

## A New Interpretation of the Jīn Tǐng 金籛

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Shū 34, the Jīn Tǐng, recounts a sudden sickness of King Wǔ of Jōu, two years after the victory over Shāng (which I believe occurred in 01040). His brother Dàn, “Duke of Jōu,” performs a divination rite, addressing the three preceding royal ancestors, and offers his own life in place of the king. The result is favorable: the king recovers, yet no harm befalls the Duke. The record of the rite is sealed in the “metal-bound coffer” and the attendants are sworn to secrecy. Later, when the Duke is suspected, a storm causes the coffer to be opened, the record comes to light, and the Duke is restored to unquestioned grace.

Why a new translation?<sup>1</sup> I want to put forward a suggestion about one of the most puzzling details in the text. There is also the problem of when it was written. Although it is one of the “genuine” or pre-Hàn parts of the book, and pretends to deal with immediate post-Conquest events, it is not an early Jōu text, nor even, I think, a late Jōu one. On the basis of my researches of the last fifteen or more years on the Bamboo Annals (that is, the “modern text” Jū-shū Jì-nyén), I will argue that the Jīn Tǐng cannot have been composed earlier than the 05c, and probably not much before 0400 (or possibly even later).

### Some Explanations

How can we account for the Duke describing himself (§6) as having more ability than King Wǔ?

The story is fiction. SJ 4 (周本紀) incorporates it, using a variant text that has “clever” (chǎo 巧) instead of “deceased father” (kǎo 考). This word, coming shortly after rǎn 仁, normally “good,” shows that the latter cannot be used in its Confucian sense, but must be nìng 佞 “artful,” in a good sense (“graceful”), not the bad sense Confucians give it.<sup>2</sup> Probably an original character was resolved correctly in one text tradition as 巧 “clever,” parallel to 能 “able,” and incorrectly in another tradition as 考 “deceased father” (assuming the normal Confucian meaning for 仁). The word 若, here “accommodating,” may (as many scholars think) be used for 而 “and,” thus “I am graceful [in speech] and clever [in wit].”

<sup>1</sup>See the Appendix. [The translation has since appeared in de Bary *Sources* 2ed 1/32f – DSN 2000].

<sup>2</sup>LY 1:3 “Clever in speech and fair in appearance – seldom indeed is such a person good,” LY 17:15, and LY 5:5 “I don’t know whether he is rǎn, but why need he be nìng?”

With such usage, we seem to have here a fragment of text from a much older form of the story. There is one also in SJ 33 (魯世家), in which the Duke of Jōu offers his life to the God of the Yellow River in place of the king, but in this other version the king is the still adolescent King Chǔng, and it would be quite appropriate for the Duke to compare himself favorably with his nephew Chǔng, for after all, the Duke was regent and tutor for the young king at this stage.

But the part of my translation that will cause by far the greatest surprise is my interpretation of §10. The standard interpretation takes the words *tǐ wáng* 體王 after “the Duke said” in separate phrases, the first word, *tǐ*, meaning “according to the form [of the prognostic]” (Legge), and the second, *wáng* 王, being the subject of the sentence *chí wǎng hài* 其罔害 taken as a prediction: “the king will take no injury.” My translation is completely different. How can I justify this?

The rest of the words uttered by the Duke create impossible difficulties on the received interpretation. Two self-referential phrases used are proper only for the king: *yǔ* *syǎo* *dǔ* 予小子 “I Princeling” and *yǔ* *yī*-*rén* 予一人 “me the One Man.” The only possible suggestion is Karlgren’s assumption that there has been an unannounced change of speaker: we are asked to supply the words *wáng* *ywē* 王曰 “the King said” after *hài* 害 “injury.” But the king wasn’t there at all. And if we twist farther and suppose that these things are said later and elsewhere, we run into the next phrase (§11): “The Duke went back.” It just doesn’t work.

