prefer *postverbal* position in the early CC, but later are commoner in *preverbal* position. This long-term tendency, in which all postverbal elements save verb objects migrate to preverbal position, is almost complete in Mandarin (some deny the existence of postverbal adverbs altogether).⁶ CC thus has the linguistic character of a text compiled over time, and reflecting gradual changes. DJ has the character of a text composed at one stage in that evolution.

Pronouns. In Chinese of the Warring States period and later, there are two pronouns for “I,” *wú* 吾 (unstressed; the subject of a verb) and *wǒ* 我 (stressed, the topic of a sentence⁷ or the object of a verb). In the CC, only *wǒ* occurs; DJ uses *wú* more than 600 times; it is the DJ pronoun of choice. This agrees with other evidence which places the DJ in the 04th century.

Chīng 卿 and Dà-fū 大夫 later contrast as higher and lower nobility.⁸ In CC, *only dà-fū occurs*. It is the usual term for the palace elite who, with their wives, formally greeted a bride from Chí in 0670. It is unlikely that CC, which shows an exquisite sense of protocol and protocol slights, would ignore the existence of a higher nobility had it existed. DJ uses the term *chīng* 150 times.

Posthumous Epithets. In CC, Lǚ rulers are given a posthumous epithet after death but before burial; the notices of their burial, and any later references to them, exclusively use that posthumous epithet, presumably a term of sacrificial address, a perfectly intelligible ritual convention. But DJ refers to some Lǚ rulers by their posthumous epithets *before those epithets would have been given*: at their birth (Yǐn-gūng and Hwān-gūng, DJ 1/1) or before they were named as rulers (Syī-gūng in DJ 4/2:8, Sywān-gūng in DJ 6/18:14). Such passages cannot be contemporary. They are *retrospective* usage, the usage of people for whom posthumous names were the usual identification. In short, the usage of later historians. We moderns are used to this convenient convention, but that does not make it less anachronistic for Spring and Autumn times.

⁶Chao **Grammar** 352-358 treats postverbal adverbs in modern Mandarin Chinese either as complements or as quasi-objects. This is a rigidly synchronic point of view. From a historical standpoint, it is more realistic to regard certain modern expressions of place (from, to, or at which), degree, and duration as fossilized postverbal adverbs surviving, in usage, from an earlier stage of the language.

⁷It is the pronoun of identification: Fr “C’est moi” or Eng “That’s him, all right.” For the contrast between topic and subject, see Fr “Moi, je dis [que les bonbons . . .],” the tune to which Mozart wrote variations.

⁸This supposed contrast is the entire basis for Hsu **Ancient**; which is devoted to the topic of social mobility “722-221 B.C.” See **Ancient** 5 and 26.

Jū-hóu 諸侯. In the inscriptions of the period, this term refers to Spring and Autumn rulers generally: the nominal feudatories of Jōu.⁹ In the CC text, the phrase is rare, and its meaning is different. It is first used in an entry of 0665 to mean “the said Lords,” referring to those listed in detail in a previous entry, and whose names the scribe does not wish to repeat. This idiom is sporadically imitated by later CC scribes. DJ does not confine itself to the meaning or the chronological range of the CC usage. In this it clearly diverges from one of its presumptive sources: the state chronicle of Lǔ – that is, from the CC text.

Historiography

The Bà Theory. Like the Bamboo Annals, which supposedly represents the state of Jìn, the CC does not mention a formal conferral of hegemony on Jìn,¹⁰ though to judge from the detailed CC entries for that year (5/28:1-20), Lǔ clearly did resent an 0632 attempt by Jìn to coerce the approval of the Jōu ruler for the de facto dominant position of Jìn. In the CC, Lǔ never treats Jìn as an overlord, but only as a powerful contemporary. The DJ contains not one but three versions of a bà theory (the other two are the bwó and mǐng-jǔ theories), whereby some functions of Jōu sovereignty were voluntarily delegated to a series of Jìn rulers or, in other DJ passages, of rulers from different states. No evidence from Spring and Autumn times attests such a *system*, but that *concept* played an important role in the political theory debates which were current at the time the DJ seems to have been compiled. We should therefore regard that bà theory not as part of the actual history of Spring and Autumn, but as a retrospective historical construct; one fashioned by the writers of the DJ.