Further, the word “await” (*sè* 俟) is obviously being repeated from the Duke’s charge to the shell – as Legge sees, but the only thing he can do with the words *dǔ* *yōu* *sè* 茲攸俟 “then what we are to await” is to make them a complete sentence (“I have to await the issue”), which they cannot be.

Another difficulty is the phrase *wǎng* *hài* “be without injury.” The point was not to keep the king from being harmed (he is already in harm’s way), but to get him to recover. It was the Duke of Jōu who faced the prospect of “injury,” because he has just offered his life, and it would appear that the offer has been accepted. The standard interpretation leaves his fate unresolved and unexplained.

The solution is supplied by the complete form of the divination ritual, seen repeatedly in the Shāng oracle inscriptions. There we find a named official diviner stating the “charge” (the problem, calling for a true/false response), and after that a “prognostication,” always by the king. Further, in some of these prognostications we find the king issuing a command to the spirits, apparently a ritual super-normal power he acquires as officiant. Particularly interesting is a class of inscriptions in which (I have argued) the king offers himself as a surrogate victim in a rite aimed at curing a sick person. In one case, the following prognostication contains an imperative statement commanding that the king *not get sick* after all! Further, in Shāng oracle idiom at least, the syntax with *chí* 其 before a negative, *chí* *wáng* *hài* 其亡害, must be a command, wish, or expression of intent; a simple prediction (Legge: the king “will take no injury”) would be *wáng* *chí* *hài* 亡其害. Note the usage *chí* *wù* *mù* *bǔ* 其勿穆卜 “Let us not reverently divine” in §18 of the text.

So *that* is what is happening here: the king *is* “speaking,” not himself but in the voice of the Duke ritually representing the king, in the prognostication: the part of the rite that properly has to be the king’s. Hence my interpretation of the phrase *tǐ wáng* 體王 “taking the part of the king” (impersonating the king).<sup>3</sup> The Duke is protecting himself ritually by having the king “say” “Let there be no harm” – to the *Duke himself*. The baleful force of the Duke’s word “await” [death] in his charge is then diverted – the king is still “speaking” – by the words “then what we are to ‘await’ . . .” (*dǔ yōu sè* . . .), which is the king’s recovery.

As for the self-referential phrases that only the king can use, we see now that it is the king who *is* using them, through the mouth of the Duke in the rite.

### The Date of Composition

There is not much to go on. But we can notice these details:

(1) The chapter is not a document but a story, based on what seems to be an earlier and more primitive story of the Duke offering himself for King Chǔng – delivering himself over to the River God by throwing his fingernails into the Yellow River. Therefore the chapter cannot date from early Jōu.

(2) Though the earlier story also exalts the Duke, this one does so much more grandly. We should suppose that the time might be when hagiographic treatment of the Duke was being stressed in Lǔ; M<sub>w</sub>òdž complains about it in the 05c.<sup>4</sup>

(3) But the surprising use of the word *rén* 仁, which even in early Confucian thought names an interior virtue of “goodness,” in opposition to mere glibness (*nìng*) or cleverness (*chyǎu*), shows that this Confucian sense has not yet become so “entrenched” in discourse that an earlier sense would not be understood.

These considerations suggest a post-Jōu date, but probably not late Warring States. If my interpretation of the phrase *tǐ wáng* is right, one must suppose that details of very ancient divination practice, later forgotten, were still well known, needing no explanation.

(4) The text is sometimes cited as supporting proof for the (correct) dating of King Wǔ’s death two years after the conquest of Shāng. But it does not imply this. Instead, while the illness is said to occur two years after the conquest, in the story King Wǔ did recover, and lived significantly longer. Thus the writer is assuming a chronology like that in the BA, which dates the conquest to Wǔ’s 12th year, and his death to his 17th year. Shaughnessy has shown<sup>5</sup> that this dating is either created or accommodated by the transposition of a bamboo slip from the chronicle of Chǔng to the end of the chronicle of Wǔ. So the *Jīn Tǔng* cannot have been written until after the reasoning that led to this transposition.