Jūng-gwó 中國. This term, “the central states,” never occurs in CC. Instead, the CC reflects a fact first noticed by Chyén Mù and developed by Owen Lattimore (*Inner* 340f, 361f, 364 n40). It is that conflicts between Sinitic and non-Sinitic peoples are not confined to the edge of the “Chinese” area, but often occur *within* that area. The implication is that Chinese and non-Chinese settlement zones interpenetrated in the Spring and Autumn period. The DJ, on the other hand, sees that period in terms of a center/periphery model, and uses the term jūng-gwó 中國 for the center states and their common culture.

That term, and that perception, both reflect the situation which we know existed in the middle and late 04c, a time when centuries of contact and absorption had largely homogenized the center states culturally, and when those states were dealing with a challenge from the newly newly militant steppe cultures to the north.

⁹We are grateful to members of the WSW E-mail list for information on inscriptional occurrences of the term jū-hóu.

¹⁰Late 04c Ngwèi (the successor to 05c Jìn), as reflected in the Bamboo Annals, had a quite different theory about the origin of Jìn hegemony; see Brooks **Hegemon**.

The DJ is apparently projecting this polarized 04c situation onto the more ethnically diverse, and more geographically mixed, Spring and Autumn period. That is, it is not giving a factual account of the Spring and Autumn as such; rather, it is imposing a later perception, one contemporary with the DJ itself, onto those earlier centuries.

Finally, there is a profound difference in social orientation. The CC is concerned with the rulers of Lǔ and other states, and notices other persons chiefly as they present threats to the ruler. The DJ was written during the ritual phase of Confucianism, and takes very much that view of events. It focuses instead on the minister; not the person who rules, but the minister who knows how to rule, and advises the ruler accordingly; Mencius as minister of the King of Chí is the ideal example. The DJ Confucius, whether by that name or another, continually predicts outcomes according to whether someone follows, or violates, ritual propriety.

It also notices persons below that level. It tells tales of humble folk who repay favors by helping a warrior overtake his enemy, or set an example by displaying conspicuous concern for parents. The rulership question is still there, but in the DJ, that question is characteristically seen *from below*.

Conclusion

These contrasts tend to show that the CC is a year-by-year record, not indeed free of period conventions or court agendas, but precisely *because* of these traits, a genuine contemporary document. At just the points which tend to authenticate CC in this way, DJ diverges. The DJ was (1) written in a relatively consistent linguistic medium, (2) over a relatively short time period, and specifically (3) a time period later than Spring and Autumn. It presents the Spring and Autumn centuries in terms which were first meaningful in the 04c, such as the concept of successive hegemonies and the center/periphery polarity, which were major concerns of the 04c, but seem to have been unknown earlier. In all these ways, the DJ emerges as a work of its own time: the 04c.

The Kǔng family writers of the DJ knew things which we do not. They could sometimes make guesses about personal motivation which are at least as plausible as ours. They probably had access, through diplomatic contact, to the lore traditions of other states. They had their own Kǔng family traditions, and beginning with the last four reigns, which include the lifetime of Confucius and his father, DJ comments suddenly become more numerous. There is no need to reject all DJ comments out of hand. But the manifest presence of a DJ historical theory, the insistence that mere attention to ritual propriety will assure success for persons and for states, may serve to warn us of an overriding DJ agenda.

For an understanding of the Spring and Autumn centuries as they appeared to those who lived and died in them, we conclude by suggesting that the CC, a first-hand eyewitness account of the period, must be our preferred source.