<sup>3</sup>Compare *tǐ dào* 體道 “embodying the Way,” said of a sage in *Syǔndž* 21:5d.

<sup>4</sup>MZ 46:13, concordance 46/41-42, Mei **Ethical** 217-218.

<sup>5</sup>Shaughnessy **Authenticity** 149-180.

That reasoning probably has to be dated to the 05c. King Wǔn died in 01050, King Wǔ died in 01038, his own 12th year. The conquest occurred in the spring of 01040, Wǔ's 10th year, but the 17th year in another "royal Jōu" calendar that King Wǔn had promulgated in 01056, two years after having claimed the "Mandate of Heaven" in 01058, a year when Jupiter was in station Quail Fire, following its appearance in a spring 01059 planetary conjunction thought to have heralded the change of Heaven's will. But in the early 05c, calculation based on current observations and the (mistaken) assumption that Jupiter's cycle was exactly twelve years would have identified 01065 as a Quail Fire year, making 01056 seem to be the first year of King Wǔ's own calendar, the conquest thus being in *his* 17th year. This is impossible: King Wǔ could not have conquered in his 17th year and died in his 12th year. Therefore, '12' and '17' must have gotten mixed up. The conquest must have been in 01045, and Wǔ must have died in 01040, *five* years later, as in the BA (which now dates the conquest to 01050). Analysis of the BA suggests that this theory had come to be accepted by 0427 or soon after that.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever the date, the underlying implication of the story is an ideal virtually eternal in China, and the celebration of the Duke of Jōu merely exemplifies and dramatizes it: a ruler rules by his "virtue." "Virtue" requires of the king restraint, humility, and willingness to listen to advice. But "virtue" is not limited to kings. If a king acquires "virtue" by action or attitude that can be seen as self-sacrificial or self-denying, this will also be true of others, notably the king's ministers. So, paradoxically, it is precisely by a minister's self-denial, his renunciation of any self-interest in a complete demonstration of loyalty, if need be to the death, that he establishes the moral authority that effectively requires his king to heed him. This is the deeper meaning of the myth celebrated in the *Jīn Tǐng*.

### Concluding Note

For more on the relevance of Shāng oracle rituals to the *Jīn Tǐng* story, see Nivison **Virtue** 23f. For a study of the sources for the status of the Duke of Jōu at the beginning of the reign of King Chǐng, see Shaughnessy **Retirement** 41-72. He argues that the Duke of Jōu's status was exaggerated in later tradition, and that King Chǐng participated as king in the campaign against Gwǎn-shú and the revived Shāng power. To me this suggests that the idea that King Chǐng was angered at the Duke – several accounts have the Duke fleeing into exile – may be a Warring States misunderstanding. Polemics among Warring States political philosophers frequently led to invention of historical details, as in the myths of Yáu and Shùn. Celebration of the Duke must have led to conceiving King Chǐng as a passive child, in a court where the Duke must in reality have had opponents (how else explain the prominence of the Duke of Shàu in older records?).

<sup>6</sup>The entire complex argument is worked out in my unpublished book, **The Riddle of the Bamboo Annals** (privately circulated version of April 1995). For a brief but fairly complete statement of the argument, see Nivison **Key** part 5-5.1 (p8-9) and part 6.2 (p11).

### Appendix: Translation of the Jīn Tǐng

*My version follows that of Legge Classics v3 p351-361 as far as possible. I also adopt some suggestions from Karlgren's Glosses. I insert the traditional section numbers, as used by both Legge and Karlgren:*

1. Two years after the conquest of the Shāng Dynasty, the king caught a fever, and was quite ill.

2. The two dukes [Tài-gūng and Shàu-gūng] said, Let us reverently consult the turtle concerning the king.

3. But the Duke of Jōu said, You may not so distress our former kings.

4. He then took the business on himself, and made three altars of earth, on the same cleared space, and having made another altar on the south, facing the north, he there took his own position. He placed the jade bì-discs 璧 [on the three altars], while he himself held his jade gwèi-mace 珪. He then addressed the kings, Tài-wáng, Wáng Jì, and Wǎn-wáng.

5. The recorder accordingly wrote [the Duke's] prayer on a tablet:

N, your chief descendant, is suffering from an epidemic disease and is violently ill. If you Three Kings are obligated to Heaven for a great son, let me Dàn be a substitute for this person. [6] I am graceful and accommodating, clever and able, possessed of many abilities and arts which fit me to serve spiritual beings. Your chief descendant, on the other hand, has not so many abilities and arts as I, and is not so capable of serving spiritual beings; [7] moreover, he was appointed in the hall of Dì 帝 to extend his dominion to the four quarters [of the world], so that he might establish your descendants in the lands below [heaven], and so that none of the peoples of the four quarters would fail to be in awe and reverence. Oh! Do not let that precious heaven-conferred Mandate fall to the ground; then [all] our former kings will also ever have security and resort.

[8] Now I accordingly make this charge to the great turtle. If you grant what I request, I will take these discs and this mace, and will now go back and await (sè 俟) your command [ie, my death]. If you do not grant it, I will put the discs and mace away.

9. [The Duke] then divined with three turtle [shells], and all were favorable. He opened the tubes and read the [oracle] texts, and these too were favorable.

10. The Duke said (speaking in the king's role):

Let there be no harm [to the Duke]. I, humble prince, have a renewed Mandate from the Three Kings. It is a lasting future that [I] may expect. Then what [we] "await" (yōu sè 攸俟) [is not the Duke's death, but] is that they will have concern for me, the One Man.

11. The Duke went back, and then placed the tablet [with the charge] in a metal-bound coffer. On the next day, the king recovered.

12. After King Wǔ died, Gwǎn-shú and his brothers [other sons of King Wǎn] spread talk around the country, saying, “The Duke will do no good to the [king’s] young son [King Chǐng].”

13. The Duke of Jōu accordingly declared to the Two Dukes, “if we do not punish them, we will be unable to report to the royal ancestors [that we have done our duty].”

14. The Duke of Jōu spent two years in the east, and then the guilty men were apprehended.

15. Afterward, the Duke made a poem and presented it to the King, calling it “The Owl.” The King on his part did not dare to blame the Duke [for punishing the King’s uncles].

16. In autumn, there was a great [impending] harvest that had not yet been reaped; Heaven [then] sent a great storm of thunder and lightning, with wind; the grain was all beaten down, and great trees were ripped up. The people of the land were all terrified. The King and his great officers thereupon all put on their caps of state and opened the metal-bound coffer [and examined the] writings in it, and thus obtained the account of the Duke of Jōu taking it upon himself to be a substitute for King Wǔ.

17. The Two Dukes and the King then questioned the recorder and all the other officers involved about the matter. They replied, “It was truly so. But, ah! The Duke ordered us not to dare to speak about it.”

18. The King held the writing and wept, saying,

Let us not reverently divine [for the truth is plain]. Formerly the Duke had earnest concern for the royal house, but I, only a child, was not able to know about it. Now Heaven has moved its terrors to display the virtue (dé 德) of the Duke of Jōu. I, princeling, will greet him in person. The rites of our country indeed make this right.

19. The King went forth to the suburbs [to meet the Duke]; Heaven then sent down rain, and a contrary wind, so that the grain all stood up. The Two Dukes gave orders to the people of the land, to take up all the great trees that had been blown down and replant them. The year then turned out very fruitful.

## Discussion

(1996)

**Bruce Brooks:** I note that the *Jīn Tǐng* claims to give a compositional history of *Shī* 155, which it mentions, and that the “modern” BA does the same for the *Jīn Tǐng* itself, by dating it at *Wǔ-wáng* 14 (*Legge Prolegomena* 144), two years after the conquest of *Shāng* (the storm, and the vindication of *Jōu-gūng*, have their own entry, at *Chǐng-wáng* 2). If we agree with David that the *Jīn Tǐng* is of Warring States date, then the BA entry, which mentions it, cannot have been handed down from *Jōu* times, since whether or not the *event* occurred, the *text* was not yet written at that time. The BA entry then shows the BA compilers taking the *Jīn Tǐng* itself at face value. The *Jīn Tǐng* text must then have been known at *Ngwèi Syāng-wáng*’s court (0319–0296), and must at minimum have been composed before the BA cutoff year of 0299.

Jīn Tǐng as a source for BA has a parallel in the so-called Byāu bells from Hán, which may have been still above ground in the 04c, and whose inscription is the likely source for the BA entry on the attack on the Chí Long Wall. Seen thus, BA does not *confirm* the inscription, it *attests its availability* in the late 04c. It represents an opinion earlier than that of Gwō Mwò-rwò or Karlgren about the date of the event in question.

**Taeko Brooks:** David bases his 05c date for the Jīn Tǐng on a theme in Mwòđž 46:13. We see that passage as coming slightly after LY 13 (c0322) and contemporary with MC 1A5 (c0320). This date would locate Mician reaction to the Jōu-gūng myth shortly before the finalization of the Dzwǒ Jwàn text, and before the beginning of the reign of Ngwèi Syāng-wáng, the King with whom the Bamboo Annals chronicle was buried, inviting the inference that he commissioned it. Our datings for these texts thus converge toward the late 04c.

**David Nivison:** Do ideas date a text, or does the text date the ideas? More than the Mwòđž is involved. I have granted that there is not much to go on, but problems such as the meaning of rǐn suggest (but merely suggest) not too late a date, while the date of the transposition of Shaughnessy’s slip forbids a date earlier than the late 05th century. The use of shì 是 “these” verging on copula in the quote in David K’s second question, below, suggests a late date. I see no way of being more precise.

**David Keightley:** I would like to look backwards from the Jīn Tǐng to Shāng practice, of limited usefulness though this may be in view of the possibility of a later date for the text. First, in §6, Nivison renders the phrase 能事鬼神 as “capable of serving spiritual beings,” but might it not also be “serving the revenant spirits”? In other words, how does one translate gwěi?

**David Nivison:** I had never supposed that gwěi-shǐn is anything but gwěi and shǐn, if gwěi-shǐn is thought of as two words combined, rather than one unanalyzed lump (eg, sometimes they are conceived as pwò and hún). Am I being asked to reconsider this prejudice? I am open-minded about gwěi 鬼 “ghost” being perhaps cognate with gwěi 歸 “return.”

**David Keightley:** For 我先王亦永有依歸 in §7, Nivison has “our former kings will also ever have security and resort.” The gwěi 歸 interests me. Could one take this as, “Our former kings will also ever have something to rely on and return to [their descendants, still offering sacrifices below]”? There would then be a link between the gwěi 鬼 as “revenant” (§6) and the gwěi 歸 of “returning” (§7).

**David Nivison:** In using the word “resort” I was following both Legge and Karlgren (who explains: “sacrifices to sustain them”). We all agree that the meaning is as David understands it. As for gwěi, if “return” in some sense is the ancestral core meaning, I would think “returning to the earth” (rather than “rising to the skies”) might be the idea. But I consider myself hardly qualified to guess.

**David Keightley:** In §9, we have 乃卜三龜一習吉，啓籥見書乃并是吉，“[The Duke] then divined with three turtle [shells], and all were favorable. He opened the tubes and read the [oracle] texts, and these too were favorable.” What is going on? We have already been told that the turtle divination was favorable. What are these tubes (or, with Legge, who reads ywè, lock) and “oracle texts?”

**Bruce Brooks:** It may be that the authors of the Jīn Tǐng are projecting back to

an earlier period the text and divination practices that were familiar in their own time. I believe the YínchYWèshān bamboo texts, from c0134, were found rolled up in cylindrical containers, not unlike the Dead Sea scrolls in their scroll jars. If this were also the practice a couple of centuries earlier, it would account for the idea of a “tube” as a container for a written text. As far as I know there is no evidence that anyone looked up divination results in a text; it would seem that crack configurations were interpreted directly. But from the Dzwǒ Jwàn divinations, we know that people of c0312 *envisioned* diviners as consulting a written text, not only for stalk but for bone interpretation. Here is another area in which the *Jīn Tǐng* would seem to reflect its probable time of composition; that is, the late 04c, rather than the period of the story which it purports to tell.

**David Keightley:** In §10, we have 公曰體王罔害, “The Duke said (speaking in the King’s role), Let there be no harm [to the Duke].” I like Nivison’s reading of tǐ 體, which treats the word not as a reference to the configuration of the cracks, but as a verb, referring to the Duke’s replacement of King Wǔ. This works well with the earlier phrase 以旦代某之身 (§5), which Nivison translates “let me Dàn be a substitute for his person.” Substitution was evidently in the air. At the same time, unless more relevant texts are excavated, I doubt that we will ever be able to assign this meaning to this usage of tǐ with certainty.

**Bruce Brooks:** Is there not also a grammar problem? Surely the parenthesis “(speaking in the King’s role)” masks a grammatical impossibility; the order, at least in Warring States Chinese, would have to be 公體王曰, paralleling the standard inscriptional form 王若曰, to produce that meaning. I can’t see tǐ but as some sort of verb: “apprehend that . . .” Legge’s and Karlgren’s adverbs seem forced, and Waley’s sentence “All is well!” strikes me as sheer desperation.

**David Keightley:** In the following phrase, I do not agree with Nivison that chí wǎng hài 其罔害 was a command, wish, or expression of intent. I resist this not on grammatical grounds but because of the flow of the story (for chí in Shāng prognostications, see eg Hǎjǐ 1075 and 6057, where a general forecast of harm was followed, after the chí, with a specific forecast of the harm to be expected). The text tells us that the cracks had all been favorable. The Duke has now read the texts. Like any Shāng diviner he prognosticates on the basis of what he has seen. I thus read chí wǎng hài as a prognostication: “There will be no harm.”

**Bruce Brooks:** Or, to put the two together, “I prognosticate that the King will come to no harm.” If we need a link between “embody” and “prognosticate,” we might try “I intuit.” The fact that there seems to be no warrant for this sense of tǐ, whether late Shāng or contemporary, may identify it as a pseudo-archaism: an invented usage with a certain semantic probability, inserted to give the right degree of difficulty to an archaizing narrative.

**David Nivison:** I must take Bruce’s point about word order. What I did is perhaps not legal: We supply the punctuation to old Chinese as written. One use we have for parentheses (a form of punctuation) is to remove a phrase from the scope of an operator like “say.” It appears that this is what I was doing here.

Perhaps better would be to bite the bullet and make “tǐ wǎng” part of what the



Duke says, but still keeping my sense; that is, he is starting by ritually clearing his throat, so to speak: “The Duke said, ‘Assuming the King’s role, [I say for him] let there be no harm,’ etc. My translation of *chí wǎng hài* tries to honor Shāng oracle word order (as I understand it): a simple indicative prediction would require *chí* to follow the negative (even the negative *wǎng*); if this isn’t the case, one must assume a non-indicative construction. And elsewhere in the chapter we find *chí* preceding the imperative-negative *wú*: “we must not.” Whatever we do, we must keep in sight the main provocative problem: The language that is apparently put in the Duke’s mouth is speech fit only for a king, and not appropriate for the Duke; but the King is definitely not there. In his last comment, Bruce blinks, it seems to me.

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